

## The Effects of Identity Dimensions and Employment on the Transition to Adulthood \*

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### Abstract

Sense of adulthood is influenced both psychological and contextual factors. The aim of this present study is to examine the contribution of psychological (identity dimensions) and contextual (being in university and being employed) process on a sense of adulthood. Data was collected from 312 participants. Identity Stage Resolution Index, Dimensions of Identity Development Scale and the following item: 'Do you think that you have reached adulthood?' were used. Results showed that most of participants who are in workforce perceived themselves as adults whereas most of university students stated that they had reached adulthood in some respects but not in other respects. Regression analysis indicated that all predictors accounted for 25% variance of the sense of adulthood of emerging adults who took part in the present study. The best predictor of sense of adulthood is commitment making and then ruminative exploration, identification with commitment and being employed.

**Keywords:** Sense of adulthood, identity development, employment, emerging adulthood

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In recent years transition to adulthood has prolonged due to social and economic changes. Results of this changes new life period appeared that called as emerging adulthood. Emerging adulthood is defined as life stage between adolescence and young adulthood. Most of emerging adults consider themselves neither as adolescents nor entirely as adults (Arnett, 2000, 2004). According to Arnett (2004, 2006) that period has five main features. They are the age of identity exploration, the age of instability, the self-focused age, the age of feeling in-between, and the age of possibilities.

Sense of adulthood is influenced both psychological and contextual factors (Cote, 1997; Arnett, 2007; Luyckx, Schwartz, Goossens, & Pollock, 2008b). As psychological factor, identity development is important psychological component in emerging adulthood period. Arnett (2000; 2006) proposed that most identity exploration take place in emerging adulthood while Erikson (1968) formulated identity exploration as main developmental task in adolescence. Marcia (1966, 1980) proposed four identity status based on Erikson's (1968) views on identity formation. The four identity status (achievement, foreclosure, moratorium and diffusion) are determined presence or absence of exploration and commitment. Exploration refers to search potential identity alternatives and commitment refers to make choice among identity alternatives (Marcia, 1966,1980). Although Marcia's (1966) identity status model has been used a lot of studies, some new approaches (Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens & Beyers, 2006; Luyckx, Schwartz, Berzonsky, Soenens, Vansteenkiste, Smiths, et al., 2008a; Luyckx, Schwartz, Gooessens, & Soenens, 2008c; Crocetti, Rubbini, & Meeus, 2008) have been proposed to reformulate this model. Luyckx et al. (2008a) proposed a "dual-cycle" identity formation model that include two commitment dimensions and three exploration dimensions. Commitment making refers to Marcia's commitment definition. Identification with commitment refers to the degree to which an individuals identify themselves with their choices. Exploration in breadth denotes the degree to which an individual search for different alternatives about identity. Exploration in depth denotes the degree to which individuals evaluate their existing commitments; finally, ruminative exploration shows that individuals become "stuck" in the exploration process. In this process individuals permanently search different alternatives but it doesn't finish with commitment (Luyckx et al., 2008a, b, c).

To work or being university student are also crucial contextual factors for sense of adulthood. Research (Arnett, 2001, 2007; Facio & Micocci, 2003) have showed that three criteria are crucial markers of reaching adult status. They are accepting responsibility for

oneself, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent. Employment provides financial independence to emerging adults that effects emerging adulthood in several ways (Arnett, 2000; Buhl, 2007). Employment may hinder psychosocial moratorium and individuals would make earlier commitments (Arnett, 2001,2007; Luyckx et al., 2008b). Hence individuals in workforce may have higher sense of adulthood compared with individuals in university.

Turkey is among the 20 most populous countries of the world and the major characteristic of Turkish population is the high rate of young people (TDHS, 2008). Although Hofstede's research (1991) indicated that Turkish culture displayed collectivist features, recent studies (Göregenli, 1997; Kagitsibasi, 2005) revealed that Turkish culture consist of both individualistic and collectivistic characteristics. Turkey has changed in many ways. Family structure (from traditional family to modern family), gender roles (more women can be seen in working life), education features (more people are studying in universities), marriage age (marriage age has increased) have been changing in recent decades. (State Institute of Statistic, 2013; Kagitsibasi, 2005). As a result of those changes transition to adulthood have also changed. Recent studies (Atak & Cok, 2007; Dogan-Ates et al., 2007) have shown that emerging adulthood period is experienced the ages of between 19-26 years in Turkey.

In the light of the knowledge summarized above the aim of this study is to examine the contribution of psychological (identity dimensions) and contextual (being in university and being employed) process on a sense of adulthood.

In the present study it is hypothesized that;

*Hypothesis 1.* Commitment dimensions would positively predict higher scores on sense of adulthood and exploration dimensions would negatively predict higher scores on sense of adulthood.

*Hypothesis 2.* Being employed would positively predict higher scores on sense of adulthood.

## Method

### *Participants*

Data was collected from 312 participants. Of the participants 160 were university students and 152 were nonstudents and their age was between 18-26 years old (mean age=22.88, SD=1.91). The participants who are university students comprised 87 (%54.37) females and 73 (% 45.62) males and their age was between 18-24 years old (mean age=21.12, SD=1.62). The participants who are nonstudents comprised 78 (%51.31) females and 74 (%48.68) males and their age was between 19-26 years old (mean age=24.48, SD=2.21). All participants were single. Nonstudents group had finished postsecondary or high school and they work in full-time cleaning or security sector.

### *Measures*

*Sense of Adulthood.* In line with Luyckx et al.'s study (2008b) three items from The Identity Stage Resolution Index (ISRI; Cote, 1997) were used to determine sense of adulthood. The three items are "I consider myself to be an adult," "I feel I have matured fully," and "I feel respected by others as an adult.". Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 (*not at all true*) to 5 (*entirely true*). According to data of the study, Cronbach's alpha value was .74.

*Self-Classification as an Adult.* In order to determine participants define themselves as adult, the following item (Arnett, 1997; Nelson & Barry, 2005) was used: 'Do you think that you have reached adulthood?'

*Identity Dimensions.* Dimensions of Identity Development Scale (DIDS; Luyckx et al., 2008a) was used to determine identity dimensions. This scale has 25 items and five subscales: commitment making, identification with commitment, exploration in breadth, exploration in depth and ruminative exploration. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). According to data of the study, Cronbach's alpha values: commitment making .89, identification with commitment .83, exploration in breadth .82, exploration in depth .77, ruminative exploration .80.

*Procedure*

Data were collected voluntarily from participants. The aim of the study was explained to the participants before the application of the instruments. Completion of scales took approximately 30 minutes.

*Data Analysis*

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze data in this study. In order to analyze participants' demographic features, descriptive statistics were used. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to determine correlations between the variables. Hierarchical regression analysis was performed to examine the contribution of psychological (identity dimensions) and contextual (being in university and being employed) process on achieving a sense of adulthood.

Results

As can be seen in Table 1 most of participants who are in workforce perceived themselves as adults whereas most of university students stated that they had reached adulthood in some respects but not in other respects.

*Table 1*  
Frequencies and Percentages Self Classification as an Adult

Variable	N	Reached Adulthood		
		Yes	In some respect yes, in some respect no	No
		N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
University Students	160	17 (10.62)	118 (73.75)	25 (15.62)
Nonstudents	152	104 (68.42)	33 (21.71)	15 (9.86)
Total	312	121 (38.78)	151 (48.39)	40 (12.82)

Table 2 presents the correlations among the variables. Consistent with expectations, commitment making ( $r = 0.26, p < 0.01$ ), identification with commitment ( $r = 0.21, p < 0.01$ ) were positively related to sense of adulthood and ruminative exploration ( $r = -0.23, p < 0.01$ ) was negatively related to sense of adulthood. Inconsistent with expectations, exploration in breadth ( $r = 0.04, p > 0.05$ ), and exploration in depth ( $r = -0.08, p > 0.05$ ) weren't related to sense of adulthood.

*Table 2*  
Correlations Among the Variables

	M	SD	2	3	4	5	6
1. Commitment Making	19.01	3.11	0.57***	0.16*	0.12*	-0.54***	0.26**
2. Identification with Commitment	18.21	3.02		0.15*	0.10*	-0.41***	0.21**
3. Exploration in Breadth	17.51	3.36			0.42***	0.13*	0.04
4. Exploration in Depth	17.38	3.23				0.17*	-0.08
5. Ruminative Exploration	14.58	4.12					-0.23**
6. Sense of Adulthood	9.02	1.21					

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

A hierarchical regression analysis was conducted how well sense of adulthood is predicted by contextual (being in university and being employed) (Step 1), and how well the dimensions of identity (Step 2) predict sense of adulthood. In first step of the regression analysis (Table 3) being employed accounted for 8% of the variance of the sense of adulthood. In second step of the regression analysis (Table 3) dimensions of identity were entered and they accounted for 17% variance of the sense of adulthood. As it is seen Table 3 while both commitment dimension and ruminative exploration were significant predictor of sense of adulthood, exploration in breadth and exploration in depth were not significant predictors of sense of adulthood. Finally all predictors accounted for 25% variance of the sense of adulthood of emerging adults who took part in the present study.

*Table 3*  
Hierarchical Regression Analysis Results

Step	Predictor Variables	$\beta$	t
1	Being university vs being employed	0.14	3.69*
	$R^2 = 0.08$	$R^2 \Delta$ for model = 0.08	F for $R^2 \Delta = 6.21^*$
2	Commitment making	0.21	5.72**
	Identification with commitment	0.17	3.81*
	Exploration in breadth	0.02	1.03
	Exploration in depth	-0.06	-1.64
	Ruminative exploration	-0.18	-4.02**
	$R^2 = 0.25$	$R^2 \Delta$ for model = 0.17	F for $R^2 \Delta = 16.41^{**}$

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ . 0=being university, 1=being employed.

## Discussion

The study was designed to examine the contribution of psychological (identity dimensions) and contextual (being in university and being employed) process on a sense of adulthood. Compared to university students and nonstudents group in terms of whether they define themselves as adult, results of this study indicated that most of university students define themselves some respects as adult but some respects not as adult while most of nonstudents define themselves as adult. This is consistent results of previous studies (Luyckx et al., 2008b; Morsunbul, 2013). In line with second hypothesis of this study, regression analysis also showed that being employed positively predict sense of adulthood. This results support Erikson's (1968) theory of development. According to Erikson (1968) societies provide for individuals psychosocial moratorium time. In this time individuals search and experience different alternatives and roles without adult responsibilities. Emerging adults in university can experience psychosocial moratorium time but it is difficult for individuals in workforce (Montgomery & Cote, 2003; Luyckx et al., 2008b). Entrance into work life hinders psychosocial moratorium and individuals may make decision about their future without exploring different alternatives (Yoder, 2000; Buhl, 2007; Luyckx et al., 2008b).

According to results of this study commitment dimensions and ruminative exploration significantly predicted sense of adulthood, however, exploration in breadth and exploration in depth did not significantly predicted sense of adulthood. This results partly support first hypothesis of this study. Commitment dimensions contribute to establishing sense of adulthood. Commitment process helps to individuals to interpret their personal experiences and to give meaning and direction to life. People who perceive themselves as adults have more commitment (Luyckx et al., 2008b). As expected, results showed that ruminative exploration hinder achieving sense of adulthood. In ruminative exploration process individuals become 'stuck' exploration process. They constantly search different alternatives but can't make any commitments (Luyckx et al., 2008b; Schwartz, Beyer, Luyckx, Soenens, Zamboagna, Forthun, et al., 2011).

Although the present study reveals several important findings, it has some limitations. A one limitation is that participants in workforce works in low-qualified jobs. It is need to work with middle or high-qualified people to understand better the effect of working on sense of adulthood. The second limitation is that sense of adulthood was examined only three items. Different and detailed measures may be used in the next studies.

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