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Emerging Adulthood in India

Liann Nicole Seiter

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science

John Hoffmann, Chair  
Larry Nelson  
Lance Erickson

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Brigham Young University

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## ABSTRACT

### Emerging Adulthood in India

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Master of Science

This paper explores the nature of emerging adulthood in Southern India. Survey data was collected from 478 college students in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India and 100 non-students from rural villages surrounding Coimbatore. Unlike American samples, the majority of the 18- to 26-year-olds studied felt that they had achieved adulthood. The sample emphasized attributes needed to fulfill family roles as characteristics necessary for adulthood. Differences in optimism levels were found between students and non-students. Arnett suggests that emerging adulthood would be affected by cultural influences. The unique cultural and structural influences in India such as, Hinduism, caste, gendered socialization, and the educational system, are discussed as possible explanations for the unique findings.

Keywords: adolescent development, adult development, emerging adulthood, India, Tamil Nadu, socialization

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Having been thrust into the globalized economy, the social environment in India has changed rapidly in the recent past. These changes are leading young people in India to begin questioning the traditional system (Kashyap, 1996). As Verma and Saraswathi (2002) observe, “Standing at the crossroads of technological advancement and a global market economy, it is an opportune time to examine how tradition and modernity in sociopolitical and cultural factors have shaped and continue to influence adolescence in India” (p. 106). The same could easily be said about emerging adulthood (Arnett 2000a), the period between the ages of 18 and 25, in India.

Recent demographic shifts in America, namely the postponing of marriage and child bearing, combined with an economic shift increasing the number of jobs requiring higher educational levels, leave young people an extended time of pursuing higher education and dating before settling down. Arnett (1998, 2000a) observed these changes and wanted to examine the impact they have on young people in America.

In his research with people between the ages of 18 and 25 he found that there were five distinct characteristics that define this period of human development. These characteristics include identity exploration, instability in residential, schooling and work patterns, a focus on self, feeling in-between adolescence and adulthood, and a feeling of optimism about the future (Arnett 2000a, 2004b, 2006a). Arnett (2000a) found the term “young adulthood” used previously for this stage of human development unsatisfactory since it implies adulthood has been achieved, whereas people in this phase feel ambiguous about their status as adult. Therefore Arnett (1998, 2000a) called this period of human development “emerging adulthood.”

Arnett (2000a) recognized that emerging adulthood may or may not be a universal phenomenon. He cited the importance of culture in influencing the transition into adulthood. Arnett (2004b) theorized that emerging adulthood is a new period of human development that has emerged as part of living in an industrialized society. However, researchers have found features of emerging adulthood in countries such as Japan (Rosenburger, 2007), Israel (Mayseless & Scharf, 2003), and religious subcultures (e.g., Nelson, 2003) in the United States. Research in these various cultures suggest that features of emerging adulthood (e.g., optimism, feeling in between) may exist but specific beliefs and practices within the culture may lead to differences in how these features look from culture to culture.

While researchers have explored the transition to adulthood in other developing nations such as Argentina (Facio & Miccoci, 2003), China (Nelson, Bager, & Wu 2004), and Romania (Nelson, 2009), one nation that has received relatively little attention is India. Arnett (2006b) speculated that India would be an interesting place to study emerging adulthood because the majority of the population is living in poverty, yet a thriving middle class has taken advantage of increased educational opportunities and jobs in informational technology. Besides the economic changes taking place in the country, India also has numerous cultural beliefs (e.g., Hinduism) and practices (e.g., arranged marriage) that may influence emerging adulthood.

The purpose of this study is to examine emerging adulthood among young people in India. Specifically, the study examines Indian people ages 18-26 to examine (a) whether or not they feel they are adults (i.e., “age of feeling in-between”), (b) the criteria they deem necessary for becoming adults, and (c) the extent to which they feel optimistic about their future (e.g., “age of possibilities”). Furthermore, the study will examine how these aspects of emerging adulthood may vary as a function of gender, student status, and living context (i.e., rural versus urban).

## Chapter 2: Review of Literature

### *Emerging Adulthood*

After conducting several hundred interviews with people between the ages of 18 and 25, Arnett (2000a) proposed a new developmental stage of human development. He proposed that people between the ages of 18 and 25 are in a period between adolescence and adulthood called emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000a). This period of emerging adulthood has five distinct characteristics (Arnett, 2004b, 2006a): (1) It is a time for identity exploration, specifically exploration of love relationships and work possibilities. (2) Emerging adulthood is a period of instability. For example it is a time where emerging adults change their residences often. (3) Emerging adults tend to be very self-focused as they attempt to become autonomous individuals. (4) Emerging adulthood is characterized by the feeling of being in-between because young people tend not to have taken on all adult responsibilities but no longer consider themselves to be adolescents. (5) Emerging adulthood is also a time of possibilities during which emerging adults are hopeful for their futures and ready to change things from the past (Arnett, 2000a, 2004b, 2006a).

#### *Identity Exploration*

According to Erikson (1950, 1968), identity is made up of three pillars: love, work, and ideology. Whereas Erikson claims that identity exploration is a task for adolescents, Arnett (2000a) argues that identity exploration continues into emerging adulthood. In the 1960s, the time when Erikson was writing, the median marriage age for females was 20 and 23 for males; the age has risen to about 26 for females and 27 for males in 2005 (Popenoe, 2007). This delay in marriage has been accompanied by a delay in other adult roles such as parenthood and

entrance into a career; allowing emerging adults a period of freedom to explore and try out new ways of living before they settle into such long term commitments (Arnett, 2006a)

Unlike dating in adolescence, dating in emerging adulthood is part of exploring one's own identity (Arnett, 2000a). When adolescents pair off and participate in physical intimacy they tend to do it for interaction, partnership, and fun, not love, attachment, or long-term commitment (Porter, Oakley, Guthrie & Killion, 1999; Feiring, 1996). In contrast, dating in emerging adulthood involves not only the search for a life-long partner but an exploration of oneself regarding what is wanted in that partner (Arnett, 2000a, 2006b). Exploring one's sexuality has also become part of identity development in emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2006b). The social norms surrounding dating have changed over the last century, taking courtship out from under parents' supervision and making sexual exploration a normal part of premarital relationships (Bailey, 1988).

Work in emerging adulthood involves exploring for a good career fit (Arnett 2004b, 2006b). In contrast, the purpose of work for adolescents is to pay for leisure activities; their part-time work is generally not tied to their career aspirations (Safron, Schulenberg, & Bachman, 2001; Bachman & Schulenberg, 1993). Without the pressure of financially providing for a family, single emerging adults can explore through a series of jobs what they may want in a long term career before starting it, but married emerging adults and parents are more likely to settle into a career earlier (Arnett, 2004b; Hamilton & Hamilton, 2006; Cooksey & Rindfuss 2001). For college-going emerging adults, higher education provides an additional opportunity for career exploration. They try out various majors and to an increasing extent graduate programs unrelated to their undergraduate degrees all in an attempt to better understand what they really want their identity to be in regard to work.

A key part of growing up for emerging adults is to decide on their beliefs and values independently of parents or other influences because they see making those decisions to be an important part of their identity development (Arnett, 1998, 2006a). Emerging adults feel it is both their right and obligation to come to their own unique set of beliefs (Arnett & Jensen, 2002; Arnett, 2004b). While college leads students to question their worldviews, non-college students also feel it important to closely examine the beliefs their parents taught them (Arnett, 2000a). Many emerging adults come to believe something different than what they learned in their families (Arnett, 2004b; Arnett & Jensen, 2002). In exploring their identity in regard to their worldviews emerging adults decide how similar or different their beliefs are from their parents (Arnett, 2006a).

Participating in risk behaviors is part of identity exploration for emerging adults. Without parental supervision and constricting adult roles, young people see emerging adulthood as a time to gain a variety of experiences before they make more enduring commitments (Arnett, 2000a). Substance use, binge drinking, and crime peak in early twenties (Eisner, 2002; Schulenberg, O'Malley, Bachman, & Johnston, 2005). The substance use of emerging adults not living in their parents' home was more than those still under parental supervision. Once married substance use decreased dramatically (Schulenberg, et al., 2005). Emerging adults are also participating in sexual behaviors that can be associated with unwanted consequences such as sexually transmitted diseases and unplanned pregnancy (Lefkowitz & Gillen, 2006). Increased participation in high sensation experiences is a reflection of the desires emerging adults have to expand their range of experiences before settling into adult roles (Arnett, 2000a).

*Period of Instability*

These different explorations in work, school, and love indicative of emerging adulthood make this period of human development a time of instability. One indication of the instability of emerging adulthood is frequent residential changes (Arnett, 2000a, 2004b, 2006a). Residential mobility rates for Americans and the diversity of living arrangements peak between the ages of 20 and 30 (Rindfus, 1991; Iacovou, 2002). For example, one study found that when emerging adults leave their parents' home 28% live alone, 39% live with a spouse or partner, 18% live with a small group, and 15% live with a large group (Garasky, Haurin & Haurin, 2001). Forty percent of emerging adults move back to their parents' home at least once for a temporary stay (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1994). This large residential variety is considered another indication of the residential mobility indicative of emerging adulthood (Arnett 2004b). In sum, there is a great deal of residential instability and diversity during this time period.

School and work patterns of emerging adults are also manifestations of the instability of this time period. The road to college graduation for most emerging adults includes many deviations such as dropping out, starting again later, and switching back and forth between full-time and part-time work/school. Most emerging adults hold their first job for less than one year, and during the first 10 years of employment they will hold an average of seven jobs (Arnett 2006b). As emerging adults explore their identity with different jobs, new living situations, and educational changes their lives have a higher level of instability. However, the instability of emerging adulthood does not last long; levels of residential mobility and diversity decrease while satisfaction with current career increases as emerging adults age and take on more enduring adult roles (Rindfus, 1991; Iacovou, 2002; Arnett, 2004b).

*Self Focused*

Emerging adulthood is a unique time period in human development during which individuals are able to focus on themselves. On the one end, the lives of adolescents are highly structured by parents and school teachers. On the other end, people who have taken on adult roles, such as parent or employee, have several obligations to others that dictate how they spend their time (Arnett, 2004b, 2006a, 2006b, 2007b). Without commitments to children or employers, emerging adults are able to enjoy more leisure and personal time (Gauthier & Furstenberg, 2005). In one study (Grob, Krings, Bangerter, 2001) of adults of various ages researchers found that emerging adults felt they had the most control over significant events in their lives, which Arnett (2006b) states is evidence of the self-focused nature of emerging adulthood.

Unfortunately, these emerging adults are considered very selfish. For example in Japan these older singles are called 'parasite singles' (Rosenberger, 2007) and in America today's college student is considered more narcissistic than previous generations (Twenge, 2006). Arnett (2007b) argues that emerging adults are not selfish. Indeed, compared to adolescents, emerging adults tend to be less egotistical, more considerate, and better able to understand the view of others (Arnett, 2006a, 2007b; Labouvie-Vief, 2006). Instead, Arnett (2004b, 2006a, 2007b) claims that it is more accurate to think of emerging adulthood as a self-focused time where individuals have needed time and space to focus on their self-development and attain self-sufficiency. For example, research has shown that a person's sense of self becomes more complex during emerging adulthood and this self-focused period may promote development of self-reflection and a better understanding of this new complex self (Labouvie-Vief, 2006). Thus, emerging adulthood is a time during which young people are able to develop their own identity



(a restructuring of self) without the daily influences of their parents or future family (Arnett, 2000a, 2006a, 2006b; Labouvie-Vief, 2006). Hence, one distinguishing and important attribute of emerging adulthood is a focus on self (Arnett, 2004b, 20006a, 2007b).

### *Feeling In-between and in Transition*

One characteristic of emerging adulthood is the ambiguous feelings emerging adults have about their own attainment of adulthood. Very few people consider themselves to be adolescents after they turn 18, since they have completed secondary school, finished the biological changes of puberty, and are no longer living under the rules of their parents (Arnett, 2000a, 2006a). In a study of adolescents, emerging adults, and young to midlife adults, fifty percent of the emerging adults felt ambiguous about their adult status, while only twelve percent of the young to midlife adults felt such ambiguity (Arnett, 2001a). When both parents of emerging adult children and their children had been surveyed, neither young people nor their parents felt that the children had achieved adult status but instead were somewhere in between having achieved adulthood in some ways, but not in others (Nelson, Padilla-Walker, Carroll, Madsen, Barry, & Badger, 2007). It is clear that while people in their thirties feel they are adults, emerging adults do not yet think they have achieved adulthood (Arnett, 1998, 2000a, 2001a).

Given the feelings most emerging adults have being “in between” it raises the question regarding what they feel they need in order to become an adult. The criteria emerging adults find necessary to be considered an adult do not focus on demographic transitions (marriage, finishing education, parenthood, etc). Instead of outward events marking adulthood, emerging adults emphasize the internal character qualities needed to take on adult roles such as accepting responsibility for self, being able to make decisions independently, becoming less self oriented, and gaining financial independence (Arnett, 1998, 2000a, 2004b; Nelson et al., 2007). Indeed,

the criteria deemed important by young people today have been categorized (e.g., Arnett, 2003; Badger, Nelson, & Barry, 2006; Nelson & Barry, 2005) broadly into domains such as *independence* (e.g., being financially independent from parents), *interdependence* (e.g., develop greater consideration for others), *role transitions* (e.g., parenthood, finished with schooling), *norm compliance* (e.g., avoid becoming drunk), *family capacities* (e.g., become capable of caring for children), and *relational maturity* (e.g., accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions). Unlike demographic transitions these criteria are intangible and obtained gradually over time; it follows that the feeling of attaining adulthood would also develop gradually (Arnett, 1998, 2001a, 2004b, 2006a) and lead to feelings of in-betweenness until they are fully developed.

#### *A Time of Possibilities*

Emerging adulthood is an age of possibilities in two ways—first it is a time of optimism and second it is an important opportunity for those with difficult backgrounds to make changes (Arnett 2006a). Journalists have portrayed people in their twenties and early thirties as pessimistic and cynical (Hornblower, 1997). However, research reveals that emerging adults show great optimism for their own futures while still maintaining some pessimism about the future of the generation as a whole. They see many societal level problems, but have high expectations for their personal career and marriage (Arnett, 2000b). This unfounded optimism about one's future can be helpful when facing the transitions typical of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000b). For example, college students with more optimistic views tended to adjust better to their first semester of college as seen through smaller increases in stress and depression (Brissette, Scheier, & Carver, 2002).

Emerging adulthood is a particularly optimistic time for people who come from dysfunctional or impoverished families (Arnett, 2004b, 2006a). Studies have shown that people

from low socioeconomic backgrounds show more optimism toward their own futures than those of higher socioeconomic backgrounds (Arnett, 2000b; Eskilson & Wiley, 1999). Arnett (2004b, 2006a) explains that, unlike adolescents, emerging adults are able to physically remove themselves from their dysfunctional homes and hopefully leave behind the problems of the past. This gives emerging adults a chance to redirect their lives in a way that will position themselves positively for the future before they enter into more permanent adult roles (Arnett, 2006a).

### *Emerging Adulthood Worldwide*

Arnett (2004b) states that emerging adulthood tends to exist under certain social and economic conditions, which are becoming more widespread with a globalized economy. The increasing globalization of the world economy is providing more higher paying jobs that require education (Arnett, 2002). Secondary schooling is becoming the norm for most young people in industrialized nations (Arnett, 2000a, 20004b). As technology in agriculture increases with globalization families in developing nations can survive without the labor of their young sons or daughters, allowing them to participate in the educational system longer (Arnett, 2000a). Rising rates of educational participation, an indicator of the economic development, makes it possible for young people to have an extended moratorium to explore various life choices, since their labor is not urgently needed (Arnett, 2000a, 2004b). While globalization is making this extended moratorium available to more young people in developing nations, emerging adulthood will be experienced differently in each culture, reflecting the unique cultural values, history, and traditions (Arnett, 2000a). Since these economic and social conditions have only occurred quite recently and not in all cultures, emerging adulthood is not considered a universal period of human development.

There are some conditions that seem to be necessary for emerging adulthood to exist in a given society. First, emerging adulthood is more likely to exist in industrialized and post-industrial nations (Arnett, 2000a, 2004b). Even within developed nations emerging adulthood may potentially only exist for the economically advantaged members of those societies (e.g., upper and middle classes). These individuals have the economic resources to put off adult roles in order to explore and experiment (Arnett, 2000a, 20004b). For example, many upper and middle class your people have the opportunity to pursue higher levels of education. Higher education provides additional time for one's identity exploration, contributes to a feeling of being in-between, and increases opportunities for one's future which raises optimism.

Second, emerging adulthood is most likely to exist in these countries where there has been a demographic shift to later marriage and parenthood. This demographic shift presents emerging adults with time to be self-focused, explore different life possibilities, and experience the ensuing instability before being tied down with marital and parenting responsibilities (Arnett, 2000a, 2004b). In traditional cultures the timing of marriage is often determined by family interests and cultural expectations, but as young people gain more control over their resources they are more able to choose the timing of their own life transitions (Arnett, 1998). Emerging adults in industrialized or post-industrial countries are more likely to have control over their own resources and delay the timing of marriage (Arnett, 2000a). Although it is important to note that there are some traditional cultures where the transition into marriage and parenthood is delayed and a period of emerging adulthood exists (Arnett, 1998).

Third, emerging adulthood exists in cultures rather than countries. In any given country there may be some cultures where the young people experience emerging adulthood while other young citizens in the same country (including those in different subcultures) do not (Arnett,

2000a, 2004b). For example, those of lower socioeconomic status within a country may not have the opportunities middle class young people have to explore during their late teens and early twenties (Arnett, 2000a, 2004b). Ethnic minorities within a given country may also experience emerging adulthood differently because of unique cultural values. For instance, Asian and Latin emerging adults in the U.S. tend to feel increased family obligation as they reach their twenties instead of focusing on self (Fuligni, 2007). Religious groups, such as the Mormons in America, may also have beliefs that make their experience of emerging adulthood very different from those in the majority culture of the country (Nelson, 2003).

There are numerous examples to show how the surrounding economy, the postponement of marriage, and cultural beliefs and values influence emerging adulthood. For example, Argentina is one of the most highly developed nations in Latin America, but it still has a large proportion of impoverished people (Facio & Miccoci, 2003; Galambos & Martinez, 2007). When studying a sample of secondary schooled emerging adults in Argentina, Facio and Miccoci (2003) found many similarities to American emerging adults. For example the employment situations and romantic partnerships were very diverse. While 46% of the sample indicated they felt they had achieved adulthood, 45% felt ambiguous about their adult status (Facio & Miccoci, 2003). As Galambos and Martinez (2007) suggest and Facio and Miccoci (2003) found, the experience of emerging adulthood in Argentina is flavored by the collectivistic values emphasized in Latin culture. Emerging adults in Argentina highly endorsed criteria relating to family capacities and interdependence, reflecting the Latin emphasis on family values (Facio & Miccoci, 2003).

In another study examining emerging adulthood in Romania, Nelson (2009) found that similar to other emerging adults around the world, the majority of Romanian emerging adults

surveyed did not consider themselves to be adults. Nevertheless, emerging adulthood in Romania has features that reflect its unique history. For example, Romanian young people placed a greater emphasis on complying with societal norms (avoiding drugs, avoiding committing petty crimes like shoplifting, and using contraception if sexually active and not trying to conceive a child) than is typically seen in other countries. Nelson (2009) speculated that Romanians may have seen the significant consequences to their country for not adhering to these norms. Specifically, Romania has received substantial negative media attention for the large number of abandoned children found in inhumane conditions in institutions. This situation presented significant challenges to Romania being granted entrance into the European Union (see Lataianu & Jacoby, 2009). Hence, Romanian young people have seen the consequences of not complying with societal norms and therefore place it highly in their self-prescribed criteria for adulthood.

A final example of how a country's culture or economic condition may influence emerging adulthood can be seen in the research conducted in China. Nelson, Bager and Wu (2004) surveyed college students in China and found that the majority felt they had achieved adulthood, evidence that emerging adulthood may be a shorter time period in that culture. While the Chinese students endorsed the criteria also approved of by American students (e.g., accept responsibility of your actions and become financially independent from parents), the Chinese sample also strongly endorsed criteria that reflected the collectivistic values characteristic of Confucian doctrine such as becoming less self-oriented, developing greater concern for others, and becoming capable of supporting parents financially. These students also reported more norm-abiding behavior (e.g. avoiding getting drunk, using illegal drugs, and shoplifting) and less

exploration than their American counterparts, evidence that emerging adulthood in each culture will have unique features (Nelson, Bager, & Wu, 2004).

### *Cultural Influences in India*

Similar to other cultures studied, India presents a culture that may make emerging adulthood uniquely different from the United States. While aspects of emerging adulthood may exist, they may look different due to historical, cultural and economic features of India. For example, unlike Western civilization, which has its foundation in Christianity, Hinduism has been the major religion in India. Even today, 81% of Indians describe themselves as Hindu (Office of Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India, 2001). The caste system, the practice of arranged marriages, the popular view of human development, the collectivistic nature of the society, and Indian rites of passage all have their foundation in Hinduism. In order to understand how these unique aspects of Hinduism and as consequence Indian culture might influence emerging adulthood in India, the following sections will explore these cultural constructs.

#### *Caste*

India's society is organized by caste. Caste refers to two different things that are interrelated—*varna* and *jati*. *Varna* comes from the ancient Hindu scriptures where during the creation the Lord gave different duties to the people born of the different parts of his body. Those born of the mouth, the most sacred part, were made priests, those born of the arms were made to be warriors, those born of the thighs were made merchants, and those born of his feet were given the duties of servants. Those not born of the Lord were deemed untouchable or outcaste and were given the lowest, most degrading tasks (Shurmer-Smith, 2000). These

scriptures delineate through principles of purity and pollution a foundation for an economic, political, and social system based on caste and justified by God (Shumer-Smith, 2000).

*Jati* refers to the current vocational and endogamous (intermarrying) groups of India (Shumer-Smith, 2000; Verma & Saraswathi, 2002). *Jati* determines one's occupation at birth, however in today's India one is not obligated to work in that profession (Shumer-Smith, 2000). These rigid vocational boundaries ascribed at birth have weakened due to formal schooling and industrialization (Verma & Saraswathi, 2002). However, people born in *jatis* of traditional vocations usually work within that livelihood because they also inherit the necessary skills and networks to be successful in that career (Shumer-Smith, 2000). While the profession associated with caste is negotiable for individuals, it is still necessary for one to marry within the same *jati*, which indicates how entrenched caste is in Indian culture (Shumer-Smith, 2000; Verma & Saraswathi, 2002).

#### *Arranged Marriage*

Marriage is considered a union or alliance between families and important to continuing the genetic line. It is believed that such an important decision should not be left to inexperienced youth who may not follow the rules of marriage, for example marrying within one's *jati* (caste) (Singh, 2004; Saraswathi & Ganapathy, 2002). Arranging a marriage involves a carefully dictated process which includes steps of obtaining information about the potential spouse's reputation, a meeting of the families of the potential couple, a consultation with an astrologist to make sure the couple's horoscopes match, a meeting between the couple, and a final discussion between the families about wedding details which may include having an astrologist pick an auspicious day for the event (Kluck 1985; Singh 2004). If a son or daughter chooses to marry



outside of the family's caste or religion, the family risks social exclusion, especially in rural areas (Verma & Saraswathi, 2002).

Historically child marriage has been preferred, specifically because marriage of girls before menstruation was considered sacred in Hindu families (Shukla, 1994). According to the 1951 census only 6.4 percent of females 15 years old and older were unmarried (Chandrasekhar, 1960). The average age of marriage in India has risen significantly since then (Devi, 2006). The government has fixed laws that prohibit marriage for females under 18 and males under 21, although the laws are not strictly enforced even today (Shukla, 1994; Devi, 2006).

The majority of Indians today still have marriages arranged by their parents or members of their kinship group. Educated parents are beginning to consult their children, specifically sons in the area of marriage (Singh, 2004; Kashyap, 1996; Shukla, 1994). While young people are asserting their independence in the process of arranged marriages, their actions are limited to insisting on meeting the potential mate prior to the marriage before agreeing or opposing the marriage (Singh, 2004). In general, arranged marriages still play a prominent role in India.

### *Hinduism*

According to Hindu scripture the marriage of a Hindu is seen as the beginning of one of the stages in human development. Hindu scripture delineates four stages of life for a Hindu. The first stage is *brahmacarya*, a time for studentship, discipline, and preparation for future relationships. The second stage, *grhasthasrama*, comes as a person marries, has children, and fulfills his or her duties as a householder. *Vanaprastha* is 'the retiring forest-dweller stage' where one loosens the bond created during the life. The fourth stage is *sanyasa*, where one renounces all past and present relations in order to seek for spiritual emancipation, or *moksha*

(Saraswathi, 2005; Saraswathi & Ganapathy, 2002; Mascolo, Girishwar, & Rapisardi, 2004; Carstairs, 1967).

*Moksha* is the ultimate reward in Hinduism, the spiritual realization of self, and is attained through *dharma*. *Dharma* is the term used in India for fulfilling one's moral duty. Duty, or obligation, is the basis of Indian morality (Mascolo et al., 2004; Saraswathi & Ganapathy, 2005). Each Indian has been born into a set of hierarchical relationships based on his or her position within their extended family and class or caste; each relationship has its accompanying obligations and duties (Mascolo et al., 2004).

Morality in India is tied to fulfilling social responsibilities towards others. Compared to Western religious views, Hinduism is much more collectivistic, or in other words other-oriented (Mascolo et al., 2004; Turiel, 2004). An example of this collectivistic attitude is seen clearly in Indian families, where members are known to be very loyal and each member has a set of duties or obligations to the family (Kluck, 1985; Singh 2004). Collectivism is associated with such solidarity and integration in social groups (e.g. family, caste, community) in which people place the interests of the group above self-interests (Triandis 1995).

The traditional Hindu joint family in India is an ideal example of collectivism. In order to keep agricultural land in the family, sons lived together with their parents in one complex. Each person put their earnings into a common family purse, the family ate together out of one common kitchen, and the members participated in certain family worship practices (Singh 2004; Chandrasekhar 1960; Kluck 1985). Decisions made in the joint family system favored the welfare of the entire family over individual members (Singh 2002b). To keep order, there was a clear hierarchical order by age and gender—the oldest male acted as the head of the household and was consulted in all decisions regarding family members, oldest sons were treated with

similar deference by younger siblings, and the mother of the household was in charge of all the daughters in law (Singh 2004; Chandrasekhar 1960; Kluck 1985).

Gender relations within the joint family were highly regulated through regular gender segregation. A woman's status in the joint family was low, based on the age of her husband and increased when she bore a son (Singh 2004; Chandrasekhar 1960; Kluck 1985). Sons within the joint family were expected to act with formal decorum when interacting with their wives and children in the presence of their parents. Intense emotional attachment between spouses was discouraged because of its potential to disrupt joint family loyalties (Kluck, 1985).

The urbanization of the Indian population and diversification of employment opportunities has led to the nuclearization of the Indian family (Singh 2002b, 2004). Some Indian households continue to keep a common purse or choose to live near one another making them pseudo or marginal joint families (Singh 2004). The nuclearization of the Indian family has led to more intimate relationships between husbands and wives, giving women more power within the family context (Singh 2002b) but collectivistic principles, such as patriarchal hierarchy and deference toward elders which were key to the joint family system, are still seen in nuclear Indian families today (Singh 2004).

As Turiel (2004) discusses, any one culture does not exist on a continuum from individualistic to collectivistic, but instead both characteristics can coexist in the same culture and create separate pulls on one's actions within the culture. Individualism and collectivism vary by the stage of development in Hindu philosophy. Attaining *moksha* involves fulfilling ascribed duties to other people (fulfilling one's *dharma*) during earlier phases in life, but then in older age separating or detaching themselves from those relationships. These earlier stages of life in the Hindu view of development are other-focused or collectivistic; therefore for the

purposes of this paper, which focuses on the young people of India, we will refer to Indian culture as collectivistic, while still recognizing the complexity of individualism and collectivism.

### *Indian Rites of Passage*

For higher castes, adolescent boys participate in the sacred thread ceremony, which marks the end of childhood (Saraswathi, Manjrekar, & Pant, 2003; Steveson, 1971). The celebration is called *Upanayana*. In the more recent past the ceremony would last three days, during which the boy would enter the *brahmacarya* stage, then by the end of third day he would cease this stage in preparation for marriage (Stevenson, 1971). In ancient times a boy would leave his home at the time of the *Upanayana* and live with a Guru where he would serve him and learn from him for twelve years before being considered ready for marriage (Carstairs, 1967). However, today the ceremony typically lasts one day and the boy simply continues his secular schooling and is considered ready for marriage once his education is completed (Devi, 2006).

Hindu women also have a ceremony that marks the end of their childhood. For females of high and low caste when they reach menarche the community holds a celebration with pomp and splendor for the adolescent. This ceremony used to act as a public announcement that a woman was ready and available for marriage, but with child marriages banned in Indian law, it is now a symbol of maturity for a female child (Bhattacharyya, 1968; Saraswathi, et al., 2003).

### *Aspects of Emerging Adulthood in Indian Culture*

Hinduism plays a very unique role in Indian culture. As discussed, the caste system, the practice of arranged marriages, the popular view of human development, the collectivistic nature of the society, and Indian rites of passage have their foundations in Hinduism but still play a part in modern day Indian culture. India also has a unique position economically—while it is a developing nation, many foreign companies have been able to outsource to India more than just

manufacturing but also service-oriented tasks like customer service call centers because of prevalence of English medium schools. The following sections will examine how each of these topics might possibly relate to emerging adulthood in India.

### *Age of Possibilities*

Although optimism is a strong characteristic of most American emerging adults, Indian culture and economic prospects might create wide differences in the optimism of Indian young people. One's caste often determines what occupation and the type of spouse an Indian will have (Shummer-Smith, 2000). The caste occupational lines are slowly breaking down with urbanization, higher rates of education, and increased job opportunities available through globalization (Verma & Sarawathi, 2002). Caste has provided a sense of continuity among generations previously, this current generation is poised to take advantage of India's capitalism and entry into the global market, allowing people a chance to change their socioeconomic status. This may make young Indians' views of the future very positive. However, those of lower caste living in rural areas generally continue in the livelihood dictated at birth (Shummer-Smith, 2000) which may lead those of lower caste to feel that their lives will be the same as their parents.

### *Feeling In-between*

From the descriptions of Hindu development it would seem that unmarried young people in India who continue into higher schooling would be considered in the *brahmacarya* stage. However the *Upanayana* for men and menarche ceremony for women signify the end of that stage. These ceremonies have and still do take place during adolescence, however in the past a child was then married and considered in the next stage of development, the *grhasthasrama* or householder stage (Stevenson, 1971; Saraswathi, 2005). Therefore, in modern day India both men and women have a few years between puberty and marriage where they are in-between the

two Hindu stages of human development. This may lead Indians to feel in-between similar to their counterparts in the United States.

The Hindu view of development and the collectivistic nature of Indian religious beliefs may affect the criteria Indian young people might have for adulthood. In the *grhasthasrama* stage of development (the householder stage) adulthood is defined by marriage and parenthood (Saraswathi & Ganapathy, 2002). Because of this view of adulthood in India, youth may be more likely to emphasize role transitions such as marriage and child bearing to be necessary for the transition into adulthood and since those have not occurred, they may considered themselves somewhere between adolescence and adulthood.

The collectivistic influences of Hinduism may affect the criteria Indian young people consider necessary for adulthood. During the first two stages of Hindu development a person is expected to conform to cultural and social structurally prescribed roles within the family (Saraswathi, 2005; Saraswathi & Ganapathy, 2002; Mascolo et al., 2004). While the traditional Hindu joint family system is not common today, the principles of solidarity and sacrifice of self-interests for the group along with expectations for children to consult their parents in major decisions and for sons to provide financially for aging parents are still a part of Indian culture (Kluck, 1985; Singh 2004). As a result, Indian youth may endorse more collectivistic criteria for adulthood (e.g., “become less self oriented” and “become financially capable to provide for parents”).

### *Gender in India*

Gender is a very salient issue in India; there is a lot of discrimination against women in India. Much of the gender discrimination has its roots in the current marriage practices (Singh 2002a). First, families with daughters are expected to pay large sums of money for their

dowries at the time of marriage (Singh 2002a, 2004; Kluck 1985). Families of the groom have been known to be violent towards and in some cases kill the new bride when the dowry is not enough (Singh 2002a, 20002b, 2004). Second, when a daughter marries she moves into the house of her husband's family; parents expect little economic or social support from their daughters after marriage. Rather than investing precious money for healthcare and education into daughters, families prefer to care more for their sons (Singh 2004). Third, an ideal Indian bride is docile, obedient, and a virgin (Singh 2002a, 2004). The virginity of a daughter and later the purity of a wife is an important part of a man's honor (Singh 2002a). Once a girl reaches menarche her social interactions, specifically with men outside of her family, are restricted (Saraswathi, et al., 2003; Saraswathi, 1999).

The educational and literacy rates for women are much lower than they are for men (Office of Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India, 2001). These gender gaps have been blamed on the marriage practices enumerated above (Singh 2002a). Since families are saving money for their daughter's dowry they have no extra money to provide for her schooling (Singh 2004). When allocating precious resources, many families choose not to educate their daughters since it is their sons who economically care for their aging parents (Singh 2002a, 2004). Indian families are also afraid to educate their daughters because they may become more defiant and insubordinate, making it harder to marry them off (Singh 2002b, 2004). In addition to the possible personality change, many families choose not to send their daughters to school because of the social safety risks such as the absence of single sex schools, the lack of safe transportation, and the dearth of female teachers. These families feel it is their duty to protect their daughters specifically after puberty (Saraswathi et al., 2003). These restrictions placed on Indian women may limit the amount of exploration young females are able to do.

The preference for male children in India is strong. Since it is the sons who are expected to financially provide for their families, male children with interest in the humanities or social sciences are forced into more lucrative careers like engineering and medicine by their parents (Singh 2002b). Because of the economic security sons provide and the resulting preference for sons, women in India are valued for their role as mother, especially when they bear a son (Singh 2002a, 2004; Kluck 1985). Since women traditionally have not been able to work outside of the home and generate income, their complete economic dependence on their families has limited their ability to control their own lives (Singh 2002a). These strict gender roles may lead to differences in the way men and women in India view the transition into adulthood. For example, men may be more likely to see their career achievements and the ability to provide for aging parents as necessary steps to be considered an adult. On the other hand, Indian women may focus on their family roles of wife and mother as necessary points in adulthood.

While these gender inequities do exist in modern India, progress is being made. For example, the literacy rate is increasing for women 36 percent of women were literate in 1991, that increased to 54 percent in 2001 (Singh, 2002a; Office of Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India, 2001). There has been an increase in the number of women's colleges, in 1955-56 there were 300 whereas in 2003 there were a total of 1146 women's colleges in India, which allows more Indian women to participate in higher education. Women are also engaging in paid employment outside of the home, making economic independence a possibility (Singh 2002a). As enumerated previously, the nuclearization of the family has led females to have more power within the family (Singh 2002b). These social changes for women may make them feel more optimistic about their own futures, especially in comparison to the lives of their mothers.



*Rural/Urban Divide*

In developing nations there tends to be a cultural difference between those living in the rural regions and those living in urban cities (Arnett 20004b). Poor families living in rural areas tend to participate in child labor, marry younger, bear children earlier, and have higher rates of fertility (Arnett 2006b). Whereas, young people in urban areas of developing nations tend to become more educated, participate in varied recreational activities, have greater employment opportunities, get married later, and are older when they bear children (Arnett 2004b). India has similar demographic differences between rural and urban populations. For example, rural Indian women tend to marry earlier than their urban counterparts and have more children (Sheela & Audinarayana, 2003). Hence, one's length of emerging adulthood in India might be influenced by one's living situation. Those living in rural areas tend to marry and become parents earlier, and therefore may be more likely to have a shorter period of emerging adulthood than those living in urban areas or may not experience emerging adulthood at all.

In addition to these demographic differences there is a greater sense of community among those living in rural villages compared to those living in urban centers (Wolpert, 1991; Mukerji, 1956). Villagers tend to be more involved in their neighbors' lives than urbanites, villagers often informally gather in central meeting places during the afternoon rest period or in the evening. There is also a sense of continuity as families pass the same land from generation to generation (Fuller 2003; Mukerji, 1956). A family's reputation could be tarnished for generations if one person chose to violate an important norm (e.g., have a love marriage instead of an arranged marriage or participate in premarital sex). With the prevalence of arranged marriages it is important that a family have a good reputation in the village in order to marry off their sons and daughters (Seiter, 2006). With migration to urban centers there tends to be more

of a sense of autonomy and anonymity, making community not as central to daily life (Wolpert, 1991). Urban lifestyles combine Western and Indian values, which do not emphasize the traditional restrictions regarding premarital sex and alcohol consumption (Kluck, 1985). These differences may lead people from rural areas to value criteria for adulthood associated with norm compliance (e.g., avoiding getting drunk) more than their urban counterparts.

The self-sufficient nature of the rural economy in India is dependent on vocational diversity and continuity provided by the caste system. The caste system was meant to be perpetuated through generations. For example, the local barber's son would take over the business in the village, providing haircuts for generations of villagers (Wolpert, 1991). Sons were expected continue in the family business/trade, providing a sense of generational continuity of economic and social standing. However, with increasing urbanization, people are leaving the village for economic opportunities in the city (Wolpert 1991; Mukerji, 1956). It follows that young people who live in the urban setting will be more optimistic than their rural counterparts about their chances to improve their own economic and social prospects.

#### *Students and Non-students*

Children from impoverished families in India are forced to work from an earlier age (Verma & Saraswathi, 2002; Saraswathi, et al., 2003). On the other hand, Indians who come from wealthier families are able to afford the expensive fees for English medium schools, the preferred schooling, from an early age (Saraswathi et al., 2004; Kashyap, 1996; Wolpert, 1991). Those wealthy children are then more likely to continue on to college, learn to speak English well and/or become trained in a highly technical information technology field. They then are better poised to get a job with multi-national companies providing jobs in India, especially with call centers and jobs relating to computer technology (Saraswathi et al., 2004; Kashyap, 1996).

Demographically middle class urban young people within developing nations including India are participating in higher education making them better positioned to experience the explorative, self-focused, highly optimistic, and instable period of moratorium characteristic of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2006b).

Non-students on the other hand are more likely to participate in a more traditional life which involves early marriage, work, parenthood (Verma & Saraswathi, 2002; Saraswathi, et al., 2003). Earlier entry into these adult roles may lead non-students to feel more like adults and limit the time they have for identity exploration. Without training for a different occupation, non-students are more likely to pursue the careers dictated by their caste, a career their parents also had, which may make them less optimistic about their lives in relation to their parents' lives (Shumer-Smith, 2000)

#### *Rural/Urban and Student/Non-student Similarities*

In making generalizations about rural and urban Indians and college students and non-students in India there are a lot of similarities. Non-students and rural people tend to live more traditional lives; they marry younger, begin work at a younger age, and pursue the career dictated by their caste (Verma & Saraswathi, 2002; Saraswathi, et al., 2003; Shummer-Smith 2000). However, there is not complete overlap between student status and living setting. For example, there is a portion of rural families who can afford to send their students to college. According to the census Indians living in urban centers tend to be more educated; the literacy rate in urban areas in India is 79.9, compared to 58.7 percent of literates in the rural population (Office of Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India, 2001). Further, Indian urban centers are known for their slums full of impoverished people (Wolpert, 1991). So, while a rural setting does not preclude education and living in an urban setting does not ensure education and wealth, the

sampling technique used in this study did not include impoverished urbanites. Instead the rural sample included only non-students. Because in the current sample all non-students live in rural settings, for the sake of parsimony in the present study, separate hypotheses and analyses will not be conducted. Instead, the student/non-student status will represent the urban/rural status as well.

### *Summary of Purpose*

Features of emerging adulthood as proposed by Arnett (2001) may exist in India today, but these aspects will most likely reflect the cultural beliefs and traditions of India as well as recent economic changes in India. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine Indian people ages 18-26 to investigate (a) whether or not they feel they are adults (i.e., “age of feeling in-between”), (b) the criteria they deem necessary for becoming adults, and (c) the extent to which they feel optimistic about their future (e.g., “age of possibilities”). It is important to note that this Indian sample will not be compared directly with a sample from the United States, but instead will be reviewed in light of previous research. Furthermore, the study will examine how these aspects of emerging adulthood may vary as a function of gender and student status.

### *Feeling In-between*

First, the study will examine how young people in India feel about their own status regarding adulthood. As noted, emerging adults in America often consider themselves in between adolescence and adulthood (Arnett, 1998, 2000a, 2001a, 2004b,). Studies done in other countries have found similar results in other cultures including Argentina (Facio & Miccoci, 2003), China (Nelson et al., 2004), and Romania (Nelson, 2009). In India young adults have culturally left childhood behind, indicated by puberty ceremonies for females and *Upanayanas* for males of high caste. However, young single people have not yet entered the householder stage, otherwise known as *grhasthasrama*. Therefore, it was hypothesized that Indian young

people, similar to Chinese and American emerging adults, will feel in-between adolescence and adulthood.

Young people in India generally marry only after they have finished their schooling, and those who do not continue for higher education marry younger (Devi, 2006). Those from rural areas tend to marry younger than those from rural areas (Sheela & Audinarayana, 2003). Women also tend to marry much younger than men (Devi, 2006). Therefore, non-students and women are more likely that to have fulfilled the role transitions (e.g. marriage and parenthood) necessary to be considered an adult in the Hindu view of development. For that reason, it is hypothesized that students and males in this sample will be more likely to feel in-between adolescence and adulthood, and non-students and females will be more likely to feel they have achieved adulthood.

### *Criteria for Adulthood*

Part of the reason emerging adults in America feel ambivalent about their status as adults is because of the criteria they feel are necessary for adulthood (Arnett 1998, 2000a). Thus, this study will examine the criteria young people in India have for adulthood. When asked about the criteria emerging adults in America felt were necessary for adulthood the top three criteria (accepting responsibility for self, being able to make decisions independently, becoming less self oriented, and gaining financial independence) were related to establishing independence. Items regarding role transitions, such as marriage and bearing children, were rarely endorsed (Arnett, 1998, 2000a; Nelson & Barry 2005; Nelson et al., 2007). Variations on criteria endorsed by emerging adults in other cultures have been found. For example, college students in Argentina endorsed characteristics relating to family capacities (e.g., being able to care for children) and interdependence (e.g., become less self oriented) (Fazio & Miccoci, 2003) and young people in

China endorsed criteria related to norm-abiding behavior (e.g., avoid becoming drunk) and fulfilling duties to family specifically becoming capable of financially supporting parents (Nelson et al., 2004).

Hindu texts delineate different periods of human development with criteria that is not internal, but rather relates to role transitions. In the Hindu stages, the transition to the “adulthood” stage is through marriage and child bearing (Saraswathi, 2005; Saraswathi & Ganapathy, 2002; Mascolo et al., 2004; Carstairs, 1967); this may affect the way young Indians view adulthood. Thus, it is hypothesized that young people in India will emphasize the specific criteria of being married and having children. Further it is hypothesized that when the criteria is aggregated Indians will emphasize the categories of role transitions (e.g., finishing school, marriage, and having children) and family capacities (e.g., being able to care for children, being able to financially support a family and capable of financially supporting parents) to a greater extent than areas of independence.

Similar to Chinese culture, religion in India emphasizes the fulfilling of duty to family and society at large (Saraswathi & Ganapathy, 2005; Mascolo et al., 2004). Part of fulfilling one’s duty in India involves avoiding immoral behavior, such as drinking alcohol or having premarital sex, because it will reflect poorly on their family. Indian young people may endorse different criteria for adulthood than emerging adults in America because of this fundamental difference in approaches to morality. Therefore, it is hypothesized that young people in India will also strongly endorse the specific criteria of avoiding becoming drunk and will not endorse criteria of having sexual intercourse. It is further hypothesized that when aggregated young Indians will endorse criteria relating to norm compliance (e.g., avoid becoming drunk, avoid committing petty crimes).

The sense of community and importance of family reputation in rural Indian villages in contrast to the anonymity of migrating to urban centers may affect the way people living in rural or urban areas may view the transition into adulthood (Wolpert, 1991). The reputation of a young person in the village is vital when arranging a marriage, especially when the family cannot afford to pay a large dowry or the son has no promising economic prospects (Seiter 2006). Thus, non-students from rural areas cannot depend upon their family's wealth to buy their way into a good marriage. Therefore, it is hypothesized that non-students will be more likely than students to strongly endorse criteria related to norm compliance, specifically the criteria of avoiding getting drunk.

While women are beginning to enter the workforce in India, men and women are more likely to follow traditional gender roles (Singh, 2002a). Women are valued for their role as wife, but most importantly mother. Men on the other hand, have a lot of pressure to economically provide for his family and aging parents (Kluck, 1985; Singh 20004). A son is not deemed ready to marry until he has finished his schooling or training and begun his career (Devi 2006). Therefore, it is hypothesized that women will emphasize role transitions related to the family, specifically marriage and bearing children and men will emphasize career related role transitions, specifically finishing education and settling into a career.

#### *Age of Optimism*

The next purpose of the study was to examine whether young people in India see this period of their lives as an age of optimism. For many emerging adults in America, emerging adulthood is a time of high hopes for their personal futures (Arnett, 2000b). When studying emerging adulthood in China, Nelson, Badger and Wu (2004) found this same type of optimism among Chinese college students. In the past, caste has made social and economic movement

difficult. However, India has developed economically and the government has implemented affirmative action towards those of lower castes making more career options available to more Indian young people (Shummer-Smith, 2000). Therefore it is hypothesized that most young Indians will be optimistic about their own economic futures.

The deterioration of the joint-family system, the nuclearization of the family, and the changes to arranged marriages have changed the face of the Indian family. The nuclearization of the family has led to an increase in relationship quality of close family relationships (Singh 2002b). Women prefer nuclear families because they gain more power in their marriage relationship and do not have to be submissive to their mother-in-laws (Singh 2002b, 2004). Within a joint family system a son was expected to be very formal in his interactions with his wife and children in front of his parents, whereas in a nuclear family he is able to be more casual and intimate with his immediate family (Kluck, 1985). In addition to the nuclearization of the family, young adults now have more say in the process of arranging a marriage than ever before (Singh, 2004; Kashyap, 1996; Shukla, 1994). With all these social changes surrounding the family, it seems that Indians today are more likely to have control over the quality of their close intimate relationships. Therefore, it is hypothesized that young Indians will be optimistic about their personal relationships.

Globalized companies are providing good jobs for well-educated, English speaking Indians. Those unable to attend further schooling are likely to rely on the training and connections provided by their parents, and thereby follow in the same career and social standing dictated by their caste, especially in rural areas (Shumer-Smith, 2000). Therefore, it is hypothesized that students, who are poised to take part in the recent globalized economy, will feel optimistic about their economic and social future in relation to their parents. It is



hypothesized that non-students will be more likely to feel that their economic and social lives will be the same as their parents since they are following a similar career path.

While gender equality in India is a long way off, there has been significant social change in regard to women's status. Educational and literacy rates for women, while still low in comparison to developed nations, have risen significantly in the recent history (Singh 2002a). More women are participating in paid employment, violence against women is beginning to be reported more often, and laws have been put into place to prohibit dowry (Singh 2002a). Wives and mothers are enjoying a higher social status in the nuclear family (Singh 2002b, 2004). Taken together, it seems that young women today are enjoying less gender discrimination than their mothers. Therefore, it is hypothesized that young Indian women will be much more optimistic than men about their future economic prospects and relationships in relation to those of their parents.

#### *Summary of Hypotheses*

In summary, the following hypotheses are examined. First, it is hypothesized that Indian young people will feel in-between adolescence and adulthood. Second, it is hypothesized that non-students and females in the sample will be more likely to feel like adults when compared to students and males, respectively. Third, it is hypothesized that the sample will emphasize specific criteria relating to role transitions of marriage and parenthood. Fourth, when the criteria is put into categories, it is hypothesized that the sample will emphasize categories of role transitions (e.g. finishing school, marriage), and family capacities (e.g. being able to care for children) over categories relating to independence.

Furthermore, it is hypothesized that this sample of Indian young people will emphasize the specific criteria of avoiding becoming drunk and not endorse the criteria relating to sexual

intercourse. Sixth, it is hypothesized that young Indian people will endorse the category of criteria relating to norm compliance. When broken down by student status, it is hypothesized that non-students will be more likely than students to endorse criteria relating to norm compliance, specifically the criteria of avoiding becoming drunk. When comparing males and females it is hypothesized that females will emphasize role transitions related to the family while males will emphasize career related role transitions.

In relation to optimism, it is hypothesized that the sample will be optimistic about their own futures, specifically in relation to their economic futures and the personal relationships they will have in the future. Due to the differences between student and non-students it is hypothesized that students will feel more optimistic about their economic and social future when compared to the non-students. Finally, it is hypothesized that females in the sample will feel more optimistic about their futures in comparison to males.

### Chapter 3: Methods

#### *Participants*

Participants include 576 people (288 males, 288 females) ages (17-26) in India. Of these, the written survey was administered to 478 students at three different educational institutions located in Coimbatore: 187 graduate students (91 males, 95 females) at Bharthiar University, 157 undergraduate students (78 males, 79 females) at PSG College of Arts and Science, and 133 undergraduate students (69 males, 64 females) at the Government Arts College. The educational institutions were chosen based on their characteristics—a graduate institution, a quality undergraduate institution, and a government funded undergraduate institution. At each school the classes were sampled out of convenience, with the intention to gather a variety of majors and grades. Students were asked to fill out the survey in class. The students were from a variety of majors across campus. The mean age of participants (238 males, 238 females) was 20.26 ( $SD = 1.83$ ). The participants were predominantly unmarried (98%), Hindu (89%), and came from families where the parents had little higher education (87% of mothers and 75% of fathers had received high school education or less).

With the assistance of several translators the survey was verbally administered to 100 people between the ages of 18 and 26 living in rural villages surrounding Coimbatore who had not attended college. The mean age of participants (50 males, 50 females) was 22.26 ( $SD=2.389$ ). A little less than half of the participants were unmarried (47%) a majority of them were Hindu (79%), and almost all came from families where the parents had not participated in higher education (100% of mothers and 99% of fathers had received high school education or less).

Taken as a whole the mean age of participants (295 males, 293 females) was 20.64 (SD=2.139). The participants were predominantly unmarried (89%), Hindu (87%), and came from families where the parents had little higher education (90% of mothers and 83% of fathers had received high school education or less).

### *Measures*

The items on the questionnaire were initially translated by a Tamil language speaker who also spoke English. After being back-translated some errors were found, so the measure was retranslated by college students, knowledgeable in both Tamil script and English language. The entire translation was then checked by a Tamil linguist who was fluent in English.

The questionnaire had 149 items. Items 1-10 asked about demographic information (except item 10). Items 11-21 asked about family background (except number 20-21 which asked about plans for marriage and children). Items 22-25 asked about religious background. Items 26-32 asked about expectations for the future. Items 10 and 33 asked about perceptions of adulthood status. Item 34 was an open ended question asking the participants to describe what they felt was most important in determining whether or not a person has reached adulthood.

Items 35-118 explored the participants' view of criteria necessary for adulthood. The questionnaire included a list of possible criteria for adulthood and asked the participant to "1. Indicate whether or not YOU believe the following are necessary for adulthood" and "2. Give your opinion of the importance of each of the following in determining whether or not a person has reached adulthood." For each criterion the participant could mark either "yes" this is necessary for adulthood or "no" it is not. Then the participant could rate the importance of that criterion in determining adulthood as "not at all important," "not very important," "fairly

important,” or “very important.” Items 119-149 asked the participant about their personal achievement of possible criteria for adulthood.

#### *Data Collection*

Permission was received from either the principal or the registrar of the university/college and then the Head of each department. Once permission was received the professors would allow the researcher to take time at the beginning of class to administer the survey.

Each student was handed an envelope with a copy of the survey and a pen inside. The students received brief instructions regarding the consent form, the demographic information, the section on criteria for adulthood, the section asking about personal behavior, and the process for turning in the survey. The students were informed that the answers would remain confidential and if the students did not understand or feel comfortable filling out any questions on the survey they were welcome to leave them blank. To reinforce the confidential nature of the survey, the students placed the survey in the envelope and handed it to the researcher who then gave them a copy of the consent form to keep. A pen was given as a small token of appreciation for the student’s participation.

The written Tamil version of the survey was administered to nine students studying Tamil in Bharathiar and all of the students (N=141) at the Government Arts College. Since students at Bharthiar and PSG College read, write, and listen to college level lectures in English, the English version of the survey was administered to those students (N=344).

A representative from a local non-government organization (NGO), Shanti Ashram, was hired to administer the survey to the rural sample. Possible methods of administering the survey was discussed with the director of Shanti Ashram, a woman experienced in conducting health related surveys in rural India. Verbal administration of the survey was decided as the best

approach with this population with varied literacy levels and trust levels of outsiders. There was regular dialogue between the director of youth activities and the researcher about sample size, demographics, as well as issues regarding confidentiality, translation, and process of administering the survey. Translators were trained, given copies of the Tamil survey to fill out on behalf of the rural participants, and sent into rural villages.

## Chapter 4: Results

### *Subjective Status*

To determine whether Indian young people considered themselves to have attained adult status, responses to the question “Do you think that you have reached adulthood?” were examined. Results showed (see Table 1) that 61% answered “yes,” 14% indicated “no,” and 26% responded the ambiguous “in some ways yes, in some ways no”. These results show that the majority of Indian young people believed they have reached adulthood whereas over a fourth of the participants portrayed a sense of ambivalence about their adult status.

To explore whether perceived adult status differs depending on student status, frequencies were examined based on responses to the question “Do you think that you have reached adulthood?” for students and non-students, respectively. Among students, 61% responded “yes”, 8% responded “no”, and 31% indicated “in some ways yes, in some ways no”. Among non-students, 59% responded “yes”, 30% indicated “no”, and 11% indicated “in some ways yes, in some ways no”. A chi square test revealed that students were slightly more likely to feel they had achieved adulthood, but also more likely to be ambiguous about their adulthood status when compared to the non-students,  $\chi^2 (2, N=415) = 38.08, p < .001$ .

To explore whether perceived adult status differs by gender, frequencies were examined based on responses to the question “Do you think that you have reached adulthood?” for males and females, respectively. Among males, 71% responded “yes”, 11% responded “no”, and 17% indicated “in some ways yes, in some ways no”. Among females, 50% responded “yes”, 16% indicated “no”, and 34% indicated “in some ways yes, in some ways no”. A chi square test revealed that more females felt ambiguous about their adulthood status than males and more males considered themselves to be adults than females  $\chi^2 (2, N=415) = 20.55, p < .001$ .

Figure 1 displays the distribution of the “yes” responses to the question, “Do you think you have reached adulthood” by age. It shows that feeling like an adult increases as one gets older; the responses peak at age 24. Figure 2 displays this distribution by student status. The curve looks similar for both students and non-students. However, Figure 3 shows a large difference in the feelings of achieving adulthood by gender. At age 18 few women feel they have achieved adulthood. That number rises gradually as the age increases. By age 23 and 24 the majority of women feel they have reached adulthood status. On the other hand, many males feel like adults at age 18, and after 22 the majority of males, feel they have achieved adulthood status.

In order to examine further the gender differences in the subjective feelings regarding adulthood status, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted with gender serving as the independent variable and achieved criteria scales (achieved relational maturity, achieved family capacities, achieved biological/age related transitions, achieved norm compliance, and achieved role transitions) acting as the dependent variables. Results revealed that significant difference as a function of gender existed for achieved relational maturity,  $F(1, 387) = 17.76, p < .001$ . An examination of the means revealed that females ( $M = 5.30, SD = 1.72$ ) had a higher mean score on achieved family capacities than males ( $M = 4.78, SD = 3.03$ ).

#### *Criteria*

To investigate the criteria that Indian young people deem necessary for adulthood, responses to the question “Is this criterion necessary for adulthood?” were examined. Table 2 includes all of the responses. The five criteria that received the most “yes” responses included: (1) “For a man, become capable of keeping family physically safe”; (2) “Accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions”; (3) “Learn always to have good control of your



emotions”; (4) “Drive an automobile safely and close to the speed limit”; and (5) “For a woman, become capable of keeping family physically safe”.

To investigate the criteria that students, compared to non-students deemed necessary for adulthood, responses to the question “Is this criterion necessary for adulthood?” were examined for students and non-students in Table 2. The six criteria that received the most “yes” responses for students included the following: (1) “For a man, become capable of keeping family physically safe”, (2) “Avoid drunk driving”, (3) “Avoid illegal drugs”, (4) “Learn always to have good control of your emotions”, and tied for (5) “Accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions” and “Drive an automobile safely and close to the speed limit”. The five criteria that received the most “yes” responses for non-students included the following: (1) “For a man, become capable of keeping family physically safe”, (2) “Become less self-oriented, develop greater consideration for others”, (3) “Accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions”, (4) “For a man, become capable of running a household”, and (5) “For a woman, become capable of running a household”.

To investigate gender differences in the criteria deemed necessary for adulthood, responses to the question “Is this criterion necessary for adulthood?” were examined for males and females, respectively (see Table 3). The five criteria that received the most “yes” responses for males included the following: (1) “For a man, become capable of keeping family physically safe”, (2) “For a man, become capable of supporting a family financially”, (3) “Accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions”, (4) “Avoid drunk driving”, and (5) “Become less self-oriented, develop greater consideration for others”. The five criteria that received the most “yes” responses for females included the following: (1) “Learn always to have good control of your emotions” (2) “Accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions”, (3) “For a woman, become capable

of keeping family physically safe”, (4) “For a man, become capable of keeping family physically safe”, and (5) “For a woman, become capable of running a household”.

The next set of analyses examined responses to the item, “how important is this criterion for adulthood?” The responses available for this criterion was “not at all important,” “not very important,” “fairly important,” and “very important.” Due to complications with the verbal administration of the survey, only students who took the written version of the survey provided data on the importance of the criteria. Therefore, the analysis of the importance of adulthood criteria across student and non-student status was unavailable. The means of the importance of individual criteria for students is available in Table 4. The top five criteria in importance for Indian students were (1) “Avoid drunk driving”, (2) “For a man, become capable of keeping family physically safe”, (3) “For a man, become capable of supporting family financially”, (4) “For a woman, become capable of keeping family physically safe”, and (5) Learn always to have good control of your emotions”.

To further investigate the criteria Indian young people find important for adulthood scales were created from the responses to the prompt “Please give your opinion of the importance of each of the following in determining whether or not a person has reached adulthood.” Scales were created based on previous work conducted in another collectivistic culture – China (Badger et al., 2006). The scales included *family capacities* (6 Items;  $\alpha = .74$ ; e.g., “For a woman, become capable of caring for children”), *relational maturity* (4 Items;  $\alpha = .62$ ; e.g., “Accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions”), *norm compliance* (8 Items;  $\alpha = .80$ ; e.g., “Avoid drunk driving”), *role transitions* (7 Items;  $\alpha = .75$ ; e.g., “Finished education”), and *biological/age related transitions* (9 Items;  $\alpha = .77$ ; e.g., “Grow to full height”). Table 5 shows a complete list of items

for each scale. In Table 6, the means and standard deviations are presented in rank order of importance for all students and then separated for male students and female students.

In order to compare males and females on the degree of importance they placed on each of these categories of criteria, a One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted with gender as the independent variable and the five categories of criteria (i.e., family capacities, relational maturity, norm compliance, role transitions, and biological/age transitions) serving as the dependent variables. Results revealed that significant differences as a function of gender existed for family capacities,  $F(1, 254) = 14.92, p < .001$ . Examination of means showed that females ( $M = 3.57, SD = 0.46$ ) placed greater importance on family capacities than males ( $M = 3.31, SD = 0.57$ ).

### *Optimism*

To investigate the optimistic nature of Indian young people, responses to the following questions were examined: (1) “Overall, do you think the quality of your life is likely to be higher or lower than your parents have been?” (2) “Overall, do you think your financial well-being in adulthood is likely to be better or worse than your parents have been?” (3) “Overall, do you think your career achievements are likely to be greater or less than your parents have been?” (4) “Overall, do you think your personal relationships are likely to be better or worse than your parents have been?” Frequency analyses (see Table 7) were conducted and found that (a) 74% of the respondents thought the quality of their life is likely to be higher than their parents, (b) 77% believed that their financial well-being in adulthood is likely to be better than their parents, (c) 79% indicated that their career achievements are likely to be better than their parents, and (d) 63% answered that their personal relationships are likely to be better than their parents. These results indicated that the majority of Indian young people are optimistic about their futures in relation to their parent’s lives.

To explore the differences in optimism among students and non-students frequencies were compared and presented in Table 8. Using Chi square analyses, significant differences were found between students and non-students in all domains: (1) 80% of the students felt that their quality of life is likely to be better than their parents, while 53% of the non-students responded that their quality of life is likely to be better  $\chi^2 (2, N = 430) = 30.31, p < .001$ . (2) Among the students 84% responded that their financial well-being in adulthood is likely to be better than their parents, in contrast 57% of the non-students felt the same way  $\chi^2 (2, N = 423) = 30.79, p < .001$ . (3) Results showed 89% of students indicated that their career achievements are likely to be greater their parents, but only 45% of non-students felt such optimism about their own future career achievements  $\chi^2 (2, N = 432) = 86.73, p < .001$ . (4) Regarding personal relationships 70% of students thought their relationships are likely to be better than their parents have been, on the other hand 42% of non-students felt similarly about their personal relationships  $\chi^2 (2, N = 424) = 33.33, p < .001$ .

To test the hypothesis regarding gender differences in optimism, frequencies were conducted separately for males and females. Results revealed (see Table 9) that 78% of the males and 71% of the females felt that their quality of life is likely to be better than their parents. Among the males 75% and among the females 80% responded that their financial well-being in adulthood is likely to be better than his parents. Results showed 78% of males and 79% of females indicated that their career achievements will be greater. When looking at personal relationships 67% of males and 60% of females thought their relationships were likely to be better than their parents have been. While chi square tests indicated that only optimism regarding quality of life were significantly different among males and females  $\chi^2 (2, N=430) = 8.15, p < .05$ , the percentage difference between males and females was 7%.

Further analyses were conducted in order to compare the optimism of males and females as well as students and non-students. The responses were coded -1 if the respondent thought their future would be better than their parents lives have been, 0 if the response indicated respondents thought their future would be the same as their parents, and +1 if the respondents indicated a positive outlook towards their own future in relation to their parents' past. The four optimism variables were summed and averaged to create a score for overall optimism. The mean scores and standard deviations of overall optimism, as well as individual optimism variables in the domains of quality of life, financial well-being, career achievement, and personal relationships for males and females are presented in Table 10 and for students and non-students in Table 11.

To test for differences based on gender and student status, multivariate general linear modeling (GLM) was conducted to explore the differences in optimism between student status and gender. The mean score of the indicators of the four domains of optimism (quality of life, financial well-being, career achievement, and personal relationships) and overall optimism served as the dependent variables while student status (student and non-student) and gender (male and female) served as the independent variables.

Results revealed a significant Gender X Student Status interaction,  $F(4, 406) = 3.31, p < .05$ , as well as a significant main effect for student status,  $F(4, 406) = 25.27, p < .01$ . No main effect for gender was found. To further examine the main effect for student status, subsequent univariate analyses showed significant differences as a function of student status for all five of the dependent variables: Quality of life,  $F(1, 409) = 25.32, p < .001$ , Financial well-being  $F(1, 409) = 28.15, p < .001$ , Career achievements  $F(1, 409) = 90.88, p < .001$ , and Personal Relationships  $F(1, 409) = 10.30, p < .01$  and Overall Optimism  $F(1, 409) = 73.33, p < .001$ . An

examination of means (see Table 10) revealed that students had higher mean scores on all of the optimism variables than the non-students.

To examine the Gender X Student Status interaction, univariate analyses were examined and it was found that the Gender X Student Status interaction was significant for financial well-being  $F(1, 406) = 4.57, p < .05$ . To examine this Gender X Student Status interaction, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted for males and females separately using student status as the independent variable and financial well-being as the dependent variable. For males, results revealed a significant difference as a function of student status,  $F(1, 210) = 4.50, p < .05$ , with male students ( $M=.71, SD=.62$ ) scoring higher than male non-students ( $M=.50, SD=.65$ ). For females, results also revealed a significant difference as a function of student status,  $F(1, 211) = 30.77, p < .001$ , with female students ( $M=.84, SD=.45$ ) scoring higher than female non-students ( $M=.34, SD=.82$ ). The means and standard deviations for gender combined with student status are presented in Table 11.

#### *Comparison of Perceived Adults and Emerging Adults*

Finally, given the high rate of feeling like an adult, the final set of analyses attempted to examine what factor(s) might differentiate those who feel like an adult compared to those who do not. To investigate these differences the sample was broken into two groups reflecting adult status—those who felt they had reached adulthood (perceived adults) and those who did not (emerging adults). Achieved criteria scales were the same as adulthood criteria scales. The scales included *achieved family capacities* (4 Items; “Have become capable of keeping family physically safe”), *achieved relational maturity* (4 Items; “Have established a relationship with parents as an equal adult”), *achieved norm compliance* (8 Items; “Avoid becoming drunk”), *achieved role transitions* (6 Items; “Finished with education”), and *achieved biological/age related*

*transitions* (4 Items; “Have become biologically capable of producing children”). Table 12 shows a complete list of items for each scale.

First, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted with adult status serving as the independent variable and achieved criteria scales (achieved relational maturity, achieved family capacities, achieved biological/age related transitions, achieved norm compliance, and achieved role transitions) acting as the dependent variables. Results revealed that significant difference as a function of adult status existed for the achieved family capacities,  $F(1, 393) = 4.34, p < .05$ . An examination of the means revealed that perceived adults ( $M=5.39, SD=2.74$ ) had a higher mean score on achieved family capacities than emerging adults ( $M=4.78, SD=3.03$ ).

Second, five separate one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted with adult status serving as the independent variable and each of the achievement scales as dependent variables.

Results revealed that significant difference as a function of adult status existed for the following six individual achieved criteria: have become capable of supporting a family financially,  $F(1, 409) = 5.39, p < .05$ , have become capable of running a household,  $F(1, 402) = 4.41, p < .05$ , financially independent from parents  $F(1, 409) = 5.88, p < .05$ , have purchased a house,  $F(1, 403) = 3.99, p < .05$ , have reached age 21  $F(1, 414) = 23.68, p < .001$ , and have had sexual intercourse  $F(1, 382) = 4.44, p < .05$ . An examination of the means revealed that perceived adults ( $M=1.30, SD = 0.81$ ) felt they are more capable of supporting a family financially than emerging adults ( $M=1.10, SD=0.90$ ). Perceived adults ( $M = 1.30, SD = 0.82$ ) felt more capable of running a household than emerging adults ( $M = 1.12, SD = 0.87$ ). Perceived adults ( $M = 1.03, SD = 0.85$ ) felt more likely to be financially independent from their parents than emerging adults ( $M = 0.82, SD = 0.87$ ). Emerging adults ( $M = 0.80, SD = 0.40$ ) were slightly more likely to own a house than perceived adults ( $M =$

.71,  $SD = 0.45$ ). Perceived adults ( $M = .65$ ,  $SD = 0.48$ ) were more likely to have reached 21 than emerging adults ( $M = .41$ ,  $SD = 0.49$ ). Finally, emerging adults ( $M = 0.87$ ,  $SD = 0.34$ ) were more likely to have had sexual intercourse than perceived adults ( $M = .79$ ,  $SD = 0.41$ ).



## Chapter 5: Discussion

### *Purpose of Study*

The purpose of this study was to examine emerging adulthood among young people in India. Specifically, the study examined (a) whether or not they felt they were adults (i.e., “age of feeling in-between”), (b) the criteria they deemed necessary for becoming adults, and (c) the extent to which they felt optimistic about their futures (e.g., “age of possibilities”). Furthermore, the study examined how these aspects of emerging adulthood vary as a function of gender and student status.

### *Feeling In-between*

Results revealed that the majority of respondents (61%) felt they had reached adulthood. There was little difference in feelings regarding adulthood status among students and non-students. However, among males and females a larger difference was found. Of the males 71% said they had achieved adulthood, while only 50% of females felt that way. Of the females 16% did not feel they had achieved adulthood compared to 11% of males who felt the same way. Of the females 34% and 18% of males felt ambiguous about their adulthood status, indicating that females felt a lot more ambiguity than males when considering themselves adults or not.

Findings showed that the older participants were more likely to respond that they considered themselves adults. This trend was similar among students and non-students. When separated by gender, results showed that males were likely from 18 years and older to feel they had achieved adulthood. Females seemed to gradually feel they had achieved adulthood as age increased. For example, only 30% of 18 year old females felt they had achieved adulthood compared to the 60% of 18 year old males who felt they were adults, but by age 24, 69% of

males and 50% of females felt they had achieved adulthood. Without longitudinal data these findings cannot be confirmed, but provides a glimpse into the transition to adulthood in India.

As the data showed, the majority of Indian young people felt they had reached adulthood. This is quite different than what is typically found in Western cultures such as the United States and Canada. For example, in one study done in America only 16% of emerging adults sampled felt they had achieved adulthood (Nelson et al., 2007); and in Canada Cheah and Nelson (2004) found that only 35% of their sample felt they were adults. However, similar findings have been found in other collectivistic, eastern cultures such as Chinese students (Nelson et al., 2004).

While some ambiguity about adult status did exist, the majority of young Indians felt they had reached adulthood, which may indicate that emerging adulthood does not exist in the more traditional Southern Indian culture. Some scholars have questioned whether adolescence (let alone emerging adulthood) exists in India as it does in America (Saraswathi, 1999). Saraswathi (1999) delineates possible differences in gender and socioeconomic status, but makes the general statement that children in India experience much more continuity between childhood and adulthood. While Indian youth may experience a brief transitional or adolescent stage between childhood and adulthood, Indian youth are not allowed a lot of exploration in future careers and romantic relationships, etc. which are typical characteristics of emerging adulthood (2000). Taken together, it is argued that the transition into adulthood is much smoother in India (Saraswathi, 1999; Verma & Saraswathi, 2002). Part of this smooth transition to adulthood may be due to the socialization of Indian children.

Early on Indian boys and girls are groomed for their adult roles (Verma & Saraswathi, 2002). From childhood, girls are socialized to become mothers by participating heavily in care of siblings and household chores. Even middle class women are expected to sacrifice their career

aspirations for the goals of marriage and motherhood (Saraswathi, 1999). On the other hand, Indian boys are prepared early on for their future careers (Saraswathi, 1999; Verma & Saraswathi, 2002). In impoverished rural families sons are expected to have learned how to earn money and contribute to the family income by age 14 and 15 (Saraswathi, 1999). Although, as a whole Indian boys generally participate in longer schooling than girls. While schooling is something seen as a moratorium in other cultures, the family pressure to succeed makes this period of schooling very focused and intense for Indian students instead of a time for identity exploration (Saraswathi, 1999; Verma & Saraswathi, 2002). This clear preparation and socialization from an early age for specific adult roles leaves no time for Indians to experience a moratorium of identity development that is considered an important part of emerging adulthood (e.g., Arnett, 2000). As a result, adolescence in India may be preparation enough for people to feel they have reached adulthood by their early twenties.

Surprisingly, there was very little variation in the subjective feelings of students and non-students about their adulthood status. This may suggest that while students have not yet settled into a career or marriage like their non-student counterparts; attending school feels like a similar step to starting a career and taking on adult responsibilities. Unlike the American educational system, the Indian education is based on the European system, where college is an intense focus and preparation for one specific career and not a time for self exploration and discovery with extended time to settle on a major. A student chooses early on what they want to do and then is set into an educational track (Arnett, 2004; Saraswathi et al., 2003). Indian institutions of higher learning do not allow for changes in major (Saraswathi et al., 2003). It may be that since Indian students have made a clear decision in regards to their career and they are participating in a short

period of intense preparation rather than exploration, they may be more likely to feel they have reached adulthood.

There was, however, a great deal of variation in the subjective feelings of males and females about their adulthood status. Males were much more likely to indicate that they felt they had reached adulthood. This may be a result of gendered socialization in Indian families. Male children are given a lot more freedoms than females—they enjoy more freedom to interact with peers outside the family system and are not expected to do as many household chores (Saraswathi, 1999). Men are allowed to interact, shop, and socialize with other men in the public sphere, while women are generally restricted to the private sphere (Gupta, 2003). This may lead young men to feel more confident in themselves, more grown up, more able to develop themselves, and readier to take on their adult roles. This extra socialization outside of the home may be what makes Indian males more likely to feel like adults in their late teens and early twenties

Females in the sample were less likely to feel like adults overall—as the age of the females increased the percentage of females who felt like adults also increased. In an attempt to protect an Indian girl's chastity she is discouraged from interacting with people outside of her family and given earlier curfews (Saraswathi, 1999). In addition to these restrictions, daughters are raised to be submissive and not to assert themselves so they can become the ideal Indian wives (Saraswathi 1999; Singh 2004). The submissiveness of new Indian brides is reinforced by the age gap between husbands and wives (Singh, 2004). This type of socialization may make feeling like an adult more gradual for females as they slowly gain confidence in themselves—either through their college experiences away from home or through fulfilling their roles as wife and mother.

Surprisingly, while females were less likely to feel like adults, they scored higher on the relational maturity scale than the males in the sample. Three of the items that make up the relational scale refer to collectivistic values—accept consequences of your actions, learn always to have good control of your emotions, and become less self-oriented. Women in India are socialized to be submissive and agreeable in order to make family relationships work. For example, in a troubled Indian marriage it is the wife who is expected to resolve the conflict (Singh, 2004). In general, women are raised to sacrifice for their family relationships.

Therefore, it may be that women in the sample scored higher on relational maturity scale because of this gendered socialization. The acquisition of skills such as learning to always control one's emotion may be things they have learned from an early age through gendered socialization, but may not be the qualities that make a female feel like an adult. In the current sample, only 17% of the females were wives, and only 15% were mothers—indicating that while the women in the sample have the relational maturity to function well as a wife and mother, they have yet to do so. Feeling like an adult for women may have come with fulfilling the role of wife and mother.

#### *Criteria for Adulthood*

In general young people in India embraced criteria that reflect family capacities and relational maturity. For example, two of the top five criteria in both necessity and importance referred to “becoming capable of keeping family physically safe.” In addition, the criteria “For a man, becoming capable of supporting family financially” ranked third as far as importance. Two of the criteria that make up the construct of Relational Maturity (Badger et al., 2006) “Accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions” and “Learn always to have good control of your emotions” were among the top five criteria considered necessary for adulthood.

It is important to note that the top five criteria included both, “For a man/woman, become capable of keeping family physically safe.” These two criteria have yet to rank highly in importance or necessity ratings of criteria for adulthood among samples of young people in other countries/cultures. India is full of physical dangers. Things like regular traffic accidents in urban areas and poisonous snakes in rural areas present real physical dangers (Wolpert 1991; Brunda & Sashindhar, 2007). In addition to these physical dangers, corruption among government officials and police officers is rampant in India. The judiciary system remains untainted, but is slow with cases taking years to go to court (Shurmer-Smith 2000). Unable to depend fully on the governmental protections, citizens of India may feel it is their own responsibility to keep their families safe. In my own village I heard the story of a rape that had happened while I was there. Supposedly village members took the law in their own hands and beat the man responsible. The presence of these physical dangers and corruption in the law system may be why young people in India feel that becoming capable of keeping their family physical safe is both necessary and important when growing into adulthood especially when compared to other cultures in more developed nations.

Similar to their American and Chinese counterparts (Arnett, 1998; Nelson et al., 2004), Indian young people emphasized the criteria, “Learn always to have good control of your emotions” and “Accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions.” Arnett (2000) considers this as evidence that autonomy is an important part of growing up in America. On the other hand, Nelson et al., (2004) considered the emphasis of these criteria as a possible manifestation of the collectivistic values in Chinese culture that encourage individuals to put the needs of their family and community above their own. Specifically, Nelson and colleagues considered the criteria of “learning always to have good control of one’s emotions” as a possible

way in which Chinese conform and integrate into society and “accepting responsibility for actions” as a way of showing interest in the concerns of others. Indian culture is similar to the collectivistic nature of Chinese culture. For example, religion in India highly emphasizes the fulfilling of duty to family and society at large (Saraswathi & Ganapathy, 2005; Mascolo et al., 2004). Additionally, Indian families work as a unit, rather than a group of individuals pursuing their own life courses. There are socially prescribed life trajectories as well a hierarchy of family relationships imposed upon Indian children (Saraswathi 1999; Singh 2004). Maturing in India may involve learning to integrate into that system of relationships through gaining skills such controlling one’s own emotions as well as taking responsibility for the consequences of their actions.

Contrary to hypotheses, role transitions relating to marriage and bearing children were not highly emphasized as being necessary for adulthood. However, the family capacities scale ranked as the most important set of criteria necessary for adulthood for Indian young people. The joint family system has a long tradition in India, but due to recent economic development away from small agricultural farming extended families are breaking into nuclear families (Singh 2002b, 2004). However, the family remains central to Indian life. It follows that being able to care for a family would be central to attaining adulthood. Like American emerging adults, Indian young people recognize that becoming adult is not inherent in the marriage ceremony or act of bearing children, but instead on the internal qualities of becoming capable of running a household and caring for children.

Unlike families in America, taking care of family for Indian men includes caring for aging parents. While not in the top five criterion, 84% of the respondents indicated that “Capable of supporting parents financially” was a necessary attribute for being considered an

adult. This finding is drastically different from what is typically seen in the United States (e.g., Arnett, 1998) but similar to findings in China (e.g., Nelson et al., 2004). In collectivistic societies, respect for elders is prevalent and part of the connectedness between the individual and family that is indicative of such societies (Nelson et. al., 2004). This is certainly the case in India where the joint family system includes a place for the elderly. Many families find it important to have a son because it is their son who is expected to care for their parents in their old age (Singh 2004). Hindus consider it part of a grown son's *dharma* or duty to take care of his parents in their old age (Verma & Saraswathi, 2002). In Indian families it is expected that parents will sacrifice for their children and eventually gain the reward of having their children sacrificing to take care of them (Saraswathi, 1999). While this is not the norm in America, the expectation to care for the elderly in one's family is high in India. It follows naturally that Indian respondents would consider "capable of supporting parents financially" as an attribute necessary for adulthood.

Another manifestation of the joint-family system mentality prevalent in Indian culture is the finding that only 28% of respondents felt that "no longer living in parents' household" is necessary for adulthood. Many adult children live with their parents while going to school, even after marriage it is expected that the wife will move into the household of the husband's family (Singh, 2004). While American emerging adults often find themselves moving back into their parents' household for a short duration, it is independent living which seems to be the norm for American emerging adults (Arnett 2004). This is not the case in Indian society where adult children are expected to stay closely connected to their family of origin. Therefore, it is not surprising that few Indian respondents felt that independent living was necessary to adulthood status.



It is interesting to note that being allowed to drink alcohol and smoke were the lowest ranked criteria necessary for adulthood, with only 11.8% and 9.6% responding “yes” to the question of whether these are necessary for adulthood. Items such as avoid drunk driving, avoid illegal drugs, and avoid becoming drunk received a noteworthy amount of “yes” responses. The Indian constitution includes a commitment to the prohibition of alcohol; however it leaves regulation and law making surrounding the legality of drinking to the individual states. Tamil Nadu does not prohibit alcohol use, but there is a general stigma against alcohol use in all of India (Bengal, 2005). Conversely, the typical American college experience involves some experimentation with substances like alcohol (Arnett, 2004b). The stigma is not nearly as strong against the proper use of such substances in America. This stigma against such substances in India has led very few Indian young people to consider being allowed to smoke or drink to be a part of adulthood.

#### *Age of Possibilities*

As hypothesized, in the aggregate the majority of Indian young people were optimistic about their futures. Results showed that there is a general sense of optimism for Indian young people. When asked about quality of life, financial well-being, career achievements, and personal relationships over 60% of the participants responded that they think they will do better than their parents. India’s economy has been growing rapidly through globalization, the discrimination based on caste and gender has lessened, and through a form of affirmative action the government is trying to make education more available (Fuller 2003; Singh, 2002a; Chitnis, 2003). There is certainly room for development and growth, but now is a hopeful time to be in India.

However, when separated by student status, results showed that students are significantly more optimistic than non-students, with the biggest difference being in relation to career achievements. Of the students, 89% thought that their career achievements in adulthood are likely to be better than their parents, while only 45% of the non-students felt the same way. This finding is very different from the studies done with American emerging adults who are highly optimistic about their own futures regardless of their socioeconomic status (Arnett, 2000b; Eskilson & Wiley, 1999). Indian culture is very different from American culture in two distinct ways that may affect the optimism of young people: the educational deprivation in rural areas of India is markedly higher than that in developed nations and the caste system still plays a very salient part in the identity of many rural Indians.

Non-students were less likely to feel their quality of life, financial well-being, career achievements, and personal relationships would be better than their parents. The non-students in this sample came solely from rural areas. Rural areas in India tend to be low in literacy rates in comparison to those in urban areas. For example, 59% of people living in rural areas are literate compared to 80% of people living in urban areas (2001 Census). Those in rural areas who cannot afford to send their children to private schools located in the cities, send their children to government run schools in the area that suffer from inadequate facilities that are poorly equipped, poorly trained teachers who are not held accountable, and stultifying teaching methods (Dreze, 2003; Saraswathi, et al., 2003). Of those children who attend school, the dropout rates incline steeply around grade eight, which is one of the most critical stages for furthering future life chances (Saraswathi et al., 2003). Of the non-students in the sample 75% did not complete 12<sup>th</sup> grade, of those who did not complete the American equivalent of high school 69% dropped out of school before 10<sup>th</sup> grade.

Without education, the non-student portion of this Indian sample is at a much bigger disadvantage than emerging adults from low socioeconomic statuses in places such as America, where they generally have at least some high school education, and usually have completed high school. As Dreze (2003) states this burden of educational deprivation in India is many-sided. Without education, Indian people have fewer employment opportunities, suffer from more health problems, become susceptible to corruption and harassment, and are generally unable to participate effectively in the modern economy and society (Dreze, 2003). Lack of education not only affects one's earning capacity, but other aspects of life as well. This lack of education may be a major factor as to why these non-students are much less optimistic about their futures.

Another considerable factor that may be affecting the lower rates of optimism among non-students is caste. The hierarchal structure of the caste system is breaking down in the face of economic changes—one's caste does not necessarily dictate their economic class as it once did. However, progress is slow in the rural villages, where caste remains a salient feature of daily life. Caste distinctions are clearly experienced through the layout of the village—houses of those belonging to a certain caste are grouped together and spatially separated from other castes. Public spaces, such as water taps and temples, are acknowledged as belonging to certain castes in the village. In this way caste is a salient part of a person's social and individual identity in a village (Fuller, 2003). Caste provides continuity from one generation to the next, which limits the amount of progress available to those young people settled in a rural Indian village.

Caste affects many aspects of one's life—whom one is allowed to marry, what kind of job one has, and with whom one associates (Kluck, 1985; Fuller, 2003). This is especially true in rural areas where everyone knows everyone else's caste standing and interacts with them accordingly. Those in rural areas who belong to castes of traditional occupations rarely change

their occupation (Fuller, 2003). While lower castes try to adopt the habits and rituals of higher castes, social mobility within one generation is limited (Kluck, 1985). It follows that non-students in rural areas are most likely planning to live a life similar to their parents since they are unable to change these caste-related aspects of their life and have no education to further their career options. As a result non-students in the sample tended to be less optimistic about their futures in comparison to those attending college.

In contrast those who are educated were very optimistic about their futures in relation to their parent's past. For example, 80% of students felt their quality of life would be better than their parents and 84% of students felt their financial well-being would be better than their parents. Those families who are able to afford education for their children sometimes sacrifice a great deal to do so—these children recognize that with their further education they will be able to do much better economically than their parents. A large portion (68%) of the fathers of the students in the sample did not go to college—54% of the students' fathers dropped out of school before 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The numbers are much higher for the mothers of these college students—84% of the mothers of college students did not go to college themselves and 66% dropped out before 12<sup>th</sup> standard. Unlike their parents, these students have been trained in higher education with skills that will help them participate in the global market. Globalization has changed the face of India's economy—through outsourcing of jobs many opportunities are made available to these college educated young people in India that were not available to their parents.

In contrast to those living in rural areas, educated students who tend to migrate to larger cities, such as Chennai and Bengaluru, for their jobs are able to escape the constraints of caste. All modern sectors of the economy have become caste-free, in that any qualified members no matter their caste are able to take up these jobs (Fuller 2003). Cloaked in anonymity indicative

of cities, urbanite Indians are also able to escape the strict social identity associated with caste—instead their income becomes the new marker of their class in urban areas (Gupta, 2003). Being part of a higher economic class will allow these young people to consume more in this market, associate socially with those of various castes through work, and overall improve their lives. While they tend to still marry someone within their own caste, that person is also of similar economic background (Fuller, 2003). So, not only are educated Indians able to escape many of the caste restrictions of the past, but are also able to increase their class position through earning higher incomes. As it follows, the students in this sample were much more optimistic about their futures especially in comparison to those non-students.

Contrary to hypotheses, optimism levels of males and females were not significantly different. It was hypothesized that with the past suppression of women, women in this young generation would be more hopeful about their own futures in relation to their mothers' past. While women are very optimistic about their futures, they do not appear to be any more or less optimistic than their male counterparts. Women who are educated will most likely marry men of the same caste with similar educational achievements (Fuller, 2003). Therefore, it follows that female students would be just as optimistic about their futures as male students. On the other hand, non-student females living in rural areas face the same limitations to social mobility because of caste distinctions and educational deprivation as non student males. It follows that the recognition of these social limitations for males and females would lead to similar optimism levels. Optimism among Indian young people does not vary based on gender. Men are just as hopeful for their futures as women.

Results showed one gender and student status interaction was found for optimism regarding career achievements. While student males were more optimistic than non student

males when it came to career achievements, female students were significantly more optimistic about their future career achievements. Generally women in India are discouraged from working outside of the home (Singh 2002a). However, as women engage in college education it appears through this data they recognize that they are being given skills that could be useful to securing respectable employment. Rural women who are economically forced to work outside of the home generally become laborers (Shurmer-Smith, 2000). Possibly this is what led the female non-students from rural areas to be much less optimistic about their career achievements than the female college students in the sample.

#### *Comparison of Perceived Adults and Emerging Adults*

Given the high rates of perceived adults in this sample, analyses were conducted to better understand the factors that may be related with some young people feeling like an adult compared to those who do not yet feel like an adult. Work done in the United States has shown that differences in the perception of oneself as an adult or not could be seen in the number of criteria individuals believe they had achieved (Nelson & Barry, 2004). Therefore, a comparison was done of achieved criteria of perceived adults (those who responded “yes” they felt like adults) and emerging adults (those who responded “no” or “in some ways yes and in some ways no” to the question about whether they felt like adults). Findings showed that those who had achieved a higher score on the family capacities scale (i.e. “have become capable of caring for children” and “have become capable of running a household”) were more likely to consider themselves adults.

When comparing perceived adults and emerging adults on the individual items of achieved criteria, some items were statistically significant. Perceived adults were more likely to

be capable of supporting a family financially, to be capable of running a household, to be financially independent from their parents, and to have reached the age 21.

From these results it seems becoming capable of fulfilling family responsibilities, specifically having enough money to be financially independent from parents, becoming capable of supporting a family financially and becoming capable of running a household, made an Indian young person feel like an adult. It is interesting that similar to emerging adults in America the actual role transition of marriage and parenthood do not make one feel like an adult in India. Instead it is the acquisition of internal qualities that leads one to feel like an adult in America, and apparently in India as well (Arnett 2004b). Family is central to Indian life (Singh 2004). Marriage and parenthood are a part of every socially prescribed trajectory of a young Indian (Saraswathi, 1999). While being married did not make Indians in this sample feel like adults, having the internal skills necessary to fulfill those future family roles did. Gaining financial independence from parents, becoming capable of financially providing for family and becoming capable of running a household are indiscernible qualities that once achieved seemed to make Indians feel like adults.

#### *Emerging Adulthood in India*

In general, the findings from the present study help provide one of the first empirical glimpses into the lives of 18-25 year olds in India. Studies have been conducted in numerous cultures and countries (e.g. in Argentina, Facio & Miccoci, 2003; China, Nelson et al., 2004; and in Romania, Nelson, 2009) in an attempt to examine how culture may influence the period of the lifespan now commonly referred to as emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). Results of the current study suggest that aspects of Indian culture (e.g., Hinduism, caste, gendered socialization) and economic changes may be influencing the lives of young people in India. Specifically, the

findings showed that the majority of Indians felt they had achieved adulthood, which is possibly due to the socialization of Indian children that provides continuity between childhood and adulthood. Males were much more likely than females to feel they had achieved adulthood, a possible manifestation of gendered socialization in India. The criteria Indian young people found necessary for adulthood also reflected their culture. An emphasis on keeping family physically safe, becoming capable of caring for ageing parents, as well as other collectivistic criteria correspond with the Indian cultural context which highly values family relationships and Hinduism which emphasizes the fulfilling of one's duty. Overall, optimism was high for this sample, a finding similar to other studies (e.g. Nelson et al., 2004; Arnett 1999). However, when broken down by student status, optimism levels varied with non-students being much less optimistic than the students. It seems that the Indian context which has a caste system as well as extreme educational inequities effects how the optimism of young people is experienced. These findings suggest that Indian culture makes the transition into adulthood different from cultures previously studied.

#### *Reflections on the Theory of Emerging Adulthood*

Considering that the theory of emerging adulthood was unable to successfully frame the transition to adulthood in this sample, the findings of this study suggest that emerging adulthood may not be a universal period of human development. One way to address the inconsistencies between the expectations of the theory of emerging adulthood and the findings of this study is to examine how the current data suggest a need to reexamine some of the assumptions of the theory. For example, according to the theory of emerging adulthood all young people in their early twenties are optimistic about their own futures. The data in this study suggest that non-student Indians were significantly less optimistic than students. The discussion of this finding



refers to cultural differences between students and non-students as responsible for the difference in optimism levels. However, it may be more helpful to look at these factors, namely the educational system in India, as markers of structural differences rather than cultural differences.

The structure of the educational system in India reinforces the economic disparity between the wealthy and the impoverished. The quality of public schooling in India is poor, which means those who can afford it send their children to higher quality private schools. While colleges do participate in a form of affirmative action for lower castes, those applicants who come from higher income low caste families are able to take advantage of the opportunities made available to their caste. Traditional Indian culture is most likely prevalent in the lives of both student and non-student, but the non-students are struggling in an educational structure that rewards those with higher income levels. Thus, the non-students in this sample feel significantly less optimistic than students about their futures. This differentiation of cultural influences and structural influences is difficult in some contexts, however it may be helpful to consider when examining emerging adulthood in the multicultural context.

Taking into consideration that the theory of emerging adulthood was unable to predict the areas of emerging adulthood studied in India suggests that the theory may be incomplete. Arnett (2004) indicates that emerging adulthood varies in different countries due to cultural influences. However, drawing from a sociological perspective, I suggest that both cultural and structural influences affect the transition into adulthood in America as well as other countries. The example of how the structural aspects of the educational system in India influences the optimism levels is one example of how using the lens of structural and cultural influences can be helpful. Arnett tends to use the term culture in a broad manner, whereas research on emerging adulthood could benefit by distinguishing cultural and structural perspectives. Whereas cultural approaches

focus on attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviors of people, structural approaches address institutional factors that affect the life course, such as differential access to educational and occupational institutions. Given India's traditionally stratified society, it is clear that addressing both cultural and structural influences when studying emerging adulthood is essential for future research. My study merely begins this approach to examining the life course in India.

### *Limitations*

While there are valuable findings in this study, there are also limitations to this study. One limitation of the current study was the lack of diversity in the sample. This study was conducted in colleges and villages in and around Coimbatore, a city located in a state known for its conservative culture even in India (Grihault, 2003). Indian society is vast, diverse, and complex (Singh, 2004). As a result generalizations to Indian society as a whole should be made with caution. Furthermore, the sampling method did not include non-students living in urban areas. Those youth who live in cities who are not participating in higher education most likely have a different experience from their rural counterparts—the urban poor face poverty with different challenges, i.e. corrupt employers, looser kin networks, and worse sanitation conditions (Shurmer-Smith 2000). The sample in this study cannot be generalized to all people in India. More work is needed both in various geographical regions in India as well as within various social settings in the country.

In addition to these limitations, the sample of college students came from liberal arts colleges only. Those majoring in professional programs like information technology or engineering were not sampled, yet this makes up a large portion of the educated Indian youth. As indicated in other scholarly pieces, the demands of professional programs in Indian colleges do not allow for the luxury of a psycho-social moratorium made available to students in liberal

arts and commerce programs where peer activities are more common (Saraswathi, 1999). As a result, the students in this sample do not represent all educated young people in India. Without this break, students in professional programs may feel differently about adulthood than the arts and commerce students in this sample. Future research should include students from both professional colleges and arts and science colleges for greater understanding of the role college plays in the transition into adulthood in India.

Another limitation is the small size of the non-student sample relative to the student sample. The rural sample was collected utilizing connections made through the NGO Shanti Ashram, an organization that has been doing development work in those villages for years. While we were able to capitalize on the relationships of trust already in place, there is a great deal of diversity between Indian villages—including level of economic development and women empowerment. The generalizing of these findings should be judicious. Ideally, more research should be done with a larger sample of young people from rural areas.

An additional limitation is that caste was not included in the analysis. While the caste system is breaking down, caste remains a salient part of the identity of Indians, particularly those living in rural areas (Fuller, 2003). Caste lines do not necessarily follow economic class distinctions; some students of low caste were most likely able to attend college due to the government's affirmative action programs to reserve seats for those of low caste. Their experience of college may be a very different experience than those who come from middle or upper castes. As mentioned earlier, caste heavily dictates the experience of those living in rural areas. In both the rural and urban setting one's caste may change the experience of growing into adulthood in India. Therefore, future research should examine caste since it may provide a more insightful understanding of the transition into adulthood for Indians.

Finally, translation issues may limit the ability to generalize the data. It was difficult to find an appropriate term for “adult” in Tamil. Phrases suggested for “adult” in Tamil roughly translated to “period of self decision taking,” “bride/groom,” or “youngster.” The Tamil linguist settled on the Tamil word *mudir* meaning “mature adult.” Unfortunately, this word implies more of an elderly adult rather than a mature young adult. Therefore, the written Tamil questionnaires given to college students were removed from the sample in order to maintain validity. While the translators verbally administering the questionnaire to the rural sample were able to communicate correctly the concept of “adult” and gather valid data, the linguistic void for an appropriate term for “adult” is recognized as a limitation to this study. Future research should look into the linguistic constructs for the concept “adult.” The Tamil words suggested as options for the word “adult” were culturally loaded, for example “period of self decision taking” implied that becoming an adult included making decisions without the assistance of parents. Another term suggested roughly translated into “bride/groom” but actually referred to the stage when a person is ready for an arranged marriage—indicating that being ready for the family role of husband or wife is significant to becoming an adult in India. This linguistic confusion regarding the term “adult” is in of itself a significant finding and should be studied further in future research.

### *Summary*

Despite its limitations, this study provides one of the first glimpses into the transition into adulthood in India. The results of this study are important because they contribute to a greater understanding of how young people in a non-Western majority culture conceptualize the transition to adulthood. Consequently, the findings also provide a greater insight into the role culture plays in emerging adulthood in general. The findings seem to support the view that

emerging adulthood is culturally constructed. While direct comparisons between young people in India and emerging adults in the United States were not done in this study, when these findings are examined in light of existing research on emerging adulthood in Western culture, it appears that Indian young people experience the years between 18 and 26 differently because of their unique beliefs and values. Indian young people were more likely to feel like they had reached adulthood. They emphasized collectivistic criteria as well as criteria related to being capable of fulfilling family roles as criteria necessary for adulthood. Unlike studies done in the United States, a difference in optimism levels was found among college students and non college students. These findings indicate that emerging adulthood as defined in previous research may not exist in India as it does in other countries.

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## Appendix A: Tables

Table 1

*Responses to the question “Do you think you have reached adulthood?” by student status and gender*

	Total	Student	Non Student	Male	Female
Yes	60.5	61.0	59.0	71.2	49.8
No	13.5	8.3	30.0	11.1	15.9
In some respects yes, in some respects no.	26.0	30.8	11.0	17.8	34.3

Table 2

*Percentage of Participants responding “Yes” to “Is this criteria necessary for adulthood? by student status*

Criteria	All	Students	Non Students
For a man, become capable of keeping family physically safe	95	95	94
Accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions	92	92	91
Learn always to have good control of your emotions	92	92	89
Drive an automobile safely and close to the speed limit	89	92	78
For a woman, become capable of keeping family physically safe	89	90	77
Avoid drunk driving	88	93	74
For a man, become capable of running a household	88	87	89
For a man, become capable of supporting a family financially	88	92	73
For a woman, become capable of running a household	87	87	89
Avoid use of profanity/vulgar language	87	88	82
For a man, become capable of caring for children	86	86	85
Avoid illegal drugs	85	93	59
Establish a relationship with parents as an equal adult	84	86	79
Capable of supporting parents financially	84	86	78
For a woman, become capable of caring for children	84	88	72
Become less self-oriented, develop greater consideration for others	83	80	92
Avoid committing petty crimes like vandalism and shoplifting	82	83	77
Have no more than one sexual partner	81	79	88
For a woman, become biologically capable of bearing children	80	87	57
Avoid becoming drunk	79	86	57
For a man, become biologically capable of fathering children	78	85	58
For a woman, become capable of supporting a family financially	78	82	65
Committed to long-term love relationship	71	66	86
Reached age 18	68	77	39
Have obtained license and can drive an automobile	68	74	50
Decided on personal beliefs/values independently of parents/other influences	66	74	44
Reached age 21	66	71	48
Settled into a long-term career	65	67	60
Grow to full height	64	68	51
Financially independent from parents	62	63	58
Purchased a house	58	62	48
Finished with education	55	52	64
Be employed full-time	52	52	50
Have at least one child	48	46	53
Not deeply tied to parents emotionally	44	46	39
Use contraception if sexually active and not trying to conceive a child	40	43	29
Married	37	33	51
No longer living in parents' household	28	32	14
For a man, completed military service	26	27	25
Have had sexual intercourse	24	24	25
Allowed to drink alcohol	12	14	6
Allowed to smoke cigarettes	10	9	11



Table 3

*Percentage of Participants responding “Yes” to “Is this criteria necessary for adulthood?” by gender*

Criteria	All	Male	Female
For a man, become capable of keeping family physically safe	95	96	94
Accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions	92	90	94
Learn always to have good control of your emotions	92	87	96
Drive an automobile safely and close to the speed limit	89	88	90
For a woman, become capable of keeping family physically safe	89	84	94
Avoid drunk driving	88	89	88
For a man, become capable of running a household	88	85	91
For a man, become capable of supporting a family financially	88	90	85
For a woman, become capable of running a household	87	83	92
Avoid use of profanity/vulgar language	87	86	87
For a man, become capable of caring for children	86	87	84
Avoid illegal drugs	85	84	86
Establish a relationship with parents as an equal adult	84	87	82
Capable of supporting parents financially	84	87	82
For a woman, become capable of caring for children	84	80	87
Become less self-oriented, develop greater consideration for others	83	88	78
Avoid committing petty crimes like vandalism and shoplifting	82	76	87
Have no more than one sexual partner	81	82	81
For a woman, become biologically capable of bearing children	80	80	79
Avoid becoming drunk	79	76	81
For a man, become biologically capable of fathering children	78	81	75
For a woman, become capable of supporting a family financially	78	67	88
Committed to long-term love relationship	71	71	71
Reached age 18	68	77	60
Have obtained license and can drive an automobile	68	68	68
Decided on personal beliefs/values independently of parents/other influences	66	69	64
Reached age 21	66	68	63
Settled into a long-term career	65	70	61
Grow to full height	64	65	63
Financially independent from parents	62	64	59
Purchased a house	58	61	56
Finished with education	55	56	55
Be employed full-time	52	52	51
Have at least one child	48	51	45
Not deeply tied to parents emotionally	44	44	44
Use contraception if sexually active and not trying to conceive a child	40	37	42
Married	37	36	38
No longer living in parents' household	28	23	33
For a man, completed military service	26	24	29
Have had sexual intercourse	24	30	19
Allowed to drink alcohol	12	15	9
Allowed to smoke cigarettes	10	12	7

Table 4

*Means of Students responding to the importance of the criteria in relation to adulthood*

Criteria	All	Male	Female
Avoid drunk driving	3.69	3.74	3.64
For a man, become capable of keeping family physically safe	3.68	3.64	3.73
For a man, become capable of supporting a family financially	3.59	3.48	3.69
For a woman, become capable of keeping family physically safe	3.59	3.46	3.71
Learn always to have good control of your emotions	3.59	3.45	3.72
Drive an automobile safely and close to the speed limit	3.57	3.45	3.69
For a woman, become capable of caring for children	3.56	3.41	3.70
Capable of supporting parents financially	3.49	3.37	3.61
Settled into a long-term career	3.47	3.46	3.48
Finished with education	3.44	3.40	3.47
For a man, become capable of running a household	3.44	3.42	3.47
Establish a relationship with parents as an equal adult	3.42	3.46	3.39
Accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions	3.42	3.35	3.50
Avoid illegal drugs	3.42	3.28	3.54
For a woman, become capable of running a household	3.39	3.19	3.56
Avoid committing petty crimes like vandalism and shoplifting	3.37	3.29	3.45
Avoid becoming drunk	3.34	3.21	3.47
Avoid use of profanity/vulgar language	3.34	3.18	3.49
Have no more than one sexual partner	3.31	3.23	3.39
For a woman, become biologically capable of bearing children	3.32	3.24	3.39
For a man, become capable of caring for children	3.30	3.22	3.39
Have obtained license and can drive an automobile	3.30	3.35	3.25
Become less self-oriented, develop greater consideration for others	3.25	3.29	3.20
Purchased a house	3.24	3.29	3.19
For a woman, become capable of supporting a family financially	3.23	3.00	3.42
For a man, become biologically capable of fathering children	3.22	3.23	3.21
Be employed full-time	3.20	3.24	3.17
Reached age 21	3.18	3.11	3.26
Reached age 18	3.13	3.22	3.05
Decided on personal beliefs/values independently of parents/other influences	3.12	3.12	3.12
Financially independent from parents	3.05	3.03	3.07
Committed to long-term love relationship	3.01	2.92	3.09
Grow to full height	2.96	3.07	2.85
Have at least one child	2.95	3.01	2.89
Not deeply tied to parents emotionally	2.93	3.04	2.82
Married	2.91	2.97	2.86
No longer living in parents' household	2.84	2.87	2.81
Use contraception if sexually active and not trying to conceive a child	2.79	2.85	2.71
Allowed to drink alcohol	2.52	2.68	2.37
Allowed to smoke cigarettes	2.51	2.65	2.38
For a man, completed military service	2.46	2.69	2.22
Have had sexual intercourse	2.39	2.57	2.18

Table 5

*List of criteria for adulthood comprising each construct used in analyses*

Scale Name	Items in Scale
Role Transitions	Financially independent from parents No longer living in parents household Finish education Married Have at least one child Settle into a long-term career Purchase a house
Norm Compliance	Avoid becoming drunk Avoid illegal drugs Have no more than one sexual partner Drive safely and close to the speed limit Avoid use of profanity/vulgar language Use contraception if sexually active and not trying to conceive a child Avoid drunk driving Avoid committing petty crimes like vandalism and shoplifting
Biological/Age Related Transitions	Reach age 18 Reach age 21 Grow to full height If a woman, become biologically capable of bearing children If a man, become biologically capable of fathering children Have obtained license and can drive an automobile Have had sexual intercourse Allowed to drink alcohol Allowed to smoke cigarettes
Family Capacities	If a woman, become capable of caring for children If a woman, become capable of supporting a family financially If a man, become capable of caring for children If a man, become capable of supporting a family financially If a man, become capable of keeping family physically safe If a woman, become capable of keeping family physically safe
Relational Maturity	Accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions Establish a relationship with parents as an equal adult Learn always to have good control of your emotions Become less self oriented, develop greater consideration for others

Table 6

*Means and standard deviations of scales by gender (students only)*

Scale Name	Total		Males		Females	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Family Capacities	3.45	.53	3.31	.57	3.57	.46
Relational Maturity	3.42	.53	3.39	.59	3.45	.46
Norm Compliance	3.34	.62	3.27	.65	3.42	.58
Role Transitions	3.11	.63	3.11	.64	3.11	.63
Bio/Age Transitions	2.89	.64	2.95	.65	2.81	.62

Table 7

*Participants' comparison of their future lives in relation to their parents' lives (in percentages)*

	Overall		
	Better	Worse	Same
Quality of Life	74	5	21
Financial Well-Being	77	8	15
Career Achievements	79	8	13
Personal Relationships	63	12	25

Table 8

*Participants' comparison of their future lives in relation to their parents' lives (in percentages)*

*by student status*

	Student			Non-Student		
	Better	Worse	Same	Better	Worse	Same
Quality of Life	80	4	15	53	8	39
Financial Well-Being	84	6	11	57	15	28
Career Achievements	89	4	8	45	22	33
Personal Relationships	70	12	18	42	10	48

Table 9

*Participants' comparison of their future lives in relation to their parents' lives (in percentages)*

*by gender*

	Males			Females		
	Better	Worse	Same	Better	Worse	Same
Quality of Life	78	7	15	71	4	26
Financial Well-Being	75	9	17	80	8	13
Career Achievements	78	9	13	79	7	14
Personal Relationships	67	13	21	60	10	29

Table 10

*Mean scores on optimism scales by student status*

	Total		Students		Non Students	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Overall Optimism	.65	.42	.74	.37	.35	.47
Quality of Life	.69	.57	.76	.53	.45	.64
Financial Well-Being	.69	.61	.78	.54	.42	.74
Career Achievements	.70	.61	.85	.46	.23	.79
Personal Relationships	.52	.61	.58	.70	.32	.65



Table 11

*Mean Scores on career achievements optimism scale by gender and student status*

	Student		Non-Student	
	M	SD	M	SD
Male	.71	.62	.50	.65
Female	.84	.45	.34	.82

Table 12

*List of achieved criteria for adulthood comprising each construct used in analyses*

Scale Name	Items in Scale
Achieved Role Transitions	Financially independent from parents No longer living in parents household Finished with education Married Have at least one child Settle into a long-term career Have purchased a house
Achieved Norm Compliance	Avoid becoming drunk Avoid illegal drugs Have no more than one sexual partner Drive safely and close to the speed limit Avoid use of profanity/vulgar language Use contraception if sexually active and not trying to conceive a child Avoid drunk driving Avoid committing petty crimes like vandalism and shoplifting
Achieved Biological/Age Related Transitions	Reached age 21 Have become biologically capable of producing children Have obtained license and can drive an automobile Have had sexual intercourse
Achieved Family Capacities	Have become capable of caring for children Have become capable of supporting a family financially Have become capable of running a household Have become capable of keeping family physically safe
Achieved Relational Maturity	Accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions Have established a relationship with parents as an equal adult Have learned always to have good control of your emotions Have become less self oriented, developed greater consideration for others

Appendix B: Figures

Figure 1

*Perceived adulthood status in response to the question, “Do you think you have reached adulthood?” by age*

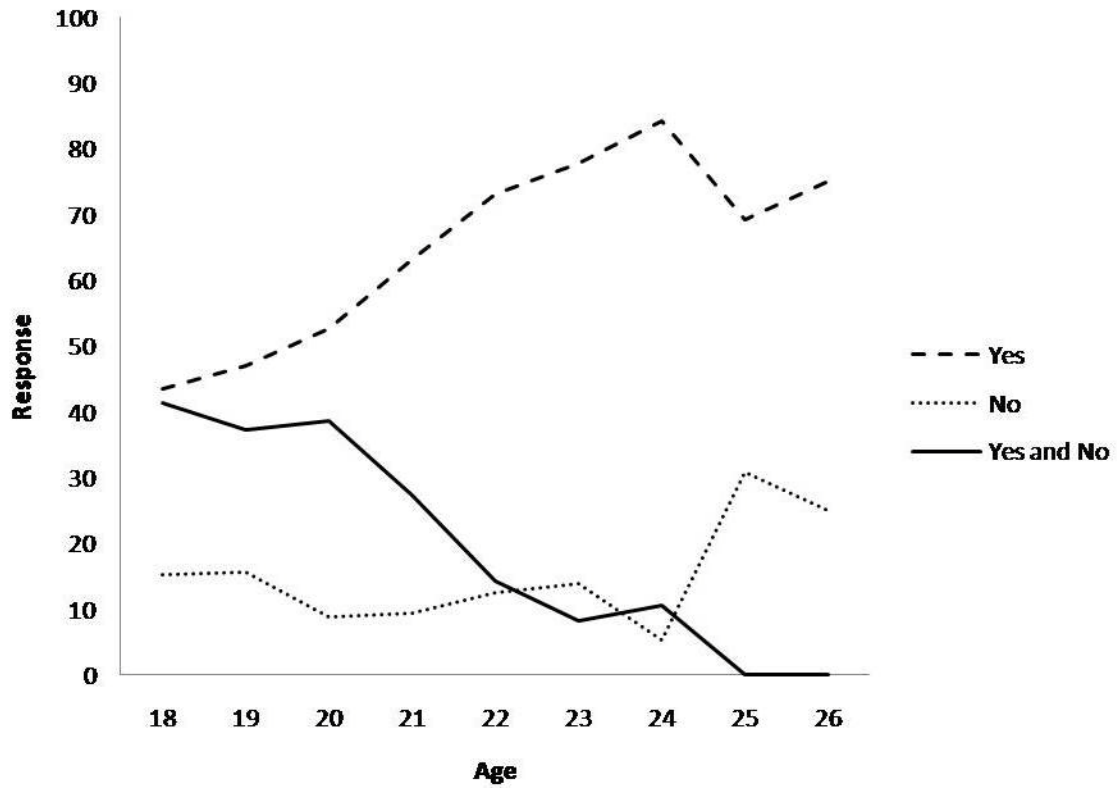


Figure 2

*Perceived adulthood status by age and student status: “Yes” Responses to the question, “Do you think you have reached adulthood?”*

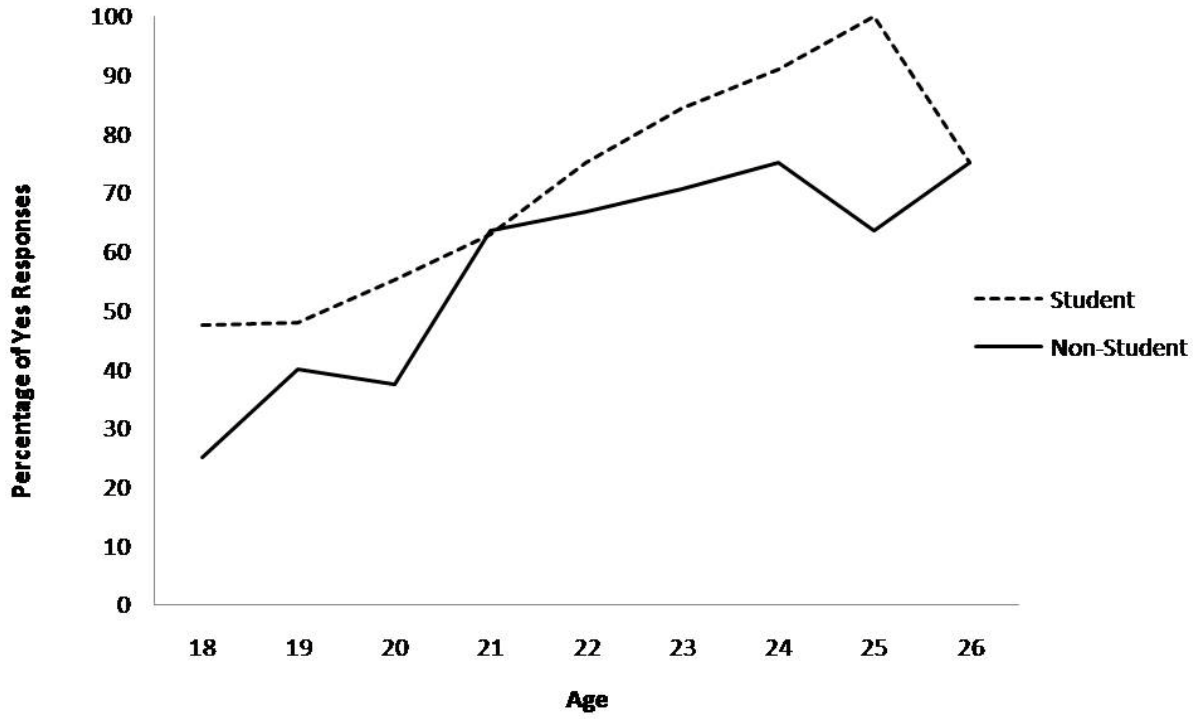


Figure 3

*Perceived adulthood status by age and gender: “Yes” Responses to the question, “Do you think you have reached adulthood?”*

