

A Comparative Study of the Experience and Perception of Emerging Adulthood in the
United States and Ireland

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to test the hypothesis that there is a decrease in the age in years at which a person is considered an adult as a function of living in Europe, with an emphasis on Ireland in particular, as opposed to the United States. This hypothesis was tested by comparing the answers to survey questions distributed in Europe as compared

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to test the hypothesis that there is a decrease in the age in years at which a person is considered an adult as a function of living in Europe, with an emphasis on Ireland in particular, as opposed to the United States. This hypothesis was tested by comparing the answers to survey questions distributed in Europe as compared to those distributed in the United States. Each survey was analyzed to determine the age in years each participant considered to be the age of adulthood. This number was termed the Perception of Adulthood Age. The research participants were young adults who volunteered to take part in the study in a variety of casual and formal settings. There were 24 participants ages 14-31 years from Europe, and 24 participants ages 17-31 years from the United States. After comparing the Perception of Adulthood age using the Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances t-test the results of the study showed Perception of Adulthood Age increases as a function of living in Europe as opposed to the United States. These results contradict the original hypothesis. The conclusion is that further research is needed to determine if these results are accurate. If further research supports these findings, the conclusion would then be that Perception of Adulthood Age increases as a function of living in Europe as opposed to the United States.

In recent generations the process of becoming an adult has changed radically. In the United States, this process has been affected by the need for higher levels of education, which prolongs the student status of many young adults. Student life often comes with instability in finances, romance, and residence. These also cause a delay in the assumption of adult responsibilities. Therefore, many young people who are clearly past the adolescent stage do not feel like full adults. Yet they are able to enjoy the luxury of an extended period of exploration in identity formation. This mixture of a delay in adult roles coupled with an extension of exploration has come to be known as emerging adulthood.

It is easy to observe how the trend of emerging adulthood has formed in the United States, especially as it is now portrayed and even exaggerated in contemporary films such as "Failure to Launch." Yet, it is also interesting to consider how this trend may be developing throughout the world. This study specifically examines the personal feelings of emerging adults in Europe, especially Ireland, and how they view their period of development as compared to the feelings of emerging adults in the United States. Although this exact topic has not previously been thoroughly researched, there have been related studies that may be helpful to examine in an effort to gain insight into the topic.

One article in particular identifies emerging adulthood as being from the age of 18 to the age of 25 (Arnett, 2000). This is a period in which a person has left childhood, but has not yet assumed all the responsibilities of adulthood. The person also faces new challenges that require the acquisition of new skills. The trend in the late 20th century was

an extension of emerging adulthood, including a longer time spent in the parental home. This trend may also be linked to recent generations pursuing higher education, thus delaying stable careers and serious romantic relationships. Interesting to note is that women, even unmarried women, are more likely than men to live away from their parents. The article also states that fear of divorce may play a role in causing hesitation for romantic commitment in young people, contributing to later marriage and prolonged emerging adulthood as well. Yet, to the contrary, a Finnish sample of 22-year-olds showed that children of divorced parents had less education and a faster transition to work and parenting. The article also states "Typical markers of entry into adulthood are the establishment of a stable residence, school completion, career selection and training, and marriage or long-term commitment with a romantic partner." (Arnett, 2000) Yet, to young people themselves, the markers seem to be accepting responsibility for themselves, making independent decisions, becoming financially independent, and becoming a parent. This article describes a piece of original research about variations in transition patterns between the ages of 17 and 27. One aspect of this research was aimed at examining patterns related to the acquisition of adult responsibilities, including independence in residence, finance, romance, and parenting. The sample consisted of 240 young adults from upstate New York who had been studied since early childhood through a program called Children in the Community (CIC). The results were as follows: "At age 17, most respondents were in high school, living in a parental home, and supported primarily by family. About one fifth of the respondents were working full time at the time of their 17th birthdays, primarily those with birthdays during the summer. Over two fifths were sexually active, but fewer than 1% had been married and fewer than 2% were

actively parenting. When these young people were 27, about 16% were still attending school, over 80% were employed, mostly full time, and fewer than 10% were still financially supported primarily by their families. At age 27, 15% were still living with family, but nearly all were sexually active and nearly half were or had been married and had a history involving pregnancy. Nearly 40% had living biological offspring.” (Arnett, 2000) In another study described in the article that was meant to be representative of the U.S. population, “Eighty-four percent and 42% of participants lived with parents at ages 18 and 22, respectively. At age 25, about one fifth lived with a parent, whereas about three quarters had an independent residence, including about half who lived with a romantic partner. By age 25, only a little more than half were fully financially independent of family.” (Arnett, 2000) This study seemed to show an increasing delay in the age of financial independence for young people. It also seemed to indicate a delay in childbirth. This 1970 study concluded that only 34% of 25-year-old white women had borne a child, in contrast to a study done just eight years prior that found 44% of white women had borne a child by that age. This article is an excellent resource for describing emerging adulthood, as well as some of the recent trends related to the developmental period.

On the topic of emerging adulthood in a non-U.S. county, another article examines the changing suicide rates in Ireland throughout the years (Connolly, 2000). The majority of Ireland’s early Christian history was recorded by monks. The only mention of suicide in their writings was in reference to a handful of famous suicides by heroes and royalty. It is not clear whether the lack of reported suicide by the general public indicates a lack of suicide or merely the fact that suicide was a taboo subject to

those in the Church. Though Ireland is still deeply affiliated with Catholic teachings, the shame surrounding the topic of suicide has somewhat subsided in recent years, allowing for more compassion and study of this subject.

By international standards, the rate of suicide in Ireland up to the 1970s was extremely low, even after doubling the reported rates to account for unreported suicides. However, in recent decades, suicides rates have taken a sharp increase. The most notable increase has been in the suicide rate of males age 15-24, a dynamic that fits within the context of emerging adulthood. Over a course of twenty years, the suicide rate in this dynamic increased 700%! By 1998 this group had thirty suicides per 100,000 individuals.

The article goes on to note that the increased rate of suicide has coincided with a time in which Ireland has undergone extreme change in society, economy, culture, and social expectations. The country has gone from a state of recession to one of more wealth than the nation has had since its independence. Also, the influence of religion in daily life has weakened, with dropping levels of church attendance and a focus away from conservative views. It is also important to note that the roles of women have changed in Ireland, with women beginning to surpass men in education level. The following article (Arnett, 2002) has also noted a correlation with the rise in suicide rates among emerging adults in countries that have undergone industrialization, as there may be a conflict between a young person's cultural identity and global identity.

Another article that looks at global identity explores the topic of how globalization influences psychological functioning (Arnett, 2002). An interesting concept brought forth in this article is that of a bicultural identity. With worldwide media creating somewhat of a homogenous world culture it is now common for people to have two

identities: one representing their own personal background and region, and another that identifies with the world culture. This phenomenon undoubtedly causes some confusion among young people, promoting a lengthened period of identity exploration that is a crucial component of emerging adulthood. The same group that is being affected most by globalization is helping to create globalization. This is because adolescents are more open to the media and to the idea of incorporating new trends into daily life than either adults or children. The article emphasizes that the period of exploration in love and work has increasingly been stretching beyond adolescent years (10 to 18 years) to emerging adulthood (18 to 25 years). The article cites a fascinating example of this trend among the Inuit population in northern Canada in which "Adolescents watch TV daily and learn about what is happening in Canada and the rest of the world, and they are avid fans of televised pro-hockey games. Some leave their hometowns for a while to pursue educational and occupational training in larger cities. However, they also maintain a local identity that is distinctively Inuit. Their local identity is defined partly by their environment—they go ice fishing and race snowmobiles; they stay outside until all hours during the long summer days when it stays light well past midnight and spend more time indoors during the winter days when it is light for only a few hours. Their local identity is also defined by their traditional values of reticence, modesty, and family obligations. Thus, they retain an Inuit identity even as they also develop an identity as members of the global culture." (Arnett, 2002). A similar occurrence is taking place in India, a country in which there is a thriving economic sector led mostly by young people. These same young people to this day more often than not choose to hold to the Indian tradition of arranged marriage. The article also refers to Erikson's theory of identity formation. It is possible

that globalization has increased identity confusion in young people of non-Western cultures. For instance, young people of Japan and China may begin to question collectivism, as a result of being exposed to concepts of democracy and capitalism through world media. While widening horizons may appear to always be a positive event, it may be too much for the young people to handle. A dramatic increase in suicide and substance use has been observed in some cultures that have recently joined the global culture. This may be a result of conflict between traditional values and the values represented in Western media. Globalization may also contribute to emerging adulthood in that the global economy, which is technological and information based, requires more education in order to obtain the best jobs. In the time required to acquire this additional education, many young people worldwide are delaying the age of marriage and parenthood. In every industrialized society the median age for transition into adult roles is in the late twenties, and the median is quickly approaching this age in developing countries.

The article also cites instability as a characteristic of emerging adulthood due to the transitions in residence, romance, and jobs during the developmental stage. This instability is continuing to increase in industrialized societies and developing countries. As a result of globalization, emerging adulthood may soon become an expected period of life for young people around the world. It is interesting to note that "As Saraswathi and Larson (2002) observed, 'In many ways, the lives of middle-class youth in India, South East Asia, and Europe have more in common with each other than they do with those of poor youth in their own countries'" (Arnett, 2002). This article is an excellent reference

regarding the similarities we have with other cultures in relation to emerging adulthood and how these similarities may have developed.

Yet another article supports the description of emerging adulthood as a period of identity exploration, focusing on the ages 18-25 (Arnett, 2000). The article also emphasizes that this period of development can take place only in cultures that allow for independent exploration of roles during this time frame. The article cites a study that found that in 1970 the median marriage age in the United States was approximately 21 for women and 23 for men. In only 26 years this mean had risen to age 25 for women and 27 for men. The article also states that in the 1990s it was revealed that although only about 10% of men and 30% of women live at home until they are married, about 40% of emerging adults return to the parental home to live for a period of time at least once before moving out permanently. The trend of young adults living within the parental home has also been reinforced in Europe where the length of education has become recently extended.

In examining the opinions of emerging adults the article reveals that these young people no longer look at themselves as being adolescents, but also do not feel entirely adult. Also, their sense of adulthood does not depend on the acquisition of traditional adult roles, but on character qualities. The two qualities that seem to be of highest importance are accepting responsibility for one's self and making independent decisions. A more tangible quality that is seen as important is financial independence.

Although Erikson focused his concept of identity formation on adolescents, he also believed that industrialized societies make a prolonged period of identity exploration

possible. In fact, it is probable that most identity exploration now actually occurs in emerging adulthood as opposed to adolescence.

Interestingly, physical proximity to parents has been shown to be inversely related to emotional closeness between parents and emerging adult children. The more contact an emerging adult has with his or her parent, the lower the chance that individual has of having a close relationship to his or her parents, and he or she has a higher chance of problems with psychological adjustment. In contrast to those in the United States, emerging adults in Europe who live with their parents report being happier with their living situation than their peers who live outside the parental home. These emerging adults also report their parents being positive components to their emotional well-being, although they report increased autonomy while living in their parents' home. Therefore, emerging adults in the United States and Europe share the experience that autonomy and relatedness are invaluable factors in positive relationships with parents. Though the emerging adulthood period may vary throughout cultures, it is safe to say that for all young people it is a time of change and exploration. The expansion of emerging adulthood as a period of development will only continue throughout the world in coming years as more countries attain a level of economic development that allows for an extended period of identity exploration and freedom from traditional adult roles. This article gives further insight into emerging adulthood and some of its components.

In an article that explores the importance of ethnic identity during adolescence, ethnic identity is shown to possibly continue on into emerging adulthood (French, Seidman, Allen, & Aber, 2006). The minorities in this study appeared to have lower group-esteem than the majority European Americans, but greater increases in esteem than

the majority over time. The study described in the article also concluded that ethnic identity can be influenced by environment and that youth of different ethnicities react differently to comparable experiences. This could mean that ethnic identity can have a different meaning for youth of different ethnicities. The importance of this article is that it demonstrates the differences in emerging adulthood among different racial groups, which could also hold true among different national groups.

The phenomenon of how conflict and cohesion between parents and adolescents vary among families from differing cultural traditions in relation to authority and autonomy has also been studied (Fulgini, 1998). Interestingly enough, the levels of conflict and cohesion throughout cultures were reported as being similar. This study is a reflection of how cultural beliefs as well as social settings can influence relationships between parents and adolescents. Once again, this article is an interesting resource because it examines a factor that affects emerging adulthood and how that factor varies among groups.

Greenburger & Chen (1996) explored the perception of relationships between adolescents and their parents and depressed mood in early adolescents and college students, all of European-American or Asian-American descent. Differences according to ethnicity relating to depressed mood first became evident in the college students, with Asian American students exhibiting more symptoms than the European Americans. Yet the associations between parent-adolescent relationships and depressed mood were overtly similar for both groups when both were at the same phase of adolescence. The perception of parent-adolescent relationships was correlated to the changes in depressed mood in early adolescents more than it was for late adolescents: nearly 50% for junior

high students and only 10 % for college students. Similar to previous articles, this article is interesting in that it explores factors that may influence emerging adulthood, as well as differences among groups.

Lucey et al. (2005) examined the effects of socioeconomic indicators on the suicide rate in Ireland. The results concluded that indictable crime had a significant independent effect on the female suicide rate. However, no other indicators were found to have statistically significant effects. There have been no age-specific studies on this topic. It would be interesting to study this topic in relation to emerging adults. This article is relevant to the current study in that it may relate to previous correlations found between globalization and suicide among emerging adults in varying cultures.

A test of identity formation in the college years is presented in a study that incorporates identity exploration and identity commitment (Luyckx, Goossens, & Soenens, 2006). Four-hundred-and-two college students were assessed four times over two years. The study found that commitment to a set identity tended to slightly decrease over time, and that identity exploration and identity commitment are intertwined components in identity formation in emerging adulthood. This study is important in that it adds depth to the concept of emerging adulthood and its construction.

Another piece of research examined the process of parent-adolescent separation in late adolescents and the factors that determine whether this is a positive or negative experience (Moore, 1987). The research concluded that this process is strongly associated with psychological health, as well as with the perception of parent-adolescent relationships. This article is helpful in that it provides more information on successful transitions into the emerging adulthood period of development.

A study that took into account the increasing age of transition into adult roles explored the trends in whether or not young people feel they are adults, as well as the connection between role transitions and the perception of adulthood

(Reitzle, 2006). A sample of young people ages 20 to 27 years from both East and West Germany were studied. The results showed that college-bound young people were less likely than their non-college-bound peers to perceive themselves as adults. Also, college-bound students reflected no connection between role transitions and adulthood. At the time of the study, the rate of role transition among Western German youth was holding steady while the rate was notably decreasing for Eastern German youth. This is clearly a result of the financial instability the country's economy experienced during its restructuring. In contrast to the college-bound youth, the less-educated young people reflected a strong connection between their perception of adulthood and role transitions. This seems consistent with the theory that the emerging adulthood period of development is more evident in highly educated young people, since those young people who do not pursue higher education are obliged to follow more traditional adult roles sooner than those who are still in the educational system. This article is helpful in that it gives perspective on the topic of emerging adulthood from yet another area of the world and highlights some traits of this period of development that Germany shares with other countries.

Researchers have also examined the pattern of change in major life goals in relation to change in personality traits during the college years (Roberts, O'Donnell, & Robins, 2004). Apparently, both personality traits and life goals demonstrate rank-order stability. However, the mean of the importance of life goals decreased over the years. A

relation between personality traits and individual differences in goals was also found. Once again, this article is valuable as it addresses another aspect of emerging adulthood, which is how goals change during this developmental period.

The pattern of self-esteem variance throughout the course of life was examined in another study (Robins, Trzesniewski, Tracy, Gosling, & Potter, 2002). The study was of a sample of 326,641 people of all ages from the U.S. and abroad. The pertinent information in this study was that there was a pattern of lowered self-esteem in adolescence, followed by a gradual increase throughout adulthood. Interestingly, this pattern held true for individuals regardless of gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and nationality. This pattern of a rising self esteem after a dip in adolescence may be important to take into account when attempting an in-depth study of emerging adults.

In another fascinating study, male adolescent Israelis were tested on their attachment levels (Scharf, Mayseless, & Kivenson-Baron, 2004). The participants then completed a period of mandatory military service. Later the participants and their friends and parents reported on the participants' level of adjustment and capacity for intimacy. The results showed that participants with an autonomous state of mind correlated with better coping skills as well as higher capacities for intimacy. These results emphasize the impact of attachment style on development. This could be helpful in predicting an individual adolescent's future success in emerging adulthood. Also, it may be interesting to note that this study was conducted with Israeli participants and to consider how this study's results might have differed within our own culture.

It may be important to take into consideration the above findings while reviewing this study. The purpose of this study is to see what effect, if any, living in Europe, as

opposed to the United States, has on the perception of when a person becomes an adult. The results of the above studies seem to conclude that increased industrialization in a country leads to a prolonging of the emerging adulthood period of life. The United States is widely held to be far more industrialized than Europe. Therefore, the logical hypothesis for the current study would be that there is a decrease in the age in years at which a person is considered an adult as a function of living in Europe as opposed to the United States.

METHODS

Participants

The participants in this study were 48 young people aged 14 to 31 years. Twenty-four of the participants were of European nationality, while 24 were citizens of the United States. Of the European participants, 12 were men, and 12 were women, with an age range of 14 to 31 years in age. While the vast majority of the European participants were Irish, there were one Polish and one Dutch participant. Of the participants from the United States, seven were men, and 17 were women, with an age range of 17 to 31 years. All the participants became involved in this study by agreeing to fill out a survey presented to them in a spontaneous and casual fashion, in the setting of a city park, classroom, or workplace.

Procedure

Young people between the age of 14 to 31 years were approached and asked to fill out a survey regarding their perception of the age of adulthood. The questions of the survey were selected based on previous research findings regarding what factors influence the perception of adulthood. As seen in the previously cited research, some of

these factors are independent residence, financial independence, marriage, and parenthood. The participants filled out the surveys, answering questions regarding these factors by responding with the age in years they felt was an appropriate answer. For instance, to the question "When is a typical age for a person to move out of his/her parents' home?" the participant might respond "18." After all the surveys were completed, all the responses to each question were averaged for each survey. The average was then used as that participant's Perception of Adulthood Age. The Perception of Adulthood Ages among the European and American participants were then compared using the t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances.

RESULTS

The data analysis as a result of using a Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances t-test showed there is a significant difference in Perception of Adulthood Age as a function of living in Europe as opposed to the United States. However, the results do not concur with the hypothesis that the Perception of Adulthood Age decreases as a function of living in Europe as opposed to the United States. In actuality, the Perception of Adulthood Age increases as a function of living in Europe as opposed to the United States, $t(46) = 2.68$ $p < .01$. The means for each group were 22.627 years for the European surveys and 21.007 years for the United States survey.

DISCUSSION

The hypothesis for this study was that there would be a decrease in the age in years at which a person is considered an adult as a function of living in Europe as opposed to the United States. The results show that there is an increase in the age in years

at which a person is considered an adult as a function of living in Europe as opposed to the United States, so the hypothesis was contradicted.

Looking back to previous studies there is some evidence that would support the finding of the current study. Since the European participants were primarily of Irish nationality, it is important to review the past studies that have explored emerging adulthood in Ireland. As described in Connolly, 2000, Ireland has undergone extreme and drastic changes in recent decades. These changes include societal, economic, and cultural changes. Perhaps in a nation as small as Ireland these changes had a chance to spread and impact the phenomenon of emerging adulthood at a rate much faster than that of the large nation of the United States. In this manner the developmental stage of emerging adulthood in Ireland has caused the Perception of Adulthood Age to surpass that of the United States. Arnett, 2002, emphasizes the concept of bicultural identity, the instance of a homogenous worldwide commercialized culture affecting young people from more traditional cultures. Perhaps this homogenized culture has had a large impact on Irish youth, promoting the development of emerging adulthood. Also, Arnett, 2000, states that emerging adulthood can take place only in cultures that allow for role exploration. It is possible that the changes described in Connolly, 2000, have made Ireland a location that is stable enough to support its youth in exploring their identities without needing to assume adult roles earlier in life.

As with all research, there were some possible confounds to this work that may have affected the results. One confound is that this study did not take place in a controlled environment. The surveys were distributed in a variety of locations in a number of ways. Some subjects were approached and asked to participate in a park,

computer lab, or other casual environments. Others filled out the survey in a structured classroom setting. The lack of control in the administration could possibly have caused subjects to underestimate the importance of the study. For instance, a few subjects were teenagers approached in Galway, Ireland's Eyre Square. They seemed delighted to take part in the study, but also found the experience entertaining. They joked about potential answers to the survey questions. In response to the question, "What is the typical age for your peers to obtain a driver's license?" one young Irish man responded, "1." Answers like these undoubtedly would have an effect on the results. However, since the Perception of Adulthood Age in the Irish/European sample was still nearly two years greater than that of the American sample, it does not seem the overall outcome was too terribly compromised.

Another possible confound to the study was that some participants did not understand the survey questions. Measures were taken to ensure the survey was written clearly, but many participants still wanted further information and direction in completing it. Some of the Irish youth in Eyre Square had particular difficulty with this. At times it seemed their responses were wishful thinking rather than a true reflection of the world around them. For example, one Irish teen responded "now" to the question, "What is the typical age for a person to be considered an adult?" Yet, as stated earlier, this sort of response does not seem to have greatly impacted the study as a whole since the Perception of Adulthood Age for the Irish/European survey was significantly greater than that of the American sample. In fact, it is interesting to note that despite these confounds that would skew the Perception of Adulthood Age to be decreased, the results still show it

is significantly greater than that of the American Perception of Adulthood Age. Perhaps this even increases the importance of the results.

Furthermore, the actual questions asked in the survey may be subject to speculation in relation to scientific validity. The survey consisted mainly of questions compiled based upon topics emphasized in previous studies. There was no pilot study for the survey. In addition, one question was added that was not gleaned from previous research. During my time in Ireland I noticed it was common for young adults not to have their driver's license. Therefore, I added the survey question, "What is the typical age for your peers to obtain a driver's license?" This question may have caused the Perception of Adulthood Age to be inflated. Appendix A is a sample survey.

In addition to the above assessment there were a few more confounds to this study. The age range of the two samples was slightly different, with the range being 14-31 years for the Irish/European sample and 17-31 years for the American sample. It is possible that participants of different ages respond differently to the questions, impacting the results. Also, there were only 24 participants per sample. Such a small sample cannot be seen as truly representative of a population. Furthermore, the European sample was first meant to include Europeans of several nationalities. However, since the European study took place in Ireland, the vast majority of participants were Irish, with only two participants of other nationalities taking part. For this reason, the European sample was mainly representative of Irish emerging adults.

When I began this thesis I honestly did not expect to learn much new information. I thought this project would merely be a researched summary of what I already knew from my psychology classes about the emerging adulthood period of development. To

my surprise, the creation of this thesis was an eye-opening experience. I discovered many new aspects of emerging adulthood, especially in relation to how this period of development manifests itself in other countries. There were two topics I learned about in the creation of this thesis that especially piqued my interest. First, was the rise in the rate of suicide in emerging adults in recently industrialized nations (Arnett, Connolly, Connolly, Lucey). Second, was the finding that both autonomy and relatedness contribute to positive relationships with parents, both in Europe and the United States. This is interesting because the autonomy and relatedness are manifested in completely different ways between the two locations, but have the same result.

As noted earlier, a dramatic increase in suicide and substance use has been observed in some societies that have recently joined the global culture, and this increase can be linked to confusion between global identity and cultural identity (Arnett, 2000). In Ireland especially, the rate of suicide for males ages 15-24 increased by 700% over a course of twenty years that coincided with a time in which Ireland has undergone extreme change in society, economy, culture, and social expectations. I spent a considerable amount of time in Ireland. In my experiences with both studying and working alongside young Irish people I was never aware that suicide was such a prevalent and growing occurrence in the country, especially among young men. I never stopped to think that some of my co-workers and friends had lived through a time of such great change within their own nation that they may have witnessed or even personally experienced the identity confusion that is believed to have led to a rise of suicide in the country. I believe it would be a worthwhile endeavor to study this topic further. Perhaps a follow-up study

could be done of Irish youth with a survey that is concentrated on suicide. Also, personal interviews with Irish young people on the topic may provide more insight.

Similarly, my second topic of interest would value from further study. Arnett 2000 noted that autonomy and relatedness are crucial factors to parent-child relationships in emerging adulthood. However, in the United States it appears that autonomy is gained by physical distance from parents, while in Europe autonomy is gained through an independent lifestyle even while living in the parental home. Therefore, American youth accomplish relatedness with their parents by communicating through telephone calls, e-mails, and other long-distance means. Perhaps they feel secure enough in their independence as a result of their living situation that they are comfortable communicating with their parents without compromising autonomy. On the other hand, it appears that emerging adults in Europe take advantage of their physical proximity to their parents to create relatedness because they are secure in their autonomy as a result of an independent lifestyle despite the fact that they still live in the parental home. It would be interesting to do a survey and personal interviews of emerging adults in Europe and the United States to learn more about this phenomenon.

Therefore, when considering possible further research that may be provoked by the current study, the two topics mentioned above would be ideal to investigate. Also, of course, it may be interesting to repeat the current study with provisions made for the possible confounds. If the same results are found, a possible follow-up study would be to compare the Perception of Adulthood ages in the different nations to actual census results about the survey questions, such as typical age for marriage, or typical age to leave the parental home. In this way any discrepancies in the two numbers might be revealed and

prove helpful in discerning why perception may differ from reality. Also, on the topic of Perception of Adulthood Age, it may be interesting to study the differences in societies with differing Perception of Adulthood Ages.

REFLECTION

I embarked upon this study because I found the concept of emerging adulthood as a new developmental stage to be fascinating. One might think that developmental stages are biologically hard-wired into us and that stages cannot be added or dropped. Yet, when I learned in my Psychology classes at Carroll about the possibility of this new developmental stage that results from changes in the environment, the concept rang true to some of my own experiences. Many of my peers are delaying marriage and parenthood in order to pursue higher education. Also, I have observed several young adults waiting to leave their parents' home or returning to their parents' home until they are financially stable. My sophomore year at Carroll I spent a semester studying in Ireland, as well as exploring other parts of Europe. I noticed many similarities between young European adults and young American adults. Many of my friends in Europe were people in their early to mid-20s who were pursuing an education and had not yet married or had children. Most of them also still considered their parents' home to be their permanent residence. I then realized that the developmental stage of emerging adulthood exists in nations outside the United States.

When I began working on my thesis my junior year at Carroll, I had already decided to return to Ireland to work for the summer. In developing the topic for my thesis, I remembered my previous observations in Europe in regards to emerging adulthood. I then realized that my upcoming summer in Ireland would be a perfect

opportunity to discover what differences there are in emerging adulthood between the United States and Europe. I chose to measure young people's perceptions of emerging adulthood, allowing me to ask several questions and to measure the answers collectively. I would be living in Galway, Ireland, which is an extremely diverse city filled with young people from several European countries. For this reason, I thought I would be able to conduct a survey of young Europeans despite the fact that the survey was taking place in Ireland. Although the survey ended up being concentrated on Irish youth, it still proved to be a fruitful study. I enjoyed distributing my surveys in both nations, and hearing and reading the comments made by the participants about my topic. Some of these comments follow in Appendix B. I was also delighted that the results of my study were significant. The results contradicted my stated hypothesis, but I actually anticipated this. My hypothesis was that there is a decrease in the age in years at which a person is considered an adult as a function of living in Europe as opposed to the United States. I made this hypothesis because this was what the research seemed to conclude. Yet, I had observed during my experiences in Europe that the opposite is actually the truth, but there was little research to back up this hypothesis. However, once the results of my study were revealed, it was easier in hindsight to see how they may have been predicted from previous studies. My results do not actually show that the age of adulthood is higher in Ireland than the United States, but that the Irish *perceive* this to be so. This conclusion is in agreement with my own personal experiences. While my peers in the United States often delay adult roles for the pursuit of higher education or identity exploration, the idea of assuming adult roles early on is not out of the question. It is common for college students to seriously consider marriage, parenthood, stable careers, and other adult roles.

Yet my experiences in Ireland seem to show that Irish youth are less likely to consider these roles early in life. I even encountered one young man who seemed to be in the depths of despair because he was in love with his girlfriend and wanted to get married, but it was out of the question because he was only 21. In the United States getting married at that age would not be so out of the question. Also, many of my young Irish friends placed high importance on exploring the world before settling down.

Nevertheless, it is evident from previous studies as well as this study that emerging adulthood is an occurrence in many nations and that it is becoming more common. The emergence of this new stage of development has an undeniable impact on young adults, as well as the societies in which they live. It is important for educators, parents, employers, media-moguls, and everyone involved with the young adults of today to recognize this impact. It will be fascinating in coming decades to follow this evolving period of development and to see what outcome it has in the world.

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APPENDIX A: Data results.

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances

	<i>Europe</i>	<i>U.S.A</i>
Mean	22.62708	21.00694458
Variance	7.536637	1.200433975
Observations	24	24
Pooled Variance	4.368536	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	46	
t Stat	2.685189	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.005024	
t Critical one-tail	1.67866	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.010047	
t Critical two-tail	2.012896	

APPENDIX B: This is a copy of the survey used in this study.

What is your sex? (please circle) M F

Nationality?

Age?

For the following questions please write the age in years you feel is the appropriate answer to the following questions. Ex: When do you think is an ideal age for a child to be allowed to have a pet? Answer: 10

What is a typical age for a person to move out of his/her parents' home?

What is a typical age for a person to be financially independent from his/her parents?

What is a typical age for a person to get married?

What is a typical age for a person to have his/her first child?

What is a typical age for a person to be considered an adult?

What is a typical age for a person to obtain a driver's license?

Feel free to write additional comments below:

APPENDIX C: Some comments made by participants in this study.

Irish man, age 21:

“Moving out of home in Ireland may be somewhat different from the States. I didn’t move out because I got my place in college in Galway. I think that for most Irish, moving out depends on college places in their hometown. Also, I put ‘29’ as the typical age to have a kid. This is based on my own experience. I know lots who have babies earlier. I think the current trend of waiting ‘til mid-30s to have kids is detrimental to our society and unhealthy from an evolutionary point of view. Whilst I don’t agree with teenage pregnancies, I also don’t agree with couples putting ‘career first.’ Aside from the fact that it is proven that it becomes more dangerous.”

Irish woman, age 23:

“Typical age to move out of parents’ home would depend on whether they were in college or working. Becoming financially independent and obtaining a driver’s license would be all tied in to whether the person was working or a student.”

American man, age 22:

“Eighteen is the age a person is expected to behave like an adult. Twenty-three is when a person should consider himself as an adult.”

American woman, age 18:

“As far as marriage and children, I think the proper age is when that person becomes fully independent.”

APPENDIX D: Interview with an Italian man.

Italian man, age 30:

Please take your time and answer the following questions thoughtfully.

1. What is your current living situation? Do you live with your family or by yourself? An apartment? A house?
I live by myself. I share an apartment.
2. At what age did you stop living with your parents? If you still live with your parents, at what age do you plan to move out?
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3. Describe the typical living situation of other Italians your age. Do they live with their parents?
All of the ones who are not married and not emigrated (e.g. for job reasons) live with their parents.
4. At what age do other Italians usually move out of their parents' home?
The ones who don't emigrate, don't move out until they marry.
5. Is your relationship with your parents a positive one? Please describe and explain.
Sure it is. We love each other but I'm fine with the distance.
6. Do other Italians your age seem to have a positive relationship with their parents? Please describe and explain.
They do, as far as I know. Most parents are permissive and understanding. Generally the son/daughter, even when he/she has a job, does not contribute to home expenses.
7. What do you think is the connection between living with parents as a young adult and relationships with parents as a young adult?
I'm not sure whether I understand the question correctly but I'll try to give an answer. Moving out, like any decision, is caused by something that you don't like about your actual situation and you want to change. You can move out if you don't like the place where you live or you look for a better job/opportunity or if the relationship with your parents is not good. Generally who has a good relationship with his/her parents is less inclined to move out.

RECOGNITION

I would like to express my thanks to everyone who made this thesis possible. I am grateful for the help and advice I received from my readers, Tom Hamilton and Murphy Fox, and especially to my director, Joy Holloway. Also, thank you to all the participants in the study and to my friends and family who have supported me during the creation of this thesis.

Mariel Ott