Conceptions of the transition to adulthood in a sample of Greek higher education students

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ABSTRACT

In a series of papers Jeffrey Arnett defines the age range between 18-25 as emerging adulthood. For a number of ethnic groups it has been found to be a particular culturally-constructed period of life course bridging adolescence and young adulthood. The primary purpose of this first exploratory study was to examine conceptions of the transition to adulthood and what criteria are endorsed when defining what an adult is among 183 Greek higher education students. Similarly to other developed countries with different cultural traditions such as the US, undergraduate students in Greece view themselves as no longer adolescents but not yet fully adults, i.e. they are best described as emerging adults. The respondents viewed internal, psychological attributes as most important as markers of adulthood, reflecting individualistic aspects. No gender differences were found with the exception of the stronger endorsement of female students in the Independence Scale.
Key words: emerging adulthood, conceptions of adulthood, transition to adulthood, Greek university students.

RESUMEN

En una serie de publicaciones, Jeffrey Arnett define el rango de edad entre los 18 y los 25 años como adultez emergente. Se ha descubierto que para un número de grupos étnicos éste es un periodo particular de la vida construido culturalmente y que constituye un puente entre la adolescencia y la edad adulta. El objetivo principal de este trabajo exploratorio ha sido el estudio de las concepciones sobre la transición a la edad adulta y de los criterios implicados en la definición del concepto de adulto por 183 estudiantes griegos de educación superior. Al igual que en otros paises desarrollados con diferentes tradiciones, tales como los Estados Unidos, los estudiantes de pregrado en Grecia se ven a sí mismos no como adolescentes ni como plenamente adultos, sino como adultos emergentes. Los participantes consideraron los atributos psicologicos como los marcadores más importantes de la edad adulta que reflejan los aspectos individuales. No se encontraron diferencias en relación al sexo con la excepción de un mayor énfasis en la Escala de Independencia en las mujeres.
Palabras clave: adultez emergente, conceptos de adultez, transicion a adultez, estudiantes universitarios griegos.

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Over the last three decades a steadily growing number of studies and published papers with regard to life changes in adulthood have appeared in the field of developmental science. For example, Erikson (1968) suggested that there are three stages of adult development (young adulthood, maturity, and old age) each defined psychosexually in relation to adult relationships and becoming a parent. Vaillant (1995) and Levinson (1986) have suggested that once men aged between 20 and 35 get married, they focus on their careers, sometimes to the detriment of their personal lives. Gilligan (1982) suggests that women are more influenced by the need to be nurturant, especially in unequal relationships indicating that their psychosocial development may be different to that of men both at home and in the workplace. These types of gender-differentiated theories are important in suggesting that male and female children, adolescents, and adults may work out aspects of their identity, and the way they perceive adulthood, differently.

As we progress through the early part of our lives toward adulthood, a number of experiences we go through, actions we take, plus skills and knowledge we gather in both formal (e.g., educational) and informal (e.g., socializing) spheres, are assumed as preparatory for autonomous existence in adulthood. However, this transition is not simply a matter of reaching a particular age. On the contrary, Settersen and Mayer (1997), criticizing the notion of chronological age, noted that this is a substitute for biological age, maturation, psychological development, social membership, and other aspects of age-graded social life. From a developmental point of view, according to Butterworth and Harris (1994), it is not clear that such life changes themselves constitute stages of development in the same sense that stages were defined for the various periods of childhood following, for example, the Piagetian or Freudian viewpoint. "Certainly, we can expect much greater variability in the way such changes occur and much less universality in their effects. Of course, there is also great scope for cultural variation in the ways in which societies manage these adult life changes, both in terms of the social organisation for reproduction (e.g. through marriage), or in the ways in which work is allocated through the education system" (Butterworth & Harris, 1994, p.242).

As Dannefer (1987) pointed out, especially for Western societies, and perhaps for other areas of the world as well, age may be less and less useful as a marker of personal progress through life, since there is more and more variability among similarly aged individuals. As a matter of fact, there has been much debate and discussion, at least since the 1980s, over the increasingly complex and ambivalent nature of this transitory phase and societies' concern about the future of young persons (Cavalli & Galland, 1995).

This demographically "dense" (Rindfuss, 1991, p.496), transitory period to adulthood and the autonomy that it implies, is reflected in the capacity for reproduction (biologically), the capability of political reasoning and action and responsibilities undertaken (culturally), economic independence and productivity (socially), and a quality of maturity in one's personal identity (psychologically). In fact, it is made up of a series of many relatively "factual", socio-demographically and culturally defined events/conditions. A first group of these events could be labeled "structural components" such as age at school leaving, age at marriage and/or becoming a parent, getting a job, conditions of labour-market entrance, education and training facilities, supply of affordable housing for young people, legal age-based criteria defining rights and responsibilities, conditions

and values allowing or restricting pre-marital cohabitation, regulations of individual access to welfare provision, etc.). A second group reflects psychologically defined circumstances -they could be labeled "subjective components"- spanning a set of relevant life domains. On the "subjective" level, for example, the transition to work is only one facet of young people's lives (and in some cases only of minor importance compared to others). Transitions to independence from the family of origin, sexuality, partnership and parenthood, lifestyle and citizenship all follow their own logic and progress according to their own rhythms with specific obligations. However, at the same time they interact with each other and their consequences affect the whole person (EGRIS, 2001).

Within the cultural sphere, two issues have been raised in the relevant psycho-sociological literature. On one hand, globalization points to continuous movement towards convergence and homogeneity across countries in many areas of social and economic life, as opposed to uniqueness and heterogeneity (Brown & Lauder, 1996). The comparative figures give many indications of general trends in this direction for young people: most notably the extension of the transition from school to work and the postponement of marriage and parenthood (for an extended discussion on the topic see Arnett, 2002).

On the other hand, within the European cultural context, for example, between and even within countries, regional distinctiveness is still clearly evident. On some dimensions there are pointers to a northern-southern Europe divide (see, for example, Helve, 2000), and on others to an English-speaking/continental Europe distinction (Evans, 2000). Furthermore, eastern versus western European distinctions in relation to attitudes to and postponement of parenthood and other similar social matters, are also evident (Coles, 2000; Helve, 2000; Roberts & Foti, 2000). An example of the effect of cultural factors can be viewed in relation to the diversity in European family patterns. Reher's work, (1998; see also Hofstede, 1984; Micheli, 2001), for example, pointed to enduring differences in family systems. He contrasts family patterns in Southern Europe, which are based on "strong" ties between the family members, with those of North-Western Europe, where, he argues, ties have been "weak" for centuries. "In the Western World it is not difficult to identify areas where families and family ties are relatively *strong* and others where they are relatively *weak*" (Reher, 1998, p. 203). These arrangements are seen as having significant impact on life course transitions and their relevant conceptions.

In the case of Greece, for example, the phenomenon of protracted reliance on the family of origin, the long-term postponement of personal independence, the relative avoidance of cohabitation, and the small size of the independent family eventually achieved is common. A similar picture is observed in other European Mediterranean countries such as Italy and Spain. Cook and Furstenberg (2001) argue that the church could have an indirect impact through a cultural heritage mechanism rather than directly through current religious beliefs and practices. On the other hand, there are reasons to believe that Greek youth is now in the European cultural mainstream due to mass media, international travel, and a "Europeanism" idea.

From a socio-demographic perspective, a further dimension of diversity within developed societies that has drawn attention in recent years is the phenomenon of "individualization", with emphasis placed on the individual level. Some scholars interested to explain behaviour in contemporary Europe and North America have argued

that increasing diversity is both in evidence and to be expected on theoretical grounds. Kohli (1986) and Buchmann (1989) argue that while all countries can be expected to converge in their demographic behaviour, increasing diversity at the individual level is to be expected. This arises because society is moving away from "standardized" scripts and towards greater individualization (for a sociological discussion on the issue see Shanahan, 2000).

Arnett (1994, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2007a,b,c), based on extensive psychological, sociological and anthropological literature review, has proposed that the time of life roughly from the late teens through the mid twenties, with a focus on ages 18-25, can be considered as a "distinct period", called Emerging Adulthood. This period is characterized by frequent change as various possibilities in love, work and worldviews are explored. Essentially, this is a time when individuals would likely consider themselves too old to be adolescents, but not yet full-fledged adults. "Having left the dependency of childhood and adolescence, and having not yet entered the enduring responsibilities that are normative in adulthood, emerging adults often explore a variety of possible life directions in love, work, and worldviews" (Arnett, 2000, p.469).

Moreover, emerging adulthood is culturally constructed. It exists only in cultures that postpone the entry into adult roles and responsibilities until well past the late teens. Thus it would be most likely in societies that are highly industrialized/technological or post-industrial where high levels of education are needed for entry into the information-based professions which, in turn, lead to more prestigious jobs. However, such advanced educational training tends to postpone marriage and parenthood well after schooling. Such trends may be reflected in young people's conceptions of the transition to adult-hood. Arnett (1994, 1997, 1998, 2000), drawing on anthropological, sociological, and psychological literature and relevant empirical research, identified several major domains of markers signifying the transition to adulthood:

1- Biological/age-related attributes include situations that reflect chronological markers such as turning 18 or 21 years of age, the biological capacity of being a parent etc., as well as passing societal age restrictions such as legal age to obtain driving license or to drink alcohol,

2- Societal attributes are related either (a) to specific role transition events such as marriage, independent residence, finishing education, being employed full time or (b) to family capacities and,

3- Parenthood such as supporting a family financially, keeping a family physically safe, and caring for children,

4- Psychological markers that refer either (a) to the separation and individuation process through the recognition of being financially independent, the negotiation of a mature and equal stance vis-a-vis parents, taking decisions according to personal beliefs and values or (b) to responsible, norm abiding behaviours such as refraining from driving while drunk, or using contraception when not wanting to conceive a child that reflect an emotional maturity.

Overall, due to social and economic institutional and cultural factors, not only diverse social and demographic outcomes are generated, but also the criteria-markers adopted by young people to characterise himself/herself as an adult. One of the key issues is whether and which conditions or events or other criteria (markers) for the transition to adulthood, identified in several domains, signify the adult status.

Different cultures may differ in their stressing of one domain or another and the emphasis may also change depending on the historical era (Arnett, 1998). Given the cultural traditions and the current socio-demographic trends, what are the criteria for adulthood adopted by young Greeks? Do they share similar perceptions to other cultural groups or do they stress different issues? The primary purpose of this first exploratory study was to examine conceptions of the transition to adulthood and what criteria are endorsed when defining what an adult is among Greek higher education students (i.e., in their late teens and early twenties).

Given that Greece belongs to the urban and industrialized Western culture and based on relatively recent evidence that young people adopt elements of a European identity as part of the ethnic identity (Georgas, 2001), we expected to find a focus on individualistic criteria similar to that of other countries, i.e. that young Greeks adhere to individualistic values in defining adulthood and lower importance is ascribed to biological or age-related aspects. However, we also expected a distinction in their conceptions of adulthood in relation to other similar aged groups from other countries. Due to the different cultural tradition characterised by a high regard for family values (reflecting traditional/collectivistic values -together with a strong religious orientation-that a significant part the Greek society may still hold) and affective importance of parents (Georgas *et al.*, 1997, 1998; Georgas, 1999a,b; Teperoglou, 1999; Teperoglou *et al.*, 1999), there is reason to believe that young Greeks would be differentiated by the criteria they adopt emphasising, for example, family capacities and responsible norm-abiding behaviour such as caring for others and contributing to society and family.

Another question explored in previous studies of conceptions of the transition to adulthood refers to whether young people questioned believe they have reached adulthood. In studies involving mostly White American samples questioning whether they have reached adulthood, the majority of emerging adults have responded "in some respects yes, in some respects no" (Arnett, 1994, 1997, 1998). It is only in the late twenties and early thirties that a majority of persons state that they feel they have reached adulthood (Arnett, 2001). Based on socio-economic trends indicated previously we assumed that the same notion would be shared by the Greek young people as well.

With respect to both the self-perception of adult status and the conceptions of what an adult is, we also intended to investigate differences within the sample in relation to certain socio-demographic variables such as family-of-origin SES, educational level, religiosity. For example, one of the interesting findings reported by Arnett (1998), with regards to conceptions of adulthood in the American society, was the lack of gender differences. Finally, we sought to investigate if those considering themselves adults define what an adult is in a different way to those who do not perceive themselves as entirely adults yet.

METHOD

Participants

The participants were 183 Greek students (49 male and 134 female), aged between 18-25 (mean age= 21.5, *SD*= 1.6), sampled from the University and the Technological/ Vocational Institute in the city of Ioannina (North-Western Greece). The majority of the students were between their 2nd and 4th year of studies (86%). Most of them were studying away from their native town (18% of the participants lived in the place of their studies sharing the same household with their parents). The vast majority of the students (97%) were from two-parent intact families. The majority of the participants had one brother or sister (67%) and 54% of them were first born children. Background characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

	Table 1. Background information.	
	Variables	N (%)
Gender	Male	49 (26,8)
	Female	134 (73,2)
Father's educational level	Less than 9 yrs of education	52 (29.2)
	12 yrs of education or +2 yrs post-secondary education	58 (32.6)
	Higher Technological College or University	68 (38.2)
Mother's educational level	Less than 9 yrs of education	64 (35.2)
	12 yrs of education or +2 yrs post-secondary education	73 (40.1)
	Higher Technological College or University	45 (24.7)
Family income/month	Up to € 900	23 (12.6)
	Up to € 1500	48 (26.2)
	Up to € 2100	61 (33.3)
	"I Don't know"	35 (19,1)
	"I Don't answer"	16 (8,7)

Instruments

The 43-item instrument used for this particular study is an adaptation of the markers of adulthood questionnaire which was devised by Arnett (1994, 1997, 1998, 2001) and previously used both in the US as well as in other countries such as Argentina (Facio & Micocci, 2003) and Israel (Mayseless & Scharf, 2003). The questionnaire was translated into Greek by the author. The items were originally based on the literature of anthropology, sociology, and psychology (see Arnett, 1994, 1997, 1998) and on pilot studies.

The questionnaire was designed to include a wide range of possible criteria (items) for the transition to adulthood randomly ordered. Participants were asked to "Indicate whether you think the following [list of items] must be achieved before a person can be considered to be an adult", or else, the extent to which each of the criteria is necessary for a person to be considered an adult. The original survey (Arnett, 1994) required the respondents to answer by "yes" or "no" to each item. In the current version each of the

43 items had four alternatives following a Likert-style rating scale (1= "not important at all", 2= "slightly", 3= "quite", and 4= "very" important), with higher scores to indicate greater importance. For the present analyses, we replicated the theory-based approach for the scale structure devised by Arnett (1998, 2001). The subscales formed included Independence, Interdependence, Role Transitions, Norm Compliance, Biological Transitions, Chronological Transitions, and Family Capacities. The only modification to the original scale construction was made to three items (41, 42, and 43) that were added to the "Legal/Chronological Transitions" subscale. The total score for each person on each subscale was the averaged rates given to the items of that subscale.

Participants were also asked on the questionnaire, "Do you think that you have reached adulthood?" Response options were "yes", "no", and "in some respects yes, in some respects no". In addition, a limited number of questions concerning social background aspects were selected that were assumed to differentiate the young Greeks' conceptions for the transition to adulthood. These variables together with their descriptive information are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Sample's distribution on selected social-psychological variables.		
Variables		N (%)
Work experience during school	Yes	52 (28,4)
	No	131 (71,6)
Work experience during studies (occasionally or permanently)	Yes	63 (34.4)
	No	120 (65.6)
Financial problems during studies (occasionally or permanently)	Yes	90 (49.5)
	No	92 (50.5)
Religiosity (How strongly [would you consider that] you believe in faith?)	Low	18 (9.9)
	Moderate	63 (34.6)
	High/strong	101 (55.5)
Do you feel like you have reached adulthood?	Yes	63 (37,7)
	In some ways yes, in some ways no	99 (59,3)
	No	5 (3,0)

Design and Procedure

This is a descriptive study through a survey type research with the above described scale. Administration of the instrument was carried out, collectively and anonymously, during spring of 2010. Following permission by the tutors, all the respondents were approached during class time and asked to fill out the questionnaire. The completion of this paper-and-pencil measure generally takes about 45 minutes.

RESULTS

In general, most of the subscales showed acceptable internal reliabilities (standardized Cronbach alphas): Independence (.56), Interdependence (.57), Family Capacities

(.89), Norm Compliance (.90), Role Transitions (.81), Biological Transitions (.77), and Legal/Chronological Transitions (.68). These internal reliabilities were very similar to those reported by Arnett (2003). To examine the extent to which these domains reflect separate aspects, bivariate correlations using Pearson r coefficient were run. As expected the associations among the subscales were small to moderate in magnitude (ranging from $r= .08$ to $r= .55$) confirming that these domains in which adult status is expected to be demonstrated reflect different facets or markers of adulthood.

With regard to conceptions of the transition to adulthood, and for reasons of presentation, the subscales' means and standard deviations as well as the frequencies of positive responses endorsing the items of the questionnaire, following a conversion of the "1 to 4" scale into a "yes-no" format, are shown in Table 3. More specifically, an answer of 1 or 2 on the Likert scale was converted into a "no" and an answer of 3 or 4 was converted into a "yes".

Based on the subscale means (Table 3) using the 1 to 4 Likert scale it can be seen that Independence received the highest average score, closely followed by Family Capacities and Norm Compliance. Fourth came Interdependence, fifth -Biological transitions, sixth -Role Transitions, and seventh -Legal/Chronological transitions. This pattern of ranking was slightly different for the males' subgroup where Interdependence preceded the Norm Compliance scale. Based on post-hoc comparisons, it was revealed that all but six out of the 21 pairwise comparisons were significant at $p< .001$.

The frequencies for the items on the questionnaire, organized into subscales, varied widely. Based on the frequencies of positive responses 24 items/criteria were supported by 70% or more of the participants. More specifically, the items endorsed by 90% or more of the participants were: "accept responsibility for the consequences of your action" (95%), "decide on personal beliefs and values independently of parents and other influences" (92.8%), "establish a relationship with parents as an equal adult" (89.9%). Being "financially independent from parents" was also highly endorsed (82.8%). These items indicated the importance of the "Independence" subscale reflecting the individualistic transitions conceptions. Exception was the item "not deeply tied to parents emotionally" which was endorsed among the lowest (20.6%).

The items denoting "Family Capacities" such as "become capable of keeping family physically safe" for men and women were also endorsed to a high degree (88.9% and 85.8%, correspondingly). Together these items denote a strong accent on individuality as a marker of achieving adulthood.

In addition, 50% to 78.3% of the respondents supported the domain of norm compliance as reflecting adulthood. This cluster of items represents consequences to other people (e.g., "using contraception if sexually active and not trying to conceive a child": 76%; "avoid drunk driving": 74.6%).

Greek respondents viewed items denoting "Interdependence" as moderately important, followed by Biological/Age-related Transitions. It is quite notable that Greek students did not strongly support the items on the Role Transitions subscale (exception was the item "settled into a long-term career": 88%). It should be mentioned that the items of this particular subscale presented the most mixed picture in terms of the frequencies distribution of the positive responses.

Table 3. Endorsement of items on the markers of adulthood by subscale.

A person has reached adulthood if he/she [is/has] ...	% Yes	Crit. Rank	M*	SD
Independence	-	-	3.0	0.4
1. Financially independent from parents	82,8	7		
2. No longer living in parents' household	53,3	25		
14. Not deeply tied to parents emotionally	20,6	40		
18. Decide on personal beliefs and values independently of parents or other influences	92,8	2		
31. Accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions	95,0	1		
37. Establish a relationship with parents as an equal adult	89,9	3		
Family Capacities	-	-	2.9	0.6
20. If a man, become capable of supporting a family financially	75,3	11		
21. If a woman, become capable of caring for children	72,2	15		
22. If a woman, become capable of supporting a family financially	61,5	21		
23. If a man, become capable of caring for children	69,7	17		
24. If a woman, become capable of running a household	66,7	19		
25. If a man, become capable of running a household	50,8	26		
29. Become capable of keeping family physically safe (men)	88,9	4		
30. Become capable of keeping family physically safe (women)	85,8	6		
Norm Compliance	-	-	2.8	0.8
8. Avoid becoming drunk	50,0	28		
9. Avoid illegal drugs	66,1	20		
10. Have no more than one sexual partner	50,6	27		
11. Drive an automobile safely and close to the speed limit	50,0	29		
12. Avoid use of profanity/vulgar language	43,3	34		
13. Use contraception if sexually active and not trying to conceive a child	76,0	10		
35. Avoid drunk driving	74,9	13		
36. Avoid committing petty crimes like vandalism and shoplifting	78,3	9		
Interdependence	-	-	2.7	0.5
17. Committed to long-term love relationship	44,1	32		
19. Make life-long commitments to others	75,0	12		
38. Learn always to have good control of your emotions	68,9	18		
39. Become less self-oriented, develop greater consideration for others	82,6	8		
40. Capable of supporting parents financially	43,9	33		
Biological Transitions	-	-	2.6	0.7
26. Grow to full height	72,1	16		
27. Become biologically capable of bearing children (women)	56,4	23		
28. Become biologically capable of fathering children (men)	57,5	22		
33. Have had sexual intercourse	47,2	30		
Role Transitions	-	-	2.5	0.7
3. Finished with education	55,6	24		
4. Married	29,1	37		
5. Have at least one child	28,9	38		
6. Settled into a long-term career	88,0	5		
7. Purchased a house	35,6	35		
34. Be employed full-time	72,6	14		
Legal/Chronological Transitions	-	-	1.9	0.5
15. Reached age 18	20,9	39		
16. Reached age 21	35,2	36		
32. Have obtained license and can drive an automobile	8,9	43		
41. Allowed to drink alcohol	10,6	41		
42. Allowed to smoke cigarettes	10,1	42		
43. Completed military service (males)	46,9	31		

*The average score was based on the 4-point scale.

Due to the exploratory character of the study, a first step, using bivariate statistical techniques, was to control for associations (based on mean differences or correlations significance) between a number of selected social background variables (IVs) (see Tables 1, 2) and the subscales' mean scores (DVs).

Contrary, partly, to what was expected only for gender and religiosity significant results were revealed with certain subscales (Table 4). More specifically: (a) only in one scale the scores differed significantly for gender and more specifically: women (mean: 3.1) gave more importance to Independence than their male colleagues (mean: 2.9) (t_{178} = 2.13, p <.05). (b) Religiosity seemed to influence the conceptions of the transition to adulthood on the Family Capacities ($F_{(2,177)}$= 11.04, p <.001), Norm Compliance ($F_{(2,177)}$= 5.93, p <.003) and Role Transitions ($F_{(2,177)}$= 4.58, p <.02) domains. The Scheffé Test was used to compare pairs of group means in order to assess where the differences lie. Post-hoc tests revealed several differences. In general, the students with higher level of religiosity ascribed more importance than the other two subgroups to the relevant items with these scales. The only exception to this pattern was found with regard to the Interdependence scale where the mediocre/moderately religious students endorsed the scale against the other two groups, although the F-ratio for the overall analysis of variance was marginally significant at 5%.

Participants were asked to judge whether or not they considered themselves adults in their mid-twenties. In response to the question, "Do you think that you have reached adulthood?", more than half of the students responded "in some respects yes, in some respects no" (59.3%), 37.7% of them gave positive answers and only 5 students (3%) answered "no". Due to the minimal number of negative responses, these cases were left out from further analysis. The association between the two remaining levels of responses and gender was significant (χ^2= 7.74, p <.005). It seems that, proportionally, more males than females consider themselves as having achieved the adult status (57.5% vs. 32.8% correspondingly within "gender" variable), whereas a larger proportion of females do not see themselves as entirely adults.

Table 4. Gender and religiosity comparisons.

	Gender			Religiosity				
	Males	Females	*t*-value	Low (1)	Moderate (2)	High (3)	*F*-ratio	Post-hoc
Independence	2.9 (.48)	3.1 (.38)	-2.13 p <.04					
Interdependence				2.4 (.59)	2.8 (.44)	2.7 (.49)	2.97 p <.05	2>12
Family Capacities				2.3 (.77)	2.9 (.54)	3.0 (.58)	11.04 p <.001	3>2>1
Norm Compliance				2.3 (.82)	2.6 (.73)	2.9 (.79)	5.93 p <.003	3>1, 2
Role Transitions				2.1 (.71)	2.5 (.66)	2.6 (.66)	4.58 p <.01	3>1

Notes: Only the statistically significant results are presented; Standard Deviation in parentheses.

From the variables selected for the current study, individual's age was found to be associated with self-conception of adulthood as expected. Participants who were older were more likely to feel they had reached adulthood ($t= 2.49$, $p <.01$). In addition, fathers' educational level was related to self-perception of adulthood. More specifically, those students with less educated fathers were more likely to consider themselves adults than those with more educated fathers. The students with more educated fathers were more ambiguous towards their adulthood state ($\chi^2= 6.95$, $p <.03$).

Finally, no association was found between any subscale and self-perceived adult status, indicating that those who perceived themselves as having fully achieved adult status versus those who did not consider themselves in a number of aspects as adults, did not differ significantly in their profiles on the seven subscales.

DISCUSSION

The goal of the present exploratory study was to examine what criteria are endorsed by Greek higher education students when defining what an adult is. Like college students in the United States, undergraduate students in Greece view themselves as no longer adolescents but not yet fully adults. Thus, in their subjective views of themselves, they are best described as emerging adults (Arnett, 1998, 2000).

The transition from adolescence to adulthood is not simply biological but, rather, according to sample's conceptions, social, psychological and cultural, and societies may differ in the criteria they consider to be most important in marking the transition to adulthood. The results confirmed the importance of the "subjective components" in relation to the "structural" and normative elements that are commonly referred to as the most characteristic markers of adulthood.

Indeed, the most striking result concerning the criteria for adulthood refers to the cluster of items denoting independence as an immutable requirement for adult status. The finding is in line with studies undertaken in other developed countries with different cultural traditions such as the US (Arnett, 1997, 1998, 2001; Greene *et al*., 1992; Scheer *et al*., 1996), Argentina (Facio & Micocci, 2003) and Israel (Mayseless & Scharf, 2003).

The respondents in this study viewed internal, psychological attributes as most important as markers of adulthood, reflecting individualistic aspects. Items such as accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions, decide on personal beliefs and values, establish equal relationship with parents or even financially independent from parents, may reflect the tendency to become independent from parents and learn to stand alone as a self-sufficient person (Arnett, 1998). Almost more than 90% of the respondents adhered to these statements.

This prominence of the individualistic criteria of the transition to adulthood, on one hand, and the sharing of common conceptions with other cultural groups that go through these years of exploration of a variety of life directions in love, work and worldviews, suggests the existence of a widely shared conception among young Greeks in defining what an adult is as well as an increasing influence of the American and

North-Western European culture in Greece that may have passed over the media and processes of ideological influence. Indeed, the pattern of responses proved to be similar to the conceptions of adulthood reported by US (Arnett, 2001, 2003) and Israeli respondents (Mayseless & Scharf, 2003) with regard to order of the clusters of criteria mentioned, but different in terms of the degree of endorsement.

Although they projected that adulthood is firmly connected with the individualism domain, nevertheless this view does not seem to involve "the emotional ties with parents" (which may reflect a different conception of being Independent in the Greek culture). This finding reflects the difference with other western cultural traditions and, at the same time, confirms findings of sociological studies that stress the strong family ties in southern European countries (e.g. Reher, 1998). To be considered an "independent" adult is not related to the emotional ties with parents but rather with the acquisition of responsibilities and the establishment of a relationship with them on an equal basis.

These results attest to the existence of a general common view regarding the markers of adulthood across these cultures and are in line with the depiction of Greece as a modernised western society emphasising individuation but, at the same time, pertaining collectivistic views that characterise Greek society. In fact, although individualistic transitions ranked highest, Family Capacities and Norm Compliance also ranked quite high as important for adult status. These clusters of items involve responsibility to and consideration for others and may be considered as counterbalancing the individualistic qualities by attributing to social and communal concerns (Arnett, 1998).

For the present study, it was expected that young Greeks would be more likely to support gender-specific criteria for adulthood and more traditional views about gender roles as a consequence of keeping the collectivistic values of Greek society. Analogous concerns have been expressed for ethnic minority groups (Marin & Marin, 1991; Sung, 1985; Taylor, 2001) as well as among Whites within the U.S. American society (Arnett, 2003). The Family Capacities subscale, for example, contained a variety of gender-specific items including capacities such as supporting a family financially, keeping a family physically safe, and caring for children. The more the traditional the culture the more likely gender-specific capacities to be attributed for adulthood, with men expected to provide and protect (men as bread-winners) and women to care for children and run a household (Arnett, 1998; Gilmore, 1990; Schlegel & Barry, 1991).

The Norm Compliance subscale contained items that pertained to complying with social norms such as avoiding becoming drunk and driving safely and within the speed limit. It was hypothesized that Greek undergraduates would favour these items as criteria for adulthood, as a reflection of collectivistic values emphasizing consideration for others. Results reflected this hypothesis. A closer look at the pattern of results for the items on this subscale and the corresponding figures for a White-American sample (Arnett, 2003) indicates White-Americans as being less likely than Greeks to support items that involve behaviour that does not directly harm others. For example, only 19% of White-Americans supported avoid becoming drunk as a criterion for adulthood compared to 50% Greeks. In contrast, similar to the Greek sample results were the findings concerning other American ethnic minority groups such as African-, Latinos-, and Asian-Americans. However, specification of this behaviour before driving (avoid

drunk driving) revealed a smaller difference (60% for White-Americans *vs*. 74.9% for young Greeks).

Role Transitions ranked relatively lower as a domain signifying adulthood. The relevant items were supported by a considerably lower proportion of the students than most of the items on the Independence, Family Capacities, or Norm Compliance sub-scales. This subscale contained items drawn from the sociological literature (Shanahan, 2000) pertaining to transitions such as get married (29.1%), finish education (55.6%), and become employed full-time (72.6%). It is interesting to note that the correspond-ing proportion for White-Americans was 19% but 50% for Latino-Americans and 43% for African Americans (Arnett, 2003). The only prominent exception was the statement concerning settling into a long-term career, item which was endorsed by 88% of the respondents and implies a financial independence and autonomy. It is noteworthy that when this particular item was retracted from the subscale, Role Transitions was ranked lower than Biological Transitions, which were endorsed by almost half of the partici-pants. The finding could be considered consistent with studies in other western coun-tries (e.g. USA) (Arnett, 1997, 1998, 2000; Greene *et al*., 1992; Scheer & Palkovitz, 1995) and is in contrast to the emphasis on role transitions as the definitive criteria for the transition to adulthood in sociological and anthropological studies in such cultures (e.g., Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1999; Hogan, 1980; Marini, 1984; Modell, 1989; Schlegel & Barry, 1991).

The Legal/Chronological Transitions received limited endorsement. Three out of the six were the least-endorsed items included in the study (allowed to drink alcohol, allowed to smoke cigarettes, have obtained driving licence). These items were supported by less than 10% of the participants. Chronological markers such as turning 18 years of age and transition events such as marriage or finishing education may have great significance in the Greek, as well as in other western countries, legal and socio-economic system but the results indicate that for emerging Greek adults these age milestones have little significance as markers of adult status.

Looking at the separate analyses, it can be stated that in the Greek group there was a high consensus as regards the most endorsed criteria for the transition to adult-hood. In general, no gender differences were found with the exception of the stronger endorsement of female students in the Independence scale. Similar results have been found in other studies as well (e.g., Arnett, 1998). However, the most prominent dif-ference was found with regard to "religiosity" indicating that the stronger the religious belief and practices the stronger the endorsement of markers reflecting a "traditional", "collectivistic" view for the transition to adulthood such as Family Capacities, Norm Compliance and Interdependence.

Overall, the results show that from one hand the Greek students appear to embrace the individualism of the western, North-European and American majority culture, as re-flected in widespread endorsement of criteria for adulthood such as accept responsibility for your actions and decide on personal beliefs and values. At the same time, however, they are likely to embrace criteria related to Family Capacities, Norm Compliance and Interdependence criteria that appear to reflect more traditional cultural values of fam-ily obligations and consideration for others and, in addition, to reject biologically and

legally attributed features such as turning a certain age or getting married and becoming a parent or being allowed for certain actions.

With regard to their subjective transition to adulthood, only 3% of the persons give a negative answer in response to the question "Do you feel that you have reached adulthood?" Two thirds (59.3%) of the participants responded "in some respects yes, in some respects no", a figure similar to Arnett's (2003) findings. Moreover, contrary to what could be expected there was a substantial effect of gender on subjects' self-perception of their adult status, indicating that more males than females -proportionally- consider themselves as having reached adulthood.

The reason why the ambiguous "yes and no" response was so common among Greek young people is apparent from the criteria most likely to be considered important in marking the transition to adulthood. Most of the top criteria for the transition to adulthood are gradual, intangible character qualities: accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions, decide on personal beliefs and values, and become less self-oriented. These are not events but processes that take place over an extended period of time. Consequently, it is understandable that many emerging adults would feel that they are in the course of these processes but have not yet completed them -on the way to adulthood but not there yet (Arnett, 2003).

According to Arnett (2001), it is only after age 30 that a clear majority of people believe they have fully reached adulthood. In a similar line of evidence, the present study revealed that the older the student the more adult he/she feels. In addition, looking at the social status of the family of origin (based on fathers' educational level), it was revealed that the lower family SES the greater likelihood of considering themselves adults due, probably, to having more family responsibilities in childhood and adolescence. This finding is in congruence with that of other studies (e.g. Arnett, 1997). For these students, then, the sense of having reached adulthood is not necessarily attributed to cultural factors per se but because they more frequently experience a low SES family background (Arnett, 2003).

Definitely, many more things are needed. The theoretically-based and constructed instrument seems to reflect separate facets or markers of adulthood, although in a future study the factor analysis should be considered for the examination of the constructive cohesion from the statistical perspective. To test the replicability of these conclusions it would be necessary to expand the study in terms of geographic areas, age range, and socio-demographic background. It would be illuminating to explore, for example, if there are differences between Greek college and non-college groups as well as what the conceptions of the transition to adulthood are in adolescents and adults, married and unmarried persons, employed and unemployed. It would be very interesting, also, if the data could be obtained on a longitudinal basis for exploring potential cohort differences under different socio-economic conditions.

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