

Development in emerging adulthood – Comparison of employed and unemployed emerging adults in Germany

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INTRODUCTION

Arnett has described "emerging adulthood as a new life stage in between adolescence and young adulthood" (2011, p. 255) that is identified by five characteristic features. Although Arnett proposed originally that emerging adulthood be defined as the time from age 18 to age 25 (Arnett, 2000), he and others have expanded this stage of development among young people (especially in industrialized countries) to cover the ages from 18 to 29. According to Arnett's theory (2000, 2006), development in emerging adulthood is characterized by great heterogeneity. However, despite empirical evidence that supports the theory of emerging adulthood, there is a lack of empirical studies that consider development in emerging adulthood among employed and unemployed emerging adults. Thus, the current study posed the following research questions.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Do employed and unemployed emerging adults differ with regard to perceived adult status, perceptions of the five features of emerging adulthood, and the importance of criteria for adulthood?
2. Do the results differ by age group (18-24 vs. 25-29) as well as by gender?

DESIGN

124 emerging adults (70 employed and 54 unemployed, 62 women and 62 men) were investigated from August 2010 to September 2011.

PARTICIPANTS

Participants ^{1,2}		employed		unemployed		differences between employment status x age group
Age group		18-24	25-29	18-24	25-29	
Gender	women	13	23	13	13	$\chi^2(3, 124) = 27.58$ $p < .001$
	men	17	17	11	17	
Age ³	women	22.62 (1.89) ^a	27.44 (1.36) ^a	21.87 (1.78) ^c	27.37 (1.55) ^c	$\chi^2(3, 124) = 9.02$ $p < .05$
<i>M (SD)</i>	men	21.82 (1.69) ^b	27.25 (1.45) ^b	20.91 (2.15) ^d	27.79 (1.09) ^d	
Degree (university or vocational college)	no	9	1	15	11	$\chi^2(3, 124) = 16.80$ $p < .001$
	yes	21	39	9	19	
Partner	no	12	11	15	16	$\chi^2(3, 124) = 9.02$ $p < .05$
	yes (married)	18	29 (4)	9 (1)	14 (7)	
Children	no	28	33	17	15	$\chi^2(3, 124) = 16.80$ $p < .001$
	at least 1	2	7	7	15	

¹ distribution employment status x age group, employment status x gender: ns;
² father's level of education: employment status x age group: ns;
³ same indices indicate significant differences between the groups ($p < .001$)

VARIABLE AND MEASURES

perceived adult status

"Do you feel you have reached adulthood?" (Arnett, 2008)

yes / no / in some ways yes, in some ways no

perceptions of the five features of emerging adulthood

German version of the Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (IDEA) (Reifman, Arnett, & Colwell, 2007)

subscales: Identity exploration ($\alpha = .71$), Experimentation/possibilities ($\alpha = .71$), Negativity/instability ($\alpha = .78$), Self-focused ($\alpha = .64$), Other-focused ($\alpha = .68$), Feeling in between ($\alpha = .71$)

4-point scale from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (4)

importance of criteria for adulthood

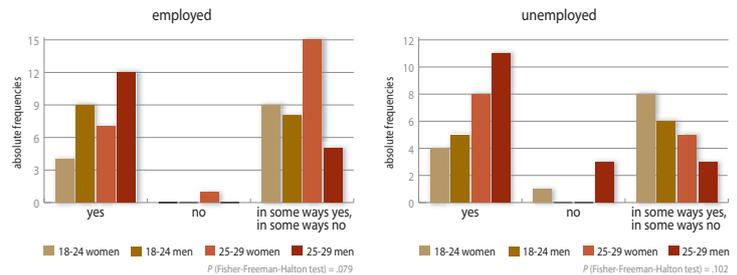
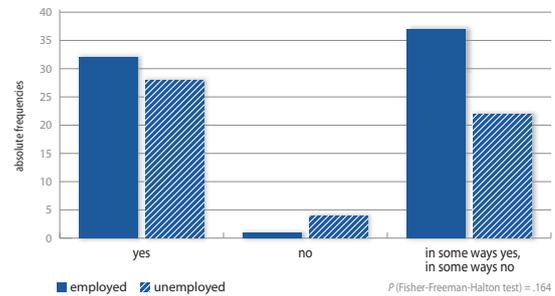
German version of the "Markers of Adulthood" questionnaire (Arnett, 2008)

subscales (Arnett, 2001): Individualism ($\alpha = .44$), Role transitions ($\alpha = .75$), Norm compliance ($\alpha = .81$), Family capacities ($\alpha = .87$), Legal/chronological transitions ($\alpha = .69$), Biological transitions ($\alpha = .70$), other ($\alpha = .56$)

4-point scale from "not at all important" (1) to "very important" (4)

RESULTS

"Do you feel you have reached adulthood?"



Perceptions of the five features of emerging adulthood (employment status x age group x gender)

Subscale ¹	employed		unemployed		main effect employment status	main effect age group	main effect gender
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Identity exploration ²	2.93	0.51	3.03	0.61			$p < .001$
Experimentation/Possibilities	2.95	0.61	2.98	0.55			
Negativity/instability ³	2.47	0.54	2.72	0.68	$p < .01$	$p < .001$	$p < .01$
Self-focused	3.02	0.50	2.83	0.51	$p < .05$		$p < .05$
Other-focused	2.77	0.69	2.46	0.84		$p < .01$	
Feeling-in-between	2.95	0.76	2.92	0.82		$p < .001$	$p < .001$

¹ Anovas (employment status x age group x gender); ² interaction age group x gender: $p < .05$; ³ interaction employment status x age group: $p < .05$

Importance of criteria for adulthood (employment status x age group x gender)

Subscale ¹	employed		unemployed		main effect employment status	main effect age group	main effect gender
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Individualism	3.42	0.42	3.43	0.41		$p < .05$	
Role transitions	2.41	0.66	2.43	0.79			
Norm compliance	2.81	0.61	2.92	0.75			
Family capacities	3.29	0.61	3.34	0.64			
Legal/chronol. transitions ²	2.44	0.96	2.55	0.93			
Biological transitions	2.41	0.87	2.86	0.94	$p < .01$		$p < .01$
Other	2.14	0.55	2.35	0.58	$p < .05$		$p < .05$

¹ Anovas (employment status x age group x gender); ² interaction employment status x age group x gender: $p < .05$

CONCLUSIONS

In response to the question "Do you feel you have reached adulthood?" most of the emerging adults (52 %) answered "in some ways yes, in some ways no" (48 %) or "no" (4.0 %). In interaction with age group (18-24 vs. 25-29) and gender, results showed more similarities than differences with regard to perceived adult status, perceptions of the five features of emerging adulthood, and the importance of criteria for adulthood between the employed and unemployed emerging adults in the study. In sum, the results of our study support the theory of emerging adulthood as a new stage of life between the age 18 to age 29, also from the view of employed and unemployed emerging adults in Germany. This result may be explained by the ostensibly similar living conditions of employed and unemployed emerging adults in Germany today.

