

Growing Up of Youth: Separation from Parents, Subjective Adulthood and Psychological Well-being at the Age of 18—27

Victoria R. Manukyan

Saint Petersburg State University, Saint Petersburg, Russia

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4200-8935>, e-mail: v.manukjan@spbu.ru

The article explores the process of growing up in young people in the period of “emerging adulthood” from the perspective of psychological separation from parents and its relationship with the formation of adult identity (subjective adulthood) and psychological well-being. The study was conducted on a sample of 126 subjects aged 18—27 years ($M=22.3$) with different work and family status. Indicators of psychological separation (Hoffman PSI Questionnaire), psychological well-being (Riff Scale), life satisfaction (Diener scale), happiness level (Fordis scale), indicators of spatial and functional separation, subjective adulthood (survey questions) were measured. The study revealed the heterogeneity of the separation process and the dominance of functional and behavioral aspects over the affective and cognitive ones. Also, the separation from father was more expressed in comparison with the separation from mother. Behavioral components of psychological separation from parents are viewed as predictors of a decrease in satisfaction, happiness, and purposefulness of life. Subjective adulthood is not related to the degree of separation, but it is related to psychological well-being: the highest levels of psychological well-being scales were found in young people with developed adult identity.

Keywords: growing up, adulthood, subjective adulthood, psychological separation from parents, psychological well-being.

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Взросление молодежи: сепарация от родителей, субъективная зрелость и психологическое благополучие в возрасте 18—27 лет

Манукян В.Р.

ФГБОУ ВО «Санкт-Петербургский государственный университет»

(ФГБОУ ВО СПбГУ), г. Санкт-Петербург, Российская Федерация

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4200-8935>, e-mail: v.manukjan@spbu.ru

Рассматривается процесс взросления молодежи в период «формирующейся зрелости» с точки зрения протекания психологической сепарации от родителей и ее взаимосвязи с формированием идентичности взрослого (субъективной зрелостью) и психологическим благополучием. Исследование проведено на выборке 126 человек в возрасте 18—27 лет ($M=22,3$) с разным трудовым и семейным статусом. Измерялись показатели психологической сепарации (Опросник PSI Дж. Хоффмана), психологического благополучия (Шкала К. Рифф), удовлетворенности жизнью (шкала Э. Динера), уровень счастья (шкала М. Фордуса), показатели пространственной и функциональной сепарации, субъективная зрелость (вопросы анкеты). Выявлены неоднородность процесса сепарации и доминирование функциональной и поведенческой сторон над аффективной и когнитивной, а также большая выраженность сепарации от отца по сравнению с сепарацией от матери. Поведенческие компоненты психологической сепарации от родителей являются предикторами снижения удовлетворенности, счастья, целенаправленности жизни. Субъективная зрелость не имеет связи со степенью сепарированности, но имеет связь с психологическим благополучием: наиболее высокие уровни шкал психологического благополучия выявлены у молодых людей со сформированной идентичностью взрослого.

Ключевые слова: взросление, зрелость, субъективная зрелость, психологическая сепарация от родителей, психологическое благополучие.

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Introduction

Most modern researchers note significant changes taking place in the processes that accompany the growing up of today's youth around the world [3; 15; 17; 19; 23; 25]. It becomes clear that growing up is a complex, multifaceted process that covers a

significant part of a person's life and is influenced by historical time. As N.N. Tolstykh notes, the questions with which we should start discussing the problem of modern growing up are questions about the age at which a person can be considered an adult, requirements of society for an adult and in-

ternal criteria — “on the basis of what does a growing person begin to consider himself an adult?” [13, p. 8]. Thus, we are talking about the selection of chronological, sociocultural and psychological markers of adulthood, which are only partially interconnected and exposed to heterochrony, which has been increasing in recent years. For example, recent demographic studies show that the age at which partnerships are initiated has fallen to historic lows, while the age at which education is completed has increased significantly. Young people “debut in different spheres of life in accordance with their life schedules and at the right time” [6, p. 36], which probably occurs as a result of the weakening of traditions, increasing informatization and individualization of modern society. This socio-demographic context determines the relevance of research into the maturation of young people.

In each of the identified aspects of growing up, serious transformations have taken place in recent decades. Chronological markers of adulthood have expanded significantly [13; 15; 16; 25]. For the last 20 years, we have been using J. Arnett’s term “emerging adulthood” in relation to young people from 18 to 30 years old [16], suggesting that even by the age of 30, not everyone makes the transition to adulthood, which is especially the characteristic of developed industrial societies that allow a long education and period of searching for one’s own identity through trials and experiments.

The traditional social and role markers of entering adulthood, which were such events as graduation, leaving the parental family, marital status, the appearance of the first child, making a decision about the future profession, stable employment, financial independence, are also losing their role [23; 25]. A number of authors note that the internal, psychological criteria of adulthood prevail in importance over social ones [16; 25; 26], however, this thesis strongly depends on the demographic context and

socioeconomic status of the studied group of young people [15; 16; 19] that indicate the heterogeneity and high individualization of the process of transition to adulthood.

The psychological criteria of adulthood are associated with the formation of autonomy, beginning of self-realization, growth of responsibility, individualization, stress resistance, and realism. This allows us to define growing up as the acquisition of the qualities of personal maturity — responsibility, autonomy, resilience, focus on self-development, self-understanding [3; 11]. Most of these qualities also correspond to the concept of psychological well-being which includes personal characteristics of positive functioning [4].

The most important psychological criterion for the transition to adulthood is a subjective adulthood or a formed “adult” identity that allows one to classify oneself as a member of the adult world and subculture [9]. Subjective adulthood begins to form already in adolescence as a “sense of adulthood” — the main neoplasm of this period, including the adolescent’s attitude to himself as an adult, his idea or feeling of being an adult, which in adolescence is not always conscious, but is already included in the design of the image of adulthood [9], thereby contributing to real maturation. In the study of M.V. Klementieva it is shown that in the period of 18-33 years, the age transition from diffusion to integration and connectivity of the “true self” and the “adult self” is still taking place when a person manages to harmoniously balance his authenticity and the social expectations from society [2]. It has been shown that at the stage of emerging adulthood, the feeling of adulthood is unstable and grows with an increase in the stressful fullness of life [18].

The growing differentiation of maturation, the difficulty of identifying markers of its achievement raise the question of the mechanisms of the emergence of adulthood. In the context of growing up as the formation

of one's own individuality, gaining spatial, functional and psychological autonomy, the most important mechanism is psychological separation from parents [1; 3; 4; 8; 12; 14; 24]. Timely separation of a child from parents is associated with the development of the ability to control, protect, develop one's psychological space [7] corresponds to the formation of responsibility, setting life goals, entering an independent life, maturity, subjectivity [3; 12; 24]. This is a long-term process of mental separation of the child from his parents, family, accompanied by the development of identity, which starts at an early age and continues at adulthood [12; 14; 24]. T.V. Petrenko, L.V. Sysoeva note that at the age of 23-25 years, separation activity increases significantly — this is a turning point in confrontation, the final separation from parents, and beginning of independent life [8]. N.E. Kharlamenkova highlights the external and internal sides of separation where the first involves separation, severance of relations, distancing, getting rid of external control along with the adoption of responsible decisions, the manifestation of independence. Internal separation is the separation of the Self from internal objects and the present — from images of the past and future when a person is separated from previous feelings, actions, ways of thinking that do not correspond to new life tasks [14]. In the structural model of J. Hoffman, separation is considered in three levels: emotional (as a decrease in the need for parental approval and support), attitude (cognitive) as the formation of views and judgments different from parental ones, the ability to build a position based on one's own experience; functional (behavioral) — the ability to make independent decisions, solve problems, the ability to provide for oneself on one's own. An idea about the style of separation is introduced (harmonious or conflict), associated with the manifestation of negative feelings of guilt, anger, anxiety, distrust arising in the process of separation [1; 21]. Studies also

record the gender specifics of separation from parents and differences in models of separation from the father and mother [1; 12; 22].

The complex structure of separation suggests that it is precisely the features of its course — the ratio of the external and internal sides, as well as various components determine the process of becoming an adult both in terms of its external social and role criteria (spatial, financial independence, independence in everyday life, building relationships), and internal, psychological that are associated with the formation of maturity and adult identity. Indirect criteria that determine the course of growing up, indicating the degree of maturity of the individual and the success of solving age-related tasks may be the psychological well-being of the individual in conjunction with his emotional characteristics — happiness and satisfaction. The consideration of separation as a complex set of processes that ensure growing up determines the novelty of this approach to the study of youth maturation.

Thus, based on the foregoing, the purpose of the study was formulated as to determine the role of psychological separation from parents in the formation of an adult identity and ensuring the psychological well-being of young adults.

The hypothesis is based on the following assumptions:

1. Psychological separation is a heterogeneous phenomenon where the components of psychological separation from the father and mother have different severity and are differently related to the formation of an adult's identity (subjective adulthood) and psychological well-being of a young person.

2. The severity of separation processes and the formation of an adult's identity are interconnected with the psychological well-being of young adults due to the importance of this process in a given age period.

To achieve the purpose of the study and test the hypotheses, the following tasks were formulated: 1) to study separation from parents in the ratio of its various components: spatial separation, financial independence, household independence (functional aspect) and psychological components of separation from the father and mother, taking into account gender specifics and chronological age of respondents; 2) to study the formation of an adult identity (subjective adulthood) and its foundations; 3) to study the relationship of separation and psychological well-being with the formation of an adult identity; 4) assess the impact of the components of psychological separation from parents on indicators of psychological well-being.

Methods

Measures. To study psychological separation from parents, the Psychological Separation Inventory by J. Hoffman Q (PSI) [21], adapted by T.Yu. Sadovnikova, V.P. Dzukaeva was used [1; 4]. Scales: “Conflictual Separation” (Style), “Emotional Separation”, “Attitudinal Separation” (Cognitive), “Functional Separation” (Behavioral), measured separately for the father and mother on a 5-point Likert scale. The characteristics of the scales correspond to the structural model of J. Hoffman presented in the introduction.

The study of functional separation included an assessment of cohabitation or separation from parents (spatial aspect); assessment of self-dependence in everyday life, the formation of the necessary life skills (cooking, cleaning living space, paying bills, making necessary household and large purchases, communication with government agencies, etc.), measured on a 4-point scale; assessment of financial independence.

To study subjective adulthood, respondents were asked an open question: “Do you consider yourself an adult? Why?” which also made it possible to describe the criteria

by which young people classify themselves or do not classify themselves as adults.

To study psychological well-being, we used the C. Riff Scale adapted by L.V. Zhukovskaya, E.G. Troshikhina [10]. Scales: “Autonomy”, “Environmental mastery”, “Personal Growth”, “Positive Relations with other people”, “Purpose in Life” (sense of meaningfulness and direction of one’s existence), “Self-acceptance”, “General indicator of psychological well-being”, measured on a 5-point Likert scale.

To measure the emotional aspects of well-being, the E. Diener Life Satisfaction Scale adapted by D.A. Leontieva, E.N. Osin and M. Fordis Happiness Scale were used [10].

The selected methods are widely used in world practice [1; 3; 4; 10; 19; 21; 22; 26], which makes it possible to compare the results of various studies.

Participants. The study involved 126 people living in St. Petersburg (50 men, 76 women), aged 18-27 years ($M=22.3$; $SD=2.1$). Students made up 44% of the sample, combining work and study adults — 15.3% of the sample, working adults — 33.5%, about 7% of the sample were other possible options (including unemployed). The sample was formed randomly, taking into account the age range of the period of emerging adulthood and a relatively even distribution by sex; anonymously and voluntarily. The survey was conducted in an online format, the participants received feedback at will.

Statistics: frequency analysis; descriptive statistics; comparative analysis by using Student’s t-test for dependent and independent samples, one-way analysis of variance ANOVA; correlation analysis (Pearson’s test); regression analysis; content analysis.

Results

Separation from parents. Indicators of functional separation indicate its formation as a whole. Spatial separation: 25.8% of

the sample live with their parents, the rest of young people live in a separate apartment, hostel, with partners, friends or relatives. The average age at which young people leave their parental home was 19 years old and ranged from 15 to 24 years. The financial independence of young people is also quite high: 68% of the sample are fully or almost completely self-sufficient, 15% partially earn on their own, but still use their parents' money, another 10% are supported by partners, only 6% of young people are fully supported by their parents. For 74% of the sample the first experience of paid activity is quite early and falls on the period of 14-17 years, extending further up to 23 years. Household self-dependence as a whole is also fully formed ($M=3.03$; $SD=0.59$) and is the subject to gender specificity — women more often show household self-dependence according to a number of indicators. This concerns making daily purchases, cleaning living space ($p \leq 0.001$), visiting medical facilities and leisure planning ($p \leq 0.05$), which ultimately affects the higher overall self-reliance in women ($p \leq 0.05$).

Analysis of the average values for indicators of psychological separation reveals a tendency for a greater severity of indicators of psychological separation from the father compared to a mother, regardless of gender

(Table 1). This difference is highly significant for all scales, except of the separation style ($p < 0.001$, t-test for dependent samples) — young people are significantly more in need of emotional support and approval from their mother than from their father, show greater similarity with their mother's ideas and worldviews when making important decisions, more often need a mother's advice than father's. The general trend is also the predominance of the behavioral component of separation for the sample as a whole.

Gender differences were found on the scales "Conflictual Separation (mother)" and "Functional Separation (mother)" and indicate that men are easier and more harmonious separate from their mothers than women, and are also more independent of their mothers in making important decisions and in their life choices (Table 1).

The correlation coefficient for dependent samples showed the relationship between identical separation scales ($0.358 \leq r \leq 0.570$; $p < 0.001$), which together with the absence of significant differences on the "Conflictual Separation" scale from the father and mother, indicates the unidirectional and consistent nature of the separation from the parental couple.

Correlation analysis (Pearson's criterion) revealed most of the separation compo-

Table 1
Descriptive statistics on the scales of the Psychological Separation Inventory

Scales	The whole sample		M Male	M Female	t-test
	M	SD			
Conflictual Separation (mother)	3.67	0.71	3.91	3.50	3.26**
Conflictual Separation (father)	3.80	0.77	3.91	3.75	1.13
Emotional Separation (mother)	3.56	0.85	3.73	3.46	1.76
Emotional Separation (father)	4.04	0.94	4.16	3.97	1.04
Attitudinal Separation (mother)	3.56	0.87	3.67	3.48	1.19
Attitudinal Separation (father)	3.86	0.95	4.00	3.78	1,19
Functional Separation (mother)	4.03	0.75	4.27	3.86	3.05*
Functional Separation (father)	4.38	0.79	4.37	4.38	-0.75

Note: * — $p \leq 0.05$; ** — $p \leq 0.01$.

nents tend to increase with age (except for the emotional separation component from father and mother). The closest relationship with age is found in the attitudinal separation from the father ($r=0.266$; $p=0.005$) and the functional separation from the mother ($r=0.264$; $p=0.003$), i.e. there is a tendency to increase differences in views and judgments with fathers and the ability to act without relying on the effective help of a mother, but the need for emotional support and approval of parents does not decrease with age.

Subjective adulthood and its foundations. This aspect was studied using content analysis of answers to the question whether young people consider themselves adults and why. The distribution of answers showed that more than half of the sample (54.8%) have an adult identity formed (consider themselves adults), a quarter of the sample (26%) have no adult identity (do not consider themselves adults), a fifth of the sample has doubts and gives contradictory answers (19.2%) (Fig. 1).

Next, the criteria on the basis of which the respondents classified (or did not classify) themselves as adults were analyzed.

Two categories (external/internal criteria of adulthood) and 7 subcategories were selected (Table 2). Such a division of categories and subcategories as external and internal is based on the widespread analysis of the criteria of adulthood in modern studies [16; 17; 19; 26].

The results showed that internal, psychological criteria of adulthood are the pre-

Do you consider yourself an adult?

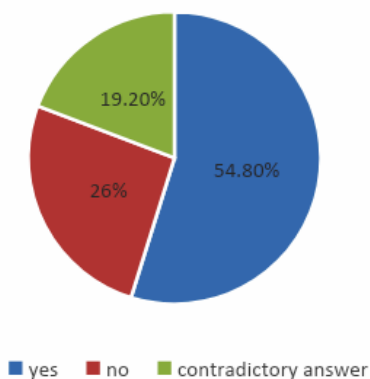


Fig. 1. Distribution of answers to the question about subjective adulthood

Table 2

Distribution of respondents' answers regarding the criteria of adulthood they single out

Categories	Subcategories	% sample
External criteria of adulthood	Financial security (independence)	19
	Separate accommodation	10
	Occupation (studies or works)	5
	Total by external criteria	34
Internal criteria of adulthood	Responsibility	32
	Self-dependence	27
	Psychological qualities of personal maturity («self-sufficiency», self-confidence, «reliance on life experience», caring for close people, etc.)	22
	Stability	5
	Total by internal criteria	86
Other (no answer, joke answer, etc.)		15

dominant grounds for adulthood (the share of their references was 86%, while external ones — only 34%), with responsibility (32%) and independence (27%) occupying leading positions. The most significant external criterion is financial independence (19%), but the importance of employment as a criterion of adulthood is the least (5%).

Connection of psychological separation, subjective adulthood and psychological well-being. By using ANOVA, the differences in psychological separation and psychological well-being in groups with different adult identity formation were studied. There were no significant differences in separation parameters, i.e. subjective adulthood is not related to the degree of psychological separation from parents. The chronological age of young people in groups with different subjective maturity did not differ either. Significant differences were found in the parameters of psychological well-being (Table 3).

Young people with a developed adult identity have a greater sense of competence in mastering the environment (“Environmental mastery”), are more accepting various aspects of their personality (“Self-acceptance”), and are generally more prosperous (“General well-being”) compared to those who have not formed an adult identity. According to the “Purpose in Life” scale, each

of the selected groups differs significantly from each other, and respondents with an unformed sense of adulthood feel lack goals, direction and meaning in life. Satisfaction with life is also significantly higher in the group with a formed adult identity. Also, the group of subjective adulthood has more experience (0.5 years on average) of living separately ($F=3.948$; $p=0.02$).

The impact of psychological separation components from parents on the psychological well-being of young adults. To solve this problem, multiple regression analysis was used, where the independent variables were the scales of psychological separation from parents, and the dependent variables were the parameters of psychological well-being. In table 4, the results are presented in order of decreasing dispersion of the models.

The style of separation (“Conflictual separation”) from the father is a positive predictor of life satisfaction and the frequency of experiencing happiness. The style of separation from the mother is a positive predictor of the “Positive Relations” component — harmonious separation has an affirmative effect on subjective well-being.

At the same time, the growth of “Functional separation” from parents negatively affects life satisfaction and happiness. The back impact of the behavioral component of

Table 3

Indicators of psychological well-being in groups with different formation of adult identity (significant differences)

Indicators	Do not consider themselves adults	Consider themselves adults	Doubters	F	p-level
Environmental mastery	25.84*	32.09*	30.36	8.244	0.001
Purpose in life	27.42*	35.05*	33.14*	9.342	0.000
Self-acceptance	29.05*	34.86*	34.07	4.981	0.009
General well-being	181.53*	204.02*	201.5	5.701	0.005
Satisfaction with life	3.05*	4.19*	4.00	4.097	0.021

Note: an asterisk (*) indicates groups that differ significantly from each other in terms of the results applying the Scheffe correction.

Table 4

Results of regression analysis

Dependent variables	R-squar	Predictors	Beta	p-level
Satisfaction with life (Diener)	0.50	Conflictual separation (father)	0.391	0.001
		Functional separation (father)	-0.431	0.002
Happiness frequency (Fordis)	0.26	Conflictual separation (father)	0.420	0.001
		Functional Separation (mother)	-0.384	0.002
Purpose in life (Riff)	0.14	Functional separation (father)	-0.368	0.004
Positive relations (Riff)	0.12	Conflictual Separation (mother)	0.348	0.007

separation from the father on the “Purpose in Life” criterion shows that a decrease of orientation to the father’s help and independent decision-making can lead to a loss of a sense of the direction in life.

Conclusions and Discussion

The results of the study confirm our hypothesis about separation as a heterogeneous phenomenon. It is shown that the behavioral and functional aspects of separation are more pronounced than the emotional and cognitive components in the period of emerging adulthood. This partially correlates with the results of the studies of separation in adolescence [1; 8]. So, we can assume that the external separation, which markers are the behavioral and functional aspects associated with the ability to make decisions independently, make choices, the ability to self-service, spatial separation and financial independence, leads to an internal separation associated with the formation of identity and personal maturity.

Separation from the father is generally more pronounced than separation from a mother, but it is more difficult for girls to separate from their mothers. The separation of a child in a family is unidirectional, i.e. moving away from one parent is not compensated by moving closer to the other.

During the emerging adulthood, separation indicators grow, however, the absence of a connection between age and affective components of separation allows us to

speak of the need for emotional support and parental approval that persists during this period. Probably, emotional separation from parents is formed most late, outside of early adulthood, which confirms the assumption of N.E. Kharlamenkova on the continuation of separation processes in adulthood [14], and is also consistent with some empirical studies of separation in adulthood [12].

Subjective adulthood is not associated with the degree of separation from parents and chronological age, but is associated with psychological well-being. Apparently, the growth of self-acceptance, mastery in managing the environment, acquisition of the direction and meaning in one’s own life, a general sense of stability and satisfaction with life are the sources of the formation an adult identity. It can also be assumed that the connection between separation and subjective adulthood is mediated by psychological well-being, and separation itself does not lead to a sense of being an adult. This is consistent with the fact that the criteria for adulthood for young people are mostly internal, psychological, where responsibility and independence are the main markers, and the most significant external criterion is financial independence. These results correspond to some results of the foreign studies [16; 17; 19; 26].

Regarding the influence of the components of psychological separation on well-being, the study showed that the behavioral components of separation are the predictors

of a decrease in satisfaction, happiness, and purposefulness of life. Independence in decision-making and making choices still hinders the experience of emotional well-being, which is probably associated with an increase in the number of life difficulties and growth of responsibility. A harmonious (conflict-free) style of separation from parents, on the contrary, contributes to rising of life satisfaction and happiness. Similar results were obtained in one of the modern cross-cultural studies on emerging adulthood [24].

In general, the obtained results indicate that separation, especially external separation, is a painful and difficult process for a young adult, however, overcoming these difficulties leads to an increase in psychological well-being and formation of subjective

adulthood, and therefore contributes to maturation.

At the same time, it should be noted that the measurement of subjective adulthood as a qualitative characteristic in our study acts as its limitation as the results obtained could not be included in the regression analysis to assess their impact on psychological well-being. In future research, attention should be paid to the development of numerical scales for measuring subjective adulthood. In addition, the most perspective direction in studying the relationship between separation features and maturation processes is longitudinal studies covering the entire period of emerging adulthood, as well as a two-sided study of separation processes in “parent-adult child” dyads.

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Information about the authors

Victoria R. Manukyan, PhD in Psychology, Associate Professor, Department of Developmental Psychology and Differential Psychology, Saint Petersburg State University, Saint Petersburg, Russia, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4200-8935>, e-mail: v.manukjan@spbu.ru

Информация об авторах

Манукян Виктория Робертовна, кандидат психологических наук, доцент, доцент кафедры психологии развития и дифференциальной психологии, ФГБОУ ВО «Санкт-Петербургский государственный университет» (ФГБОУ ВО СПбГУ), г. Санкт-Петербург, Российская Федерация, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4200-8935>, e-mail: v.manukjan@spbu.ru

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