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Social roles in emerging adulthood. Results of a nationwide study

Role społeczne w okresie wschodzącej dorosłości. Wyniki badań ogólnopolskich

Abstract: The article attempts to present emerging adulthood, i.e. experiences during the transition from adolescence to the full adult status from the perspective of the social role theory. The empirical basis is a survey research carried out on a random, nationwide sample of people aged 18-29 (n=303), stratified by gender and size of their town of residence. The aim of the analysis is to answer questions about identification with roles, and change in the multiplicity of roles depending on age, gender, and self-identification with the status of an adult. The results indicate that in the period of emerging adulthood, the professional role becomes particularly important, and the set of roles related to the status of an adult overshadows the roles typical of adolescence. In addition, it has been shown that women identify with more roles than men and more often include the parental role and the role of wife/partner in the set of roles.

Keywords: social roles, emerging adults, adulthood criteria, social role theory.

Introduction

Social and demographic changes, which occurred in the second half of the 20th century, led Jeffrey Arnett to distinguish the period of the emerging adulthood within the human development cycle. The starting point for these considerations was the work by Erik Erikson, Daniel Levinson and

Kenneth Keniston. According to Arnett, this period, both demographically and subjectively, represents a distinct stage of development, and is characterised by a search for identity, instability, self-centredness, a sense of being 'in between' adolescence and adulthood, and a belief in many possibilities or optimism about the future (Arnett, 2000; Arnett et al., 2014). This theory originally applied to 18-25 year olds (Arnett, 2000, p. 469), but over time, due to the changes associated with the increasing median age of entering marriage and having a child, the demarcation line was shifted to 18-29 years old (Arnett, 2014, p. 7).

The development of an individual is connected to performed roles (Bakiera, 2013). Taking on a social role entails certain consequences. Roles constitute a link between the individual and society – by undertaking role-related activities, the individual participates in a social reality, which at the same time acquires a subjective dimension. The expectations of the group towards an individual that occupies a specific position shape the personal definition of a role (Szmatka, 2008) and vary in degree of imperativeness – from cultural imperatives to acceptance to preferences (Sztompka, 2002). Depending on the load of obligations related with the standards associated with a given role, it may involve constraints, but it also opens up opportunities for development. Bruce Biddle (1986, p. 83) draws attention in this context to the ambiguity of a role, i.e. a situation in which expectations are incomplete or clear behavioural cues are absent. Therefore, social role awareness translates into the development of reflection and adult responsibility (Bakiera, 2008).

Referring the concept of social role to the category of emerging adults appears as interesting insofar as this specific group is in a period of transition between statuses (e.g. parent-dependent – independent person). The transition that takes place then has both a social and a psychological dimension, while at the same time reflects broader socio-cultural changes. On the one hand, the socially constructed indicators of reaching adult status have been modified. On the other hand, increasing individualistic tendencies, a decline in the importance of traditional values, a wider range of personal freedom, but also greater uncertainty about the possibility of successfully pursuing one's intended life course (Grob, Krings and Bangerter, 2001, p. 188) have translated into a multiplicity of strategies for entering adulthood (Arnett 2006, p.4). Ulrich Beck (2002, p. 202) emphasises that there has been a shift from biographies created by the society to biographies shaped by the individuals themselves (so-called 'do-it-yourself' biographies), which involves continuous decision-making.

The aim of the article is to present the emerging adulthood through the prism of social role theory, based on the results of empirical research on a random, nationwide sample. In particular, an attempt will be made to present self-identification with roles, their multiplicity (understood according to Merton's approach) and selected correlates. Thus, the publication may provide for a verification of the theory at the intersection of pedagogy, psychology and sociology of upbringing through unique, representative, and empirical material.

The social role as a link between the social structure and an individual

The forerunners of role theory include sociologists, educators, psychologists and anthropologists whose work set the stage for later interest in the subject: Charles Horton Cooley wrote about the looking-glass self, John Dewey about habits and behaviour, Georg Simmel about interactions, and Emile Durkheim about social mechanisms (Thomas and Biddle, 1966). Nowadays, the concept of social role, understood as a mediating factor between processes in the social structure and processes in the individual's personality, is applied in sociology, anthropology, psychology and education.

Notwithstanding the work of early social scientists, who implicitly pointed to the concept of the role, the term itself entered scientific discourse in the 1930s. It was then that George H. Mead, while analysing problems of interaction and the self, described the process of 'adopting roles'. Within it, a distinction was made between two phases in the development of the self. In the former, the individual takes on the roles of other specific individuals, with whom he or she interacts in the course of engaging in social activities; in the latter, there is a process of generalisation of other people's behaviour and attitudes, and the 'generalised other' becomes the social group as a source of norms of behaviour. This process strengthens the individual's ties to the community (Szacki, 2002, pp. 584-586).

Around the same time, the second strand of consideration of social roles emerged, which placed a stronger emphasis on the impact of social structure. Ralph Linton, while drawing the attention to the relationship between role and social position, pointed to the patterns of behaviour which operate within society (1936, pp. 113-114). Linton defined role as the sum of the cultural patterns corresponding to given statuses, encompassing 'the attitudes, values and behaviours that society attributes to each person holding a given status' ([1945] 2000, p. 98). Linton's distinction between positions, associated expectations and patterns of behaviour facilitated the search for points of contact between society and the individual (Turner, 2005, p.

407). At a relatively early stage, role theory reached a level of advancement that enabled complex analyses to be conducted. The prime representative of this period is Robert Merton, who introduced the concept of a role-set into the theory, defined as a set of 'dependencies in the roles assigned to an individual because of the social status he or she occupies' (2002, p. 411, see Merton 1957, p. 110). At the same time, he distinguished between a role-set and multiple roles, which are related to many different social statuses enjoyed by the individual, i.e. a set of statuses (e.g. roles referring to the status in professional and family spheres).

Henryk Białyszewski (1967, pp. 171, 177), analysing the genesis of the concept of social role, distinguished between two groups of definitions. In the first category, he classified definitions drawing upon the concept by Mead, which refer to the human personality and its development, regarding role as 'the orientation of the role bearer in relation to the social situation or as the role bearer's ideas as to its realisation' (1967, p. 177). In the second group, he classified definitions that take into account social structure along the lines of the concept of Linton, i.e. linking the concept of social role to status or, as Daniel Levinson (1979, pp. 126-127) put it, to social position.

Subsequent authors have attempted to integrate structuralist theory with that of personality. Bruce J. Biddle (1986, p. 68) notes that role theory considers three concepts: patterns of social behaviour, roles or identities assumed by individuals, and scripts or expectations of behaviour. A social role can be understood in three ways (Levinson 1979, p. 127), as:

1. 'Structurally assigned imperatives', i.e. the norms and expectations associated with a given social position. This way of role definition situates the role outside of the individual.
2. 'Orientation' or a 'concept', i.e. a way in which an individual defines how a person holding a particular position should behave.
3. 'Activity' of individuals in the context of the position they hold i.e. in relation to the norms in place. This manner of role definition relates to the individual and not to the external environment.

As mentioned above, the emerging adults are in a period of transition between statuses, abandoning roles characterised by dependency (e.g. towards their parents), achieving independence in many dimensions and, finally, adopting parental roles. If we look at them from the perspective of the three-part categorisation by Levinson, they have to meet the structurally assigned imperatives of the roles they start to assume as adults. Concurrently, it is necessary to create a personal, individual role orientation – defining oneself in terms of a new status and acquiring the relevant competences to

function, for example, in a parental role. Lastly, adoption of new statuses requires role-specific activities, and individuals during the transition between statuses have to reconcile to some extent the challenges of functioning in Mertonian multiple roles.

Process of entering into adulthood and adulthood criteria

The fundamental model used to describe the process of entering adulthood in the mid-20th century was the so-called 'Big Five'. It took into account the following elements (the 'markers of adulthood'): completing education, getting a job, moving out of the family home, getting married and having a child. Traditional markers of adulthood referred to the acquisition of social roles and responsibilities. Cultural imperatives and expectations related to age and the sequence of attainment of successive criteria conditioned the relatively rapid pace at which the aforementioned points were reached (Settersten, Ottusch and Schneider, 2015). Nowadays, what becomes a characteristic feature of industrialised societies, is the 'delay syndrome', which consists of postponing marriage (with cohabitation and 'single life' becoming increasingly popular), a delay in entering into relationships and parenthood, prolongation of education and, consequently, later achievement of economic independence from one's parents (Slany 2006). The tendency to postpone adulthood, noticeable in many societies, is recognised as the later adoption of social roles, which are typical of adulthood (Brzezińska, Kaczan, Piotrowski and Rękosiewicz, 2011).

Not only has the process of entering adulthood lengthened, the markers of adulthood themselves have changed (Schneider, Klager, Chen, and Burns, 2016). Research indicates that the previously described traditional markers of adulthood are not perceived by the emerging adults themselves as necessary aspects of becoming an adult in today's society (Nelson et al. 2007, p. 666). Jeffrey Arnett, based on his research, lists five criteria of adulthood most frequently indicated by respondents aged 21-28: taking responsibility for oneself, financial and executive independence (making decisions on one's own), general self-sufficiency and establishing an independent household (Arnett, 1998, p. 305, see Arnett, Žukauskienė and Sugimura, 2014, p. 573). Thus, as a consequence of social change, some elements of the 'big five' – especially marriage and parenthood – have lost their relevance. Achieving independence has been separated from starting a family. Financial independence, on the other hand, is still a significant measure of adulthood, although, as Richard Settersten, Timothy Ottusch and Barbara Schneider (2015) note, the use of parental financial support up to the age of 30 is quite

common in the middle and upper classes. Some of the factors mentioned by Arnett are also pointed out by Piotr Oleś (2011, pp. 17-19). In his view, the criteria of adulthood are the following: responsibility for oneself and other people, emotional independence and autonomy in decision-making, as well as 'defining the direction of one's own life, the dominant form of activity (not necessarily in a professional capacity), formulating life aspirations for the coming 10-20 years, and self-definition in terms of readiness to build a lasting relationship (or live alone), along with an active and persistent attempt to pursue the chosen lifestyle' (Oleś, 2011, p. 18). In this frame, it is not so much the relationship (and marriage in particular) that is the benchmark of adulthood, but the conscious decision to build it or to live alone.

The emerging adulthood in the context of taking on social roles

The emerging adulthood is analysed primarily in the context of changes within the individual, the diversity of developmental pathways, and in relation to lifelong development (Arnett, 2000). This concept takes into account both psychological aspects (e.g. identity) as well as sociological ones (e.g. occupational instability), while emphasising the role of cultural conditions (e.g. industrialisation, secularisation) in shaping the emerging adult experiences (Tanner 2006, p. 26). Marriage and parenthood are postponed; moreover, it appears that reaching the age of majority is no longer the time to enter stable, adult roles. The reason for this is the transformation of the labour market – on the one hand the lengthening time needed to obtain the education necessary to perform professional roles, and on the other hand, the necessity to devote a certain period of time to achieve a position on the labour market guaranteeing economic stability and a sense of security, indicated as a *sine qua non* condition for intentional entry into family and parental roles (Brzezińska et al., 2011).

In connection with the aforementioned 'delay syndrome' and de-standardisation of biographies, the phenomenon of so-called 'peak hours' emerges (Brzezińska et al., 2011). Diminishing or more dispersed normative expectations, as well as a widening range of choices regarding the pursuit of developmental tasks related to adulthood have caused young people to postpone these tasks to later stages of life, which may be caused by external conditions, such as the situation on the labour market or the housing market. At the same time, according to Anna Brzezińska and co-authors (2011), emerging adults feel pressure originating from the awareness that postponing certain tasks for an excessive amount of time will make them impossible to complete.

Consequently, this leads to an accumulation of tasks and difficulties related to the process of entering adulthood.

The internal variation within the 18-29 age group and the lack of a homogenous model for the transition of emerging adulthood is a reflection of the experimental and exploratory nature of this period. Emerging adulthood is the time when life events, considered significant, are most likely to occur, and choices made at this age are believed to be influential to the person's life and subsequent biography (Tanner, 2006, p. 24). Research on life events suggests that towards the end of the 'era of opportunity and exploration' there is a consolidation of the self around the role-set and beliefs that define a relatively stable, adult personality. Conversely, Alexander Grob, Franciska Krings and Adrian Bengterter hypothesised that the way the transition between adolescence and adulthood is experienced is connected to a sense of personal control over significant life points. During the period of emerging adulthood, the feeling of control is at its highest level and then declines in the following decades of life (Grob et al., 2001, p. 182). According to Jennifer Tanner (2006, pp. 21-22), the fact that emerging adulthood represents a peak in the occurrence of significant marker events in the lives of individuals makes it a critical moment in their development, when the relationship between an individual and society takes on a new meaning.

The sense of 'being in-between', characteristic of emerging adulthood, is associated with a relative independence from social roles. It involves not only the actions taken, but also the structurally assigned imperatives and role conceptions. As young people have moved on from the state of dependency, characteristic of childhood and adolescence, they do not yet take on the responsibilities which come with the adulthood stage. Referring to what Parsons stated about social roles, Arnett refers to emerging adulthood as a 'roleless role' (Arnett, 2000). It is precisely the adoption of social roles, characteristic of adulthood, which constitutes the distinction between the various stages of life – a rare occurrence in adolescence, a common one in early adulthood, whereas at the stage of the emerging adulthood it is significantly diverse (Brzezińska et al., 2011). During this period, between the functioning structured by parents or school and one regulated by work or family responsibilities, young people have particular opportunities to explore and experiment with social roles (Arnett, 2007).

Methodology

The author's own survey was constructed with the use of a quantitative strategy (Creswell, 2006). This decision was based on the desire to obtain a representative picture of Poland and, at the same time, to capture a sufficiently diverse sample to allow for the analysis of disparities between individuals, who function in various parts of the social structure, and – consequently – are possibly subjected to different role prescriptions. The following research questions were posed:

- With which social roles do emerging adults identify? Here, the main objective is to examine to what extent emerging adults adopt roles typical of childhood and adolescence, and to what degree they adopt the ones associated with the status of an adult. Hypotheses are made about the influence of age and gender upon identification with particular roles.
- Is there a change in the multiple roles depending on age and gender? The two research hypotheses that arise from the question about the relationship between cultural gender and age and the multiple roles make it possible to visualise a period of transition ('being in between') and to identify moments in which the multiple roles increase (as adult status roles are overlaid onto childhood roles) and then decreases (once the adult status is firmly established). The diversity of gender scripts suggests that for various genders the process may have a different trajectory.
- Does the multiplicity of roles coexist with the sense of being an adult? This question concerns the degree to which the structural transformations of a biography of an individual are reflexive.

The survey was conducted in October 2022 on a random group of people aged 18-29 years (n=303), stratified by gender and size of their town of residence. The maximum proportion error for the 95% trust level was +/- 5.8%. An electronic survey was utilised – the Computer Assisted Self-administered Web-based Interview. The variable distributions used for stratification came from the Local Data Bank of the Statistics Poland (2022). The project received a positive opinion from the Ethics Committee of the Christian Theological Academy in Warsaw.

The stratification by gender presupposed, according to data from official statistics of the Statistics Poland, a dichotomous gender division; nevertheless, the respondents in the questionnaire were able to specify their gender identity (including a non-binary identity). Among the respondents, 49.2%

were female, 50.5% were male, and 0.3% declared other self-identification. The low representation of non-binary respondents makes it impossible to include this fraction in cross-analyses. The average age of respondents was 23.9 years (Mdn= 24 years, SD=3.41). At the time of the survey, 43.9% of respondents were attending a post-secondary school or a university, and 56.1% were not continuing their education. Complete economic independence was achieved by 47.2% of the respondents, 24.4% benefited from occasional financial support, 8.6% from a regular one, and 19.8% were dependent on their parents. Regarding professional work, 50.8% of the respondents were working full-time and 19.5% were not employed. More than half of the respondents lived with their parents (51.8%), 20.5% lived independently in their hometown and 27.7% lived on their own in another city or town. Almost half of the respondents were in a stable, informal relationship (46.2%) and 13.9% were married, 7.6% were not in a stable relationship and 32.3% described themselves as single. At the time of the survey, 44.6% of the respondents had children.

Results

Most respondents identify with a professional role (71%). More than half of the respondents indicated a role associated with being in a relationship – 58% of emerging adults identify with the role of a partner or husband/wife (Tab.1). A slightly smaller group, 56%, cite being responsible for another person and 48% refer to being caregivers among the roles they identify with. Parental roles were indicated by less than a quarter of respondents (23%).

When it comes to roles typical of childhood or adolescence, their indications are mentioned by a minor group. Less than half (44%) of the respondents indicated the role of a pupil/student, while just over a third (34%) identified with the role of a child.

We can therefore conclude that in the age group described in the literature as corresponding to emerging adulthood, identification with roles typical of adolescent status was indicated more frequently: being professionally active, being in a relationship, taking responsibility for another person or taking on a caring role. Roles typical of adolescent status – self-identification as someone's child or as a learner – were indicated significantly less frequently. The relatively high percentage of indications of the latter role is probably caused by the prolonged period of education. Thus, the role of a pupil or a student seems to function in the space 'in between' the statuses of a non-adult and an adult.

Table 1. Roles with which the emerging adults identify.

Which of the roles listed fits you?		Definitely agree	Rather agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Not likely to agree	Definitely disagree	Total
I am an employee	n	145	70	47	20	21	303
	%	47,9%	23,1%	15,5%	6,6%	6,9%	100,0%
I am a child	n	34	69	72	68	60	303
	%	11,2%	22,8%	23,8%	22,4%	19,8%	100,0%
I take care of someone	n	59	87	62	51	44	303
	%	19,5%	28,7%	20,5%	16,8%	14,5%	100,0%
I am a pupil/student	n	100	32	25	45	101	303
	%	33,0%	10,6%	8,3%	14,9%	33,3%	100,0%
I am a mother/father	n	57	14	21	28	183	303
	%	18,8%	4,6%	6,9%	9,2%	60,4%	100,0%
I am a partner, husband/wife	n	140	35	24	26	78	303
	%	46,2%	11,6%	7,9%	8,6%	25,7%	100,0%
I am responsible for someone	n	95	75	57	34	42	303
	%	31,40%	24,80%	18,80%	11,20%	13,90%	100,00%

Source: own study

Identification with roles matches to some extent with the life situation of the respondents. Among the roles included in the study, the professional role, which is identified by Arnette (1998) as a key marker of adulthood, stands out clearly, with 71% of respondents that identify with it. However, not all employed persons identify with this role – at the time of the survey, 75% of people in the sample group were professionally active. It can therefore be inferred that Linton's (2000) role orientation does not coincide perfectly with the activities performed as part of the role.

A comparison stratified by gender reveals that for all roles included in the study, self-identification was more often stated by women than by men (Table 2). However, significant differences by gender occurred only for the partner or husband/wife role ($\chi^2(1, N=302)=11.250$; $p=0.001$) and the parenting role ($\chi^2(1, N=302)=3.579$; $p=0.059$). Among the respondents, 71.5% of women and 52% of men indicated that they define themselves by

the role of being in a relationship. In contrast, for the role of a father or mother, such responses were given by 19% of men and 28% of women. On the one hand, this may show a more rapid transition towards identification with partner and parental roles for women, but the mechanism itself may be moderated by culturally regulated role expectations (Biddle, 1986). These are not contradictory, but rather complementary explanations: namely, the stronger social emphasis on identification with a role that is related to the core of the original social group, the Mertonian emotional link for women, as opposed to men, may translate into a changed dynamic of role acquisition.

Table 2. Roles with which emerging adults identify, including the differences between men and women

		men			women		
		No indication	indication	Total	No indication	indication	Total
I am an employee	n	45	108	153	43	106	149
	%	29,40%	70,60%	100,00%	28,90%	71,10%	100,00%
I am a child	n	109	44	153	91	58	149
	%	71,20%	28,80%	100,00%	61,10%	38,90%	100,00%
I take care of someone	n	84	69	153	73	76	149
	%	54,90%	45,10%	100,00%	49,00%	51,00%	100,00%
I am a pupil/student	n	84	69	153	87	62	149
	%	54,90%	45,10%	100,00%	58,40%	41,60%	100,00%
I am a mother/father*	n	124	29	153	107	42	149
	%	81,00%	19,00%	100,00%	71,80%	28,20%	100,00%
I am a husband/wife/partner**	n	74	79	153	44	105	149
	%	48,40%	51,60%	100,00%	29,50%	70,50%	100,00%
I am responsible for someone	n	73	80	153	60	89	149
	%	47,70%	52,30%	100,00%	40,30%	59,70%	100,00%

** Differences statistically significant at $p < 0.01$ level *Differences statistically significant at $p < 0.05$ level

Source: own study

The analysis of identification with social roles in the age categories 18-20, 21-23, 24-26 and 27-29 showed significant variation for the professional role ($\chi^2(3, N=303)=27.608$; $p < 0.001$), parenting role ($\chi^2(3, N=303)=36.401$; $p < 0.001$), pupil/student role ($\chi^2(3, N=303)=74.822$; $p < 0.001$), role related to being in a relationship ($\chi^2(3, N=303)=15.723$; $p = 0.001$) and feeling responsible for others ($\chi^2(3, N=303)=8.284$; $p = 0.040$). For most of the above-mentioned roles, the percentage of people identifying with them increases with

age (Table 3). The exception is the role of a pupil/student – in this case, the proportion of people defining themselves by this role decreases with age. These results correspond to the trajectory of the transition to adulthood: with an increasing age, the identification with roles characteristic of adult status rises and the perception of oneself in terms of immaturity declines.

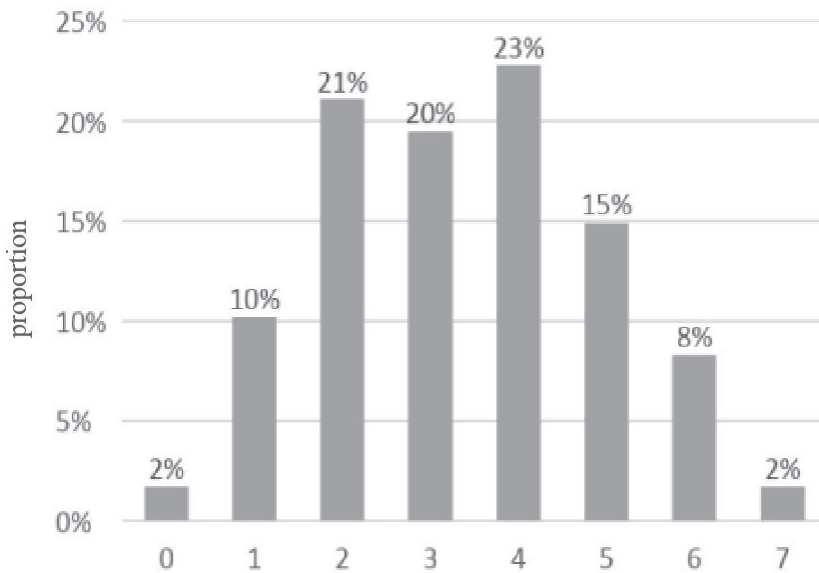
Table 3. Role identification by age categories (the table shows the proportion of people who identify with the role)

age	18-20	21-23	24-26	27-29
I am an employee**	44,10%	72,20%	77,80%	81,70%
I am a child	35,60%	35,40%	36,10%	30,10%
I take care of someone	52,50%	40,50%	43,10%	55,90%
I am a pupil/student**	79,70%	59,50%	34,70%	14,00%
I am a mother/father**	6,80%	12,70%	22,20%	44,10%
I am a husband/wife/partner**	45,80%	58,20%	56,90%	76,30%
I am responsible for someone*	52,50%	46,80%	54,20%	67,70%

** Differences statistically significant at $p < 0,01$ level *Differences statistically significant at $p < 0,05$ level

Source: own study

The number of roles with which the respondents identify themselves varies (Figure 1), with the highest proportion of emerging adults identifying with four roles (23%), followed by those who identify with two roles (21%) and those who define themselves by three roles (20%).

Chart 1. The number of roles with which emerging adults identify

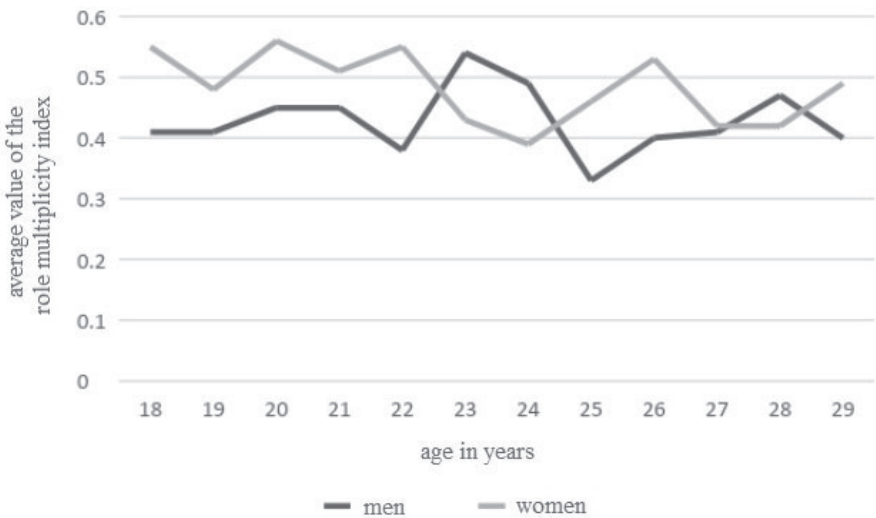
Source: own study

Women ($M=3.61$, $SD=1.59$) identify with more roles than men ($M=3.12$, $SD=1.51$) – a statistically significant difference ($t(300)=3.201$, $p=0.002$, $d=0.368$). There was also a slight, positive correlation between the number of roles and age ($r(301)=0.137$; $p=0.0017$), which indicates that with age, the number of roles with which emerging adults identify increases. However, when gender was factored into the analysis, a slight correlation occurred only among men ($r(151)=0.190$; $p=0.018$), while no significant correlation was found among women ($r(147)=0.130$; $p=0.115$). As can be seen in Chart 2, the relationship between age and multiple roles is not linear. Certainly, the hypothesis of a bell-shaped relationship (an increase with the acquisition of roles typical of adulthood and a decrease when moving away from childhood roles) for women can be discarded. It may be that culturally shaped expectations of assuming family and parental roles cause women to identify with roles typical of adolescence as well as adulthood at a relatively low age. The level of role multiplicity decreases in the first six years, reaching its lowest level among 24-year-old women, before increasing and remaining at a similar level, although lower than the initial one. Among men, on the other hand, we can observe changes in line with the hypothesis. After the age of 22, there

is a clear increase in role multiplicity, which decreases after three years, to then undergo a gradual, though no longer that clear, increase.

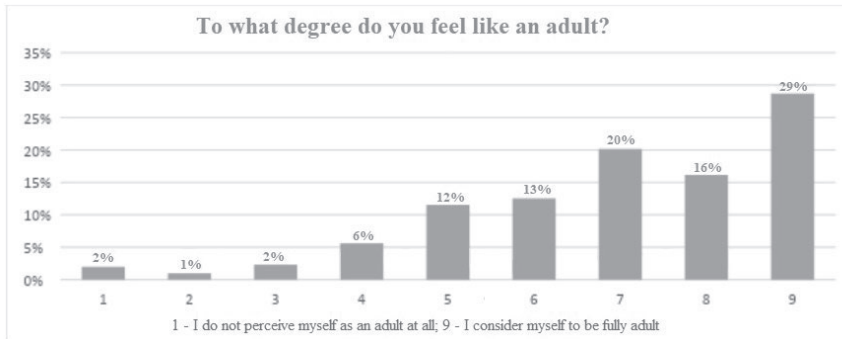
For both men and women, a moment of clear change in role multiplicity can be discerned. The age at which the figures clearly increase for men and decrease for women (22 years) coincides with the end of first degree studies, for the typical educational career trajectory. It seems that the cultural variation in role expectations according to the gender of the social actor, as described above, may explain the differences as to this moment's transition specificity.

Chart 2. Multiplicity of role by age and gender



The ordinate shows the weighted average for the number of roles with which the respondent identifies, compensating for differences in the number of role indicators that are typical of adulthood and adolescence. Source: own study

Respondents were asked to indicate on a scale from 1 to 9 the degree to which they feel like an adult (1 meant that they do not perceive themselves as such at all and 9 meant that they consider themselves to be fully adult). More than half of the respondents (65%) selected between the three responses with extremely high values (Chart 3), indicating a high level of identification with the adult status.

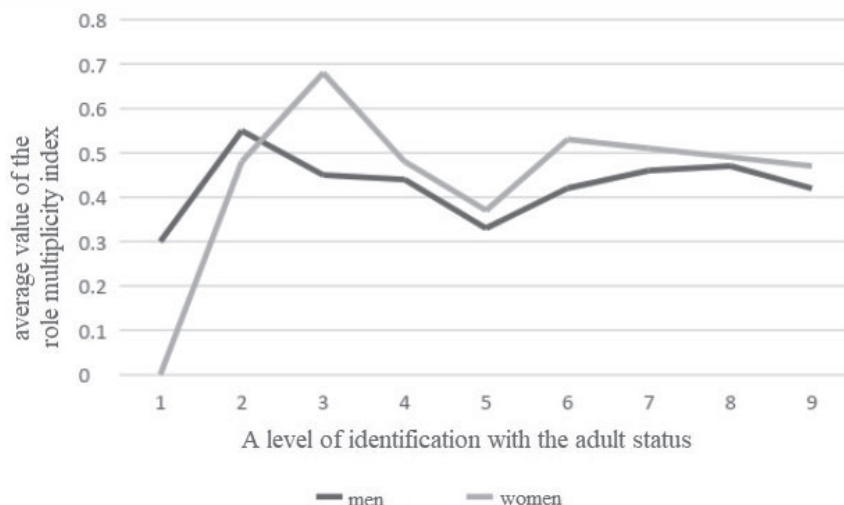
Chart 3. The number of roles with which emerging adults identify

Source: own study

There was a slight, positive correlation between the level of adult self-perception and the number of roles the respondents identify with ($\tau_b=0.179$; $p<0.001$). This means that the more the respondents feel themselves to be adults, the greater the number of social roles they identify with. In this case, the correlation is significant among both women ($\tau_b=0.187$; $p=0.004$) and men ($\tau_b=0.172$; $p=0.007$).

The relationship between self-identification with adult status and role multiplicity does not have a linear relationship. Significant, positive values of Kendall's tau b are related to a clear increase for the lowest values of the identification index. As we can see in Chart 4, the highest levels of role multiplicity are indicated by people who do not identify as adults. On the one hand, this illustrates the importance of roles typical of adolescence (e.g. student), which diminish as self-identification with adult status increases ($\tau_b=-0.298$; $p<0.001$), but also the fluid nature of the markers described by contemporary researchers of emerging adulthood. It appears that identification with the role of being professionally active, in a relationship or responsible for someone does not necessarily translate into seeing oneself as an adult.

Chart 4. Identification with the adult status
versus role multiplicity stratified by gender of the respondents



The ordinate shows the weighted average for the number of roles with which the respondent identifies, compensating for differences in the number of role indicators that are typical of adulthood and adolescence. Source: own study

We can therefore gather that in the age group described in the literature as corresponding to emerging adulthood, more often indicated was the identification with roles typical of the adult status: being professionally active, having a relationship, taking responsibility for another person or taking on a caring role. Roles typical of adolescent status – self-identification as someone's child or as a learner – were marked significantly less frequently.

Conclusion

In this article, an attempt was made to characterise the emerging adults through the lens of identification with structural and status roles that are associated with a stage of transition from adolescence to adulthood.

The research has shown that at the stage of the emerging adulthood, young people more often identify with roles that are more characteristic for adulthood than for the adolescence period. In most cases, role identification overlaps to some extent with the life situation of the respondents, but the research has delineated a group of people in whom role activities do not always coincide with role identification. Of particular note is the fact that women are more prone to identify with family roles (the role relating to being in a relationship and the parental one) than men, which, on the one hand, may suggest a more rapid transition to these roles, but, on the other, may be a response to the social expectations formulated towards them.

The literature points to internal variation among the emerging adults and the lack of a uniform model for entering the adulthood stage. Indeed, the research discussed here has shown a fracture along the lines of culturally regulated gender scripts and the changes associated with the transition between different age groups. The nature of survey research does not allow one to fully track this process. It seems worthwhile for future research to attempt a longitudinal approach and to supplement the quantitative data with in-depth interviews, which would provide a more complete picture of the experiences of young adults.

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