

# Emerging adulthood's characteristics in Greece in the face of economic adversity

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## ABSTRACT

*Emerging adulthood is a phenomenon of the economic development of our times. Several studies have tried to explore this aspect-situation, as first captured by scholar J. Arnett. In this study, which is referred to Greece, important aspects of emerging adulthood (as distinctive characteristics-IDEA scale) are examined. To achieve this, a questionnaire was created and addressed to a random sample of people aged 18-29. The main scope of this research is the presentation of the views of emerging adults in Greece, during an economic crisis period, concerning the emerging adulthood characteristics. The sample included 315 individuals, employed and unemployed individuals. The results revealed that the EA is an existing phenomenon in Greece and the most important characteristics of EA are related with gaining independence.*

## KEYWORDS

*Emerging adulthood, Greece, distinctive characteristics, economic crisis*

## RÉSUMÉ

*L'âge adulte émergeant est un phénomène qui est le résultat du développement économique qui a été fait au monde occidental les dernières décennies. Beaucoup de recherches ont été faites afin d'explorer cette situation comme elle a été inventée et dite pour la première fois par le chercheur J. Arnett. Le travail présent se réfère en Grèce où les aspects de l'âge adulte ont été recherchés (comme les caractéristiques distinctes – échelle IDEA). Pour le réussir, on a créé un questionnaire qui a été adressé aux sujets de 18 à 29 ans. L'échantillon comprenait 315 personnes (étudiants et non, employés et sans emploi). Le but principal de la recherche était l'expression de l'opinion des adultes émergents en Grèce au milieu de la crise économique, par rapport aux caractéristiques de l'âge adulte émergeant. Les résultats ont montré que le phénomène de l'âge adulte émergeant est existant en Grèce et les caractéristiques de développement les plus importantes ont un rapport avec l'acquisition de l'indépendance.*

## MOTS-CLÉS

*Âge adulte émergeant, Grèce, caractéristiques distinctes, crise économique*

## INTRODUCTION

Emerging adulthood (EA) is a relatively new phenomenon and can be considered to be a spawn of modern western society, due to the serious economic and social changes have occurred the last years. The main reasons for its introduction, is the generalization and longer

duration of education, the need for more job specialization, the economic crisis that prevents young people to abandon their parents' nest and the appearance of puberty at an earlier age. In response to demographic and socioeconomic changes that have taken place during the last few decades, young men and women are in fact increasingly postponing the timing in which they go through their most important transition steps, such as leaving the parental home, getting a job, and forming a new family (Furstenberg, 2010). As a result, transition to adulthood nowadays, is becoming longer and uncertain as well as more "individualized" (Iacovou, 2002). This means that individuals are no longer expected to become adults following predetermined social steps, but their identity development depends on how they are autonomously envisioning their future life trajectory.

The conception of EA aims just to describe the specific phenomenon, because it can't be generalized to all the people that belong to this age frame worldwide, since as it had mentioned it is a characteristic of western world and countries with similar socioeconomic conditions (Arnett, 2011). In general, it can be referred that this phenomenon occurs when there is a gap of many years between the time young people finish secondary education and the time that they enter stable adult roles in work and love (Arnett, 2015). As Arnett (2000) declares, EA exists in cultures where the responsibilities undertaking and adult people roles, are delayed for many years after adolescence.

It is a period that emerging adults, most of the times, feel neither minors nor adults (Arnett, 2000; Munsey, 2006). Moreover, Arnett (2004) highlights that adulthood defines the end of independence and this is a possible reason why emerging adult try to avoid or delay it.

The role of university studies is also important to the transition to adulthood, since besides family, it is a carrier that configures the life of young people (Galanaki, Kalantzi-Azizi & Amanaki, 2008) and this is more evident in our times, as the percentage of young people studying is larger than before. For example from Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) derived data (OECD, 2017) it was evident that the percentage of people attending tertiary education in the thirty-four developed countries members of OECD, increased from 25.9 in 2000 to 43.1 in 2016. The most important changes that occur in the period of EA and relate with the transition to tertiary education are relevant with sexuality, religion and interpersonal relations (Galanaki et al., 2008).

From the time that EA was recognized as a separate life stage (Arnett, 2000) and consequently it has been investigated in the context of developmental psychology, many studies have been conducted to register various of its characteristics, such as perceptions of what is important to define adulthood, perceptions of whether emerging adults have reached adulthood, perceptions for the achievement of adulthood criteria, identification of many more emerging adulthood subjects.

Arnett (2015) has identified five dimensions that characterize this period: identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between and possibilities. Arnett (2007) considered that the above dimensions, although they are common, they may differ among societies or countries. It is also remarked (Arnett, 2000; Arnett 2001) that the EA phenomenon changes even from culture to culture and sometimes in the same country. The case of Greece is examined in this paper, with the contribution of a questionnaire, in which except the questions that characterize EA, with a main aim to illustrate the state of emerging adults in Greece this period, as it is obvious social and economic turmoil have occurred and many more are approaching in the country.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In order to register the views that the emerging adults express for this period they are going through, there is the potential to measure EA dimensions (or developmental characteristics). The theoretical background of the scales used to characterize EA, follow in the remaining of this section.

### *Characteristics (dimensions) of EA*

Emerging adults are considered adults in some elements and not in others (Hill et al., 2015). However, their subjective experience for this period of their lives, can vary depending the country, the culture and social or economic conditions. In order to be able to register the view of emerging adults about their life, Reifman, Arnett & Colwell (2003, 2007) developed a scale, called Inventory of the Dimensions of EA (IDEA), which measures the five dimensions of EA proposed by Arnett, with the addition of one more, the other-focus.

### *Greece's special characteristics*

Greece is an urban and industrialized western/Mediterranean country, based on elements of a European identity as a part of its ethnic identity (Georgas, 2001). This country of European south, is considered a typical example of family kinship forms and practices (Papataxiarchis, 2012).

Paxson (2004) refers to the Greek familism as "the notion that family relations are prominent social relations, that the family should be a cohesive unit, that the family's loyalty supersedes all others" (p.144). Comparing a number of everyday aspects among Greek and Americans, in their technical report. The Greek family emphasizes the importance of supportive relationships among family members and friends and endorse high intimate relationships within the family (Pnevmatikos & Vardos, 2014).

Greek familism also reinforces a pattern of dependencies among family members (Pnevmatikos & Vardos, 2014) and family operates as the primary provider of welfare support, and this is reinforced by the absence of a family policy (Papadopoulos, 1998). In this way, young people become more dependent on their family and thus their dependency on the family is maintained (Pnevmatikos & Vardos, 2014).

Marriage is considered as a vehicle for young adults, especially females, to escape from the family environment and live independently (Pnevmatikos & Vardos, 2014). Tertiary studies facilitate young people's independence from the family to some extent, although familism and lack of policy on students' financial assistance prevent emerging adults from gaining their independence from the family (Pnevmatikos & Vardos, 2014).

Eventually, it is apparent that as in other Southern European countries, Greek young people follow the 'living apart and together' model (Billari, Rosina, Ranaldi & Romano, 2008). Thus, Greek emerging adults lack a crucial element that promotes self-reliance and emotional autonomy: leaving the parental home (Kins & Beyers, 2010).

Greece, except the aforementioned peculiarities of its culture that also characterize countries of southern Europe, presents one more characteristic, which even though it can be considered global, has affected Greece more severely. We are referring to economic and social crisis, which lasts since almost a decade and the dimensions and the consequences caused and burden the Greek citizens, produce even more difficult the integration of the young people (those that have not migrated) in the work force, forcing them to stay more years in the family house and to accept financial support from their parents for a longer period.

### ***Studies about EA in Greece***

It is an aftermath that Greece, a country belonging to the western side of the world and also considered a developed country, should present proportional characteristics in the EA subject and indeed many studies have preceded in the Greek area to examine the subject (Galanaki et al., 2008; Galanaki & Leontopoulou, 2017; Galanaki & Sideridis, 2018; Leontopoulou & Triliva, 2012; Leontopoulou, Mavridis & Giotsa, 2016; Petrogiannis, 2011; Pnevmatikos & Bardos; 2014; Stephanou, 2011; Tsiplanitis & Karalis, 2018). The above studies were addressed mainly in University students and the age ranges covered, were usually in the range of 18-25.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Participants and procedure***

Participants in the current survey were 315 individuals, living in Greece, covering the whole suggested age range for EA, of 18 to 29. These persons were chosen using convenient sampling and most of them (57%) were students in Greek Universities, the majority was females (58%), some employed (39%) and some unemployed (and not students), which were approached in a local employment office (OAED). The questionnaire was distributed to the participants, which consented to participate in the research and to complete it, after they had been informed about the content and had been assured for the confidentiality of the data. During the completion of the questionnaires, there was always a researcher present, for queries and clarifications, in order to avoid mistakes and voids in the questionnaires. Moreover, the questionnaire was created in the "Google Forms" application, so that it would be easy to filled out, electronically as well. The researcher had sent e-mails to individuals in his professional and academic environment, covering the specific age range. The completion of the questionnaire required about 20-25 minutes. The research started in January of 2017 and ended in June of 2017.

### ***Measure of the questionnaire***

The main measure-scale of the questionnaire was the IDEA scale. This measure included thirty-one questions, which were answered in a 4-grade Likert scale [from "(1)=completely agree" to "(4)=completely disagree"]. This measure of the questionnaire was also presented and translated in Greek language by Galanaki and Leontopoulou (2017).

### ***Hypotheses-Research questions***

The main aim of the current study was the display of EA's characteristics in Greece. The research questions to be analysed and responded, were:

- Research question (R.Q.) 1: Which are the most important EA characteristics of Greek emerging adults? (it is a purely exploratory subject without defining a specific hypothesis).
- R.Q.2: The extent to which Greek young people experience EA (also an exploratory one).

## **RESULTS**

The participants in the survey conducted, were 56.81% students, 58% women and 60.8% unemployed. Analytical descriptive statistics of the socio-demographic variables are presented in Table 1.

**TABLE 1**  
*Descriptive statistics of the socio-demographic variables of the sample (N=315)*

Variable	Values	Percentage	Variable	Values	Percentage
Gender	Male	41.86	Romantic relationships	Married	3.32
	Female	58.14		Steady	46.51
Occupation	Yes	39.17		Occasional	22.59
	No	60.83		No	27.57
Studying	Yes	56.81	Living arrangement	Alone	23.36
	No	43.19		With parents	64.60
Education level	Post-graduate	8.00		With other	6.57
	Tertiary	26.58		With husband/companion	5.47
	Post-secondary	6.98		Financial support	Little/not at all
	Secondary	58.47		Occasional	24.92
Marital status	Single	92.36		Quite frequently	20.27
	Engaged/married	6.97		In a permanent basis	41.20
	Divorced/separated	0.66		Age	Category1: 18-21
				Category2: 22-25	31.36
				Category3: 26-29	25.09

Table 2 presents the mean averages and the percentages per subgroup of the IDEA scale. The sub-groups of “Experimentation” and “Identity” exploration distinguished positively, as emerging adults appreciated them much, with a percentage over 75%, while “Other focused” and “Negativity” ones, were not endorsed as much by the Greek emerging adults.

**TABLE 2**  
*EA’s characteristics subgroups mean averages and percentages per category*

Subgroup	Average	S. D.	Categories			
			% 1:comp dis	% 2	%3	% 4:comp agree
Experimentation/possibilities on	3.07	0.87	6.34	16.37	41.52	35.78
Negativity/instability	2.74	0.97	14.71	24.80	32.67	27.82
Self-focused	3.00	0.84	6.00	19.91	42.08	32.01
Identity exploration	3.05	0.88	7.78	16.22	39.23	36.78
Other focused	2.64	0.88	10.45	32.01	40.15	17.38
Feeling-in-between	2.91	1.01	13.13	18.19	33.51	35.17
<b>Average</b>	<b>2.92</b>	<b>0.90</b>	<b>9.57</b>	<b>20.68</b>	<b>38.33</b>	<b>31.73</b>

Table 3 below, displays the percentages per category and mean averages of all the items of IDEA scale. The total mean average of all the items was 2.92 (at a range of one to four), which indicates that EA can be considered to be a relevant concept in Greece. (R.Q.2).

**TABLE 3**  
*Mean averages of EA's characteristics items and percentages per category*

Is this period of your life a...	Subscales	Categories				aver.	S.D.	Rank
		1:comp. dis.	2	3	4: comp agree.			
1. time of many possibilities?	Experimentation / possibilities on	6.27	9.90	42.57	41.25	3.19	0.85	5
2. time of exploration?	Experimentation / possibilities on	3.30	13.86	39.60	43.23	3.23	0.81	3
3. time of confusion?	Negativity / instability	12.87	21.12	34.65	31.35	2.84	1.01	20
4. time of experimentation?	Experimentation / possibilities on	10.23	22.44	42.24	25.08	2.82	0.92	21
5. time of personal freedom?	Self-focused	5.28	16.83	41.25	36.63	3.09	0.86	7
6. time of feeling restricted?	Negativity / instability	30.03	43.23	18.48	8.25	2.05	0.90	31
7. time of responsibility for yourself?	Self-focused	2.64	9.90	34.65	52.81	3.38	0.77	2
8. time of feeling stressed out?	Negativity/instability	9.90	19.47	36.30	34.32	2.95	0.97	18
9. time of instability?	Negativity/instability	18.81	26.40	32.34	22.44	2.58	1.04	28
10. time of optimism?	Self-focused	6.60	17.82	46.86	28.71	2.98	0.86	15
11. time of high pressure?	Negativity/instability	12.87	22.11	37.29	27.72	2.80	0.99	23
12. time of finding out who you a?	Identity exploration	16.17	18.15	33.00	32.67	2.82	1.06	21
13. time of settling down?	Other focused	12.87	19.47	42.90	24.75	2.80	0.96	24
14. time of responsibility for others?	Other focused	12.54	39.60	33.33	14.52	2.50	0.89	30
15. time of independence?	Self-focused	5.61	17.16	44.22	33.00	3.05	0.85	11
16. time of open choices?	Experimentation/possibilities on	7.26	18.15	40.92	33.66	3.01	0.90	14
17. time of unpredictability?	Negativity/instability	11.88	22.44	33.00	32.67	2.86	1.01	19
18. time of commitments to others?	Other focused	5.94	36.96	44.22	12.87	2.64	0.78	26
19. time of self-sufficiency?	Self-focused	9.90	38.28	38.28	13.53	2.55	0.85	29
20. time of many worries?	Negativity/instability	6.60	18.81	36.63	37.95	3.06	0.91	9

21. time of trying out new things?	Experimentation/possibilities on	4.62	17.49	42.24	35.64	3.09	0.84	8
22. time of focusing on yourself?	Self-focused	5.94	19.47	47.19	27.39	2.96	0.84	17
23. time of separating from parents?	Identity exploration	14.85	25.74	35.31	24.09	2.69	1.00	25
24. time of defining yourself?	Identity exploration	6.93	16.17	49.17	27.72	2.98	0.85	15
25. time of planning for the future?	Identity exploration	2.31	6.60	36.96	54.13	3.43	0.72	1
26. time of seeking a sense of meaning?	Identity exploration	6.93	17.82	40.26	34.98	3.03	0.90	13
27. time of deciding on your own beliefs and values?	Identity exploration	4.62	14.85	37.62	42.90	3.19	0.85	5
28. time of learning to think for yourself?	Identity exploration	2.64	14.19	42.24	40.92	3.21	0.78	4
29. time of feeling adult in some ways but not others?	Feeling-in-between	8.25	17.16	35.64	38.94	3.05	0.94	10
30. time of gradually becoming an adult?	Feeling-in-between	9.27	14.90	38.74	37.09	3.03	0.94	12
31. time of being not sure whether you have reached full adulthood?	Feeling-in-between	21.85	22.52	26.16	29.47	2.62	1.13	26
	<b>Average</b>	<b>9.57</b>	<b>20.68</b>	<b>38.33</b>	<b>31.73</b>	<b>2.92</b>	<b>0.90</b>	

From the examination of the above table which presents the items of the IDEA scale, we noted the following:

The five most important characteristics of EA as evaluated by the Greek emerging adults were (in the parentheses the sub-groups they belong): time of responsibility (Self-focus), planning for the future (Identity exploration), learning to think for yourself (Identity exploration), deciding on your own beliefs and values (Identity exploration) and time of many possibilities (Experimentation/possibilities). Hence, the three items come from the Identity exploration subgroup and this is an indication that the Greek emerging adults are still in a stage to explore their identity. In contrary, the less important features were: feeling restricted (Negativity), self-sufficiency (Self-focus), responsibility for others (Other-focus), instability (Negativity). Here, as the Negativity items were neglected, we can realize the optimism of the emerging adults, as they seem to reject the negativity items.

The average mean of all the 31 questions was 2.92 (in a 1-4 scale) which is an indication that EA is an existing phenomenon in Greece, as the above characteristics, seemed to be quite appreciated. Another indication of the above result is the percentages of the

answers in questions 29 and 31, with 74.58% and 55.63% respectively. These questions are seeking the beliefs of the young people, for their transition to adulthood situation.

## RESULTS-DISCUSSION

Surely, Arnett (2007) considered that the explorations make this period of life more unstable and maybe this adds more anxiety, although in general it is considered a period of optimism (Arnett, 2004, 2007). In addition, this age frame offers a number of abilities to every individual, such as ability for economic independence, ability for effective self-protection and protection of other persons, acquisition of sexual experience, ability to care for children, all of which require skills, such as realistic confrontation of life, diligence, courage, strength and self-confidence (Galanaki & et al., 2008). While instability was a characteristic that was not present in the people included in the sample of our study, it was nevertheless evident that optimism was not so much appreciated, as other studies in Greece (Galanaki & Leontopoulou, 2017), where the optimism item was endorsed by 78% of the participants. The present study was conducted recently, the economic situation in Greece was worst than five years before and the sample did not include only students. Hence, all these factors have led to relatively different results. It seems that optimism was not neglected, but it was not a major tendency, and at the same time Greek emerging adults did not feel that they were in a state of instability.

Most important characteristics of the emerging adulthood period, were considered by the Greek young people, those related with achieving independence from parents, as to accept responsibilities for the consequences of their actions, to be able to decide based on their own beliefs and of course economic independence from parents. The above criteria are related to identity exploration and self-focus, which represent their willing for freedom and independence (financial and not) from their parents. This fact was also referred in the studies of Petrogiannis (2011) and Galanaki & Lentopoulou (2017). Arnett (2007) considered that the dimensions that characterize this period, although they are common, they may differ among societies or countries, but he believed that the identity exploration is the most important dimension and in this aspect contributes the absence of obligations and commitments to others. These characteristics are also appreciated by emerging adults in other developed countries, although in some studies, like the ones from Crocetti et al. (2015), Doğan, Yüzbaşı & Demir (2015), where the young people were employed, this was not the case. However, in other studies (Atak & Cok, 2008; Leontopoulou et al. 2016; Lisha et al., 2014, Negru, 2012; Sirsch, Dreher, Mayr & Willinger, 2009) where the sample was consisted only from students, the factors of Experimentation and Identity development, had also distinguished. Studies in USA (Facio, Resett, Micocci & Mistrorigo, 2007; Fierro Arias & Moreno Hernandez, 2007), displayed similar results, and in addition the scores were lower on the feature of instability, like in the present study. Surely, Arnett (2007) considered that the explorations make this period of life more unstable and maybe this adds more anxiety, although in general it is considered a period of optimism (Arnett, 2004, 2007). In addition, this age frame offers a number of abilities to every individual, such as ability for economic independence, ability for effective self-protection and protection of other persons, acquisition of sexual experience, ability to care for children, all of which require skills, such as realistic confrontation of life, diligence, courage, strength and self-confidence (Galanaki et al., 2008).

Some other cultures and studies, like the one for the country of China (Nelson, Badger & Wu, 2004), showed that Chinese emerging adults placed greater emphasis on collectivistic goals and displayed a greater commitment to others, indicating that this period is not so self-focused, as referred in the USA or European studies. Moreover, a study in Argentinian emerging adults (Facio et al., 2007), presents Argentinian people more other-focused.



The least important characteristics by the Greek emerging adults were mostly related to role transitions. Generally, the tendency existed in Greece for the criteria that lead to adulthood, are identical to those from other countries of the western world.

The EA's characteristics of this life period, were evident in the sample of Greek individuals examined in this study, which is an indication of the existence of the EA phenomenon. The mean average of the items the IDEA scale was 2.92, which is much above average. However, the Greek emerging adults were not sure whether they have reached full adulthood, with a 55.63 percentage, which is lower than other studies and countries, but we must always have in mind that the sample in this study, included many young people that were not students and many of them had already found an occupation. However, in studies with a similar mixture of persons (employed and unemployed, students and not) the results were relevant. For example, in the research of Sirsch et al. (2009) conducted in Austria and the sample were not consisted only from students, the percentage was 55%, in another corresponding study in Czech from Macek, Bejcek & Vanickova (2007) was 64% and in Argentina (Facio & Micocci, 2003), where the participants were of 25 to 27 years old, the percentage of the young people declaring that were partly adults, was 45%.

Nevertheless, the EA features of this period of life, were obvious in the sample of Greek people examined in this study, which is an indication that the phenomenon of emerging adulthood exists in Greece. It can be concluded that the majority of the Greek young people of the sample (aged 18-29) viewed themselves in a transition toward adulthood. The same results were evident in other studies in Greece (Galanaki et al., 2008; Galanaki & Sideridis 2018; Leontopoulou et al., 2016; Pnevmatikos & Vardos, 2014; Tsipianitis & Karalis, 2018).

In the end, it should be referred that the questionnaire created for this study, included many more questions and variables regarding EA and it is a future scope of the author to present more analyses and results in other articles.

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