

PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENTAL LABORATORY

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SHARING SCIENCE: PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT NEWSLETTER

As the Psychosocial Development Laboratory at Ankara University of Social Sciences, we are proud to share our academic work and current literature with you on a scientific platform.

Human development is a lifelong, multifaceted, and dynamic interaction of biological, cognitive, and sociocultural factors. Our laboratory's vision is to deeply examine the processes that shape individuals' identity construction, social networks, and psychological well-being. In this context, our newsletter aims to ensure that theoretical research is not limited to academic articles and that scientific knowledge is systematic, understandable, and accessible to everyone interested in the field.



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UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT

In the first issue of our publication, we will address the concept of “emerging adulthood,” an important part of our lives, through a comprehensive literature review. We will examine this period, which spans the ages of 18 to 29, not only as a biological growth phase but also as a unique stage of life in which factors such as identity search, romantic and social relationships, and attachment dynamics are intertwined, drawing on current research. We hope that this newsletter, which is the product of research and curiosity, will be useful to our readers.

-Begüm Karabacak

CURRENT ISSUE: EMERGING ADULTHOOD

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NOT A SINGLE ENTITY, BUT A COMBINATION: THE THEORY OF EMERGING ADULTHOOD

Many of us may think that adulthood is solely related to our age or biological maturity. While these are important, turning 18 to 19 only represents a one-year period; nevertheless, this transition is often seen as a sharp step from childhood to adulthood. However, assuming this process can be so sudden overlooks the complex nature of human development.

In reality, the transition to adulthood is not a linear or uniform process. At this point, Jeffrey Jensen Arnett introduces the concept of emerging adulthood (roughly ages 18–25, in some contexts up to 29) to argue that this transition is not a sharp boundary but rather a long and heterogeneous journey. In today's world, adulthood is less of a monolithic structure and more of a construction process where an individual's internal discoveries intersect with social transformations in education, work, and family structures. The lengthening of education periods, the delay in marriage and parenthood, and the increasing flexibility of work life have been decisive in the emergence of this new life stage.

Therefore, emerging adulthood should be considered not merely a transition to adulthood but a distinct life stage with its own developmental characteristics.

Jeffrey Arnett's 5 Key Elements of Emerging Adulthood

The Age of Identity Search: At this stage, questions such as “Who am I?” and “Who do I want to be with?” are explored through trial and error in work and close relationships.

The Age of Indecision: This is a period characterized by frequent moves, changes in education, or relationship changes.



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The Age of Self-Focus: A stage in which long-term responsibilities such as marriage or parenthood are relatively few, and the individual focuses on developing their skills and autonomy.

The In-Between Stage: Despite biological adulthood, not feeling fully grown up is one of the most common experiences of this period. It is an experience of being stuck in between, neither fully adolescent nor fully adult.

The Age of Possibilities: A period when hope for the future blossoms, when the feeling that everything is not yet over and that something can still be done is dominant.



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As you can understand, although the emerging adulthood period involves uncertainty and fluctuations, research shows that this period is not merely a crisis phase; for many individuals, it is a process of discovery in which self-esteem increases, skills develop, and their outlook on life gradually becomes clearer. When these characteristics are considered together, it becomes clear that there is no single path to adulthood and that each individual shapes this phase within their own social conditions and personal experiences. Taking these into account, new questions inevitably come to mind. If this period is a process influenced by social conditions and personal experiences, and at the same time shaped by them, can we defend the universality of this concept within the human development process?

-Erkan Taşcı

TO WHAT EXTENT IS EMERGING ADULTHOOD UNIVERSAL?

The image is sourced from the Ambre Associates website.



Is the concept of emerging adulthood, as defined on the previous page, truly the same stage for everyone? Are there differences? How significant are these differences? As defined by Arnett, is it universally observed in young people aged 18-29? Can't there be people who feel like adults at 16-17? We will answer all these questions with the research conducted by Hendry and Kloep (2010) from Glamorgan University.

To summarize the research: Hendry and Kloep interviewed 38 young people aged 17-20 who were not in higher education in Wales to examine their perceptions of adulthood and life experiences. The study tested Arnett's five key characteristics (identity exploration, instability, egocentricity, feeling of being in-between, age of opportunity) and obtained results contrary to many of Arnett's claims. This showed that age alone is not a determining factor; for example, while some young people marry and have children at 19-20, others are still in the exploration phase at 20. This finding revealed that the developmental process is shaped by individual experiences.

In the qualitative research conducted, when the interviews were examined using thematic analysis, it was observed that responsibility makes people more mature. Young people who worked and cared for their families identified themselves as "adults" more easily. The study also shows that inequality of opportunity and socioeconomic status play an important role in individuals' transition to adulthood. This situation emphasizes that the concept of "emerging adulthood" is only valid for middle-class, college-educated young people and that other young people do not fit this template.

In short, the transition to adulthood cannot be limited to a single age range. Individual experiences, responsibilities, and living conditions are decisive in development. Social class, educational opportunities, and family structure are among the most important factors. Finally, I would like to share with you a quote from a young person, which the author of the article also considers a very good summary:

"There are differences... My attitude, the environment I grew up in, the things that happened to me, perhaps difficulties that others haven't experienced, or that I haven't experienced. Everyone has differences, so I don't understand how people can say you're a typical teenager." (male, 19 years old)

-Erkan Taşçı

FROM PARENTS TO PEERS: HOW ATTACHMENT REPRESENTATIONS SHAPE THE QUALITY OF FRIENDSHIPS IN YOUNG ADULTHOOD?

From the moment we come into the world, we establish our first relationships with our parents. The relationship we once had with our parents does not remain limited to them but expands further. When we start school and go through the process of individualization, our network of relationships expands as we form relationships with our peers. In fact, as we reach adulthood, our friends begin to become our second family. But do we continue the attachment style we established with our family in our relationships with our friends, or do we compensate for our troubled relationship with our parents in our relationships with our friends? A comprehensive study published in 2023 by Marie G. Oldeman and colleagues seeks the answer to this question in the “attachment styles” we bring with us from childhood.



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Sometimes we may think, “I have problems with my family, but I have a great relationship with my friends, so I compensate for that.” However, research shows that this is not quite the case. According to the research results, young adults who develop an anxious or avoidant attachment style with their parents also transfer this insecure attachment model to their closest friends. In other words, the insecure bond we form with our family leads to insecurity in our friendships. So how does this affect our relationships with our friends in everyday life? In the second phase of the study, participants were asked to keep a diary for two weeks. These diaries were then examined, revealing some interesting findings. People who form anxious attachments with their closest friends open up less to their friends and seek less emotional support from them. The fear of rejection within them may be sending them the message that “if you ask for help, you will be a burden.” As a result, because they cannot get the support they need, their relationships with their friends may also be negatively affected.

Another finding of the study is that the partner effect is not observed. In other words, your being anxious and avoidant does not directly cause your friend to perceive the relationship negatively; your attachment style is more related to how you view the relationship and affects how much you enjoy the friendship.



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What we understand from this study is this: If we experience problems or dissatisfaction in our friendships, the problem may not always lie with the other person. We need to look for the problem within ourselves and examine the attachment patterns we have inherited from our families. So, how can we overcome the invisible barriers in our relationships and build healthy ones? At this point, asking for support is important. We may be going through a difficult time or just want to open up; at this point, it is important to have the courage to talk to your closest friend without hesitation. Being aware of our feelings is another important point. Observe your relationship and make an effort to improve it. In summary, regardless of our relationship with our parents, it is up to us whether or not to reflect this in our other relationships. Rather than being left alone with the fear of rejection or being a burden, we should sincerely reach out to our friends.

What we understand from this study is this: If we experience a problem or dissatisfaction in our friendship, the problem may not always lie with the other person.

-Begüm Karabacak

THE POWER OF CHARACTER: NAVIGATING THE UPS AND DOWNS OF YOUNG ADULTHOOD

One of the important transitional phases of our lives, emerging adulthood, involves not only biological changes but also dynamic shifts in consciousness and emotions. Within this dynamic structure, there are often times when we feel depressed. Researchers wanted to examine what triggers and protects depressive mood during this period of intense stress and uncertainty. In a study by Brito and Soares (2023), 1,060 young adults with an average age of 22.3 were examined. The concepts measured included dimensions of emerging adulthood. For example, identity search or feeling stuck in between. Another concept is the PERMA model of well-being. The concepts examined in this model are positive emotions, relationships, and achievement. Another concept is character strengths, namely, 24 personality traits such as courage, kindness, curiosity, or enthusiasm. Looking at the results of the study, it was found that the strongest protector was positive emotions. Looking at the strongest risk factor, "negativity" stood out as a factor affecting depressive mood.

So, being positive protects us, while being negative puts us in a depressive mood. We see that another concept examined in the study, character strengths, has a significant effect on mood. Looking at the results of the study, we see that the most prominent character trait is "excitement." In other words, being enthusiastic and passionate about life protects us from depression in this age group. In addition to seasonal difficulties, trying to hold on to life or enjoying life, as difficult as it may be for some during this period, is essentially the key to escaping depression.

The feeling of negativity experienced during this period is the biggest source of depression. At this point, the character strengths mentioned in the study are actually our greatest weapon against depression. Recognizing our strengths and using them without exhausting ourselves will help us get through this transition period more healthily.

-Begüm Karabacak



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OUR PERCEPTION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE: ITS JOURNEY TO MATURITY AND INFLUENCING FACTORS



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How is young people's perception of social justice shaped? Most of us would say the answer to this question is "a concept learned from the family," but most of us see that the transmission of these values changes as we grow up and reach university age. Research conducted by Tara M. Stoppa sheds light on precisely this issue.

In his study, he examines how university students' sensitivity to social justice is influenced by their families, friends, and the spiritual/religious communities they belong to. The results are surprising to most of us.

The study focused on three main social environments. These are defined as family, peers, and religious communities. The research measured the effect of both "talking" and "being a role model (action)" separately in these three groups (family, friends, religious group). The most striking results of the research concern who is most effective. According to the results, the strongest factor determining university students' attitudes toward social justice is their peers.

If a student's friends are interested in social justice and are active in this area, the student's commitment to this issue also increases. Statistically, the family's direct impact on the student's current commitment to social justice is the lowest. This does not mean that the family is unimportant. Families lay the foundation, but during college years (emerging adulthood), the real force shaping the young person's active behavior is their current environment (friends and community).

Another point is that being a role model is much more effective than talking about social justice. The conclusion we can draw from this study is that fundamental values such as social justice need to be lived rather than preached. Therefore, we should stop giving advice and instead put these concepts at the center of our lives and inspire others through our actions.

Fundamental values such as social justice are meant to be lived rather than merely talked about. Therefore, we should stop giving advice and instead place these concepts at the center of our lives, inspiring others through our actions.

-Begüm Karabacak

CLOSING MESSAGE AND THANKS

In this first issue, we have endeavored to address the theoretical foundations of emerging adulthood, the individual structure of this process as it varies according to socioeconomic conditions, the impact of parental attachment patterns on our friendships, the role of character strengths such as “excitement” in psychological well-being, and the influence of peer effects on the formation of our perception of social justice, based on our literature reviews. You can review the sources we used in the “References” section.

We would like to thank you, our valued readers, for joining us in this first issue and sharing in our excitement for sharing science.

This newsletter is part of the Psychosocial Development Laboratory at Ankara University of Social Sciences' vision to share scientific knowledge with the community and engage with society. As part of this vision, you can also follow our monthly webinar announcements on our Instagram social media account **@psychosocialdevlab**.

With Our Sincere Thanks and Respect

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to our esteemed founding academics, **Zehra Allahverdi** and **Hatice Işık**, for their permission and support in preparing this newsletter, which has enabled us to conduct our work freely, supported our productivity, and guided us on our academic journey. We would also like to thank our laboratory team for all their moral support throughout this process. We look forward to seeing you again in future issues with new themes.

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Next Issue: It will be published in March with a new topic.



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