

A Cultural Contribution from Bride's Trousseau (Dowry) to “Emerging Adulthood”: Ideas Based on Turkish Culture

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Abstract

This paper tries to set out the link between emerging adulthood and preparing dowry in Turkish culture. As reviewed by Arnett, emerging adulthood is a culturally constructed life phase and thought to carry its own constellation of demographic and psychological correlates. In this editorial essay, dowry is discussed not only in its original form that has served to ornament houses as laces and cloths which are usually kept in a wood chest typically but also in its recent form that serves to set up houses as furniture and white goods at least for the urban educated part of the society. We think this change is quite related with the presence and duration of emerging adulthood as it makes the transition to adulthood a longer and more difficult period. We suggest that preparing dowry and having this tradition regionally in different levels of importance effects the timing of transition to adulthood in Turkey.

Keywords: Dowry, emerging adulthood, transition to adulthood, Turkish culture.

Introduction

In this editorial essay, dowry which is quite traditional in Turkish culture is discussed not only in its original form that has served to ornament houses as laces and cloths which are usually kept and in a wood chest typically but also in its recent form that serves to set up houses as furniture and white goods at least for the urban, educated part of the society. We think this change is quite related with the presence and duration of emerging adulthood as it makes the transition to adulthood a longer and more difficult period.

As reviewed by Arnett (2000), emerging adulthood is a culturally constructed life phase and thought to carry its own constellation of demographic and psychological correlates. So, some demographic variables may affect the time in different cultures, at which emerging adulthood ends. At this point, we suggest that preparing dowry and having this tradition regionally in different levels of importance effects the timing of transition to adulthood in Turkey. This paper tries to set out the link between emerging adulthood and preparing dowry in Turkish culture.

Emerging adulthood and some demographic variables in Turkey

Regardless of their culture-specific aspects, lineage relations and regional loyalties along with other pre-modern affiliations play a crucial role in the process of becoming an adult (Arnett, 2004). In Turkey, human development has its own set of culturally specific characteristics: These characteristics can undoubtedly affect the nature of transitioning to adulthood in Turkey. Though Turkey and western societies do share some of these aspects, i.e. lengthened formal education and later marriage, there are also differences (Kagitcibası, 1996).

Turkey is going through rapid social, political and economic changes, accelerated during the last two decades. From a global perspective, Turkey is a developing nation, traditionally considered an eastern and primarily rural culture. It is also the only Muslim country which is also secular. Turkey has collectivistic values similar to other developing nations, but also has Westernized values and life styles that reflect the events after the establishment of Turkish republic by Ataturk in 1923. But Turkey's population is diverse, with a variety of different living styles. In understanding the nature of transition to adulthood in Turkey, one must consider basic social facts:

Turkey's high rate of youth unemployment (12.6 % as of November 2014) means that young people are often in temporary, and poorly paid jobs. Lack of viable employment also

often means that young people are forced to delay certain life plans (TSI, 2015). The general unemployment rate was 8.5% in 2007, though youth, urban and female unemployment rates stand at 19.0%, 11.8% and 10.7% respectively. Unemployment is also more widespread in urban than in rural areas but a great deal of rural unemployment is hidden. Young people live in what they consider temporary residences, i.e. dormitories, houses for singles or family homes, because they lack jobs and income. The high unemployment rate contributes to a way of life prevalent for young people across different cultural settings (Koç, 2007).

Males and females have different socialization pathways in Turkey. Child-rearing approaches and parenting styles for girls and boys are traditionally different from each other. Girls tend to spend more time at home, take more responsibility in the home, are expected to conform to the traditional roles and are encouraged to become more dependent. Parents tend to be more protective of females. Boys, on the other hand, are encouraged to be more independent, more assertive and to spend more time outside house. Girls are expected to be more emotional (Kagıtcıbaşı, 1996). Though opportunities have increased for women in education, social life, and in the work place over the last few decades (Turkey Demographic and Health Survey (TDHS), 20013), traditional cultural values still permeate the everyday life of even well-educated individuals. These factors contribute to the patterns that exist in different settings in transition to adulthood, and that will exist in different forms across traditional and less-traditional contexts.

In Turkey, all male citizens from twenty years old must complete compulsory military service; the length of the basic military service varies in accordance with the educational level of the soldier candidate. This compulsory military service can cause true hardship and stress, not only for the men, but for their families, girlfriends, wives. In rural areas, particularly, military service is considered an important step in transitioning to adulthood and the rest of life (Koç, 2008). The completion of military service is the pre-condition for the life plans of most young men, including marriage, employment and even travel (TSI, 2015). In urban areas, many young professionals and university graduates view military service as an obstacle to progress in their life plans, and so try to avoid it, more so than their rural counterparts.

Compulsory education was legally extended to eight years, from five years, in August 1997. It is estimated that over 1.1 million children will receive three extra years of elementary education as a result (Koç, 2007). According to TDHS (2013), the median number of years of schooling for male's age 20-24 years is nine; compared with 4.9 years for males in the 40-44 age groups. In rural areas, gender disparity in education is less evident in rural than in urban

areas. The median number of years of school attendance for men in rural areas is 4.5 years, compared with 4.0 years for rural women. The disparity is more marked in urban areas, where the median years of schooling are 5.4 and 4.5 respectively for men and women. Education has been prolonged in the last years as young people continue their education preparing for and attending university and post-graduate institutions. The Turkish university entrance system is based on a highly selective and competitive scoring system. In 2009, just 21% of all applicants were admitted to university program (TSI, 2015); many young people must wait one or even several years for a chance to attend university. At the same time, the number of graduate students has increased every year over the last few decades. English preparatory courses in high school and at the university level have also become more prevalent in Turkey. As a consequence of these developments in the educational system, young people are spending more time within the educational system.

Marriage, in Turkey, is important from demographic and social perspectives (Koç 2008; Civelek and Koç, 2007). In addition to being a country in which marriage is still an institution, the great majority of births in Turkey occur within a marriage. The TDHS (2013) indicated an increase in median age at first marriage across groups, from 19.2 years for the 45-49 age groups to 21 years for the 25-29 age groups. The TDHS (2013) also indicated distinct differences in the age at first marriage as related to the educational level of women. The mean age of marriage is 24, for men and 21, for women, in the general population; among educated young men, the mean age at first marriage is 27 and for women it is 23 (TSI, 2015). The mean age for the birth of the first child for women is 21.8, on average, in Turkey (TDHS, 2013). The gender differences in terms of social trends in marriage and family life renders transition to adulthood more complicated in different parts of society (Civelek and Koç, 2007).

To summarize, there are variations of life styles and socio-cultural backgrounds in present day Turkey that can have an effect on the transition to adulthood. Another important variable to be considered in this context is in Turkey is dowry preparation. Preparing dowry in Turkey has a special importance traditionally.

Dowry (as a delaying factor) in transition to adulthood process

In previous generations, and in many traditional cultures today, the entrance to adulthood is initiated by events such as marriage, completion of education, and parenthood. Marriage readiness has only received modest attention in the research literature and little is known about the factors that influence an individual's perception of his/her personal readiness

for marriage (Kagıtcıbası, 2003). It will later be proposed that research on readiness for marriage needs to extend its analysis and examine the criteria on what young people perceive as necessary and important to feel ready to get married. Marriage has been, and often still is, regarded as the definitive transition to adulthood in traditional cultures worldwide and is the event that marks the transition from boy to man and from girl to woman. In these cultures, it is only after marriage that a person is considered to have attained adult status and given adult responsibilities. In Turkey for instance, mothers of girls traditionally begin to prepare their daughters' dowry (trousseau) at very early ages. Other important women in little girls' life such as grandmothers, aunts, wife of uncles etc also contribute to the preparation. Preparing dowry is part of socialization process in growing girl's life, although it loses traditional meaning in nontraditional and less traditional settings.

The dowry (trousseau) symbolizes the whole content of those nice things that is prepared in years. Very nice handmade laces, embroidery, satin quilts, and other things such as table cloths, bedspreads, towels and even dishcloths are prepared with the belief of the growing girl being always perceived as a candidate for bride. The girl herself actually is used to being expected to do all these nice embroidery and similar handmade arts which have a value in terms of recreation and preparation for getting married and adult life. In some settings, the content of dowry has started to be simple and the girl doesn't take part in this process actively. But others mainly mothers have taken care of preparation of dowry. In most of the rural setting, this tradition still exists. Typically parents of bride are supposed to buy necessary stuff for the new couple's bedroom and kitchen. This sharing differs among different regions, even among different villages. On the other hand, this tradition in today's life conditions has changed considerably. Not all families and not all regions are similar in these practices and expectancies but generally this tradition has been realized differently among the educated and more city life oriented settings.

Girls are now more oriented for schooling and for work force. So the *importance of dowry* (trousseau) is losing its value currently but instead *preparing a new house* is dominating in the transition to adulthood. Yet mothers try to prepare some stuff for their growing daughters, now it is part of a more symbolic cultural value of having a daughter and mothers are kind of oriented to prepare at least some of the basic items of traditional trousseau. However, the preparation for adult life and marriage has tended to become costier recently. Especially middle and even upper SES young men and women both try to purchase many home stuff before getting married. Depending on their income and interest, they buy their furniture, DVD players, even home theaters, washing machines, refrigerators,

dishwashers, vacuum cleaners all utensils such as spoon fork sets, plates and dinner sets, beautiful rugs, sofas and everything. Most of the young people and/or their parents try to buy all of this stuff even they don't have a fiancé or a serious girl/boy friend (targeting marriage) at that moment. Some start buying those things while having a serious boy/girl friend, even the marriage is not intended yet.

It is important to include the influence of socialization (i.e., parenting and childrearing) in a discussion of marital readiness because emerging adults' perceptions of readiness for marriage are largely influenced by social rules and norms. In Turkey, parents themselves try to buy home stuff in addition to the girl's traditional dowry. Parents encourage their growing children to do savings as things house they will have in few years and some parents also buy all of the expenses for the couple's new house before they get marry. There are some couples who have a relationship but not married and have modest life conditions without having all these good things currently but they consider themselves quite "serious" in terms of getting married. They try to buy the things mentioned above for a perfect "home" of a married couple. In the homes of young people who live with parents, you can see many big boxes of electronics that are kept for young people to use after they get married. It seems that the expensive and big stuff saved and prepared for marriage is now replacing the traditional dowry (trousseau) that still persist with its' symbolic meaning and relatively lesser amount. Paying installment has eased the consumption and many young people when get their monthly salaries pay their installment for their investments in these kinds.

You may hear in Turkey that a young man working as a teacher for instance is going to pay for monthly refrigerator and TV installments as soon as his salary is paid. In this period, buying things seems to result in extending the duration for transition to adulthood. This period may last up to 5-6 years in some cases. This consumption tendency among young people –as among all people at all ages- has become very apparent after Turkey's shift to free market economy in the last decades. Values of increased globalization probably have contributed to this much purchasing. Some young couples preparing to get married save money for the marriage ceremony as well. The big party (or series of parties sometimes) with special costumes of the bride and everything is very costly. Usually it is under the responsibility of parents (large portion is paid by the groom's side) but if the parents are not able to do all these things, the young couple want to pay for all those expenses themselves with their own earnings and savings before getting married. In some instances young couples save money even for their honey moon as well. It is quite interesting to see how all these investments are realized with limited economical conditions by the young couple before they

feel they are total adults. These expenses may not be considered basic but young people usually get married when all the (at least most of the) basic and even extra stuff is owned.

There is also division of labor in purchasing most of these machineries and furniture between the bride and groom's sides. This does not characterize every couple of course. However, bedroom of the couple, utensils related to kitchen and washing machine and the traditional trousseau (including those laces, embroidery, quilts etc) are usually bought by the women (the bride or commonly called as girl's side). On the other hand, refrigerator and basic furniture such as chairs, sofa, dining table and rugs/carpets are provided by the groom (or commonly called as boy's side). The origin of this division is not known well but it sounds that it was originated by old tradition according to which only laces and clothes trousseau were prepared by girls. Boy's side is supposed to cover relatively more costly stuff for the formation of a new house (a new family indeed) which might have stemmed from traditional expectancy of man's power. Many single young people live with their parents without supporting them financially despite working and earning money but they buy necessary home stuff for their probable own future family. While some are engaged or have marriage oriented boy/girl friends, others do not have such commitments but they still save money for their future family.

Conclusions

In this paper, we tried to set out the link between emerging adulthood and preparing dowry in Turkish culture. Dowry is quite traditional in Turkish culture and it has an original form that has served to ornament houses which are usually kept and in a wood chest typically but also it has a recent form that serves to set up houses. Emerging adulthood is a culturally constructed life phase and thought to carry its constellation of demographic and psychological correlates. Thus, in this paper, we suggested that preparing dowry affects the timing of transition to adulthood in Turkey.

One of the most dramatic changes related to life course in the western societies and the developing countries over the past few decades has been the emergence of a new life stage between adolescence and adulthood that has been labeled emerging adulthood. This distinct period of life has mainly emerged as a result of demographic shifts that have taken place over the last fifty years; most notably a rise in the average age at which people first get married. At this point, we want to see the change of the traditional and modern form of dowry which sets up the new house in Turkey although there are huge variations in such practice.

Cultural expectations for marriage present a complex picture in Turkey. Traditional dowry and its transition to the idea of setting up a complete house seem to be important in understanding transition to adulthood. Young people may wait to marry until they have accumulated the necessary means to set up a home (often substantially or totally by their parents) and to afford a wedding party. All these might take several years to accomplish, which makes emerging adulthood longer and maybe more visible.

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