

Development and Aging

Becoming an adult: A proposed typology of adult status based on a study of Spanish youths

JUAN JOSÉ ZACARÉS,¹ EMILIA SERRA¹ and FRANCISCA TORRES²

¹Department of Developmental and Educational Psychology, University of Valencia, Valencia, Spain

²Department of Education Sciences, CEU-Cardenal Herrera University, Valencia, Spain

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Emerging adulthood is a transitional period which has been examined in relatively few studies in Southern European countries. This study has two aims: (1) to determine the features of emerging adulthood in Spain based on criteria for adulthood and experiential dimensions; and (2) to explore whether variations in these criteria are related to gender and adult status (self-classification as an adult and adult role adoption). Participants included 347 young Spanish people, aged 18–30, who completed a questionnaire about their conceptions of adulthood. They used similar criteria for adulthood to other Western countries, placing an extremely strong emphasis on psychological maturity criteria in comparison with role transition indicators. Important variations were observed in both the importance and achievement of criteria for adulthood according to gender and adult status. The results likewise suggest there may be different psychosocial profiles associated with each adult status group. The relevance of this classification to future research in the field of emerging adulthood is discussed.

Key words: Emerging adulthood, criteria for adulthood, typology, adult status, identity, Spain.

Juan José Zacarés, Department of Developmental and Educational Psychology, Faculty of Psychology, University of Valencia, Avenida Blasco Ibáñez, 21, 46010-Valencia, Spain. Tel: +34-96-398-34-89; fax: +34-96-386-46-71; e-mail: Juan.J.Zacares@uv.es

INTRODUCTION

The 21st century clearly marked the start of a new developmental period in the human life cycle, “emerging adulthood,” just as the 20th century introduced the concept of what is now known as “adolescence.” Based on a series of studies conducted in the United States, Arnett (2000, 2004) proposed his theory of emerging adulthood to characterize development among 18–25 year-old individuals. According to that author’s view, this period has distinctive features that differentiate it from both adolescence and full-blown adulthood. Such features include “feeling in between two stages” (emerging adults perceive themselves neither as adolescents nor adults), identity exploration (especially in the professional, interpersonal, and ideological/worldview spheres), focus on the self (especially when lacking obligations to others), diversity and instability of living situation (which manifests itself in changing residences, relationships, work, and education), and age of possibilities (optimism about one’s potential to take their life in any direction they like) (Arnett, 2004, 2011).

While there is some theoretical controversy as to whether or not these years truly constitute their own developmental stage (Arnett, Kloep, Hendry & Tanner, 2011), researchers have certainly come to consider that such characteristics define the transition to adulthood in many geographical and cultural contexts (Arnett, 2003; Fierro & Moreno, 2007; Nelson, 2009). However, emerging adulthood exists “only in cultures that postpone the entry into adult roles and responsibilities until well past the late teens” (Arnett, 2000, p. 478), which relegates it to more industrialized, Western countries. That being said, more recent analyses have confirmed that emerging adulthood is a growing world-

wide phenomenon to the extent that, within the urban middle class in developing countries, post-secondary education has been prolonged, the ties between sexual relations, marriage, and starting a family are growing weaker, and people assume marriage and parental roles at closer to thirty years of age (Arnett, 2011; INJUVE, 2012). Young people are confronted with the task of identifying the criteria that define the attainment of adult status. As a basis for comparison, this study will utilize the conceptual model derived from Arnett’s (2003) research that identified six categories of criteria for adulthood: “Independence” (e.g., accepting responsibility for the consequences of your actions), “Interdependence” (e.g., making life-long commitments to others), “Norm Compliance” (e.g., avoiding drunk driving), “Role Transitions” (e.g., getting married, becoming a parent), “Biological Transitions” (e.g., bearing/fathering children), “Chronological Transitions” (e.g., reaching age of 18), and “Family Capacities” (e.g. running a household).

Cultural criteria for adulthood

In earlier generations and more traditional cultures, entering adulthood was indicated by rites like marriage, completing an education, and parenthood (Schlegel, 1998). Marriage has been, and continues to be, a definitive sign of the transition to adulthood in traditional cultures, and one that defines the attainment of adult status for both sexes. In such cultures, by getting married, a person is considered to have achieved the level of competence needed to take on adult responsibilities, especially those that entail obligations to others like conceiving, protecting, and raising offspring. Recent research has revealed that the majority of emerging adults no longer consider marriage and other rites

and transitions (like finishing school, getting a stable job, and parenthood) to be important hallmarks of the adult condition (Arnett, 2003; Badger, Nelson & Barry, 2006). In fact, people who could be considered “emerging adults” rate a series of internal, individualistic criteria more highly; these have to do with what Arnett (1998) calls “qualities of character,” referring to the process of forging a personal identity, psychologically and morally, for oneself.

In effect, the most representative criteria today for entry into adulthood reflect a cultural appreciation for independence. The three criteria for adulthood most often reported by researchers in an array of countries are: taking responsibility; deciding one’s own values and beliefs independently of one’s parents and other influential agents; and becoming financially independent (Arnett, 2003; Nelson, Badger & Wu, 2004; Sirsch, Dreher, Mayr & Willinger, 2009). Also, independence and autonomy develop in tandem with identity and a set of psychological resources or “personal maturity” (Zacarés & Serra, 1998).

On another note, in defining adulthood, attention must be paid to differences that occur according to cultural variations and contexts. Living up to social norms and role transitions are considered more important criteria for adulthood in cultural groups with more collective values, in which external events that indicate shifting roles reflect an orientation toward social expectations and an emphasis on family responsibilities and interdependence (Badger *et al.*, 2006; Rankin & Kenyon, 2008). Thus, for example, Chinese college students rate financially supporting their parents as a more valuable adulthood criterion than their North American counterparts (Nelson *et al.*, 2004). Family capacities – especially being capable of caring for one’s parents or children – were also deemed necessary for adulthood in a group of female, Chinese, migrant workers (Zhong & Arnett, 2014).

Variations in emerging adulthood: differences associated with gender and adult status

Next, there is considerable intracultural diversity in the features of emerging adulthood. The first source of variability lies in gender-related differences. Women tend to consider complying with norms and other more relational criteria (e.g., being able to care for children) to be more important signs of adulthood than men do (Badger *et al.*, 2006; Cheah, Trinder & Govaki, 2010). There is evidence that men and women reason differently when it comes to gender-associated characteristics, a wide-ranging group, of which criteria for adulthood form a part. For example, regarding gender roles in the family context, women rely more on issues of morality in their reasoning, and men rely more on social conventional reasoning (Gere & Helwig, 2012).

Nelson and Barry (2005) suggest that individual differences in the extent to which young people perceive themselves as adults could be another important factor in explaining variations within a given country or culture. In one study, they compared 18 to 25 year-old participants who already considered themselves adults (“self-perceived adults”) with participants who did not (“emerging adults”), finding that they did not actually differ in terms of the criteria they judged necessary in order to be considered an adult. However, the self-perceived adults believed they

were closer to reaching those adult benchmarks and exhibited a more consolidated personal and interpersonal identity, were less depressive, and took part in risk behavior less often. These data suggest that perceived adult status could be an important factor to bear in mind when analyzing the wide variety of attitudes, beliefs, and forms of behavior that people exhibit during this developmental period. We might also ask ourselves, as Nelson (2009) suggests, to what point adopting an adult role during these years (e.g., marriage or stable romantic relationship, not living with one’s parents, working full-time, parenthood) does or does not coincide with self-perceived adulthood. Effectively, this connection between self-perceived adulthood and role transitions has recently become more complex. First of all, its intensity may vary as a function of social structure variables, like the level of education. For example, studies into German youths (Reitzle, 2006) and Dutch youths (Plug, Zeijl & Du Bois-Reymond, 2003) found that in less educated participants, subjective adulthood was still connected to role transitions. Second, some qualitative studies found that while traditional markers of adulthood had become much less important, they had not disappeared entirely from the discussion of “what makes an adult” (Andrew, Eggerling-Boeck, Sandefur & Smith, 2007; Mary, 2014; Molgat, 2007). Role transitions have been reconceptualized as the “means of achieving or confirming subjectively the more individualistic dimensions of adulthood” (Molgat, 2007, p. 508). It is, therefore, crucial to explore to what extent actually experiencing certain social transitions is – or is not – independent of self-perceived adulthood, and whether the many connections between those two dimensions generate interindividual differences of psychological significance. When we take the two aspects into account (self-perceived adulthood and adopting adult roles), the result is the typology of adult status displayed in Table 1. We retained Nelson’s (2009) original category names, except the group he labeled simply “adults,” who are designated here as “practising adults.” We make that distinction to express that this group, compared to the other three, does not represent a sort of “true adulthood.” This change of terminology better captures participants’ views of their own attainment of adulthood, in keeping with the findings of emerging adulthood research to date (Arnett, 1998, 2004).

Rooted in the framework described above, the present study’s objective is two-fold. On the one hand, it aims to create an overall panorama of emerging adulthood in Spain by examining the criteria for adulthood that Spanish youths, 18 to 30 years old, deem most important, the extent to which they believe they have reached those benchmarks, and their evaluations of the most salient characteristics of their current life experience. On the other hand, we aim to analyze differences in the aforementioned aspects as a function of gender and adult status according to the typology outlined in Table 1. We predict that among Spaniards, psychological autonomy-related criteria will be more prominent than those having to do with role transitions and financial independence (Fierro & Moreno, 2007; Uriarte, 2007). Since the 1980s, emancipation in Spain has continued to be delayed, both socio-professionally speaking and also in terms of housing and family. Various structural factors clearly play a role in this delayed access to adulthood in Spain, from a lack of emancipation policies, to cross-generational solidarity, home-ownership

Table 1. *Typology of adult status (adapted from Nelson, 2009)*

	Do perceive themselves as adults	Do not perceive themselves as adults
Have adopted an adult role	“Practising adults”	“Unprepared Adults”
Have not yet adopted an adult role	“Self-perceived Adults”	“Emerging Adults”

culture, young people's economic situation, and job insecurity (Moreno, 2012). We also predict that differences as a function of gender will be observed here, too, in such a way that women will score higher on indicators of norm compliance and commitment to interpersonal and family responsibilities. Finally, we hypothesize that, as a function of adult status, differences will occur in criteria for adulthood, the extent to which respondents believe they meet those criteria, and in the general experience of life during this transitional period (Nelson, 2009). Groups that have already taken on an adult role (“practising adults” and “unprepared adults”) will attribute more importance to criteria related to role transitions, norm compliance, family capacities, and financial independence than those who have not taken on any such role (“self-perceived adults” and “emerging adults”). We also anticipate that the former will meet more of those criteria.

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

The participants in the study included 347 people aged 18 to 30 years old, all residents of the region of Valencia (Spain). Women made up over half the sample (54.2%) and had an average age of 22.4 years ($SD = 3.4$). Meanwhile, the men's average age was 23.22 years ($SD = 3.2$). Fifty-eight percent of the participants were between 18 and 23 years of age; 12.2% of the women in the sample were co-habiting with an intimate partner in their own home (78% of whom were married); 1.6% had children; 9.5% of their male counterparts lived with a stable, intimate partner (half of those were married), and only 0.6% had children; 37.9% of the sample was made up of full-time college students; 22.3% were students working part-time, and 32.7% worked full-time. The remaining 7.3% were unemployed. In terms of employment status, there was no statistically significant difference between the men and the women. As far as the highest level of education completed was concerned, 8.7% had only finished elementary school, 63.7% had reached secondary school (high school or vocational school), and 27.6% college.

Non-probability “snowball” sampling was used. The sample consisted of a study group formed on the subject of “emerging adulthood.” Its 22 participants were 18- to 24-year-old college students. Each filled out the questionnaire and was trained to administer it to 15 others. These 15 participants were classified according to sex, age (18 to 30 years old), and employment status (enrolled in college courses, employed part-time, and employed full-time).

Instruments

Adult status. Adult status assessments of each participant combined two indicators each: self-perceived adulthood and having adopted at least one adult role. Self-perceived adulthood was captured by the following question: “In general, do you believe you have reached adult age?” Their response options were “no,” “in some ways yes, and in others no,” and “yes.”

To assess whether or not they had taken on at least one adult role, participants were divided into two groups. Those assigned to the “adult role adopted” group (36% of the total) met one or more of the following criteria: (1) being married; (2) living on one's own with a romantic partner; (3) having children; and (4) committed to a job on an exclusive, full-time basis. The “adult role not adopted” group was comprised of young people who did not meet any of those requirements. These roles were adopted as criteria based on trends in transitions, family, employment, and education among Spanish youths, as presented in the latest *Juventud en España* [Youth in Spain] report (INJUVE, 2012). We took the following aspects into account: (1) dependence on family of origin (e.g., in 2009, 35.5% of 25- to 34-year-olds were living with their parents); (2) stable intimate partner and parenthood, and the rising age of access to both those roles (e.g., in 2012, only 12.5% of women and 7.5% of men aged 20 to 29 had children); and (3) full-time employment, with clear trouble finding a job placement (the unemployment rate in 2012 was 52% among 16- to 24-year-olds, and 31.2% among 25- to 29-year-olds).

Thus, each participant was assigned to one of the four categories described in Table 1. People who perceived themselves as adults (answered “yes”) and had adopted some adult role, as previously defined, were classified as “practising adults” ($n = 39$). Those who did not perceive themselves as fully adults (they answered “no” or “in some ways yes, and in others no”) but who had taken on some adult role were categorized as “unprepared adults” ($n = 85$). Meanwhile, participants who perceived themselves as adults (answered “yes”) without assuming any adult role were labeled “self-perceived adults” ($n = 34$). Finally, participants who neither considered themselves adults (they answered “no” or “in some ways yes, and in others no”), nor had adopted any adult role were classified in the “emerging adults” group ($n = 186$).

Criteria for adulthood. To assess criteria for adulthood, participants were presented with an adaptation of Arnett's (1997) questionnaire that has been employed in numerous studies about emerging adulthood (e.g., Arnett, 1998, 2003; Facio & Miocci, 2003; Nelson *et al.*, 2004). It presents a list of 47 possible criteria for adulthood (e.g., “being financially independent from parents”). Participants were asked to indicate each criterion's importance when considering a person an adult or not on a scale from 1 (*not at all important*) to 4 (*very important*). The list of criteria presented differs slightly from Arnett's original (1997) in two ways: (1) certain duplicate items for men and women were combined (e.g., “capable of caring for children” and “capable of running a household”); and (2) nine criteria were added to tap indicators of psychological maturity (Zacarés & Serra, 1998), because those were underrepresented on the original instrument (e.g., “seek consistency between what you feel, think, and do”).

Criteria for adulthood already personally attained. The instrument administered again prompted participants with the same list of criteria for adulthood, this time asking them to indicate to what extent they “had achieved” each criterion. The response scale offered four options: 1 (*No*), 2 (*A little/hardly*), 3 (*Often/Almost completely*), and 4 (*Completely*).

Dimensions of emerging adulthood. The last portion of the questionnaire taps six features that align with the relevant dimensions of emerging adulthood per the categories of the Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (IDEA; Reifman, Arnett & Colwell, 2007). Its dimensions are endless possibilities, identity exploration, instability, other-focused, self-focused, and feeling in between adolescence and adulthood. For each dimension and tapped by six separate items each, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which “it reflects how you are feeling during this current stage of your life” on a scale ranging from 1 (*No, not at all*) to 4 (*Yes, very much agree*).

RESULTS

Perception of adulthood

The extent to which participants perceived themselves as adults was tapped by posing the question “in general, do you believe you have achieved adulthood yet?” The results convey that only 21% of the participants answered affirmatively. Meanwhile, 9% responded “no” and 70% answered “in some ways yes, and in others no”. That ambivalent attitude was predominant among the young people evaluated, most of whom did not consider themselves fully adult. Perceived adulthood increased, as expected, with age (see Fig. 1), confirming that although self-perceived adulthood increases between the ages of 18 and 30, even among those over 26 years old, most do not report that they consider themselves fully adults. At that age, only 45% of study participants did.

Criteria for adulthood

Next, we analyzed the importance which participants attributed to a series of criteria one might use to consider someone an adult. Table 2 displays all the responses in the total sample, as well as the groups of men and women, separately. The five criteria deemed most important were, in descending order: (1) “Accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions;” (2) “Have a sense of personal and social responsibility;” (3) “Decide on personal beliefs and values independently of parents or other influences;” (4) “Seek consistency between what you feel, think, and do;” and (5) “If sexually active, avoid contracting sexually transmitted diseases.” Exploratory factor analysis was applied, utilizing the principal components method with varimax rotation to verify the underlying structure of criteria for adulthood. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) index had been studied previously, yielding a value of 0.87. Bartlett’s test of sphericity yielded significant results at the level of $p \leq 0.001$ ($\chi^2 = 4,614.6$; $df = 1,081$), revealing that the items were sufficiently correlated with one another to carry out factor analysis. That analysis identified four factors with eigenvalues of over 1.50, which accounted for 39%

of the variance in scores. For an item to be grouped into a factor in our analysis, it had to have a minimum factor loading of 0.40.

The final version of the instrument included the following factors: (1) role and biological transitions, which accounted for 13.36% of the total variance (14 items, eigenvalue = 8.49, $\alpha = 0.86$); (2) norm compliance, which explained 10.13% of the variance (10 items, eigenvalue = 3.91, $\alpha = 0.84$); (3) psychological maturity, which explained 9.42% of the variance (13 items, eigenvalue = 2.11, $\alpha = 0.77$); and (4) financial independence-family capacities, which accounted for 6.11% of the variance (5 items, eigenvalue = 1.86, $\alpha = 0.63$). On the whole, the psychological maturity factor stood out; its criteria were deemed the most important ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 0.37$), followed by two with a similar level of importance, norm compliance ($M = 2.96$, $SD = 0.54$) and financial independence-family capacities ($M = 2.93$, $SD = 0.53$). The factor of least relevance when considering a person an adult was found to be role and biological transitions ($M = 1.97$, $SD = 0.58$).

Indicators of adulthood as a function of adult status

Several analyses were carried out to detect possible differences in the importance attributed to indicators of adulthood as a function of perceived adult status, as was defined earlier in this paper (see Table 3). The first one-way ANOVA allowed us to compare average age differences in the groups, $F(3,337) = 62.71$, $p < 0.001$. *A posteriori* comparisons using Tukey’s test revealed that the “practising adults” group was significantly older than all the other groups, and that “unprepared adults” and “self-perceived adults” were also significantly older than the group of “emerging adults”. In light of the differences detected, all subsequent analyses were controlled for age.

To explore the differences between adult status groups in terms of the criteria considered to be important, a multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was performed. Sex and adult status were considered independent variables and age a covariate. As a dependent variable, average scores of the importance of the four criteria for adulthood were used. The results revealed there was no main effect of either the adult status, or of the interaction of sex \times adult status. However, gender was found to have a significant effect, $F(4,329) = 2.91$, $p < 0.05$. Subsequent univariate analyses indicated there was a significant gender-associated effect on the importance attributed to norm compliance, $F(1,332) = 9.55$, $p < 0.01$, psychological maturity, $F(1,332) = 5.38$, $p < 0.05$, and financial independence, $F(1,332) = 4.10$, $p < 0.05$. The means suggest women ascribed greater importance to the factors of norm compliance ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 0.54$), psychological maturity ($M = 3.31$, $SD = 0.36$), and financial independence-family capacities ($M = 2.97$, $SD = 0.52$) than men did ($M = 2.86$, $SD = 0.61$; $M = 3.20$, $SD = 0.39$; $M = 2.88$, $SD = 0.54$, respectively). Univariate analyses also confirmed there was a significant effect of adult status group on the factors of role transitions, $F(3,332) = 2.72$, $p < 0.05$ and norm compliance, $F(3,332) = 3.21$, $p < 0.05$, as shown in Table 3. *A posteriori* comparisons (Tukey) showed that unprepared adults ascribed more importance to role transitions and norm compliance than self-perceived adults and emerging adults did.

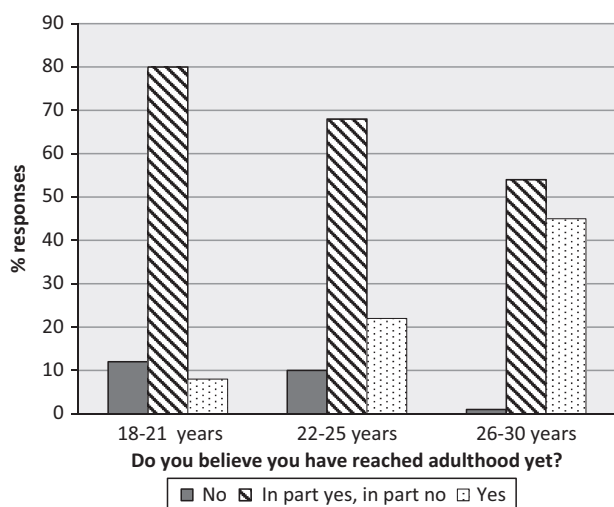


Fig. 1. Responses to the question “Do you believe you have reached adulthood yet?” in each age group.

Table 2. Results of factor analysis of the importance of criteria for adulthood and average scores for all participants ($N = 347$), women ($N = 188$), and men ($N = 159$).

Loadings	Factors	Average scores		
		Total	Women	Men
	Role and biological transitions	1.97	1.96	1.98
0.68	Have at least one child	1.47	1.41	1.54
0.66	Finished with education	1.65	1.64	1.65
0.63	Biologically capable of fathering children	2.08	2.10	2.06
0.62	Purchased a house	2.30	2.32	2.28
0.61	Married	1.60	1.53	1.68
0.61	Biologically capable of bearing children	1.65	1.71	1.58
0.57	Obtained driver's license	1.74	1.71	1.78
0.56	Committed to a long-term love relationship	2.62	2.68	2.56
0.52	Pays taxes	1.85	1.94	1.73
0.52	Employed full-time	2.19	2.18	2.21
0.51	Settled into a long-term career	2.63	2.57	2.71
0.50	Have had sexual relations	1.72	1.61	1.85
0.43	Grown to full height	1.32	1.23	1.44
0.40	Make lifelong commitments to others	2.88	2.95	2.79
	Norm compliance	2.96	3.05	2.86
0.71	Avoid drunk driving	3.23	3.33	3.12
0.68	Avoid using illegal drugs	2.93	3.06	2.76
0.68	Drive automobile safely and close to the speed limit	2.95	3.09	2.79
0.63	If sexually active, avoid contracting sexually transmitted diseases	3.53	3.65	3.38
0.63	Avoid becoming drunk	2.21	2.25	2.17
0.60	Use contraception if sexually active and not trying to conceive a child	3.34	3.47	3.18
0.54	Avoid committing petty crimes like shoplifting and vandalism	2.96	3.02	2.89
0.45	Capable of keeping family physically safe	3.06	3.10	3.02
0.44	Avoiding using profanity/vulgar language	3.15	3.17	3.12
0.44	Have no more than one current sexual partner	2.27	2.33	2.20
	Psychological maturity	3.26	3.31	3.20
0.63	Capable of tolerating the possible frustrations of daily life	3.37	3.38	3.36
0.61	Seek consistency between what you feel, think, and do	3.53	3.57	3.48
0.55	Have a sense of personal and social responsibility	3.64	3.68	3.60
0.53	Decide on personal beliefs and values independently of parents or other influences	3.53	3.61	3.44
0.53	Try to understand points of view different from your own	3.38	3.42	3.33
0.51	Know how to cope with different situations that can cause conflict without avoiding them	3.45	3.52	3.37
0.50	Accept changes in life in a positive way, capable of adapting to new situations	3.40	3.46	3.34
0.49	Have a system of beliefs that helps bring meaning to your life	2.86	2.92	2.78
0.48	Have a clear stance on subjects considered controversial (substance abuse, bioethics, etc.)	2.81	2.86	2.75
0.45	Not deeply tied to parents emotionally	2.99	3.00	2.98
0.43	Accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions	3.81	3.88	3.73
0.43	Have a realistic, constructive view of the present and the future without living in the past.	3.02	3.05	2.98
0.40	Less concerned about yourself and more about others	2.65	2.71	2.57
	Financial independence-family capacities	2.93	2.97	2.88
0.60	Capable of running a household (shopping, managing expenses, etc.)	3.39	3.45	3.31
0.57	Financially independent from parents	2.88	2.88	2.87
0.56	Capable of supporting a family financially	2.93	3.08	2.85
0.52	Capable of caring for children	3.10	3.10	3.09
0.51	No longer living in parents' household	2.34	2.39	2.28
	Items that did not load on the factors			
	Establish a relationship with parents as an equal adult	3.24	3.35	3.11
	Learn to always have good control over your emotions	3.06	3.12	2.98
	Reached age 18	1.85	1.83	1.86
	Reached age 21	1.73	1.77	1.70
	Have a balanced and satisfying emotional and sexual life	2.63	2.58	2.68

Achievement of adulthood indicators and experiential dimensions as a function of adult status

A second MANCOVA was performed to determine what differences in the achievement of adulthood indicators were registered both when sex and adult status were used as independent variables, age as a covariate, and when average scores of achievement

of criteria for adulthood were posed as the dependent variable (see Table 3). No effect associated with the sex \times adult status interaction was observed. However, significant effects associated with sex, $F(4,327) = 8.41$, $p < 0.001$, and group, $F(12,865) = 8.98$, $p < 0.001$, were found. Univariate analyses indicated gender had an effect on the personal achievement of norm compliance,

Table 3. Comparison of perceived adult status groups by age, adulthood criteria, achieved criteria for adulthood, and dimensions of emerging adulthood

	Practising Adults (N = 39)		Unprepared Adults (N = 85)		Self-perceived Adults (N = 34)		Emerging Adults (N = 186)		F	df
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Age	26.7 ^{bcd}	2.34	24.21 ^d	2.93	23.35 ^d	3.05	21.07	2.54	62.71***	3, 337
<i>Adulthood criteria</i>										
Role transitions	1.88	0.38	2.10 ^c	0.61	1.85	0.47	1.97	0.54	2.72*	3, 332
Norm compliance	3.12	0.60	3.08 ^d	0.58	2.98	0.66	2.88	0.55	3.21*	3, 332
Psychological maturity	3.31	0.45	3.28	0.40	3.22	0.34	3.25	0.35	ns	3, 332
Financial independence	2.92	0.54	3.02	0.54	2.82	0.56	2.91	0.52	ns	3, 332
<i>Achieved criteria for adulthood</i>										
Role transitions	3.06 ^{bcd}	0.50	2.47 ^{cd}	0.44	2.21	0.43	2.00	0.41	24.61***	3, 330
Norm compliance	3.51 ^{bd}	0.41	3.15	0.41	3.40 ^{bd}	0.44	3.11	0.46	3.54*	3, 330
Psychological maturity	3.35 ^{bd}	0.35	2.97	0.38	3.24 ^{bd}	0.36	2.92	0.33	10.32***	3, 330
Financial independence	3.1 ^{bcd}	0.76	2.34	0.73	2.29	0.71	1.95	0.51	8.87***	3, 330
<i>Dimensions of emerging adulthood</i>										
Endless possibilities	3.44	0.59	3.28	0.73	3.56	0.56	3.31	0.61	ns	3, 326
Identity exploration	3.30	0.70	3.05	0.80	3.47	0.66	3.13	0.66	ns	3, 326
Instability	2.26	1.13	2.62	1.02	2.41	1.10	2.73	0.82	ns	3, 326
Other-focused	2.82 ^d	0.68	2.54	0.79	2.61	0.65	2.44	0.73	4.46**	3, 326
Self-focused	2.46	0.85	2.53	0.86	2.88	0.68	2.72	0.80	ns	3, 326
Not adolescent or adult	1.97	1	2.96 ^{ac}	0.99	1.94	0.95	3.13 ^{ac}	0.80	18.93***	3, 326

^a Significantly higher than practising adults (who perceive themselves as adults and have taken on adult roles).

^b Significantly higher than unprepared adults (who do not perceive themselves as adults but have taken on adult roles).

^c Significantly higher than self-perceived adults (who perceive themselves as adults but have not taken on adult roles).

^d Significantly higher than emerging adults (who neither perceive themselves as adults nor have taken on adult roles).

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

$F(1,330) = 15.86$, $p < 0.001$, and financial independence-family capacities, $F(1,330) = 11.4$, $p < 0.01$. On average, women scored higher than men on both norm compliance ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 0.46$ versus $M = 3.11$, $SD = 0.51$, respectively) and financial independence-family capacities ($M = 2.27$, $SD = 0.72$ versus $M = 2.14$, $SD = 0.71$, respectively). Likewise, univariate analyses highlighted differences in all four factors as regards the attainment of indicators of adulthood as a function of adult status. In two of those, role transitions, $F(3,330) = 24.61$, $p < 0.001$, and financial independence, $F(3,330) = 8.87$, $p < 0.001$, the differences were in line with our predictions, according to *a posteriori* comparisons (Tukey). The practising adults' group had made significantly more progress toward achieving those two indicators. The unprepared adults' group, meanwhile, excelled at role transitions but not financial independence. As for the other two factors, norm compliance, $F(3,330) = 3.54$, $p < 0.05$, and psychological maturity, $F(3,330) = 10.32$, $p < 0.001$, the differences were along the same lines in both cases. According to *a posteriori* comparisons, the groups of practising adults and self-perceived adults scored significantly higher than the unprepared and emerging adults' groups.

Finally, a third MANCOVA was carried out, considering sex and adult status as the independent variables, age the covariate, and descriptive dimensions of emerging adulthood as independent variables. No significant effect associated with sex was found, nor was there an interaction effect of the sex \times adult status. There was, however, a significant effect of the adult status, $F(21,919) = 23.8$, $p < 0.001$. Univariate analyses revealed significant differences as a function of group in two of the dimensions of emerging adulthood, as displayed in Table 3: other-

focused, $F(3,326) = 4.46$, $p < 0.01$ and feeling "in between two stages," $F(3,326) = 18.93$, $p < 0.001$. *A posteriori* (Tukey) comparisons indicated that practising adults are more other-focused than emerging adults, while unprepared adults and emerging adults express a more intense experience of transition between these two phases of life, compared to practising and self-perceived adults. Viewed all together, what best describes this stage is the experience of endless possibilities and options in life ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 0.64$) and of the reaffirmation and clarification of identity ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 0.75$). Feeling stuck in between two stages can also be considered a majority experience at least in part ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 0.75$). The characteristics of self-focus ($M = 2.66$, $SD = 0.82$), instability ($M = 2.63$, $SD = 0.95$), and other-focus ($M = 2.53$, $SD = 0.74$) turned out to be less definitive.

DISCUSSION

This study proposed a dual-objective: first, to examine certain characteristics of emerging adulthood in Spain, criteria for adulthood (importance and achievement), and the experiential dimensions of this stage; and second, to explore whether differences in these features are linked to gender or adult status. We will proceed to discuss our results regarding that two-part objective.

Overall description of emerging adulthood

A high percentage of the 18- to 30-year-olds in this study (70%) did not consider themselves fully adult (responding "in some

ways yes, and in others no"). That percentage is even higher than that reported by other studies in Spain (59%, Uriarte, 2007) and in other cultural and geographical contexts, like China (41%, Nelson *et al.*, 2004; 52%, Zhong & Arnett, 2014), Canada (50% in an Aboriginal population, Cheah & Nelson, 2004) and Argentina (54%, Facio & Micocci, 2003). However, the percentage is closer to that reported by researchers in other European countries, such as Greece (60%, Petrogiannis, 2011), Romania (61%, Nelson, 2009), and Austria (62%, Sirsch *et al.*, 2009). During this period, although the tendency to consider oneself an adult does grow, it does not seem to define it, even for people around 30 years old. These differences once again confirm that, within the common experience that people from an array of different places share, socioeconomic and cultural factors produce important variations in emerging adulthood, and these must be kept in mind.

The factors generated in this study resemble those reported in earlier research (Arnett, 2003; Nelson, 2009). Two factors that previously appeared separately, the factors of family capacities and financial independence from the family, have been combined into one in this study. Similarly, the role transitions factor also included what past studies have reported is a separate category of "biological and chronological transitions." Finally, a psychological maturity factor was clearly identified that taps aspects of interpersonal maturity, like having a well-articulated personal identity. It is similar to, but more conceptually broad than, what Badger *et al.* (2006) called "relational maturity." The results suggest these criteria are very similar in Spain to those in other countries insofar as they underline the importance attributed to internal, psychological markers (Arnett, 2003; Badger *et al.*, 2006; Sirsch *et al.*, 2009). On another level, norm compliance and financial independence-family capacities were deemed requirements of adulthood, but to a lesser extent than that reported in previous studies (Nelson, 2009). Role and biological transitions were little regarded by participants, significantly less, even, than in other studies in which they also fell in last place (e.g., Badger *et al.*, 2006). The Spanish youths in our study were clearly distancing themselves from more traditional criteria, with a strong tendency, as described above, towards valuing more individualistic criteria.

The data collected indicate that some of the central themes of emerging adulthood are characteristic of the experience of Spanish youths during this stage of the life cycle. Considering it an "age of possibilities" and perceiving it as a period of identity exploration, make up the basic nucleus of emerging adulthood as defined by Arnett (2004). Youths from different geographical areas seem to have a shared experience of these two features (Arnett, 2003; Nelson, 2009; Sirsch *et al.*, 2009), which attests to this period's critical importance as an opportune time for one's identity to develop beyond the limited time adolescence lasts.

Variations associated with gender and adult status group

The differences we observed as a function of gender are in line with the findings of previous studies into various cultural groups, especially with respect to the higher value that women place on norm compliance and family capacities (Badger *et al.*, 2006; Cheah *et al.*, 2010; Facio & Micocci, 2003; Sirsch *et al.*, 2009).

We hypothesize that the different ways in which men and women reason about adult roles could help explain these differences (Gere & Helwig, 2012). According to social cognitive domain theory, there are three kinds of reasoning which are applicable to differing social situations such as adult roles (Turiel, 2006): that based on moral concepts (fairness, justice and harm), that based on culturally relative social conventions and that which associates it with an autonomous personal choice. There is evidence that underlines how, in the domain of family roles, the morality-based criterion predominates in women whereas social convention is the dominant one in men (Gere & Helwig, 2012). The greater value which women bestow on the adulthood criterion of conforming to social norms could also reflect this difference, insofar as women tend to perceive them as universal obligations. Regarding family capacities, a framework of interpretation could be based on social role theory which advocates that people tend to attribute features to others which are consistent with their social roles (Diekmann & Eagly, 2000). In this case, the adult roles that serve as a reference for the young women participating in this study are played by adult women from the previous generation, who have developed a whole series of family capacities more intensely. Other gender differences reported in this study reiterate the findings of Nelson's (2009) study on Romanian youths in showing that women deem relational maturity criteria more important than men do. Despite social change toward greater equality, young college students continue to report that "a greater importance of human relationships", "moralist" and "maturity" are characteristics that are more meaningful for women than men (Castillo-Mayén & Montes-Berges, 2014). Nevertheless, other studies have reported that these gender differences are practically non-existent (see Arnett, 2004; Petrogiannis, 2011). Viewed together, these results suggest gender plays a certain role in the variability of adulthood criteria. Viewing emerging adulthood as a transition, sociological studies continue to affirm that gender is a differential structural variable, especially in Southern European countries like Spain (Moreno, 2012).

Despite the fact that some hallmarks of emerging adulthood were observed in Spanish youths, we must also emphasize that participants varied enormously in their attitudes (e.g., 21% already considered themselves adults), beliefs (the criteria deemed necessary to be an adult), and behavior (to what extent they have assumed adult roles). Prior research findings suggest that such attitudes, beliefs, and behavior differ as a function of how much individuals consider themselves adults (Nelson, 2009; Nelson & Barry, 2005). This study has generated a classification system in order to explain differences in adulthood criteria and in the dimensions of emerging adulthood.

First of all, two adult status groups clearly associated with different ages were identified: "practising adults" and "emerging adults". The first falls around 25 years old and the second around 20 to 21 years old. The practising adult group exhibited higher levels of accomplishment of all the criteria for adulthood, both psychological and more external. In contrast to our expectations, that group did not ascribe more importance to role transitions as a requirement for adulthood. With regard to identity development, people in this group begin to make more stable commitments and become more oriented toward others, as reflected in their experience of being more other-focused and their clear perception of themselves as adults. Meanwhile, the emerging adults group is the

one that most prototypically fits Arnett's (2004) description referring to the strong feeling of "being in between two stages." They could be described as being under moratorium, that is, they have more room for identity exploration and fewer firm commitments, and also as the group which has the highest degree of freedom from interpersonal obligations (Zacarés, Iborra, Tomás & Serra, 2009). This time of exploration seems a necessary stepping stone toward later, healthy adult development. Identity development, then, is also a necessary precursor to perceiving oneself as an adult, as Nelson and Barry (2005) suggest.

Next, the results set out two other adult status profiles of particular interest: "unprepared adults" and "self-perceived adults." The two do not differ from one another in average age, but they tend to fall in the middle of the first two groups' age (about 23 to 25 years old). The group of unprepared adults is comprised of people who have already assumed some adult roles without feeling completely prepared to do so. In Nelson's (2009) study, that group was distinguished above all for exhibiting weaker identity commitment than the groups of individuals who already consider themselves adults. In the present case, the group of unprepared adults attributed greater importance to role transitions and the data indicate they also progressed toward achievement, but not enough to perceive themselves as adults. They also seem to have a certain amount of difficulty complying with norms despite considering that as an important criterion for adulthood, which may indicate a higher incidence of risk behavior and difficulty with impulse control. One possible explanation for that is that this group exhibits a profile of "psychological immaturity" and ambivalence, much like emerging adults, but has less time and fewer chances to get involved in the exploration process associated with positive development. One could expect, therefore, less identity consolidation in the unprepared adults group, exacerbating their experience of instability (Luyckx, De Witte & Goossens, 2011). In that vein, taking on adult roles without first resolving certain identity issues, places people at risk in their future development. For example, assuming a parental role very early, without first exploring the personal significance of parenthood and its place in the life cycle, could lead a young person to feel overwhelmed and project negative expectations about parenthood. Likewise, assuming professional responsibilities early on, without first considering different values and occupational choices, could lead to tensions throughout the entire adult stage of life. In this group, the effect of viewing oneself as forced to "act like an adult" without perceiving oneself to be one must be borne in mind (Andrew *et al.*, 2007; Mary, 2014). On the flip side lie the self-perceived adults, whose consideration as adults seems to stem mostly from having acquired a set of qualities indicative of psychological maturity, which are ultimately considered the most important requirements for adulthood. They do not seem to need to adopt a specific role in order to perceive themselves as adults.

Limitations and future directions

The present study's results should be interpreted with some limitations in mind, and its findings generalized with a measure of caution. Though a third of these study participants did work full-time, most of them were college-educated professionals. Young

professionals with lower levels of education were underrepresented in this sample. That is significant because it is the less educated youths who most closely connect subjective adulthood to role transitions (Plug *et al.*, 2003; Reitzle, 2006). In terms of the level of education, future studies should recruit a more representative sample so as to explore its possible association with conceptions of adulthood and adult status. Such analyses would help clarify whether the low degree of subjective adulthood of the unprepared adults group has to do with their lack of educational capital, other more psychological factors, or a combination of the two.

Furthermore, we should ascertain the impact which this hardship or delay in attaining full adult status has on the psychosocial development of the current generation of 18- to 30- year-old Spaniards due to the negative economic circumstances (Moreno, 2012). Young people who enter adulthood through the so-called "precarious" or "destructuring" trajectories sociologists have identified (Bendit & Hahn-Bleibtreu, 2008) were hardly represented in the present study. Future studies should include a higher proportion of unemployed adults with career trajectories in which more or less prolonged periods without work alternate with highly precarious jobs. We expect that economic and occupational challenges would keenly define those individuals' conceptions of adulthood and diminish their self-perceived adulthood. That could further accentuate some of the trends discussed earlier in this paper.

Finally, this study's third limitation lies in the fact that one of the adult status typology's dimensions was adopting social roles, or not. To include a participant in the "adult role adopted" group, we applied the criterion that s/he had assumed at least one of several roles. This gave rise to a highly heterogeneous category (e.g., young people with their own home and children were combined with young people living with their parents, but who had their own job). Furthermore, due to a low representation of people in more traditional roles (i.e., marriage and parenthood) in the sample, the primary roles which participants held were having a full-time job and living with an intimate partner in one's own home. Traditional roles exert a subjective adulthood-producing force that those two simply do not (Zhong & Arnett, 2014). In future research, this system of categorization should be improved to better define what it means to "assume an adult role." It might include other situations that did not meet the criteria applied in the present study (e.g., single, living in one's own home, and financially independent). The above could be improved even more, and complemented, by further restricting inclusion criteria (e.g., having assumed at least two roles, one in the work sphere and one in the family sphere).

It could be fruitful to analyze the interaction between feeling like an adult, adopting adult roles, and developing identity during the transition into adulthood. Likewise, future research should explore what features differentiate the four Adult Status groups (e.g., dimensions of identity vs. psychological well-being) if this typology is to adequately describe psychosocial functioning. This line of research provides important information about the diversity of psychosocial patterns and trajectories in emerging adulthood, a current area of interest in this field (Nelson & Padilla-Walker, 2013; Schwartz, Beyers, Luyckx *et al.*, 2011). Another implication of these results has to do with the developmental optimization

of trajectories toward adult life in spheres like family and career. The unprepared adults group may need intervention to bolster their development of skills associated with work and family roles and to allow their adult identity to mature more fully.

CONCLUSION

The present study's findings increase our understanding of how varied emerging adulthood can be. This was the first study to explore the conceptions of adulthood of Spanish youths, and a typology for the study of emerging adulthood was proposed. The results also shed light on the complex interaction, during this lifespan period, between the attainment of "social adulthood" (occupying predetermined roles) and experiencing "psychological adulthood" (feeling psychologically prepared to take on these roles). Similarly, the proposed model provides a useful perspective through which to examine differences and similarities between emerging adulthood in Spain and other countries. The features of the Spanish case can be summed up in three points: (1) considering oneself an adult occurs especially late, around 30 years old or later; (2) psychological maturity criteria were the most highly-rated adulthood requirements, followed by norm compliance and financial independence-family capacities, which is consistent with research findings in other Western countries; and (3) these Spanish participants in particular experienced this phase as a time of opportunity, and a propitious time to resolve identity questions. Finally, we wish to highlight that the present study offers a typology of adult status that, while based on data collected from young Spaniards, could be applied in future studies to analyze the transition to adulthood in other Western countries.

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