

Available online at www.sciencedirect.com

ScienceDirect

Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 149 (2014) 803 – 807

Procedia
Social and Behavioral Sciences

LUMEN 2014

Emerging Adulthood in Romania: Comparison between the Perceptions Twelfth Graduates and Students About Maturity

Sergiu-Lucian Raiu^a, Maria Roth^b, Teodor-Paul Hărăguș^{c*}^{a,b,c} „Babeș-Bolyai” University, Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, Blvd. 21 December 1989 No. 128, Cluj-Napoca, 400604, Romania

Abstract

Recent studies on emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2004) conducted in different countries and cultures concluded that 18-25 years old adolescents do not consider markers such as getting married, finishing school or getting a job as criteria for adulthood. Instead they relate to psychological criteria that are usually achieved gradually and individually: taking responsibility, making decisions independent and achieving financial independence. After school completion youth can choose between several possible routes in the transition to adulthood: they can either continue their studies, enter the labor market or do both. For a large number of young people, college is an important step in the transition from adolescence to adulthood. We focused teenager's perception of what they think it would be necessary for someone to be considered an adult and whether attending a university (as institutional social experience) influence their perception of maturity. The database has a total of 1,240 respondents between 16-25 years ($M=18,87$, $SD=1,05$), the majority girls (60,6%) and consists of two samples: 897 XIIth graders ($F=52,8\%$) and 343 first year students ($F=81\%$). The most frequently marked maturity criteria by youth (94,03%) was "to take responsibility for the consequences of your actions", in varying proportion for XIIth graders 96,99% and 86,30% for students. Our data supports previous studies results according to internal psychological attributes are more important markers of adulthood in the perception of teenagers and young adults of the new generations than external markers identified by the classic literature. It's necessary to research on the perception of young people who do not follow college because they might be constrained due to the economic situation to take certain roles that lead them to feel adult at an earlier age.

© 2014 Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>).

Selection and peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of LUMEN 2014.

Keywords: emerging adulthood; Romania; perception of maturity; comparison between XIIth graduates and students.

* Corresponding authors Tel.: +40-072-624-0125, + 40-264-42.46.74
E-mail address: raiu.sergiu@yahoo.com, roth.mari@ymail.com, tpharagus@yahoo.com

Introduction

In recent years, a number of studies have investigated the views of young people about maturity in different countries and cultures. Based on literature review of psychological, sociological and anthropological and empirical studies conducted in American society and in other societies in Europe, Australia or Asia researcher Jeffrey Jensen Arnett proposed that the life time of 18-25 years to be considered a distinct period of development, calling it *emerging adulthood*. According to Arnett's theory, the distinct characteristics of this period, as part of the development period is different and to the adolescence and to the adulthood. Also as cultural habits and social norms vary from one country to another, they can affect the senses and youth development model, which causes young people to have different requirements and development models at the same time different opportunities. Although young people may have unique characteristics for a particular country, the characteristics observed in most countries are the same (at least in certain segments of these populations, such as students). Main results of studies of emerging adulthood and maturity criteria shows that young people aged 18-25 feel to be between two periods of life, not considered fully teens nor adults, living a period that they do not know how to call it. In the past an event such as marriage, mark the entry into adulthood in both traditional cultures, non-Western and in the U.S. or in Western cultures. Important responsibilities of adulthood were summed to provide, protect and procreate, all involving obligations to others. Recent studies show that young people only consider marriage and other events such as finishing school or getting a job as criteria for adulthood (Nelson, Badger, Wu, 2004). Ripeness that appear repeatedly in recent studies are: accepting responsibility, making decisions independently of parents or other influences and become financially independent. These studies show that youth most important criteria of transition to adulthood have changed from external events to internal standards, which generally reach gradually and individually. In addition to changing the criteria reported by young J. J. Arnett argues that emerging adulthood is unique in many ways including: demographic changes, subjective identity and behavioral distinctions (Nelson, Badger, Wu, 2004).

2. Method and research samples

In this article we have chosen as the objective examination of adolescent perceptions on the criteria that they consider to be necessary for someone to be considered an adult and to whether attending a university (as institutional social experience) influence the perception of young people on the criteria that define maturity but the data presented here are part of an extensive study¹ that aimed to identify and analyze demographic factors, social and psychological benefits to the successful transition of adolescents to young adult status.

The database for this analysis includes a total of 1240 adolescents aged 16-25 years ($M=18,87$, $SD = 1,05$), most girls 60,6% and is composed of two samples of respondents: 897 graders XIIth ($F=52,8\%$) and first-year student 343 ($F=81\%$). Students come from high schools theoretical, technological and vocational education, mostly in the counties of Argeş, Covasna, Ilfov, Timiș and Vâlcea, and students come from diverse specializations universities: Cluj, Timișoara and Bucharest.

For both samples we used the same method of research - interview method of based questionnaire, but students completed the questionnaire during in the classroom by classical technique "pen and paper" and with the students we presented the research project before a course or seminar, asking them the contact details (e-mail address and possibly a phone number), complete the following questionnaire online on the project website².

Participants indicated their conception of the transition to adulthood in the questionnaire response by checking "yes" or "no" to an item with 40 criteria for defining maturity criteria that must be met for a person to be considered an adult. This item was designed to include a wide range of possible criteria in transition to adulthood selected

¹ Project Title: "Outcomes of adolescence. A longitudinal perspective on the effects of social context on successful life transitions" (PN-II-ID-PCE-2011-3-0543), a longitudinal study (according to our knowledge the first study of its kind in Romania) that we wanted to capture how neighborly relations with parents, friends and teachers interact with individual traits and major life events (love, changing school, graduation, commencement of employment, volunteering, pregnancy, etc.).

² The project site is <http://www.viitoradult.ro/> and the questionnaire can be accessed at the following link: <http://www.viitoradult.ro/sondaj/>

criteria anthropological literature, sociological and psychological. Criteria (statements) were divided into areas such as individualism (independence and interdependence), family capabilities, norm compliance, biological transitions, chronological/legal transitions and role transitions.

Criteria of Maturity

In a number of studies conducted in the U.S. in 1994, 1997, 1998, and 2000 Arnett J. J. identified several key areas of the markers of adulthood. First identified as relevant to affiliate adult status, or age-related biological attributes. These include reaching a certain age, the biological ability to have children and to reach full height. Age-related attributes may also include crossing restrictions based on age, imposed by society such as the legal age to get a driving license or a drink. Secondly based on sociological observations of role transitions: being married, living independently, being employed full-time to become a parent, were also identified as possible criteria for representation of a person as an adult. These include those capabilities offered by family: protecting your family, manage a household and taking care of children (Mayselless, Scharf, 2003). According to anthropologists, marriage is almost universally accepted as final passage to adulthood in traditional cultures around the world. In these cultures, only after marriage, a person is considered to have reached adult status and given adult responsibilities. In traditional cultures capabilities marriage involves certain responsibilities, even specific to each gender separately. Men means maintaining the family economically and offering protection or maintain psychic family safe and adolescents develop and maintain skills through caring for household chores and caring for children (Nelson, Badger, Wu, 2004).

In addition to the considerations of biological and social, psychological two aspects have been described as being necessary for maturation. First described in the literature, the culmination of the process of separation and individuation (Arnett, 2001) and involves negotiating a mature attitude and equally to the parents, the ability to make independent decisions and to take care of itself. The second aspect can be described as emotional maturity and requires the ability to control emotions, to adopt a broader perspective and lack of selfishness or accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions. This psychological emotional maturity should be obvious manifestation of being responsible for the behavior that respects social norm, and refraining from driving when you are drunk or use contraception if you do not want to have a baby (Mayselless, Scharf, 2003).

Results

In the study conducted in 2009 in Romania to assess the criteria, a total of 230 students from Iasi have been submitted list of possible criteria to define maturity. The five criteria rated as most important were: (1) "accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions" (2) "avoid illegal drugs" (3) "decide on personal beliefs and values independently of parents or other influences" (4) "establish a relationship with parents as an equal adult", and (5) "avoid committing petty crimes like vandalism and shoplifting" (Larry J. Nelson, 2009, p 406).

In this study, in the whole sample first three criteria were approved in the highest proportion were "to take responsibility for the consequences of your actions" (94,03%), "to make decisions on personal beliefs and values independently of parents or other influences (78,23%) and "to become financially independent of your parents" (78,15%). Girls first three criteria of maturity were "to accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions" (93,22%), followed by criteria "if a woman, become capable of caring for children" (86,04%) and "to be financially independent from parents" (81,52%). For boys the three most important criteria of maturity were "to take responsibility for the consequences of your actions" (95,29%), "to become capable of keeping family physically safe (men) (80,74%) and "if a man, become capable of supporting a family financially (80,33%). For XIIth graduates three most important criteria of maturity were "to take responsibility for the consequences of your actions" (96,99%), "to settled into a long-term career" (81,72%) and "avoid illegal drugs" (79,15%). For students three most important criteria of maturity were "to take responsibility for the consequences of your actions" (86,30%), "to become financially independent of your parents" (86,01%) and "to make decisions based on personal beliefs and values independently of parents or other influences" (79,59%).

The entire sample statistically significant differences by gender for the subscales are family capacities ($t_{1238} =$

3.76, $p < .01$), norm compliance ($t_{1053.119} = 4.52$, $p < .01$), biological transitions ($t_{1238} = -4.59$, $p < .01$) and legal/chronological transitions ($t_{1064.229} = -5.130$, $p < .01$). Boys attach greater importance subscales criteria that make transitions chronological maturity ($M_B = .52$, $M_G = .41$) and biological transitions ($M_B = .50$, $M_G = .41$), and girls deemed most important to define maturity criteria from subscales family capabilities ($M_G = .66$, $M_B = .60$), and norm compliance ($M_G = .62$, $M_B = .55$). In the entire sample statistically significant differences by group (graders XII-students) are in subscales norm compliance ($t_{1238} = 4.25$, $p < .01$), interdependence ($t_{1238} = 5.86$, $p < .01$), biological transitions ($t_{1238} = 6.43$, $p < .01$), role transitions ($t_{595.772} = 6.60$, $p < .01$) and legal/chronological transitions ($t_{1238} = 7.06$, $p < .01$), graders XII giving greater importance of all these subscales criteria: norm compliance ($M_G = .62$, $M_S = .54$), interdependence ($M_G = .63$, $M_S = .52$), biological transitions ($M_G = .48$, $M_S = .35$), role transitions ($M_G = .62$, $M_S = .49$) and chronological transitions ($M_G = .50$, $M_S = .33$)

Table I. Analysis of the significance of differences by group in the total sample

Subscale:	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Independence	Graders XII	897	.68	.21	NS	NS
	Students	343	.68	.21		
Family Capacities	Graders XII	897	.64	.27	NS	NS
	Students	343	.62	.28		
Norm Compliance	Graders XII	897	.62	.25	4.252	.001
	Students	343	.54	.29		
Interdependence	Graders XII	897	.63	.30	5.863	.001
	Students	343	.52	.33		
Biological Transitions	Graders XII	897	.48	.31	6.430	.001
	Students	343	.35	.32		
Rols Transitions	Graders XII	897	.62	.30	6.600	.001
	Students	343	.49	.31		
Legal/Chronological Transitions	Graders XII	897	.50	.37	7.067	.001
	Students	343	.33	.36		

Note: NS = not significant.

Discussion

Adults emerging from Romania have experienced and continue to experience which means freedom. Removing the communist regime in 1989 and the transition Romanian society to a market economy has led young people to feel that they are open many doors that before were not for their parents, resulting in a sense of optimism. Many changes can be seen in Romania including improving living standards and the adoption of specific values and ideologies individualistic Western societies. These changes and other factors associated with these changes (for example controlling birth, gender roles, greater exposure to Western media) affected the defining characteristics of emerging adulthood, especially for students (Nelson, 2009).

Arnett says that emerging adulthood is a period of universal human development, suggesting that this period are "only under certain conditions that occurred quite recently and only in some cultures... cultures postponing entry into adult roles and responsibilities well beyond adolescence" (Arnett, 2004, p.21).

Maybe that's why until now most studies examining perceptions of youth about maturity were made on students. Studies have found that young people vary in areas such as the age at which adults take some specific responsibilities (ex. to marry, to become parents), the way they relate to the future (optimism or concern), by their life (living with parents, roommates, romantic partners), the educational and professional concerns as well as their behavior (ex. can engage in their age-specific risk behaviors such as drug, alcohol, unprotected sex). (Nelson, 2009). In comparison with the previous period of adolescence, most young people experience feelings of freedom and independence in a much greater degree. They face great pressure to make important decisions about life's problems, are free to change their minds and explore other possibilities (in relationships, love, study, work, etc.). And yet they are aware that they will remain at this stage incomplete adult status and that sooner or later will become fully adult. But it is not always clear to them when they become adults and what initial steps will lead to full ripeness (Macek,

Bejček, Vaničková, 2007).

Conclusion

The transition from adolescence to adulthood is not only a biological process, but rather in accordance with conceptions of education is a social, psychological and cultural process. In different societies may differ criteria are considered most important in marking the transition to adulthood. Whether we are talking about studies that make comparisons between age groups: teenagers, emerging adults (Arnett, 2001; Mayselless, Scharf, 2003; Sirsch, Dreher, Mayr, Willinger, 2007, Petrogiannis, 2011) and studies which are compared between ethnic groups (Arnett, 2003; Cheah, Nelson, 2004), or studies that make the difference between the views of students and non-students (Seiter, 2011) on the perception of the criteria necessary for someone to be considered an adult, in all these studies, respondents concerning internal attributes, psychological as the most important markers of adulthood. In these studies, the items that are part of the criterion most individualistic obtained approvals so that the most important marker of the transition to adulthood in the proportion of approvals were items of individualism scale.

Our analysis favors the stage development theory, not the continuity theory, showing the large differences in cognitions and future planning of the two groups different in social status and close in age. Cultural background, social status and age have all an effect on the way youngsters think about adulthood. Future research is needed to show which influence is strongest.

Acknowledgements

This study was funded through the project *Outcomes of adolescence. A longitudinal perspective on the effects of social context on successful life transitions* (PNII-ID-PCE-2011-3-0543) financed by Executive Unit for Financing Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation (UEFISCDI).

References

- Arnett, J. J. (2003). Conceptions Of The Transition To Adulthood Among Emerging Adults In American Ethnic Groups, *New Directions For Child And Adolescent Development*, No. 100: 63-75.
- Arnett, J. J. (2001). Conception Of The Transition To Adulthood: Perspectives From Adolescence Through Midlife, *Journal Of Adult Development*, Vol.8, No. 2: 133-143.
- Arnett, J. J. (2004). Emerging adulthood: The winding road from the late teens through the twenties. *New York: Oxford University Press*.
- Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist*, 55: 469-480.
- Cheah, C. S. L., Nelson, L. J. (2004). The Role of Acculturation In the Emerging Adulthood of Aboriginal College Students, *International Journal of Behavioural Development*, 28 (5): 495-507.
- Macek, P., Bejček, J., Vaničková, J. (2007). Contemporary Czech Emerging Adults, Generation Growing Up In The Period Of Social Changes *Journal of Adolescent Research*, Vol. 22 (5): 444-475.
- Mayselless, O., Scharf. M. (2003). What Does It Mean to Be an Adult? The Israeli Experience, *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, No. 100: 5-20.
- Nelson, L. J., Badger, S., Wu, B. (2004). The Influence of Culture In Emerging Adulthood: Perspectives Of Chinese College Students, *International Journal of Behavioural Development*, 28 (1): 26-36.
- Nelson, L. J. (2009). An Examination of Emerging Adulthood in Romania College Students, *International Journal of Behavioural Development*, 33 (5): 402-411.
- Petrogiannis, K. (2011). Conceptions of the Transition to Adulthood in A Sample of Greek Higher Education Students, *International Journal of Psychology and Psychological Therapy*, 11, 1: 121-137.
- Seiter, L. N., Nelson, L. J. (2011). An Examination of Emerging Adulthood in College Students and Nonstudents in India, *Journal of Adolescent Research* 26: 506-536.
- Sirsch, U., Dreher, E., Mayr, E., Willinger, U. (2007). What Does It Take To Be An Adult In Austria? Views Of Adulthood In Austrian Adolescent, Emerging Adults and Adults, *Journal of Adolescent Research*, Volume 24, No. 3: 275-292.