



## **Research Report 27: Immigrants in Time - Life Patterns 2004**

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This final report on the **Life-Patterns** Project concerns a representative sample of young Australians, born in the early 1970s, who undertook further study during the 1990s after leaving school in 1991. By 2004, at age 30, most were married and in full-time career jobs, and a third had children of their own.

The participants' narratives illustrate their progress through life since leaving school. They set the scene for our analysis of the progress of a generation from the time of leaving secondary school to the age of 30.

The evidence on their progress into adulthood calls into question many of the media stereotypes and research assumptions about their generation. Their transitions have been complex and varied and they have realised that the changing nature of the labour market within the global economy suggests that flexibility is replacing permanency as a determining factor of career success.

Their own assessments of their lives suggest that they are shaping new ways of becoming adult. Our research suggests that it is the traditional models of transition held by academics and policy-makers that may be now called into question.

Most believe they have been faced with a new adulthood characterised by an increase in the positive value placed on personal autonomy and on attaining a balance across life spheres of work, education, leisure and personal relationships with family and friends. They see that this demands greater flexibility on their part to cope with uncertainty and achieve a genuine balance between their top priorities in life.

The evidence also suggests that the decisions they make concerning study and careers have been shaped in large part by developments affecting the more personal aspects of their lives. There is a third dimension of identity formation that determines many of the choices they make in other dimensions of life.

Not yet married or parents or homeowners by their late twenties, they were however the most highly qualified generation of Australians and already established in their careers. In this sense they were immigrants in time who were confronted with an on-going mismatch between present-day realities and the established 'time-line' of youth transition into adulthood idealised by their parents.

It is paramount for them to display a readiness to reflect on their own life circumstances so that they can face and negotiate the uncertainties of life and be ready to change in the face of changing life circumstances rather than insist on what 'ought to be'.

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