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# The Defining Decade: Why Your Twenties Matter--And How To Make The Most Of Them Now

## The Defining Decade

Why your  
**Twenties** matter--  
and how to  
make the most  
of them **now**

MEG JAY, PhD



## Synopsis

Our "thirty-is-the-new-twenty" culture tells us the twentysomething years don't matter. Some say they are a second adolescence. Others call them an emerging adulthood. Dr. Meg Jay, a clinical psychologist, argues that twentysomethings have been caught in a swirl of hype and misinformation, much of which has trivialized what is actually the most defining decade of adulthood. Drawing from a decade of work with hundreds of twentysomething clients and students, **THE DEFINING DECADE** weaves the latest science of the twentysomething years with behind-closed-doors stories from twentysomethings themselves. The result is a provocative read that provides the tools necessary to make the most of your twenties, and shows us how work, relationships, personality, social networks, identity, and even the brain can change more during this decade than at any other time in adulthood-if we use the time wisely. **THE DEFINING DECADE** is a smart, compassionate and constructive book about the years we cannot afford to miss.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I read Dr. Meg Jay's NY Times piece on co-habitation (...) which lead me to ordering her book. I received it yesterday and read it in one sitting. So, I think it's pretty good. As a twenty something, I

would recommend this book to my friends and even those still in high school. Dr. Jay teaches lessons about how to ideally approach one's twenties and why it really matters. She interweaves research, stories, and counseling sessions with her patients to make a thought provoking but easy book to read. In many of those patients, I saw my friends or myself. There was the twenty something coffee barista still waiting for the right opportunity to come by. There was the beautiful and successful, girl chronically hooking up and never dating because she's still plagued with teenager, self-image problems. There was the bicycle shop guy wanting to be original and afraid of settling down. What they all have in common is this intense desire to know, "Am I going to make it? And what the hell should I be doing in my twenties? School was so easy, but life is so hard." This book isn't a step by step guide. It won't go into how to systematically meet guys/girls, get over depression, or how to do well on an interview. There are plenty of books on getting into the details. Instead, this is a thought provoking book aimed against the popular twenty something zeitgeist today that, "we can do anything", "there's always time", and "I have until 30 to get my life together." Not to mention the million other stories we tell ourselves like, "I'm never going to get good at this", "It's better to wait rather than choose", or "Everyone on Facebook is doing better than me." In a sense, this book is like "Rich Dad, Poor Dad" to personal finance. They are paradigm shifting books that sweep away the false assumptions and beliefs we acquired from our childhood and culture and replace them with solid, real principles on how reality works. This book isn't going to do the heavy lifting for you, only you can do that. This book is the starting point to begin living one's twenties with drive, clarity, and purpose. The book itself is divided into three sections: Work, Love, and The Brain and the Body. Work talks about increasing your identity capital, the value of "weak ties", that you know what you want even though you think you don't, the unhelpful prevalence of Facebook comparisons, and seeing a career as the first step in a unique, customized life versus settling down. Love goes into the importance of taking dating seriously in your 20s, compatibility with possible in-laws, how to make sure "living together" isn't harmful, and choosing the right partner. The Brain and Body is sort of a misc. collection of pieces centered on how your brain, body, and mind works. The Brain and Body section also covered a lot of neuroscience research I wasn't aware of. For example, your brain undergoes a radical period of reconfiguration in your 20s which means now is the best opportunity for learning skills. Or, the frontal cortex that controls a lot of our mature responses such as regulating emotions is still developing for most people in their 20s. Besides the physical brain, Dr. Jay also talks about the mind such as learning how to calm yourself down, how to develop confidence (rather than believing it's fixed), and that you can radically alter how you feel by changing parts of your life. It also has a very frank chapter on fertility and that ladies don't have as

much time as they think to have children. The final chapter before the epilogue talks about mapping your years to see how limited your time truly is. It seems common for many young people to talk about getting their career in order or going to graduate school eventually, getting married, and having kids but not all at the same time. Except, when you're 25 or 27 saying this, you're quickly running out of time. It's hard to convey in a review how good the book is. This is the book I wish I could have written in ten years. Not just because of the advice, but because of the patient interviews. I found myself agreeing and sharing the same POV as the patient many times but through the counseling session, it was almost like I was sitting there and seeing my own assumptions fall apart and seeing the truth for what it really is. This book doesn't knock you over the head with what Dr. Jay thinks is right but begins from where you already are and lets you see for yourself the problems in your logic. Just as any good psychologist does. This isn't your run of the mill advice book. There's a lot of popular myths and assumptions that this book dispels with cold, hard truth. I'm a self-help addict, and there was plenty of new information I never heard or thought of before. The underlying message in all the stories and chapters is start living your life now. Take responsibility. Don't believe the lies that your twenties don't matter or that confidence is only innate. For most people, the late night parties, pointless jobs, and random hookups won't be what build your identity, what you care about or remember in the future. If anything, as Billy in the book says, you will probably feel betrayed that you wasted the best years of your life doing all the meaningless things that culture and others mislead you to believe most important. So, start preparing now because the investments (or lack thereof) that you do in your twenties will have the greatest impact in your career, marriage, and overall happiness. As she ends the book, "The future isn't written in the stars. There are no guarantees. So claim your adulthood. Be intentional. Get to work. Pick your family. Do the math. Make your own certainty. Don't be defined by what you didn't know or didn't do. You are deciding your life right now."

Best book on preventing the loss of a meaningful life your twenty's. Read it in a day, agreed with the powerful stories and strategies laid out by Dr. Meg Jay to prevent the quarter-life crisis that so many college educated people find themselves trapped in after graduation. Great stories. I've given away a case of these books, and every single person receiving it said it was exactly what they needed to guide them in making major decisions toward a better life. (Many of the twenty-somethings I gave the book to said they HATE to read... which doesn't apply when given the secrets to solving the overwhelming anxiety that comes to those stuck in their twenty's or the caregivers of those who are trapped there).

I cannot believe it took me so long to read this book! I purchased it back when I was 23 years old. I am 27 now and I am totally kicking myself! There is so much information in this book that I could have used when I was 23! While reading this as a 27 year old, there was a lot of content that I simply didn't care about. Of course, that is just the way that I personally felt. So I gave this book three stars. My personal thoughts aside, I would very highly recommend this book to anyone in their 20's or 30's! Especially for people that fall within that age range who are struggling with work, love, or planning for their future.

I have read my fair share of literature on millennials, emerging adults, twentysomethings, or whatever people want to call them. Though I find the subject fascinating, now I am somewhat bored by the subject. Every article and book paints a less than rosy picture of this young generation. They are called weak, impatient, entitled, sensitive, and doomed to inherit a terribly uncertain future. Now these descriptions and predictions may be accurate proven through qualitative, quantitative, and anecdotal studies, however they leave us with a problem with no solution. This is where *Defining Decade* by Dr. Meg Jay comes in. This is easily the best book I have read all year. Dr. Meg Jay is a clinical psychologist that has studied and helped numerous twentysomethings over the past decade. This book shares the common problems all twentysomethings go through today, how each person looked at the problems, and how each person re-evaluated their twenties. This book is split into three sections: work, love, and brain and body. Work is a common problem for twentysomethings. Most have been told they are special and they can do anything they want. Yet when they reach college they are overwhelmed with the responsibility of choosing a major and consequently they are incapable of choosing a vocation. Most would rather wander until someone comes by (after they turn thirty) and leads them to a promising career. Love, like work, is another commitment that scares twentysomethings. They do not want to commit too young or wait until they are too old. Our culture glorifies the single life of twentysomethings, but it never shares the struggles. College is created with a strong curriculum to prepare you for the working world, however there are no approved methods of finding a soul mate. Though twentysomethings are finished with the ravages of puberty, their brains and bodies are still developing. The world perceived by a twentysomething is much different than someone in their thirties or forties. Twentysomethings do not feel like adults so they avoid the grown up world, but in order to grow up they need to jump into adult world. "Thirty is the new twenty" is the worst saying ever. Your twenties are the most valuable decade of your life, but you have to be intentional about it. "You twenties matter." Be

intentional. And read this great book.

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