An investigation of emerging adulthood in Greek higher education students

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ABSTRACT

Through of a series of publications, Arnett described the period of the post-adolescence to mid-twenties in the life of a person as emerging adult period. The main purpose of this study is to examine the aspects of adulthood and the criteria that determine the transition to adulthood phase of human life. The research approach is utilizing a target group of 332 Greek students of the University of Patras from two different Departments. The main research finding is that for the case of Greek students in higher education, emerging adulthood approach seems to be confirmed, as participants in the study view themselves not as adolescents nor as having reached adulthood. Factors that constitute their perception for adulthood are further elaborated in the presented data of the study.

KEYWORDS

Aspects of adulthood, emerging adulthood, higher education students, roles of adults

RÉSUMÉ

Par le biais d'une série de publications Arnett décrit la période après l'adolescence, au milieu vingt à trente ans, dans la vie d'une personne comme période d'âge adulte émergent. L'objectif principal de cette étude est d'examiner les aspects de l'âge adulte et les critères qui déterminent le passage à la phase de l'âge adulte de la vie humaine. L'approche de recherche utilise un groupe cible de 332 étudiants grecs de l'Université de Patras, de deux Départements universitaires différents. Le principal résultat de la recherche est que pour le cas des étudiants grecs dans l'enseignement supérieur, l'approche de l'âge adulte émergeant semble se confirmer, étant donné que les participants à l'étude se considèrent pas comme les adolescents, ni comme ayant atteint l'âge adulte. Les facteurs qui constituent leur perception de l'âge adulte sont présentés en détails dans les données de l'étude.

MOTS CLÉS

Aspects de l'âge adulte, émergeant de l'âge adulte, les élèves de l'enseignement supérieur, les rôles des adultes

INTRODUCTION

Based on the literature review as well as taking in mind the theoretical approaches for adulthood, someone could be considered adult when undertaking roles in his/her life like to become a parent, or husband, or a citizen who can vote (Knowles, 1973). Besides from psychological point of view, according to Kokkos (2005), someone can be considered as adult when he/she reaches self-determination and can be recognized as adult by the community.

Adulthood, as a situation and not just a period of life, is not determined on the basis of the age criterion· in addition even this criterion is not permanent in different societies and different historical periods. However, the issue that is generally accepted is that the meaning of adulthood is directly related to the social and cultural environment of the person's life.

THEORETICAL APPROACH

Adult and Adulthood

The terms *adulthood* and *adult* have several meanings and have been used in different ways in different circumstances. In some cases, the term is connected with a specific age in which a person can participate in a series of procedures (participation in society, financial transactions, e.t.c.). In other cases, according to Merriam & Caffarella (1999), adulthood is a stage of a person's life that is associated with the undertaking of specific roles such as being a husband or parent or employee. Wiltshire (1973), claimed that adult could be a person who has passed the 20th year, is mature and has experiences. Paterson (1979), believes that adulthood is based on the human's age and even the person is not fully mature is expected from him to behave like an adult.

The last three decades a continuing rising number of studies is connected with the different phases of adulthood during the human's life, with theoretical approaches that pose the transition to adulthood from the post-adolescence period to the middle twenties.

The first contribution to this research field came by Erikson (1968), who discussed about these specific age phases during human's life. He mentioned that there are three stages in adult development, first is the *young adulthood*, second is the *maturity* and last is the *old age* period and all these periods are defined mainly in psychosexual terms. Keninston (1970), suggests the term *youth* for the period between adolescence and early adult life, but he based his ideas on protesting students of the 1960's making his opinion to reflect more the spirit of a historical period than the characteristics of this phase of human development.
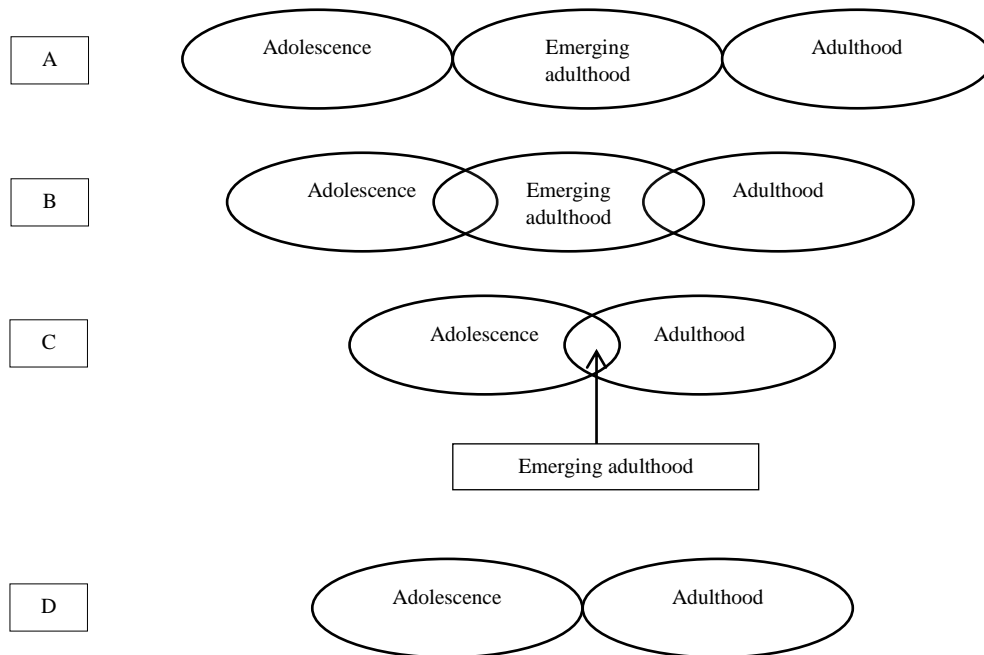
Emerging Adulthood

As we evolve from the first stage of our life to adulthood, the actions we do, the knowledge and the skills we acquire through formal or informal education processes and other factors contribute to this transition. However, this transition is not just a matter of reaching a specific age. This period is characterized by changes in emotions, occupational status, even to worldviews.

For Arnett, this is a period in which someone feels too old to be a teen but not even completely adult. He/she has left behind the dependencies of childhood; on the other hand, he/she has not entered the phase of responsibilities that characterize adulthood. Arnett (1997, 1998, 2000, 2003, 2004), based on extensive psychological, sociological and anthropological literature reaches the conclusion that the years from the late teen to the mid of second decade emphasizing on ages 18 to 25 could be characterized as a special period of life for which he coined the term *emerging adulthood*. In Fig. 1 the possible connections between adolescence and adulthood are presented, according to Arnett (2003) the more representative graph for the

transition to adulthood is B, describing both the distinct stages and the smooth transition from one to other.

FIGURE 1

LITERATURE REVIEW

The emerging adulthood period is a unique and special stage in human's life, is different from early childhood, adolescence or adulthood. This period began recently to gather the interest of researchers and its detailed conceptualization depends on cultural and social factors, in other words, the perception of emerging adulthood is connected to the wider context. Some important research findings have been present in various settings including Europe, Latin America and Asia. Regarding Latin America (Facio et al., 2007), emerging adulthood appears to be a privilege enjoyed by the middle class and not as normal stage in human's life. So more strongly observed in more economically developed countries such as Argentina where a longitudinal study showed that the experiences of emerging adults are similar with those of the Americans. A study of Rosenberger (2007), in Asia with young Japanese women concluded that many of them are experiencing the period of emerging adulthood until their thirties as the social pressures are charging them with roles such as wife, mother and much more with career responsibilities.

China case study
In China in a study with emerging adult students, Nelson & Chen (2007) found that they have common characteristics with the Americans. Nelson, Badger & Wu (2004), examined the adulthood phases and emerging adulthood issue to a sample of 207 randomly selected students from the Political Science Department of Beijing University. Chinese culture generally described as "collectivist" because the society emphasizes the goals, needs and views of family over personal opinion. Family plays a central role in China's social and cultural life, as a result the adulthood faces being influenced by cultural factors other than western ones (Saso, 1999).

The results of the survey have shown that personal attitudes of Chinese students are strictly focused on social norms giving the mark of strict cultural behaviors. According to Gu (2001), inappropriate behaviors (such as insult) are opposites to the Confucian teachings and if a young man is capable to control the way he acts, then his behavior will be better as a member of a group or the community.

India case study

Seiter & Nelson (2010), studied the criteria that assumed necessary for being an adult by Indian students from 18 to 26 years old. The research findings provide useful information on how Indian people perceive emerging adulthood. Emerging adulthood appears to exist in a part of society but with a great diversity of how it is experienced between male and female. The varied demographic and cultural norms seem to affect the ways of thinking and acting in India as compared to western cultures. The existing aspects of the structure of society and their beliefs are the issues that distinguish the way that emerging adulthood is perceived in India. A considerable rate of 61% of students participating in the survey believes that they have reached adulthood. According to Seiter & Nelson, this point can be explained by the fact that Indian people undertake roles of adults very early, especially girls who are assigned the home's responsibilities. On the other hand, young boys are preparing for their professional life in order to earn money and contribute to the family income.

Romania case study

Nelson (2009), examined the features of emerging adulthood using a sample of 230 university students from Iasi University. The main goal of the study was to define the criteria which the Romanian students considered as necessary for gaining adulthood. According to Arnett (2004), the rapidly political changes, the reforms in economy as well as the social status are serious factors which are capable to affect the criteria that characterize the emerging adulthood especially for the students who lived at this period. According to the survey results the 61% of the responders considered themselves as adults. Moreover, they highlight the economic independence and the compliance with the laws as the most important criteria. However, there are a lot of differences in the approach for men and women according to criteria such as family responsibilities and taking roles.

Greece case study

Petrogiannis' study (2011) is of a great importance and interest for the study presented hereafter as it was the first examination of emerging adulthood in the same context, with a similar population (a sample of 183 students of a Greek university), based as well in Arnett questionnaire. The results of this study are similar to those of other developed countries, the respondents find themselves not being adolescents anymore as well as not yet adults, Petrogiannis (o.c., p. 1) refers that they are best described as emerging adults, while the most important markers for adulthood are individualistic.

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study was to examine firstly the criteria that Greek University students consider as necessary in order for someone to be an adult, secondly the characteristics of emerging adulthood and finally if the participants consider themselves as adults.

The research was about the central idea of the adulthood which framed by factors such as maturity, autonomy, responsibility, self-determination and self-management. We attempt to

highlight any existing views about adulthood through the opinions of students, so as to be able to identify the degree to which we can perceive them as adults. This is very important among other reasons, also for designing the educational settings of higher education in accordance with the needs and characteristics of the students. It is very crucial for this design if we could now the degree of maturity of students in order to incorporate into the curricula educational approaches that aim to the development of critical reflection (Raikou & Karalis, 2009) and transformational process (Liodaki & Karalis, 2013).

Context of the study

The study was conducted during the academic year 2015-2016. The participants were 332 students from University of Patras (Western Greece) from 19 to 21 years old, 200 of them studying at the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, and 132 at the Department of Educational Science and Early Childhood Education, 136 men and 196 women. Background characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Participants data

	Variables	%
Gender	Man	40.8%
	Woman	59.2%
Father's Education Level	Less than 9 yrs of education	14.8%
	12 yrs of education or +2 yrs post-secondary education	37.8%
	Higher Technological College or University	36%
	Master Degree or Doctoral holder	11.4%
Mother's Education Level	Less than 9 yrs of education	14.9%
	12 yrs of education or +2 yrs post-secondary education	40.5%
	Higher Technological College or University	35.1%
	Master Degree or Doctoral holder	9.5%
Monthly Family's income	From 1000 to 1500	35.7%
	From 1500 to 2500	25.3%
	More than 2500	16.8%
	I don't know	22.3%
Family's Home	Village – 10.000 residents	22.8%
	10.000 – 50.000 residents	18.9%
	50.000 – 100.000 residents	5.7%
	100.000 – 200.000 residents	12.9%
	More than 200.000 residents	39.8%

Data collection and analysis

For the data collection we used the questionnaire developed by Arnett (1997). This questionnaire was designed to tap several defining issues of emerging adulthood (e.g., Arnett, 2000, 2004), including possible criteria for adulthood (items that range from external events such as marriage to internal standards such as accepting the responsibility for the consequences of your own actions"), feeling in-between (i.e., whether or not one perceives oneself as an adult), identity exploration, and age of possibilities (i.e., seeing the future with optimism). It has been used in many studies in different contexts such as Romania (Nelson, 2009), China (Nelson, Badger & Wu, 2004), India (Seiter & Nelson, 2010), Canada (Cheah & Nelson, 2004) and Greece (Petrogiannis, 2011).

In the current version of the Arnett questionnaire besides answers "yes" or "no", the Likert scale was used (1=fully disagree, 2, 3, 4, 5=fully agree). In the next section the more representative results of the study are presented, more specifically we present issues of Arnett'

s questionnaire (for example, capability of supporting financially the family, or avoid drinking), analyzed in combination with the self-image the subjects of the study had towards adulthood (adult considered for the subjects they believe they have entered adulthood). Furthermore, we proceeded with analyses, using the coefficient of contingency Cramer's V to investigate the association between adult consideration and each of the presented items.

RESULTS

In the tables that follow we will present the items connected with *family capacities*, *norm compliance*, *role transitions*, *financial independence* and *relational maturity*.

Family capacities

TABLE 2
Family capacities variables responses (%)

	If a woman, become capable of supporting a family financially (Cramer's V:0.134)		If a woman, become capable of caring for children (Cramer's V:0.172)		If a woman, become capable of running a household (Cramer's V:0.120)	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Adult considered	12,4	53,7	19,8	44,1	6,7	66,7
Not Adult considered	2,4	11,2	5,5	6,8	0,6	11,3

TABLE 3
Family capacities variables responses (%)

	If a man, become capable of supporting a family financially (Cramer's V:0.103)		If a man, become capable of caring for children (Cramer's V:0.191)		If a man, become capable of running a household (Cramer's V:0.114)	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Adult considered	24,5	43,1	17,9	47,4	6,1	65,2
Not Adult considered	4,8	9,0	3,9	8,9	0,6	13,2

Explaining some results from table 2, the 53,7% of the respondents who considered themselves as adults disagreed with the variable "*a woman, become capable of supporting a family financially*" as a factor that characterizes someone as adult, on the contrary with the 12,4% who agreed that this variable is a factor for adulthood. At the same variable the respondents who considered they are not adults for the time being, 11,2% of them disagreed on the contrary with the 2,4% who agreed (Table 2 and Table 3).

Norm compliance
The 43,7% of the respondents who consider themselves as adults as well as the 8,8% of the respondents who did not consider themselves as adults agreed that "avoiding committing petty crimes like vandalism and shoplifting" is a factor characterizing adulthood. This variable defines the adulthood factor by 12,5% (based on Cramer's V). The most significant variable that seems to define or to affect more than the others adulthood by 13% is the "*Using contraception if sexually active and not trying to conceive a child*" (Table 4 and Table 5).

TABLE 4
Norm compliance variables responses (%)

	Avoid committing petty crimes like vandalism and shoplifting (Cramer's V:0.125)		Avoid drunk driving (Cramer's V:0.098)		Avoid illegal drugs (Cramer's V:0.086)	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Adult considered	43,7%	20.4%	50,9%	19,2%	43%	23,3%
Not Adult considered	8,8%	4,9%	8,1%	4,8%	7,6%	5,7%

TABLE 5
Norm compliance variables responses (%)

	Avoid becoming drunk (Cramer's V:0.07)		Avoid use of profanity/vulgar language		Drive automobile safely and close to the speed limit (Cramer's V:0.117)		Use contraception if sexually active and not trying to conceive a child (Cramer's V :0.130)	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Adult considered	38%	30,2%		-	36.1%	28.6%	52.3%	17.9%
Not Adult considered	5%	7,5%			6.7%	5.3%	10.6%	3%

No association between variables the sign

Role transitions

TABLE 6
Role transitions variables responses (%)

	Married (Cramer's V:0.140)		Have at least one child (Cramer's V:0.135)		Committed to long-term love relationships (Cramer's V:0.05)		Have no more than one current sexual partner (Cramer's V:0.125)	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Adult considered	7,7 %	64,3 %	10.7 %	61.7 %	22.9 %	40.6 %	24.5 %	43.5 %
Not Adult considered	1,7 %	10,9 %	1.9 %	11.5 %	4.7 %	5.8 %	4.6 %	6.9 %

Only the 7,7% of the respondents who considers themselves as adults agree that the marriage variable seems to be a factor characterizing adulthood, on the other hand the 64,3% from the same group disagree with this approach. A great point on the role transitions variables, for the subjects that consider themselves as adults (for a percentage under to 60%) is the fact that the marriage and the birth of child are not factors that define adulthood (Table 6).

Financial independence

TABLE 7
Financial independence variables responses (%)

	Financially independent of parents (Cramer's V:0.121)		No longer living in parents' household (Cramer's V:0.118)	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Adult considered	48,6 %	15%	36,3 %	26,7 %
Not Adult considered	10,4 %	1,9 %	7,4 %	4,1 %

The interesting point of table 7 is that the 48,6% of people who considered themselves as adults believe that financially independence from parents is a critical point for adulthood. Also, 36,3% believe that the separate living from parents is a strong factor for adulthood.

Relational maturity

Another interesting issue, connecting with the manner the respondents perceive adulthood, is that of relational maturity (Tables 8 & 9). Relational maturity covers aspects such as the degree of independence in decision-making process, the awareness for the consequences of an undertaken action and the decrease of self-orientation attitude (self-orientation is considered as a central characteristic of the adolescence period).

TABLE 8
Relational maturity variables responses (%)

	Decide on personal beliefs/ values independently of parents or other influences (Cramer's V:0.145)		Accept responsibility for the consequences of own actions (Cramer's V:0.126)		Become less self-oriented, develop greater consideration for others	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Adult considered	59,6%	11,2%	70,8%	5,1%		
Not Adult considered	12,8%	1,9%	14,3%	0,4%	-	

TABLE 9
Relational maturity variables responses (%)

	Establish a relationship with parents as an equal adult (Cramer's V:0.154)		Make life-long commitments to others		Learn always to have good control over your emotions (Cramer's V:0.156)	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Adult considered	45,4%	18,0%			37,8%	21,0%
Not Adult considered	9,4%	1,4%	-		8,4%	3,5%

A very interesting issue is that of self-conception of the subjects towards adulthood. As we can conclude for the data presented in Table 10 the "grey zone" of responses that in this framework relates to emerging adulthood gathers 79,8%. Thus, 8 out of 10 participants they cannot positively declare that they are adults. Only a percentage of 16,9% feel like they have entered adulthood, while 3,3% respond that they do not believe they are adults.

TABLE 10
Adulthood Consideration (%)

Do you feel like an adult				
	Yes	**In some cases, Yes**	**In some cases, No**	**No**
Man	16.8%	67.9%	9.5%	5.8%
Woman	17.1%	67.3%	14.1%	1.5%
Overall	16.9%	67.6%	12.2%	3.3%

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The main purpose of the study was to examine the perceptions of Greek higher education students about the criteria they consider as necessary for adulthood. As it derives from the research data, we reached the same main conclusion with Petrogiannis (2011), i.e. that Greek students perceived themselves neither as teenagers nor as adults, therefore, in their subjective perception they are described as emerging adults (Arnett, 1998, 2000).

The *family capacities* in relation to adulthood that we examined, includes variables such as the capability of financial supporting the family, child carrying, homework's, verifies that the more traditional cultural of a society the more traditional answers are expected.

The *norm compliance* includes a range of variables related to social norms. Attempting to compare our findings with the Arnett's (2003), research to white Americans we can find significant differences. Only the 19% of Americans students mentioned that the variable "Avoid becoming drunk" indicates adulthood. On the contrary for the Greek students this percentage is about 43%.

The *role transitions* factors contain variables which are connected to adulthood such as marriage. A rate 9,5% of our participants agree that marriage indicates adulthood, on the contrary only the 5% of Americans believe it (Arnett, 2003). Important difference in two studies is about the variable "having a child", 12,5% for Greeks versus 5% for Americans.

For the financial independence from parents in *financially independence* category, 59% of Greek students believe that is an important adulthood marker, the more financially independent is, the more this contributes to achieving adulthood. According to Arnett's studies, 71% of white Americans, and 75% of Asian Americans agree that this is an important criterion for adulthood, while in Petrogiannis' research (2011), this rate is 82.8%.

The accepting of the consequences of our action from "*Relational maturity*" factors finds most of the students (85%) to agree that this is a marker of adulthood· similar findings to African-Americans students (89%) as well as to Asian-Americans (93%).

About the 72% of the participants in our study thinks that if you decide on your personal beliefs and values is a sign of maturity but this is not binding. The 92,8% at Petrogiannis' survey support this point while from the point of view of American minorities, the rates range from 72% to 82%. At the same time, the variables mentioned on family abilities, compliance rules

and other independent criteria approach the traditional family culture and identifies a more conservative society than the American's or Western's Europe civilizations.

In order to examine the optimization of emerging adults about their future we examined factors that reflect their outlook and their perceptions. An interesting aspect is the comparison of the Greeks with the Romanian higher education students from Nelson's research (2009). From the Greek group 55,5% consider that their life's quality will be better from their parents and from Romanian group this rate is 80%. The 34,9% of Greek University's students believe that their monthly income will be better than their parents the 31% worse and the 34% the same, capturing with this way their uncertainty for the future. On the other hand, the 71% of Romanians seem to be more optimistic considering to have greater monthly income than their parents.

Concluding, we think that in order to further explore emerging adulthood in contemporary Greece, more studies are necessary, so as to include adults that have undertaken different roles from that of being a student in higher education. Future investigations should include for example young adults with different education status or young adults having various employment status, so as to have a more concrete image for the factors that shape the transition from adolescence to adulthood.

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