

EMERGING ADULTHOOD FEATURES: AN OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH IN APPROACHES AND PERSPECTIVES IN GOALS AREA

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Abstract:

The main aim of this article is to provide a partial overview of the current research in developmental psychology and the research into emerging adulthood in particular. It is considered essential to look at this area of psychological research as there is little understanding about this life period in Slovakia. Interest in this issue is growing only slowly, as evidenced by the current interdisciplinary project (APVV-18-0303, Nozdrovická, 2019) and several studies on this topic from the perspective of other disciplines (Džambazovič, 2018; Roupa, 2016). The lack of research on emerging adulthood persists in Slovakia despite Arnett (2000) having already brought this concept to light in developmental psychology. Arnett (2000, 2004) explains that the dominant life course theory is no longer applicable due to significant demographic shifts, including the delay of marriage and parenthood. The transition into adulthood is subsequently much longer with the period of emerging adulthood between 18-29 years being suggested as a distinct developmental stage. However, no consensus has been reached about the age range of emerging adulthood and like any other life-period, it is individually experienced in the context of a particular culture. Although Arnett (2000, 2004) considers emerging adulthood as culturally constructed and not universal, he describes the characteristics which distinguish emerging adulthood from both adolescence and young adulthood.

According to Arnett (2004), there are five features of emerging adulthood. He suggests that emerging adulthood is: the age of identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between and possibilities. The first of these characteristics manifests itself in the exploration of available options in different domains of life, particularly in love and work. The purpose of this exploration is to find out one's own identity. This exploration and frequently related changes in life indicate the instability of this period, although this instability is not necessarily negative. Self-focus is connected with the low social control and freedom which is experienced by emerging adults. This allows them to focus on themselves and their needs. The dimension of possibilities represents the greater opportunity of being able to change one's life for the better, although Arnett (2004) also points out the high expectations and hopes of young people for an optimistic future. Lastly, emerging adults feel in-between which means they neither feel like adolescents nor like adults.

In order to measure these five proposed features of emerging adulthood as well as one additional dimension called "other-focus", the Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (IDEA) has been designed (Reifman, Arnett, & Colwell, 2007). This has been translated worldwide and adapted to suit different populations (e.g., Crocetti et al., 2015; Dutra-Thomé & Koller, 2017; Macek, Bejček, & Vaničková, 2007). There are more than ten language versions of the IDEA. In this article, a summary will be provided of all adaptations of the IDEA, some of which have been well-validated with conducted factor analysis. The use of this inventory enables a better understanding of experiencing emerging adulthood. It also allows perceptions of emerging adults to be contrasted between various countries and cultures.

The expansion of research into emerging adulthood has not only been demonstrated in the number of studies on this topic but also in the count of constructs examined within the context of a lifetime. These include partnerships and romantic relationships, career, parent-child relationships, substance use and abuse, at-risk behaviour, mental health and identity development (e.g., Ravert, Stoddard, & Donnellan, 2018; Swanson, 2016). The latest research in this area (Lanctot & Poulin, 2018; Tagliabue, Crocetti, & Lanz, 2016) has focused on individuals' experiences

with the transition to adulthood by creating distinct profile groups based on clusters of the IDEA dimensions. In this context, research has begun to explore the links between adaptation issues (e.g., life satisfaction, quality of life, self-esteem, psychological well-being) and the features of emerging adulthood as captured by the IDEA (Baggio, Studer, Iglesias, Daepfen, & Gmel, 2017; Lanctot & Poulin, 2018) as well as these clusters.

One of the prospective directions in recent research has been the issue of goals. The scientific community perceives the transition to adulthood as the most heterogeneous period in human life (Arnett, 2007b). The increased degree of subjective and objective instability is reflected in the variability of life plans, goals and their revision (Luyckx, De Witte, & Goossens, 2011). As such, the developmental tasks and goals of emerging adults have gained considerable academic interest (e.g., Salmela-Aro, Aunola, & Nurmi, 2007). During emerging adulthood, personal goals related to education or friendships are replaced by work-related, family or health-related goals. This change reflects the developmental tasks of emerging adulthood as well as the transition of roles. Recent findings have confirmed that successful entry into adulthood and adaptation for adult roles depends on the ability to achieve specified normative developmental goals in emerging adulthood (Negru, 2008). Given the current trend of transferring adult social roles and fulfilling socially anticipated developmental challenges to old age (e.g., Arnett, 2018; Macek et al., 2016), this stage of life becomes important in shaping the future of an adult (Salmela-Aro et al., 2007; Messersmith & Schulenberg, 2010). In order to achieve the goals, they should be able to apply self-regulatory processes (Lovaš, Ráčzová, et al., 2017; Scheier & Carver, 2003) in the form of suppressing behavioural tendencies that do not achieve the goal, the ability to overcome obstacles or the ability to decide. This is crucial as this age is considered to be one of the most critical normative life transitions (Schulenberg, Sameroff, & Cicchetti, 2004) and the issue of managing transitions and overcoming obstacles becomes very relevant during this period (Nurmi, 2004). At the same time, this raises an interest in answering questions about the specifics of self-regulation as a process of setting and achieving goals (Carver, 2005) in young people (Schulenberg, Sameroff, & Cicchetti, 2004).

Young people have a large need for exploration and experimentation. However, this is in a relatively short time period between the ages of 20 and 30. (Arnett, 2007b). This is reflected in the tendency to plan the postponement of development goals (Arnett, 2018; Macek et al., 2016) or the issue of *frozen goals* (an individual has decided on a given goal and feels committed to carrying out the goal but postpones implementation to another time; Davydenko, Werner, & Milyavskaya, 2019). Thus, time perspective shows itself to be another relevant researched construct, especially the emphasis on the contrast between focusing on the present and future. It represents a key cognitive-motivational variable in goal-directed behaviour (Kačmár, manuscript in preparation; Kooij, Kanfer, Betts, & Rudolph, 2018).

In conclusion, it can be seen that a common aim in a large part of the current research is to understand how emerging adults perceive and experience this time in their lives; at the same time, there is an attempt to compare young people's perceptions and experiences across different cultures. In terms of cross-cultural comparison, a project of particular interest has been conducted in the Czech Republic. Their main intention has been to explore autonomy, identity, attachment, romantic relationships and career during emerging adulthood (e.g., Horská & Lacinová, 2015; Umemura, Lacinová, Macek, & Kunnen, 2017). As the country closest to Slovakia, it has been a great inspiration in initiating a similar investigation into emerging adulthood here. A greater awareness of this period may be beneficial to all professionals working with young people such as therapists or counsellors as well as to employers and human resource managers in the occupational context, and to emerging adults themselves in understanding the variability of this time and successfully adapting to adulthood.

Key words:

Emerging Adulthood. Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (IDEA). Transition to Adulthood. Goal-oriented Behaviour.

Introduction

In the last two decades, there has been an important change in developmental psychology research. Following the introduction of emerging adulthood as a concept (Arnett, 2000), research interest has shifted towards the study of 18-29-year-olds. There is a wide range of topics studied within this period of emerging adulthood. Part of the research deals with the characteristics of emerging maturity as described by Arnett (2004), and the only inventory to measure them – the Inventory of Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (IDEA) (Reifman et al., 2007) – has aroused the interest of academics around the world. This is not only reflected in its

use in emerging adulthood research but also in the effort to adapt the measurement to different countries and cultures.

In this theoretical review, an attempt will be made to introduce the theme of emerging adulthood, which is a relatively new term in developmental psychology. The reason for selecting this topic is not only its recency, but also the absence of scientific interest in this developmental stage in Slovakia; despite emerging adulthood having been a very current topic in psychological research in other countries for almost twenty years. At the same time, the aim is to bring research into the field of goal-oriented behaviour during the transition to adulthood as a perspective approach to understanding this period.

The concept of emerging adulthood

The term “emerging adulthood” first appeared in Jeffrey Jensen Arnett’s article published in the *American Psychologist* in 2000. Arnett’s goal in proposing the theory of emerging adulthood was to give a new name to the 18-29-years age-period, and based on over 200 interviews with young people, Arnett conceptualized emerging adulthood as a distinct period of life.

According to Arnett (2004), sweeping demographic shifts such as prolonged education, leaving the parental home later, and delayed marriage and parenthood have taken place over the past half-century in industrialized countries. These changes have meant that the dominant theory of the life course in developmental psychology no longer fits the normative pattern in industrialized societies.

Arnett emphasizes that “emerging adulthood is neither adolescence nor young adulthood but is theoretically and empirically distinct from them both” (Arnett, 2000, p. 469). In comparison with adolescents and young adults, emerging adults have fewer social roles and obligations which results in greater independence and fewer normative expectations from society. Although emerging adulthood is not organized by social roles and commitments (Arnett, 2007b), its structure and course can be affected by the culture (Arnett, 2000). For this reason, it is essential to emphasize that this period in the life span is culturally constructed, not universal and immutable. Later on, this article will look at the universality or diversity of emerging adulthood in different cultural conditions, as well as the differences in emerging adulthood with regards to socio-demographic characteristics.

While Arnett (2000) initially described emerging adulthood as the period between 18 and 25, this has been widened by the author to the age range of 18-29 (Arnett, 2015). While other authors interested in this life period (e.g., Gelanaki & Leontopoulou, 2017; Tagliabue et al., 2016) work with various age ranges, Czech researchers (for us, from a similar cultural environment) (Macek et al., 2015) agree with Arnett, who himself admits (2016) that both options can be used depending on the investigated issue.

Dimensions of emerging adulthood

Emerging adulthood, like other stages in human development, can be described by characteristics which differentiate it from other life periods. Arnett (2004) outlines five key features of emerging adulthood that distinguish it from adolescence and younger adulthood. He describes emerging adulthood as the age of identity exploration, the age of instability, the self-focused age, the age of feeling in-between, and the age of possibilities. While these characteristics are not only present at this time of life, they are most marked in emerging

adulthood (Arnett, 2007b). The author does not consider these features as universal. On the contrary, he stresses the culturally and economically conditioned heterogeneity and variability of this period of life (Arnett, 2004).

The age of identity exploration

Arnett (2004) describes emerging adulthood as a period in which young people try out various available options in different areas of life, especially in love and work. The aim of this experimentation is to discover their identity. In the past, the exploration and formation of identity was a key developmental task of adolescence (Erikson, 2002). Although adolescents do experiment in the field of love and work to some extent, Arnett (2007a) claims that in emerging adulthood, it is an identity-based exploration.

The age of instability

The fact that emerging adulthood is the age of instability is demonstrated in many different ways (Arnett, 2004). There are frequent shifts in the life course among emerging adults – in education and work, in romantic relationships or living conditions (Arnett, 2006), although this is just a reflection of identity exploration (Arnett, 2004).

The self-focused age

Whilst emerging adulthood brings a focus on oneself, this does not mean selfishness or being egocentric (Arnett, 2006). Arnett (2007b) explains that emerging adulthood is the self-focused age in the sense that young people are the least subject to institutional control during this period. Consequently, emerging adults experience more freedom and less social control. They can focus on gaining such experience which will gradually lead to forming their “adult” life (Arnett, 2006).

The age of feeling in-between

Arnett (2004) refers to emerging adulthood as the age of feeling in-between. In other words, the period between adolescence and adulthood. The central aspect of this feeling is the concept of criteria for adulthood. A shift in entering adulthood is not only about timing, when we fulfil these criteria, but also about their meaning. In the past, there were certain criteria related to adult roles such as finishing education, getting a stable job, marriage and childbirth (Arnett, 2007b).

Nowadays, emerging adults emphasize more individualistic criteria such as accepting responsibility for one’s self, making independent decisions and financial independence (Arnett, 2001). Although the transition to adulthood is now much longer than it was in the past, most people perceive themselves to be fully adult by the age of 30 (Arnett, 2006).

The age of possibilities

As Arnett (2004) says, emerging adulthood is the age of possibilities in two respects. First, this is the time of life when young people have the greatest opportunity to change their lives in a positive way and second, that emerging adulthood tends to be a time of high expectations and hopes for the future regardless of socio-economic background (Arnett, 2007a).

The extent to which emerging adults experience identity exploration, instability, possibilities, feeling in-between and self-focus depends on many circumstances. Experiencing some of these characteristics are influenced by marital status (if young people are or were married) (Lisha et al., 2014; Reifman et al., 2007), parental status (Lisha et al., 2014), the degree of their financial independence (Macek et al., 2007; Reifman et al., 2007) and their residential status (i.e. living with parents, living independently) (Macek et al., 2007; Reifman et al., 2007). Gender (Crogetti et al., 2015; Reifman et al., 2007) and occupational status (whether the emerging adult is a

student, employed etc.) are also involved in the way of experiencing emerging adulthood (Crocetti et al., 2015; Macek et al., 2007). Although there are other variables that are concerned in the process of transitioning to adulthood, generally, the features of emerging adulthood are more typical of the 18-29-year-olds than for different age groups (Reifman et al., 2007).

Measuring the characteristics of emerging adulthood – Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (IDEA) and its adaptations

Based on five key features of emerging adulthood, Reifman et al. (2007) have developed the Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (IDEA) to explore the individual differences in experiencing emerging adulthood. The inventory consists of 31 items. Respondents indicate on a 4-point scale the degree to which they agree the phrase describes this period in their life. IDEA explores five dimensions of emerging adulthood proposed by Arnett (2004) and one additional dimension “Other-focus” as opposed to the “Self-focused” feature (Reifman et al., 2007).

Although IDEA is the only way of measuring the characteristics of emerging adulthood as described by Arnett, other instruments focus on the period of emerging maturity or transition to adulthood. For example, the Scale of Conceptions of Transition to Adulthood (e.g., Arnett, 2001, 2003; Facio & Micocci, 2003; Gelanaki & Leontopoulou, 2017; Mayseless & Scharf, 2003; Petrogiannis, 2011) focusing on criteria or markers for the transition to adulthood.

Emerging adulthood, like all life stage concepts, is grounded in culture, society and history (Arnett, 2016). In line with this, research focused on emerging adulthood has been conducted. One aim of researchers has been to adapt the inventory for use in different populations. Currently, there are several versions of the IDEA in various languages. These have been adapted to different cultural backgrounds and differ in both their factor structure and the number of items. An overview of the published adaptations of the Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood is presented in Table 1.

In addition to those shown in the table, there have been several other language versions with no factor structure analysis conducted: Spanish, used in Mexico and Spain (Facio, Resett, Micocci, & Mistrorigo, 2007), a version used in Romania (Negru, 2012) and a French version used in Canada (Lanctot & Poulin, 2018).

The summary of the adaptations of the IDEA in Table 1 shows that the authors used a different methodology to validate the inventory. Several authors (e.g., Fierro Arias & Hernández, 2007) have only performed an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) without a subsequent confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). In other cases, CFA was conducted at first (e.g., Dutra-Thomé & Koller, 2017). When the original factor structure of the IDEA was not confirmed, the authors proceeded with EFA. We consider this approach to be more appropriate, given that these studies aimed to adapt the original inventory for use in different populations.

Most of the adaptations have been validated on a sample that falls within the age range of emerging adulthood (e.g., Macek et al., 2007). However, some authors have chosen, in our opinion, an age range that is not relevant to this period of life (e.g., Lisha et al. (2014) focused on younger (14-21 years old) respondents). In adapting IDEA to the Slovak population, we would prefer the age range defined by Arnett (2015) that is 18-29 years.

Currently, IDEA is the only inventory which can be used to measure the characteristics of emerging adulthood and has already been used across cultures. It is necessary to adapt this

questionnaire to the Slovak population in order to investigate this developmental period in Slovakia with the possibility of cross-cultural comparison.

Table 1: Adaptations of the Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood

Authors	Method	Results	
Fierro Arias & Hernández (2007)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mexico, Spain; Spanish • N = 720; college, former college and postgraduate students • age range: 16-34 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50% female • EFA 	<p>40 items; 7 factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adulthood Postponement (7) • Instability (5) • Autonomy (9) • Explorations (6) • Visions of Future and Possibilities (6) • Worries (3) • Identity Moratorium (4)
Macek et al. (2007)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Czech Republic; Czech • N = 436; university students and workers • age range: 18-27 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 55% female • EFA 	<p>31 items; 6 factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stability (6) • Self-focused orientation (7) • Diffused orientation (6) • Clarity of Values (5) • Identity Exploration (2) • Concern for others (2)
Pérez, Cumsille, & Loreto Martínez (2008)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chile; Spanish • N = 162; 91% university students • age range: 18-26; mean age = 19,9; SD = 3,37 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 64% female • EFA 	<p>29 items; 4 factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity Explorations (9) • Freedom/Possibilities (8) • Negativity/Instability (6) • Self & Others (6)
Atak & Çok (2008)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turkey; Turkish • N = 296; university students • age range: 15-34; mean age = 24,2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 57.1% female • EFA 	<p>20 items; 3 factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negativity/Instability (7) • Exploration/Feeling in between between (6) • Experimentation/Self focused (7)
Lisha et al. (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USA; English • N = 1 676; mostly Latino “at-risk” youths • age range: 14-21; mean age = 16,8; SD = 0,9 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 42.2% female • EFA 	<p>21 items; 3 factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity Exploration (11) • Experimentation/ Possibilities (7) • Independence (3)
Baggio, Iglesias, Studer, & Gmel (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Switzerland • N = 5 049 • mean age = 21,26; SD = 1,23 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • male only • EFA, CFA 	<p>8 items; 4 factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experimentation/ Possibilities (2) • Negativity/Instability (2) • Identity Exploration (2) • Feeling In-Between (2)
Crocetti et al. (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Italy + Japan; Italian and Japanese • N = 2 472; university students and workers • age range: 18-30; mean age = 23,28; SD = 3,39 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50.8% female • CFA 	<p>15 items; 5 factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity Exploration (3) • Possibilities (3) • Instability (3) • Self-Focused (3) • Feeling In-Between (3)

Hill, Lalji, van Rossum, van der Geest, & Blokland (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Netherlands; Dutch N = 970 age range: 18-21; mean age = 20,0; SD = 1,44 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 54% female EFA 	24 items; 6 factors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-focus (4) Other-focus (2) Negativity/Instability (7) Identity exploration: sense of self (3) Identity exploration: future self (3) Experimentation/Possibilities (5)
Wider, Bahari, Mustapha, & Halik (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Malaysia; Malay N = 568; first year university students age range: 18-26; mean age = 20,81; SD = 0,90 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 63.2% female EFA, CFA 	10 items, 3 factors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identity Exploration/Feeling „In-Between“ (5) Possibilities (3) Instability (2)
Leontopoulou, Mavridis, & Giotsa (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greece; Greek N = 592; university students age range: 18-30; median age = 21 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 70,7% female CFA, EFA 	20 items; 3 factors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identity exploration/Feeling in-between) (9) Negativity/Instability (5) Experimentation/Possibilities/Self-focus (6)
Dutra-Thomé & Koller (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brazil; Portuguese N = 547 age range: 18-2; median age = 22 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 64.2% female CFA, EFA 	29 items; 6 factors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identity Exploration (5) Experimentation/Possibilities (3) Negativity/Instability (7) Self-Focused (8) Feeling In-Between (4) Other-Focused (2)
Sánchez-Queija, Parra, Camacho, & Arnett (2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spain; Spanish N = 1 435; university students age range: 18-29; mean age = 20,32; SD = 2,13 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 60% female CFA 	31 items; 6 factors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identity Exploration (7) Experimentation/possibilities (5) Negativity/Instability (7) Other-Focused (3) Self-Focused (6) Feeling „In-Between“ (3)

Overview of the research on emerging adulthood

Arnett's article in 2004 stimulated the scientific study of emerging adulthood, and this has been reflected in the number of research papers discussing this life period. In 2013, a “multidisciplinary, international organization with a focus on theory and research related to emerging adulthood, which includes the age range of approximately 18 through 29 years” (SSAE, 2014), was established. The SSAE (Society for the Study of Emerging Adulthood, n. d.) also provides a summary of crucial fields connected with emerging adulthood - Topic Networks. Its goal is to bring researchers with common interests together in the specific area of emerging adulthood research (SSAE, 2014).

From the developmental perspective, Swanson (2016) points out that the field of study for emerging adulthood has strong roots in and is closely associated with adolescent research. Despite this, emerging adulthood is now a legitimate field in its own right and is the focus of interdisciplinary study which means a broad range of empirical research. Among the most

frequently investigated topics in the context of emerging adulthood are: substance use, parent/family relationships, sexual development and intimacy, at-risk behaviour and peer relationships (Swanson, 2016). Many studies are directly associated with development – cognitive, intellectual, career, or identity development. Whereas Ravert et al. (2018) have reported that the concept of self is the most common topic of research amongst 18-29-year-olds. According to the authors, this includes individual characteristics such as identity, beliefs, decision-making, personality and religiosity. Another essential field of study are the aspects of the transition to adulthood, i.e., the changes that occur during this life stage. These include attitudes toward adulthood and establishing independence. There is a high prevalence of studies on risk behaviour (including alcohol use, suicide and substance use), romantic relationships and relationships with parents, siblings and peers. The research focused on achievement (in terms of work or career achievement) and psychological well-being is also very prevalent.

Research on emerging adulthood in terms of goal-oriented behaviour

One of the prospective directions of recent research has been the issue of goals. The increased degree of subjective and objective instability among emerging adults is reflected in the variability of life plans, goals and their revision (Luyckx et al., 2011). One of the reasons for this is that young people at this age are confronted significantly more often with important life transitions, decisions (Caspi, 2002; Salmela-Aro et al., 2007) and social pressure to fulfil normative developmental tasks (independence, partnership/marriage, family, education/work; Nurmi, 2004; Schulenberg, Bryant, & O'malley, 2004). This requires a significant amount of individual effort; such as setting goals, planning, making decisions, exploration and commitment. In doing so, young people not only influence their current life situation but the direction of their future lives as well (Nurmi, 2004).

In terms of the motivational theory of life-span (e.g., Heckhausen, Wrosch, & Schulz, 2010), age is related to the degree of urgency of normative tasks facing those in their twenties. The current trend of pushing adult social roles and fulfilling socially anticipated developmental challenges to an older age (e.g., Arnett, 2018; Macek et al., 2016) implies that the time perspective (focusing on the present or the future) and what goals young people perceive as relevant at that moment, play an important role. While some individuals focus on their future and realize how their current behaviour contributes to the achievement of long-term goals, others are immersed in the present to such an extent that they are unaware of the future consequences of their current decisions and actions (Kačmár, manuscript in preparation; Zimbardo & Boyd, 2008). Young people have the need to experiment and explore as much as possible. However, this is within a relatively limited time period between 20-30 (Arnett, 2007b); which is also reflected in the tendency towards planned postponement of achieving development goals (Arnett, 2018; Macek et al., 2016), and the issue of *frozen goals* (where an individual has a given goal, feels a commitment to reaching the goal but postpones its implementation for some time; Davydenko et al., 2019). In this case, the perspective of time represents a key cognitive-motivational variable in goal-directed behaviour (Kačmár, manuscript in preparation; Kooij et al., 2018). Due to this, this stage of life becomes important in shaping the future of an adult (Messersmith & Schulenberg, 2010; Salmela-Aro et al., 2007). However, a substantial part of the research carried out so far has only had the character of screening and mapping. There has been no comprehensive approach taken on the issue of goal orientation which would take current theoretical and methodological approaches into account. Part of the research has looked at the subjective timing of young people's development goals and their link to normative social expectations. Despite the discrepancy between social pressure and the individual importance that young people attribute to goals (Seiffge-Krenke & Gelhaar,

2008), the results suggest that normative expectations in achieving development goals (tasks) are still present in society (Galambos, Barker, & Tilton-Weaver, 2003). Moreover, these have the potential to guide people's thinking and action and create a kind of life scenario (Ferraro, 2014). Research also suggests that age, gender or one's role (student vs. work) (Salmela-Aro et al., 2007) play a role in the process of future planning, goal setting and achievement in the context of expected development tasks.

The role of goals and expectations in individual development has also been explored in the context of development and personality (Nurmi, 2004). In this context, the transition to adulthood is characterized by the transformation of normative developmental tasks into personal goals, the achievement of which is associated with an improvement in subjective well-being (e.g., Messersmith & Schulenberg, 2010). Research findings to date have suggested that the ability to achieve at least some of the prescriptive development goals is a prerequisite for young people at this age to successfully enter adulthood and adapt to the role of being an adult (Negru, 2008; Salmela-Aro et al., 2007; Wall et al., 2016). In order to achieve these goals, young people should be able to apply self-regulatory processes (Lovaš, Ráčová, et al., 2017; Scheier & Carver, 2003) in the form of suppressing behavioural tendencies that do not achieve the goal, have the ability to overcome obstacles, and the ability to decide. This is crucial as this age is considered to be one of the most critical normative life transitions (Schulenberg, Sameroff, & Cicchetti, 2004), and the issue of managing transitions and overcoming obstacles becomes very relevant during this period (Nurmi, 2004). In addition, Biggart and Walther (2006) state that the complexity of this developmental period has increased. This is due to it no longer being just a single transit but a series of microtransitions (e.g., role transitions, transition to work) with the so-called "yoyo effect" increasing the instability of the period.

In Slovakia, there has been neither research into emerging adulthood nor into the issue of goals during the transition to adulthood. In the culturally similar Czech Republic, however, this period of life has been given greater attention. In particular, research into the general characteristics of emerging adulthood (Macek et al., 2007; Macek et al., 2016). Between 2012 and 2016, research on emerging adulthood was carried out within a project called Paths to Adulthood: longitudinal research of developmental trajectories and predictors of autonomy and identity. In addition to autonomy (e.g., Ježek, Macek, Neužilová Michalčáková, & Bouša, 2014) and identity (e.g., Kvitkovičová, & Máchová, 2017), the research looked at romantic relationships (e.g., Kotrlová & Lacinová, 2013; Lacinová & Neužilová Michalčáková, 2014), relationships with parents (e.g., Almenara, Umemura, & Macek, 2016; Horská & Lacinová, 2015), attachment (e.g., Umemura et al., 2017; Umemura, Lacinová, Kotrčová, & Fraley, 2018), career (e.g., Kvitkovičová & Máchová, 2016), fears (e.g., Volková, Lacinová, Neužilová Michalčáková, & Dušková, 2016) and eating behaviour disorders (e.g., Almenara et al., 2016). In the context of the goals during the transition to adulthood, it has been found that up to 30% of young people experience significant uncertainty and concerns about setting adequate life goals, their implementation and self-decision (Volková et al., 2016), which may affect overall subjective satisfaction and adaptation of the individual. However, this worldwide research in goals area in the twenties has been carried out only as screening and mapping in other research tasks. It is clear that the questions concerning the selection, planning and achievement of objectives are among the key characteristics of the transition to adulthood. Identifying and clarifying essential psychological mechanisms in the process of achieving goals at a time when an individual is confronted with the need to make vital life choices is one of the most important means of understanding successful adaptation to the role of an adult.

Conclusion

The presented paper has focused on the developmental age period between 20 and 30. This is referred to as emerging adulthood in the current scientific literature (e.g., Arnett, 2018; Macek et al., 2015, 2016). This life stage is mainly considered to be a period of transition to adulthood (Caspi, 2002; Salmela-Aro et al., 2007). The key features of emerging adulthood have been identified as: identity exploration, instability, self-focus, a feeling of 'in between' (adolescence and adulthood) and having a wide repertoire of possibilities (Arnett, 2007a, 2007b). The individual differences in these markers of emerging adulthood reflect the striking variability of transition to adulthood at both a population and individual level (Arnett, 2004).

The increasing level of subjective and objective instability is reflected in the variability of life plans, goals and their revision (Luyckx et al., 2011; Shulman & Nurmi, 2010). Therefore, the current research into emerging adulthood also focuses on personal and developmental goals in several important domains of life (education/work, relationships, residential autonomy, family) (Ranta, Dietrich, & Salmela-Aro, 2014). A particular area of interest is the issue of self-regulation in terms of the specifics of the process in setting and achieving these goals in young people (Carver & Scheier, 2016; Schulenberg, Sameroff, & Cicchetti, 2004) and the question of their exact timing (Kačmár, manuscript in preparation; Kooij et al., 2018).

As has been pointed out, there has been a lack of interest in investigating emerging adulthood in Slovakia. Interest in this issue is, however, growing slowly, as evidenced by the current interdisciplinary project, which focuses on the quality of romantic relationships between adolescents and young adults (APVV-18-0303, Nozdrovická, 2019) and several studies on this topic from the perspective of other scientific disciplines (Džambazovič, 2018), especially sociology (Roupa, 2016). Given that emerging adults (people aged between 18 and 29) represent more than 15% of the total Slovak population (EUROSTAT, 2018), it is crucial to pay much more attention to this group. Furthermore, the demographic characteristics of young Slovaks are changing in a similar way to how Arnett alluded to when presenting his concept of emerging adulthood in the USA. For example, the age of entering into a marriage in Slovakia has increased by more than four years since 2000. In 2017, on average, Slovak women were first marrying at the age of 28.6, and men at the age of 31.2 (EUROSTAT, 2017a). Similarly, the age of entering into a parental role is increasing; since 2000 the age when women were having their first child increased by three years to 27.1, on average, in 2017 (EUROSTAT, 2007b). Similar shifts are seen in the case of other demographic characteristics, which may be referred to as criteria of adulthood. With this in mind, we are convinced that in Slovakia it is relevant to pay more attention to research on emerging adulthood. It is believed that exploring the key features of emerging adulthood and their role in the processes of goal-oriented behaviour will lead to a deeper understanding of the transition to adulthood processes.

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