

Perceptions of Emerging Adulthood: A Study With Italian and Japanese University Students and Young Workers

Emerging Adulthood
2015, Vol. 3(4) 229-243
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Study of Emerging Adulthood
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DOI: 10.1177/2167696815569848
ea.sagepub.com



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Abstract

In this study, we sought to compare perceptions of emerging adulthood of Italian and Japanese youth and we examined, within each national sample, gender and occupational status (students vs. workers) differences on these perceptions. Participants were 2,472 emerging adults (1,513 Italian and 959 Japanese) of age 18–30 (50.8% females; 57.1% university students and 42.9% workers). Findings indicated measurement invariance of the Inventory of Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (IDEA-short form) across national groups and across gender and occupational groups within each national sample. Results of latent mean comparisons indicated that Japanese participants scored higher than Italian respondents on dimensions of emerging adulthood with the largest difference being detected on perception of possibilities. Further, within each nation, small gender differences and small to moderate occupational differences in perceptions of emerging adulthood were detected. Overall, this study highlighted that perceptions of emerging adulthood vary across and within national groups.

Keywords

emerging adulthood, Italy, Japan, gender, students, workers

Arnett (2000a) proposed *emerging adulthood* as a conception of development for the period from the late teens through the 20s. He argued that a main factor that has led to emerging adulthood as a distinct developmental period is the progressive transformation from an industrial to an information-based economy (Arnett, 2006a). This change facilitated an increase in the need for postsecondary education and, consequently, deferral of transitions to job, marriage, and parenthood (Tanner & Arnett, 2009).

Currently, there is an ongoing debate on the utility of the notion of emerging adulthood and two theoretical perspectives have been proposed (Arnett, Kloep, Hendry, & Tanner, 2011). Arnett's theory (2000a, 2004) conceptualized emerging adulthood as a new life stage distinct from adolescence and adulthood. Recognizing heterogeneity in emerging adult experiences, Arnett (2006b) proposed there is not a unique emerging adulthood, rather it is necessary to account for many emerging adulthoods. This means that "emerging adults around the world share demographic similarities, in that they wait until at least their late 20s to enter stable adult roles, and they may share developmental similarities such as focusing on identity explorations. However, their experiences are likely to vary by cultural context, educational attainment, and social class" (Arnett et al., 2011, p. 7). As a consequence of this, Arnett (2006b) pointed to the importance of exploring this

variation in emerging adult experiences as a priority for the field of emerging adulthood.

Arnett's theory has been largely embraced in different research fields, but, at the same time, it has received its share of criticism. In particular, Hendry and Kloep (2007; Kloep & Hendry, 2011) proposed a systematic perspective as a theoretical framework for analyzing the changing life course of individuals. Doing so, they focused on emerging adulthood as a process rather than as a stage. Specifically, they argued about the uselessness of stage theories, especially when these conceptualizations apply only to a minority of individuals. In their perspective, Arnett's theory of emerging adulthood applies only to affluent middle-class young people who get university

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education and can count on parental financial support to experience personal freedom and leisure during their 20s and not to the working-class and lower class young people who have fewer options (Kloep & Hendry, 2011).

In the present study, we aimed at contributing to this debate by exploring cultural, gender, and occupational variations in perceptions of emerging adulthood. In fact, since postponement of the transition to adulthood is not a universal phenomenon, rather it is socially and culturally embedded, perceptions of this period might vary across cultural contexts and, within each context, across various groups defined on the basis of demographic variables such as gender and occupation. In line with these considerations, the purpose of the present study was to examine, within the theoretical framework provided by Arnett (2004), the perceptions of Italian and Japanese emerging adults with a specific focus, within each national group, on gender and occupational differences (university students vs. young workers).

Italy and Japan were chosen as optimal contexts for this study for two main reasons. First, youth in both countries share demographic (a marked postponement of the transition to adulthood; e.g., Scabini, Marta, & Lanz, 2006, for the Italian situation; Rosenberger, 2007; Takahashi & Takeuchi, 2007 for the Japanese context) and developmental (a focus on identity formation; e.g., Crocetti, Rabaglietti, & Sica, 2012, and Sugimura & Mizokami, 2012, for the Italian and Japanese contexts, respectively) similarities that suggest that they undergo a period of emerging adulthood (for this reason, we used Arnett's theory as the conceptual foundation for this study). Second, despite these similarities, the cultural, educational, and occupational systems of these two nations differ widely (as we will discuss later). Thus, although the notion of emerging adulthood may apply in both nations, the ways in which Italian and Japanese youth perceive this period may differ between and within countries.

Research on Perceptions of Emerging Adulthood Conducted Around the World

Arnett (2004), on the basis of his qualitative research conducted with American youth, described five features typical of emerging adulthood. First, emerging adulthood is the age of *identity exploration*, of trying out various possibilities, especially in love and work, before enacting firm adult commitments. Second, emerging adulthood is the age of *instability*, when the possibility to explore a large array of alternatives can be exciting, providing individuals with a unique opportunity for experimenting with various roles and possibilities but, at the same time, might be distressing and confusing due to the lack of stability. Third, emerging adulthood is a *self-focused* period of the life stage in which individuals are no longer subject to many of the restrictions of adolescence, mainly those imposed by parents and high school attendance, and they are free from obligations and responsibilities typical of adulthood (e.g., spouse, employer, and children). Fourth, emerging adulthood is the age of *feeling in between* because the majority of

emerging adults feel they are no longer adolescents but not yet fully adults. Finally, emerging adulthood is the age of *possibilities*, in which people tend to view their personal futures optimistically, even amid the difficult economic conditions challenging their generation as a whole (Arnett, 2000b).

Building upon Arnett's (2004) work, Reifman, Arnett, and Colwell (2007) developed the Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (IDEA), a self-report instrument aimed at measuring the extent to which individuals perceive emerging adulthood as a period of identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in between, and possibilities. Research conducted with this instrument in the United States (Reifman et al., 2007) showed that emerging adults scored higher on the IDEA dimensions than both younger (i.e., adolescents) and older (i.e., adults) groups.

Arnett's theory of emerging adulthood and its related measurement (i.e., the IDEA) has been applied in other cultural contexts including European (Austria: Sirsch, Dreher, Mayr, & Willinger, 2009; Czech Republic: Macek, Bejček, & Vaníčková, 2007; Romania: Negru, 2012; Spain: Fierro Arias & Moreno Hernandez, 2007), Central American (Mexico: Fierro Arias & Moreno Hernandez, 2007), and South American (Argentina: Facio, Resett, Micocci, & Mistrorigo, 2007) nations. Overall, these studies indicated that emerging adults from different cultural contexts reported higher scores on the features of possibilities, identity exploration, feeling in between, and self-focus and lower scores on the feature of instability. Furthermore, dimensions of emerging adulthood were all positively interrelated (e.g., Reifman et al., 2007). So far, there is a dearth of studies that directly compare how the perceptions of emerging adulthood differ between countries. It is of utmost importance to focus on this issue, considering the similarities and differences in the features of transition to adulthood across various cultural contexts.

Perceptions of Emerging Adulthood in Italian and Japanese Youth

A progressive delay in the transition to adulthood is not a recent phenomenon in either Italy or Japan. In Italy, researchers (e.g., Scabini & Donati, 1988) started to study antecedents, correlates, and consequences of this postponement of the transition to adulthood in the late 1980s. More recently, the Italian demographer Livi Bacci (2008) described a "delay syndrome," as characterized by the following five features: prolongation of education, deferral of entry into the job market and high rates of unemployment, tendency to remain in the parental home until the late 20s or 30s, postponing entry into committed partnership, and delayed transition to parenthood.

Like Italy, a delay in the transition to adulthood has been documented since the early 1980s in Japan. This was called "prolonged adolescence" based on a high growth of the economy, an extended educational process, and an increased emphasis on individualism or leading one's own life among young people (e.g., Okonogi, 1981). After the economic collapse of the

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics in Emerging Adulthood in Italy, Japan, and the United States.

Characteristics	Country		
	Italy	Japan	United States
Entry rate into tertiary education: Tertiary-type A (%) ^a			
2000	39	40	58
2011	48	52	78
Mean age of women at first marriage ^b			
1980	23.8	25.2	23.3
2004	28.0	27.8	25.1
Mean age of mother at first childbirth ^c			
1970	25.0	25.6	22.7
2009	29.9	29.1	25.0
Rate of living at home with parents, % ^d	76.4	60.0/43.2/30.5	15.9/9.7
Unemployment rate in youth aged 15–24, % ^e	29.1	8.0	17.3
Employment rate for women by age, % ^c			
20–24	27.4	64.2	58.7
25–29	50.8	72.8	67.3
30–34	59.3	64.2	67.0
35–39	62.6	63.9	68.0

Note. Tertiary-type A is a program designed to provide sufficient qualifications for entry to advanced research program and professions, with the duration of at least 3 years, usually 4 years.

Source. ^aOrganization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2013). ^bOECD (2007). ^cOECD (2014). ^dEurostat (2014) for youth aged 20–29 in Italy, Ministry of International Affairs and Communications (2011) for youth aged 20–24/25–29/30–34 in Japan, and Vespa, Lewis, and Kreider (2013) for men/women aged 25–34 in the United States. ^eCentral Intelligence Agency (2014).

early 1990s, this phenomenon was followed by the “difficulty in school-to-work transitions” (e.g., Shirai, Shimomura, Kawasaki, Adachi, & Wakamatsu, 2013), including postponement of the entry into jobs, extended permanence in the parental home, and delayed marriage and transition to parenthood.

Thus, young people in Italy and in Japan share the central aspects of a delayed transition to adulthood (see Table 1). The rates of entry into tertiary education, and consequently, the mean age of women at first marriage and at first childbirth have progressively increased in both countries. These trends are similar to those in other industrialized countries, such as in the United States. Moreover, available data suggest that the percentage of young people still living at home is very high and continues to increase in both countries, as compared to the United States, implying that the transition to adulthood occurs within the family context (Crocetti & Meeus, 2014; Scabini et al., 2006).

On the other hand, there is evidence of important differences between Italian and Japanese youth. Italian young people face dramatic challenges in finding an occupation compared to Japanese counterparts as the unemployment rate among youth is rather high (see Table 1). To this, it must be added that among young people in Italy there is an increasing disillusionment about the value of academic achievement. In fact, while for older cohorts academic achievement was a gateway for social mobility, nowadays, large percentages of graduates face problems of unemployment, underemployment, and precarious job conditions (Crocetti et al., 2012). Because of this, Italian youth often perceive emerging adulthood as an unstructured period.

In contrast to this, the youth unemployment rate in Japan is rather low, although there has been a long-term economic crisis

since the 1990s that accelerated after the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011. Low unemployment rates can be found in young people who continue education beyond the age of 18 as the rate of employment among job applicants in university graduates is 93.9% (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2013). In addition, since education has been highly valued in Japan, young people who completed at least high school are viewed as moving toward “positive” destinations and entry into secure careers (Furlong, Inui, Nishimura, & Kojima, 2012). So, Japanese youth overall can place much more trust in the educational system and have better occupational prospects than their Italian peers.

Gender Differences in Perceptions of Emerging Adulthood

The extent to which perception of emerging adulthood was affected by gender was found to vary across countries. For instance, Reifman et al. (2007) reported only one gender difference in American youth, with females scoring higher than males on self-focus. On the contrary, Sirsch et al. (2009) found significant gender differences in all dimensions of emerging adulthood in Austrian respondents, with females scoring systematically higher than males in each feature. Additionally, Negru (2012) found in a Romanian sample that female university students reported higher degrees of identity exploration and self-focus than males. Overall, these results suggest the importance of paying attention to gender differences across countries to increase our understanding of specific gender patterns playing a role in the perceptions of emerging adulthood.

It is assumed that gender may play a role in how young Italian and Japanese people view this period of their lives. Specifically, as discussed below, young women may perceive emerging adulthood as a more unstructured period when they must face a difficult balance between work and family life and decide to give up one of them. In Italy, national surveys indicate that gender stereotypes about male and female roles are still present among youth (Leccardi, 2007). As a consequence, for young women navigating emerging adulthood toward adulthood might be more challenging than it is for young men. In fact, today Italian young women need to find a balance between their career and family plans. On one hand, young women strive to realize themselves in the work sphere because of both intrinsic (i.e., desire to find a meaningful job identity and to be financially independent) and extrinsic (i.e., economic constraints that require two sources of income within each family unit) motivations. On the other hand, most Italian young people (around 60%; Leccardi, 2007) still endorse a traditionalist view of the family roles that places the responsibility of caring for home and children primarily on women.

In Japan, legal protection for women's jobs has increased since the 1980s, and the role of women has been changing toward stronger work–family balance (Cabinet Office, 2007). In fact, a national survey reported that more women intended to manage both work and family after getting married, 15.3% in 1987 and 24.7% in 2010, whereas the percentage of those planning to become full-time housewives decreased, 23.9% in 1987 to 9.1% in 2010 (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, 2011, p. 16). Thus, the significance of work for Japanese women has been increasing. However, Japanese society still contains several levels of gender role expectations. One of the most prevalent expectations for young women is that they should quit their jobs to run a household and care for children after they get married or have children. In fact, most Japanese young people (around 70%) approve traditional gender roles in family, such as “It is desirable that mothers should not work and should stay home at least when their children are young” (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, 2011, p. 23). In line with this social expectation, many young women actually quit their jobs when they have children. This can be inferred from the fact that the rate of female workers drops around the mean age of women at first childbirth (29.1 years old; see Table 1) and that the employment rate of mothers whose youngest children under 3 years old was especially low in Japan (29.8%), as compared to Italy (54.2%) as well as the United States (52.2%), in 2009 (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2014).

A Look at the “Forgotten Half”

It has been widely noted that most research on emerging adulthood has focused mainly on college students and less is known about perceptions of emerging adulthood in employed (non-student) emerging adults (i.e., the forgotten half; see Arnett, 2000a, pp. 476–477). Indeed, most studies on perceptions of emerging adulthood (Fazio et al., 2007; Fierro Arias & Moreno

Hernandez, 2007; Negru, 2012; Sirsch et al., 2009) included only samples drawn from the student population or included both students and workers but did not compare the two groups (Macek et al., 2007). An exception, however, was a study by Reifman et al. (2007) that compared college students and their similar age noncollege counterparts. They reported only one significant difference, with college students exceeding their noncollege counterparts on sense of possibilities.

Available research on the forgotten half in Italy and Japan has mainly addressed this issue within a context of social class problem, such as the difficulties in the transition to work among youth with a lower socioeconomic status (e.g., Furlong et al., 2012; Vinante, 2007). For instance, during Japan's high economic growth, the informal system of the smooth transition from high school to work, which was regulated by a national employment agency, had been maintained for decades (Rosenbaum & Kariya, 1989). Yet, this system has turned into dissolution because of a long-term depression, and the transition to work has become more competitive and less supported (Brinton, 2011; Inui & Kojima, 2012). Based on these situational changes, researchers have tended to focus on the difficulties of those young people whose economic, social, and academic resources are limited. On the other hand, however, little is known about how youth, once they are employed, experience their transition to adulthood (Sugimura, Niwa, & Takahashi, 2014). In Italy, working youth are seen as a particularly vulnerable group because of the high likelihood of them becoming unemployed, getting only temporary contracts, and/or jobs below their levels of qualification (Crocetti, Palmonari, & Pojaghi, 2011). In this context, there is an increasing interest in understanding how working youth navigate the transition to adulthood. Thus, more studies on the perceptions of emerging adulthood in working youth are highly needed in both Japan and Italy to shed more light on this part of the forgotten half.

In both Italy and Japan, occupation can be viewed as an important step toward adulthood. Entrance into work life influences future possibilities to settle into other adult roles of marriage and parenthood because it enables young people to become financially independent (Arnett, 1998). In particular, because of the aforementioned situation of the high rate of youth unemployment, Italian students can perceive emerging adulthood with more possibilities of identity exploration but also with high levels of instability. In contrast, employed emerging adults can have stronger feelings of security and certainty in their lives. In regard to Japan, although the number of regular and full-time workers has gradually decreased, permanent employment and seniority are still present (Sugimura & Mizokami, 2012). For this reason, being employed may make young people recognize emerging adulthood as a less uncertain and more structured period than university students do.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Since emerging adulthood is a socially and culturally constructed period of the life course (Arnett, 2006a, 2006b; Tanner

& Arnett, 2009), studies are needed to unravel similarities and differences of emerging adulthood across and within cultural contexts. In this study, we sought to examine for the first time how emerging adulthood is perceived by Italian and Japanese youth within the framework provided by Arnett's (2004) theory. Both in Italy and in Japan, a progressive delay of the transition to adulthood has been observed since the 80s and has raised interest in how young people perceive the period of emerging adulthood (e.g., Okonogi, 1981; Scabini et al., 2006; Shirai et al., 2013).

The first purpose of the study was to examine the extent to which Italian and Japanese young people share the view of emerging adulthood as a period of identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in between, and possibilities. In line with the above considerations about the current situation of Italian and Japanese youth, we expected that Japanese young people would be more likely to perceive emerging adulthood as a period of possibilities, since the educational and occupational systems provide them with better chances to reach personal goals, whereas Italian youth face limited opportunities due to a disillusionment about the value of education and extremely high levels of unemployment (e.g., Furlong et al., 2012; Livi Bacci, 2008).

The second purpose of this study was to explore whether or not perceptions of emerging adulthood vary by gender within Italian and Japanese national contexts. We hypothesized that in both nations the perception of emerging adulthood might be more stressful for females than for males as reflected in the reports of higher levels of instability and feeling in between. This expectation is based on the fact that in both nations gender stereotypes (e.g., Leccardi, 2007) require young women to find a balance between career and family life choices.

The third purpose of this study was to explore whether perceptions of emerging adulthood vary by occupational status within Italian and Japanese national contexts. We expected that in both nations young workers would perceive emerging adulthood as less uncertain and more structured than students. This hypothesis was based on the idea that in both nations, although large differences in the paths to employment exist (Buzzi, Cavalli, & de Lillo, 2007; Shirai et al., 2013), emerging adults with an occupation have defined with more clarity their role in the society and, thus, perceive a lower need to explore identity alternatives and have a lower sense of feeling in between.

Finally, we pursued some ancillary goals, aimed at further clarifying how Italian and Japanese youth perceive emerging adulthood. Thus, we (a) compared which dimensions of emerging adulthood are endorsed more in each country (in a sort of rank order of respondents' level of agreement); (b) analyzed the potential interaction between the nation, gender, and occupational status factors in explaining differences in the perception of emerging adulthood; and (c) examined age differences in the scores on each dimension of emerging adulthood. Relatedly to this latter aspect, we compared responses of emerging adults from two age-groups (18–25 and 26–30 years old) and we hypothesized that younger respondents would

endorse more views of emerging adulthood as a period of identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in between, and possibilities than older emerging adults.

Method

Participants

Participants were 2,472 emerging adults (1,513 Italian and 959 Japanese) of age 18–30 years ($M_{\text{age}} = 23.28$ years, $SD_{\text{age}} = 3.39$). Both the gender (49.2% males and 50.8% females) and occupational status (57.1% university students and 42.9% workers) composition of the sample were balanced. Detailed information about the demographic characteristics is reported in Table 2 both for the total sample and for the two national groups.

Procedure

Our sampling approach was aimed at (a) obtaining a nationally diverse sample for each country and (b) gathering two national samples that could be comparable. In order to reach these goals, students were contacted in a variety of university majors (e.g., educational sciences, psychology, engineering, and medicine). Similarly, workers were contacted in a variety of work settings comprising factories, shops, offices, and professional services. By doing so, we obtained a heterogeneous work subsample, including participants employed in various work settings ranging from low-skilled jobs to high-level professions. Main sites of data collection included two metropolitan cities (i.e., Milan in Italy and Nagoya in Japan) and a number of medium-sized and small-sized cities located principally in the North Center of Italy (e.g., Ancona, Brescia, and Macerata) and in the Center West of Japan (e.g., Hiroshima, Fukuoka, and Yamaguchi). Participating university students and workers were contacted by a researcher, provided with information about the research aims, and asked for their consent to participate. They completed the study measures as an anonymous self-report questionnaire.

Measure

Dimensions of emerging adulthood. We used the IDEA (Reifman et al., 2007). The IDEA consists of 28¹ items, with a response scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), that assess the following dimensions: identity exploration (7 items; e.g., “Is this period of your life a time of defining yourself?”), instability (7 items; e.g., “Is this period of your life a time of high pressure?”), self-focus (6 items; e.g., “Is this period of your life a time of independence?”), feeling “in between” (3 items; e.g., “Is this period of your life a time of feeling adult in some ways but not others?”), and possibilities (5 items; e.g., “Is this period of your life a time of many possibilities?”). In order to obtain a shorter and more reliable version of the IDEA, we selected from the original version's items that (a) were conceptually related to one and only one of the dimensions of emerging adulthood (we achieved this aim looking at correspondence between item contents and definitions of

Table 2. Background Characteristics of the Sample (%).

Characteristics	National Samples		
	Total (N = 2,472)	Italian (n = 1,513)	Japanese (n = 959)
Gender: females	50.8	53.6	46.4
Ethnicity			
Italian/Japanese	99.9	100	99.7
Occupational status			
Students	57.1	53.3	63.1
Area of study			
Social sciences	70.4	61.1	82.9
Engineer and technical science	12.1	11.3	13.3
Life sciences	17.5	27.6	3.9
Workers	42.9	46.7	36.9
Type of contract			
Permanent job	57.7	45.8	81.8
Temporary job	33.6	43.9	12.7
Self-employed	8.7	10.3	5.5
Educational background			
Junior high school or less	9.9	11.7	0.7
High school diploma	64	65.8	55.1
Bachelor or master university degree	26.1	22.5	42.4
Marital status			
Married	6.1	5.7	6.7
Involved in a romantic relationship	48.2	57.4	33.5
Single	45.7	36.9	59.8
Living status			
Living with parents	58.7	70.1	40.9
Living with roommates	11.7	13.9	8
Cohabiting with a romantic partner/spouse	9.6	10	9.2
Alone	18.5	4.6	40.5 ^a
Other	1.4	1.4	1.4

Note. ^aIn Japan, living with roommates/friends, which is usual in Western countries, is not common. Youth live in a dormitory or apartment alone, with parental financial support. In fact, a 2010 national survey reported that the peak age of living alone is the age-group of 20–24 years (Ministry of International Affairs and Communications, 2013).

each dimension and eliminating items that in Reifman et al.'s article reported substantial cross loadings) and (b) were statistically the best indicators of the latent factors (i.e., those that in Reifman et al.'s article reported the highest loadings in both studies conducted by the authors). This process resulted in dimensions with a smaller number of items, including 3 for each factor, for a total of 15 items (see Figure 1). The original English version was translated into Italian and Japanese by a team of bilingual translators following the recommended procedures for the establishment of linguistic equivalence (Van de Vijver & Leung, 1997).

Strategy of Analysis

The first research question of this study examined differences in perceptions of emerging adulthood reported by Italian and Japanese youth. In order to address this question, as

a preliminary step, we focused on measurement issues. The available instrument for assessing Arnett's dimensions of emerging adulthood (i.e., the IDEA; Reifman et al., 2007) reported a number of psychometric shortcomings documented by unsatisfactory fit indices yielded in confirmatory factor analyses ([CFAs] see supplemental materials reported by Reifman et al., 2007). The main problems included cross loadings and high correlations among residual errors. Thus, as a preliminary step, we validated a shorter version of the IDEA that could be reliably used to assess five dimensions of emerging adulthood in both Italian and Japanese emerging adults. We tested via CFAs whether this short form of the IDEA provided a good fit in both the Italian and Japanese samples.

Next, in order to meaningfully compare mean scores of dimensions of emerging adulthood, measurement invariance had to be established (e.g., Van de Vijver & Leung, 1997). To this end, we tested three levels of measurement invariance, namely, configural (the same number of factors and pattern of fixed and freely estimated parameters hold across groups), metric (equivalence of factor loadings indicating that respondents from multiple groups attribute the same meaning to the latent construct of interest), and scalar (invariance of both factor loadings and item intercepts, indicating that the meaning of the construct and the levels of the underlying items are equal across groups) invariance (Van de Schoot, Lugtig, & Hox, 2012). When scalar (full or partial; Byrne, Shavelson, & Muthén, 1989) invariance is obtained, latent means can be compared across national groups. Therefore, after having tested for scalar invariance, we could address our first research question and compare latent means of identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in between, and possibilities yielded in the Italian and in the Japanese samples. Our second and third research questions were about gender and occupational differences in perceptions of emerging adulthood within each national group. Similarly to national comparisons, gender and occupational comparisons can be reliably pursued only in the presence of measurement invariance. Thus, we tested configural, metric, and scalar invariance across gender and occupational groups in the Italian and Japanese samples as a precondition for comparing IDEA latent means of males and females and of students and workers.

To further address our research aims, we conducted ancillary analyses on the observed scores of the five dimensions of emerging adulthood. In the first analysis (repeated measure analyses of variance), we tested, within each sample, whether participants scored similarly on the various dimensions of emerging adulthood. Doing so, we could test which dimensions of emerging adulthood were endorsed more in each national sample. In the second analysis (multivariate analysis of variance [MANOVA]), we tested whether national, gender, and occupational status differences were qualified by significant interactions. Finally, we compared mean scores reported by younger (18–25 years) and older (26–30 years) participants.

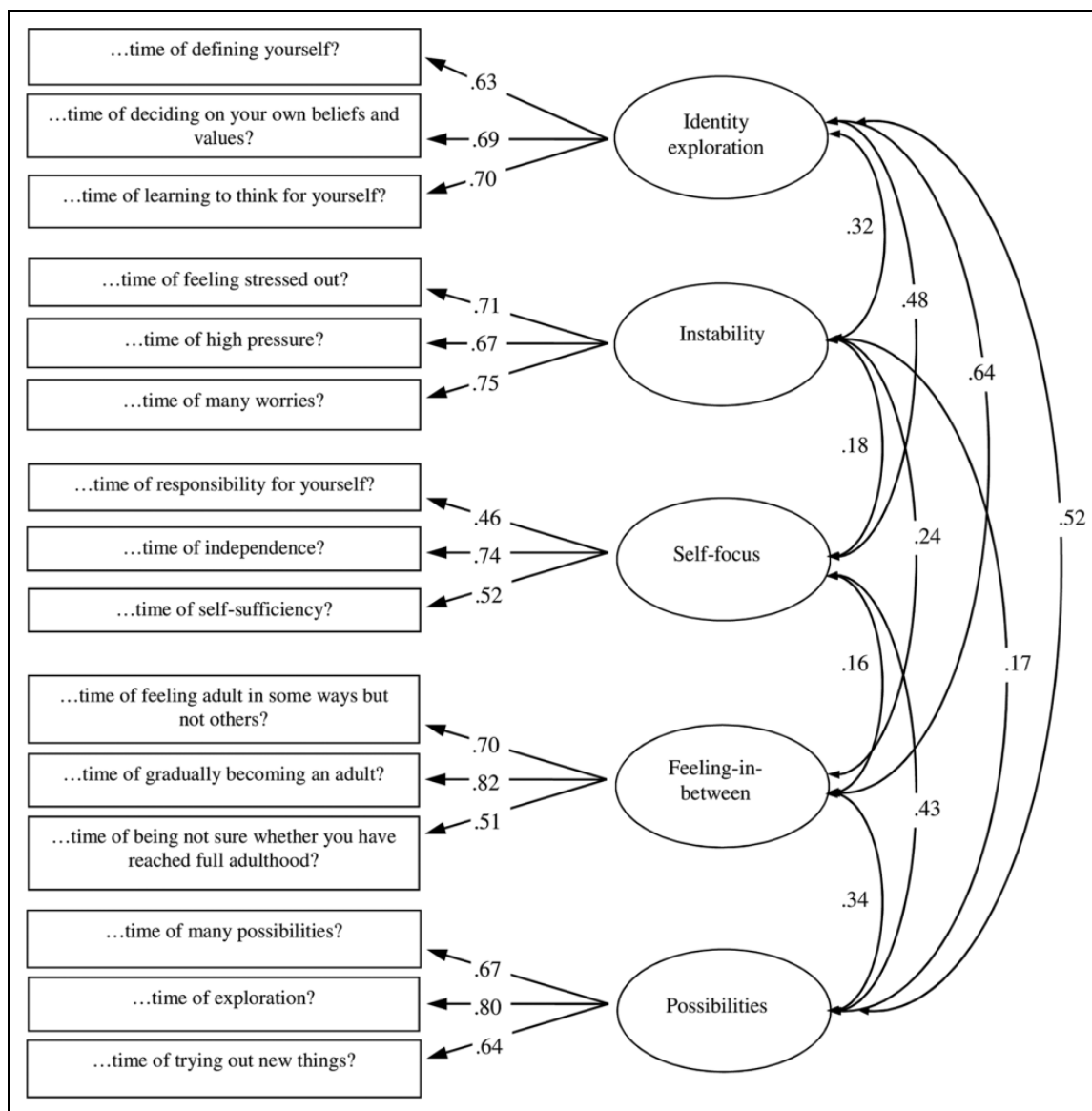


Figure 1. Standardized solution of the five-factor model of the IDEA-short form computed in the total sample. All factor loadings and correlations are significant at $p < .001$. IDEA = Inventory of Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood.

Results

Preliminary Analyses: CFAs on the IDEA-Short Form

As a preliminary step, we sought to test the fit of the short version of the IDEA in the Italian and Japanese samples. We conducted CFAs in *Mplus* 7.11 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2012) with the maximum likelihood estimation. We tested a solution with five latent variables and three observed indicators for each factor (see Figure 1). We examined the model fit through two indices: the comparative fit index (CFI) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). Values of the CFA higher than .90 are indicative of an acceptable fit, with values higher than .95 suggesting an excellent fit; values of the RMSEA below .05 indicate a very good fit, with values less than .08 representing an acceptable fit (Byrne, 2012; Hu & Bentler, 1999). Results (see Table 3) indicated that the fit of the

IDEA-short form was good in both samples. Thus, we could use this version for pursuing main study goals. Standardized factor loadings computed in the total sample are reported in Figure 1.

National Comparisons of Perceptions of Emerging Adulthood

The first aim of this study was to compare perceptions of emerging adulthood reported by Italian and Japanese respondents. To this end, we first tested national measurement (i.e., configural, metric, and scalar) invariance by conducting consequential multigroup CFAs. To determine significant differences between models, we followed Chen's recommendations (2007, p. 501) according to which a $\Delta CFI \geq -.010$ supplemented by $\Delta RMSEA \geq .015$ would be indicative of non-invariance.

Table 3. Tests of the IDEA Factor Structure and Measurement Invariance.

	Model Fit				Model Comparisons		
	χ^2	df	CFI	RSMEA [90% CI]	Models	Δ CFI	Δ RMSEA
Italian sample	553.822	80	.913	.063 [.058, .068]			
Japanese sample	358.412	80	.921	.060 [.054, .067]			
National invariance							
M1. Configural	912.235	160	.916	.062 [.058, .066]			
M2. Metric	978.292	170	.910	.062 [.058, .066]	M2-M1	-.006	.000
M3a. Full scalar	1,426.262	180	.861	.075 [.071, .078]	M3a-M2	-.049	.013
M3b. Partial scalar	1,134.355	175	.893	.067 [.063, .070]	M3b-M2	-.017	.005
Gender invariance within the Italian sample							
M1. Configural	677.400	160	.905	.065 [.060, .071]			
M2. Metric	649.865	170	.904	.064 [.059, .069]	M2-M1	-.001	-.001
M3. Full scalar	756.892	180	.895	.065 [.060, .070]	M3-M2	-.009	.001
Gender invariance within the Japanese sample							
M1. Configural	479.914	160	.909	.065 [.058, .071]			
M2. Metric	490.910	170	.909	.063 [.056, .069]	M2-M1	.000	-.002
M3. Full scalar	523.327	180	.902	.063 [.057, .069]	M3-M2	-.007	.000
Occupational invariance within the Italian sample							
M1. Configural	651.129	160	.911	.064 [.059, .069]			
M2. Metric	667.009	170	.910	.062 [.057, .067]	M2-M1	-.001	-.002
M3. Full scalar	720.976	180	.902	.063 [.058, .068]	M3-M2	-.008	.001
Occupational invariance within the Japanese sample							
M1. Configural	460.031	160	.914	.063 [.056, .069]			
M2. Metric	496.845	170	.907	.063 [.057, .070]	M2-M1	-.007	.000
M3a. Full scalar	636.827	180	.870	.073 [.067, .079]	M3a-M2	-.037	.010
M3b. Partial scalar	512.273	175	.903	.063 [.057, .070]	M3b-M2	-.004	.000

Note. χ^2 = Chi-square; df = degrees of freedom; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation and 90% confidence interval; Δ = change in the parameter.

Findings (see Table 3) indicated the presence of configural and metric invariance. Using results of the metric invariant model, we computed composite reliabilities in the CFA context using the following formula: $\rho_c = (\sum \lambda_i)^2 / [(\sum \lambda_i)^2 + (\sum \varepsilon_i)]$, where ρ_c is the reliability, λ the factor loadings, and ε the error variance (Bagozzi, 1994, p. 324). Reliabilities were .86 and .91 for identity exploration, .84 and .83 for instability, .91 and .89 for self-focus, .80 and .82 for feeling in between, and .85 and .89 for possibilities, in the Italian and Japanese samples, respectively. Average variance of the latent factors was .46 in the Italian sample and .33 in Japanese sample.

Full scalar invariance was not supported. Thus, we tested partial scalar invariance by releasing for each latent factor 1 item intercept and fixing the other two to be equal across groups. Results provided support to partial scalar invariance and, therefore, we could compare latent means (Byrne et al., 1989), using the Italian sample as the reference group (Byrne, 2012). Results indicated significant differences in all latent means, with Japanese participants scoring significantly higher ($p < .001$) on all dimensions of emerging adulthood than their Italian counterparts. The effect sizes (Cohen's d) of national differences ranged from small to moderate on feeling in between (.36), self-focus (.43), instability (.45), and identity exploration (.48), while they were large on possibilities (.84).

Gender Differences in Perceptions of Emerging Adulthood

The second purpose of this study was to examine the gender differences in perceptions of emerging adulthood within each national group. Both in the Italian and in the Japanese samples, all levels (i.e., configural, metric, and scalar) of gender measurement invariance were clearly established. Thus, we compared latent means using males as the reference group.

In the Italian sample, females scored significantly ($p < .001$) higher than males on three out of five dimensions of emerging adulthood, namely, identity exploration, instability, and feeling in between. In the Japanese sample, females scored significantly higher than males on three out of five dimensions of emerging adulthood, namely, instability ($p < .001$), feeling in between ($p < .001$), and self-focus ($p < .05$). Cohen's d effect sizes ranged from .09 to .28 and from .04 to .23 in the Italian and Japanese samples, respectively. So, gender differences were very small in both national groups.

Occupational Differences in Perceptions of Emerging Adulthood

The final purpose of this study was to examine occupational differences in perceptions of emerging adulthood within each national group. Both in the Italian and in the Japanese samples,

Table 4. Observed Mean Scores (and Standard Deviations in Parentheses) of Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood.

	Italian Sample					Japanese Sample				
	Males	Females	Students	Workers	Total	Males	Females	Students	Workers	Total
Identity exploration	3.42 (0.81)	3.65 (0.80)	3.60 (0.79)	3.49 (0.83)	3.55 (0.81)	3.91 (0.78)	3.94 (0.70)	4.02 (0.70)	3.76 (0.80)	3.92 (0.75)
Instability	3.26 (0.89)	3.46 (0.91)	3.44 (0.90)	3.29 (0.91)	3.37 (0.91)	3.67 (0.83)	3.86 (0.77)	3.78 (0.82)	3.72 (0.79)	3.76 (0.81)
Self-focus	3.54 (0.79)	3.64 (0.78)	3.50 (0.78)	3.70 (0.78)	3.59 (0.78)	3.89 (0.74)	3.95 (0.66)	3.85 (0.67)	4.04 (0.75)	3.92 (0.71)
Feeling in between	3.39 (0.90)	3.59 (0.90)	3.60 (0.86)	3.38 (0.93)	3.50 (0.90)	3.72 (0.79)	3.89 (0.63)	3.93 (0.67)	3.58 (0.76)	3.80 (0.72)
Possibilities	3.37 (0.79)	3.45 (0.84)	3.53 (0.80)	3.28 (0.82)	3.41 (0.82)	4.04 (0.80)	4.11 (0.65)	4.15 (0.70)	3.94 (0.78)	4.08 (0.73)

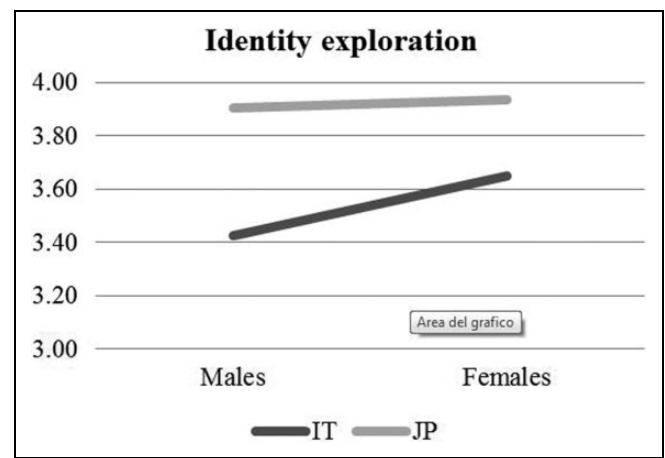
all levels (i.e., configural, metric, and scalar) of occupational measurement invariance were established with the only difference that in the Italian sample we found full scalar invariance, whereas in the Japanese sample partial scalar invariance. We compared latent means using students as the reference group.

In the Italian sample, we found the following significant differences on all latent factors: workers scored lower on identity exploration ($p < .05$), possibilities ($p < .001$), instability ($p < .001$), feeling in between ($p < .001$), and higher on self-focus ($p < .001$). In the Japanese sample, workers scored significantly lower than students on three out of five dimensions, namely, identity exploration ($p < .001$), possibilities ($p < .01$), and feeling in between ($p < .001$). Cohen's d effect sizes ranged from $|.13$ to $.31$ and from $|.07$ to $.51$ in the Italian and Japanese samples, respectively. Thus, occupational differences were small in the Italian sample and small to medium in the Japanese one.

Ancillary Analyses

To further examine how Italian and Japanese respondents perceive emerging adulthood, within each national sample, repeated measures analyses of variance (i.e., a special case of the multivariate analysis of variance) were conducted to assess within-subjects mean score differences. Results indicated significant differences in endorsement of features of emerging adulthood both in the Italian, Wilks' $\lambda = .94$, $F(4, 1,509) = 22.31$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .06$, and in the Japanese, Wilks' $\lambda = .87$, $F(4, 954) = 34.54$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .13$, samples. As reported in Table 4, a different pattern of results was found in the two national samples. More specifically, Italian respondents reported the lowest scores on possibilities and instability, intermediate scores on feeling in between, higher scores on identity exploration and especially on self-focus. Japanese participants displayed the lowest scores on instability and feeling in between, intermediate scores on identity exploration and self-focus, and the highest scores on possibilities.

Second, we tested the interaction among the different factors involved in the study in a MANOVA on the five dimensions of emerging adulthood with nation, gender, and occupational status as independent variables. Multivariate findings indicated that only the Nation \times Gender, Wilks' $\lambda = .99$, $F(5, 2,459) = 3.05$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .01$, and the Nation \times Occupational Status, Wilks' $\lambda = .99$, $F(5, 2,459) = 3.07$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .01$,

**Figure 2.** Nation \times Gender interaction on identity exploration.

interactions were statistically significant, while the Gender \times Occupational Status, Wilks' $\lambda = .99$, $F(5, 2,459) = 0.60$, $p = .70$, $\eta^2 = .00$, and the three-way Nation \times Gender \times Occupational Status, Wilks' $\lambda = .99$, $F(5, 2,459) = 1.44$, $p = .21$, $\eta^2 = .00$, interactions were not statistically significant. Follow-up univariate analyses indicated that the Nation \times Gender interaction had a significant effect only on perception of emerging adulthood as a period of identity exploration, $F(1, 2,470) = 12.30$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .01$. As displayed in Figure 2, in the Japanese sample there were no gender differences on identity exploration, while in the Italian sample, females endorsed more than males the view of emerging adulthood as a period of identity exploration. At the univariate level, the Nation \times Occupational Status interaction had a significant effect on identity exploration, $F(1, 2,470) = 7.43$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .00$, and feeling in between, $F(1, 2,470) = 4.76$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .00$. As displayed in Figure 3, occupational differences were slightly more pronounced in the Japanese than in the Italian sample. It should be noted, however, that all these interactions explained very little variance (1% or less).

Finally, we examined age differences in the perception of emerging adulthood. We conducted a MANOVA on the five dimensions of emerging adulthood with age (recoded into two age-groups, i.e., 18–25 and 26–30 years old) as the independent variable. Findings yielded a significant multivariate effect of age, Wilks' $\lambda = .98$, $F(5, 2,450) = 8.42$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .02$.

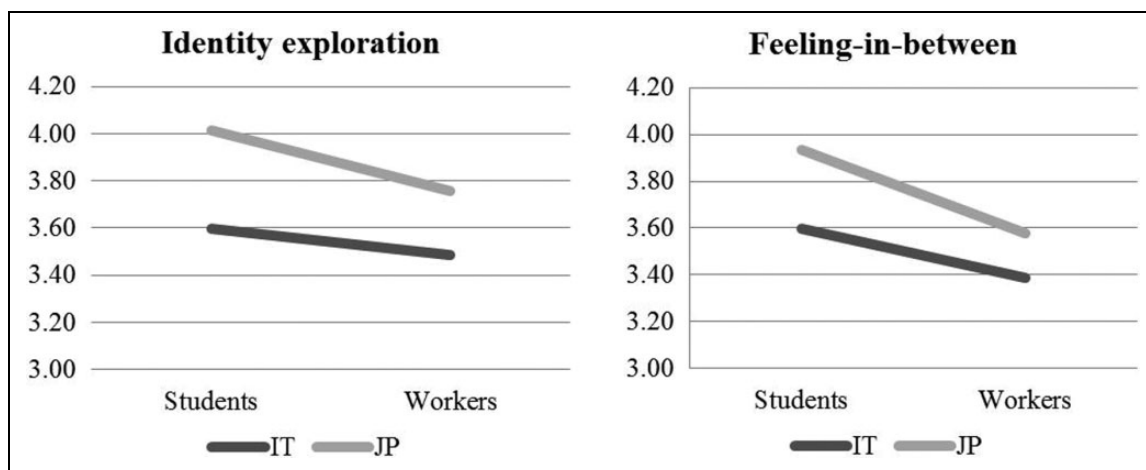


Figure 3. Nation \times Occupation interactions on identity exploration and feeling in between.

Follow-up univariate analyses indicated that age had a significant effect on three out of five dimensions of emerging adulthood, namely, identity exploration, $F(1, 2,470) = 4.50, p < .05, \eta^2 = .00$, feeling in between, $F(1, 2,470) = 31.77, p < .001, \eta^2 = .01$, and possibilities, $F(1, 2,470) = 8.57, p < .01, \eta^2 = .00$. On each of these dimensions, emerging adults aged between 18 and 25 years old scored higher than emerging adults aged between 25 and 30 years old. These effects were not moderated by any of the other sociodemographic variables (nation, gender, and occupation) examined in this study. Although the variance explained by age differences was rather small, these findings suggest that endorsement of emerging adult dimensions decreases with age.

Discussion

Patterns in the transition to adulthood have changed for several segments of the youth population (e.g., Arnett, 2000a). This is the result of social, economic, and cultural transformations that have led to the establishment of emerging adulthood as a specific developmental period (e.g., Tanner & Arnett, 2009). However, there is an ongoing debate (Arnett et al., 2011) about the heuristic value of the notion of emerging adulthood. Within this debate, a main issue of disagreement is the extent to which the notion of emerging adulthood can be applied to various groups, both within and across cultures. In this study, we sought to further advance this debate, improving our understanding of cultural differences in emerging adulthood by examining for the first time how Italian and Japanese youth perceive this developmental period. Furthermore, we paid close attention to gender and occupational differences within each nation.

As a preliminary step, we tested a short version of the IDEA in order to overcome psychometric shortcomings reported in previous studies (Reifman et al., 2007). Results of CFAs conducted in each national sample yielded good fit indices. Furthermore and more importantly, for this IDEA-short form we could establish national measurement invariance and, within each national sample, measurement invariance across

gender and occupational groups. This means that the IDEA-short form could be reliably used to compare latent means of Italian and Japanese respondents and to further investigate gender and occupational differences. This result is very relevant in the context of available literature on perceptions of emerging adulthood (e.g., Facio et al., 2007; Fierro Arias & Moreno Hernandez, 2007; Macek et al., 2007; Negru, 2012; Sirsch et al., 2009). Indeed, to the best of our knowledge, this study is the first to directly compare latent means of dimensions of emerging adulthood. Additionally, in line with results found in research conducted in other cultural contexts (see for instance Reifman et al., 2007 for studies with North American youth), current findings confirmed that all dimensions of emerging adulthood are positively interrelated.

Perceptions of Emerging Adulthood in Italian and Japanese Participants

Findings from latent mean comparisons highlighted that Japanese youth scored significantly higher than their Italian counterparts on each feature of emerging adulthood. An inspection of effect sizes pointed out that these differences were small to moderate on feeling in between, self-focus, instability, identity exploration, and large on possibilities. Thus, in line with our expectations, the most substantial result of this comparison highlighted that Japanese respondents, compared to their Italian peers, were more likely to perceive emerging adulthood as a period of possibilities. This result was further supported by ancillary analyses in which we looked at endorsement of various dimensions of emerging adulthood within each national sample. In fact, we found that this feature of emerging adulthood was the one in which Italian participants reported low scores, whereas their Japanese peers scored the highest.

Social and economic differences between Italy and Japan might account for why Japanese young people appear to see emerging adulthood as a period of possibilities to a greater extent than their Italian peers. Compared to Italy, in Japan there are several protective factors (e.g., a relative low rate of youth

unemployment and the maintenance of permanent employment opportunities) that may act as buffers against uncertainty during the transition to adulthood (e.g., Furlong et al., 2012; Livi Bacci, 2008). Thus, the path toward economic stability may be much clearer in Japan, resulting in greater optimism. In contrast, in Italy, youth face strong difficulties in finding their own place in society due to the increasing levels of unemployment and a progressive disillusionment about the value of academic attainment for promoting social mobility (Crocetti et al., 2012). Hence, the economic crisis could have undermined the young people's feeling of having a lot of possibilities. Indeed, young people from Italy, as well as their peers from other Southern European countries, experience high uncertainty and do not know what kind of future they will have (Kongshøj Madsen, Molina, Møller, & Lozano, 2013). Overall, these results highlight that views of emerging adulthood are strongly intertwined with characteristics and perceptions of the social and macro-cultural context in which young people enact their journey toward adulthood.

It is worthwhile to compare results regarding the endorsement of dimensions of emerging adulthood displayed by Italian and Japanese participants in the context of prior research conducted in other cultures. Interestingly, the pattern of findings found in the Japanese sample (i.e., Japanese participants displayed the lowest scores on instability and feeling in between, intermediate scores on identity exploration and self-focus, and the highest scores on possibilities) was very similar to the results of previous studies with North (Reifman et al., 2007) and South American (Facio et al., 2007), Austrian (Sirsch et al., 2009), and Romanian (Negru, 2012) emerging adults. On the other hand, the lower scores exhibited by Italian participants on perception of emerging adulthood as a period of possibilities reflect a difference with previous studies, in which participants were found to report high scores on this dimension (Arnett, 2000b). It should be noted, though, that this difference could be related to a cohort effect more than to a cultural difference. Italian emerging adults involved in the current study are coming to age in the middle of a severe economic crisis, which is hampering the possibilities of achieving living conditions better than those reached by their parents. In order to disentangle cultural effects from cohort effects, it is necessary to further expand emerging adulthood research with longitudinal studies aimed at capturing changing perceptions of this period across various cultural contexts.

Gender Differences in Perceptions of Emerging Adulthood

Findings regarding gender differences pointed out that both in the Italian and in Japanese samples, there were some gender differences that were statistically significant. Specifically, in line with our expectations, in both countries, females scored significantly higher than males on instability and feeling in between. Additionally, in Japan, females scored higher than males on self-focus, and in Italy they scored higher on identity exploration. However, it should be noted that an inspection of

effect sizes revealed that all these differences were rather small. Additionally, ancillary analyses pointed to a unique small Nation \times Gender interaction, further showing that gender differences in identity exploration characterized only the Italian sample.

These results mirror those found in previous studies conducted in other cultural contexts (Negru, 2012; Reifman et al., 2007; Sirsch et al., 2009) and might suggest that females feel more of a struggle than males as they are finding their way toward adulthood. Gender stereotypes are still present in both Italy and Japan (e.g., Leccardi, 2007), the roles of men may still be very clear (e.g., employment, husband, and father), which leads young men to feel much less instability and exploration during emerging adulthood. However, young women may be trying to balance the idea of varied future roles (i.e., employee, primary caregiver of children, etc.) and, therefore, may feel much more instability regarding how to use their emerging adult years. In Italy, young women are expected to find a balance between work and family life roles (e.g., Livi Bacci, 2008), whereas in Japan they are expected to quit their jobs to assign priority to family responsibilities. However, this expectation must contradict the legal protection and promotion for women's job in the Japanese society (Cabinet Office, 2007). Thus, Italian and Japanese young women share the view of emerging adulthood as a period of instability in which they feel in between and they need to make important life choices.

Occupational Differences in Perceptions of Emerging Adulthood

Finally, an important goal of our study was to shed some light on the forgotten half (Arnett, 2000a). We detected significant differences between students and workers that were small to moderate. We expected that in both nations young workers would perceive emerging adulthood as less uncertain and more structured than students. Findings supported this hypothesis, revealing that in both countries, workers scored lower on identity exploration, possibilities, and feeling in between. Ancillary analyses suggested that occupational differences on identity exploration and feeling in between were slightly more pronounced in the Japanese than in the Italian sample. However, these interactive effects were very small (i.e., they explained no more than 1% of the variance).

Overall, findings suggest that both in Italy and in Japan, those young people who are working may not feel the same need to explore possible alternative identities as students do. Furthermore, young workers might feel less in between, since occupation can be viewed as a main step toward adulthood (Arnett, 1998). At the same time, working emerging adults might perceive a lower sense of possibilities, since they have already chosen a vocation and, in doing so, they might have given up other possibilities, thus reducing their range of potential choices.

Additionally, in Italy, students rated themselves higher than workers on instability and lower on self-focus. These results are consistent with recent changes in the Italian context, in

which young people, compared to older generations, have lower trust in the value of academic achievement as a means of social mobility and thus perceive with high uncertainty their current situation and their future prospects (Livi Bacci, 2008).

Going Back to the Emerging Adulthood Debate

A main issue in the ongoing debate (Arnett et al., 2011) about the heuristic value of the notion of emerging adulthood centers around the extent to which Arnett's (2000a) theory can be applied to different cultural and social groups. As a reaction to Arnett's theory, an alternative theoretical framework questioning the utility of stage conceptualizations has been proposed by Kloep and Hendry (2011). Findings of the current study can provide new evidence for advancing this debate.

First, we found that in both Italy and Japan, participants' responses at the IDEA scale were shifted toward the side of agreement. Specifically, within a response scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), observed means comprised between 3.26 and 4.15 (see Table 4). This suggests that both Italian and Japanese youth generally agree with the view of emerging adulthood as a period of identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in between, and possibilities as proposed by Arnett (2004). Additionally, age comparisons highlighted that, in both countries, younger emerging adults (between the ages of 18 and 25 years) endorsed more the view of emerging adulthood as a period of identity exploration, possibilities, and feeling in between than older emerging adults (those between the ages of 26 and 30 years), suggesting developmental changes in the view of this period that deserve to be further investigated in future longitudinal studies.

Additionally, in line with the remark that variations in emerging adulthood are likely to occur and should be the focus of the research agenda (Arnett, 2006b), we found cultural, gender, and occupational differences. In this regard, we should note that effect sizes revealed that most differences were small or moderate (only the cultural difference on possibility was large). This suggests that the issue about the applicability of the emerging adulthood theory should not be conceived as a dichotomous (whether the theory applies to certain groups and not others) but as a dimensional one (how endorsement of emerging adulthood vary, appearing higher in some groups and lower in others).

Taken together, these findings provide support for Arnett's theory (2004). However, in order to further advance the emerging adulthood field, it is probably necessary to, more than embracing a unilateral side of the ongoing debate, build upon the possibilities of integrating the two theoretical perspectives proposed by Arnett (2004; see also Tanner, 2006) and Kloep and Hendry (2011). Some guidelines in this direction have been proposed by the same authors in the conclusion of their debate (Arnett et al., 2011).

In particular, an important aspect of future work would be to examine developmental processes, with the theoretical perspective proposed by Kloep and Hendry (2011), within the stage framework provided by Arnett (2006b). In fact, the

systemic perspective proposed by Kloep and Hendry, with its focus on the interplay between resources and challenges, can provide new insights into differences in the developmental trajectories of emerging adults. Furthermore, a fruitful integration of these two perspectives can offer a framework for disentangling (child and adolescent) predictors and (adult and old age) consequences of emerging adult experiences in a life span perspective.

Strengths and Limitations of this Study and Suggestions for Future Research

This study should be considered in light of both its strengths and shortcomings. The first strength of this study was the sample composition. We included two large samples of Italian and Japanese emerging adults with a proper balance of university students from a large array of majors and workers with different working conditions. Doing so, we were able to shed some light on the forgotten half (Arnett, 2000a). However, it is worth noticing that there is an additional segment of the emerging adult population that risks remaining completely invisible. We refer to unemployed emerging adults who are also not attending school that, especially in Italy, represent a large segment of the youth population (Central Intelligence Agency, 2014). Unemployment might have detrimental effects for young people's mental health (Paul & Moser, 2009). Thus, future studies are urged to unravel how unemployed youth perceive this period of the life span and the specific challenges they have to face. Furthermore, in this study, we did not compare perceptions of this period with perceptions of the same period reported by younger (adolescents) and older (adults) individuals. Therefore, a relevant avenue for future studies aimed at further unraveling perceptions of emerging adulthood is to compare views held by different age-groups within these cultures.

A second strength of this study was its measurement approach. We tested a short version of the IDEA that demonstrated good fit in both samples, and we were able to establish measurement invariance at various levels. Applying the IDEA we could examine to what extent Italian and Japanese youth share views of emerging adulthood proposed by Arnett's theory (2004). However, we could not identify additional features of emerging adulthood that might be specific for Italian and/or Japanese youth. In order to overcome this weakness, future studies should integrate quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches (see Macek et al., 2007 for an example). In this way, it could be possible to capture specific features of emerging adulthood unique to Mediterranean and East Asian cultural contexts that might not be captured by Arnett's (2004) theory.

Conclusion

This study adds to the debate surrounding the theory of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000a, 2004) by demonstrating that the ways in which young people perceive this period of the life span are culturally sensitive and, within each cultural context, are dependent on young people's gender and occupational

status (Nelson & Chen, 2007). We found that Japanese participants were substantially more likely than their Italian peers to view emerging adulthood as a period of high possibilities. Furthermore, in both Italian and Japanese samples, emerging adulthood was conceived as a more unstructured period by females and students, who struggle more than males and workers, to find their own place in the society. We hope that the present research provides new ways to think about the interconnections between cultural contexts and emerging adults' perception of this period of life.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This work was partially supported by JPSP Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (C), 20530592 and 24530823 to Kazumi Sugimura.

Note

1. Reifman, Arnett, and Colwell (2007) added three additional items to measure other focused as a counterpart to self-focused. However, this additional factor reported an awkward behavior in their validation study, that is, in one sample other-focused and self-focused were negatively related, whereas in a second sample they were positively related. Because of these inconsistencies and because other focused is not part of original Arnett's theory, we decided not to consider this additional subscale.

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