

Mette Ranta

Pathways to Adulthood

Developmental Tasks, Financial Resources and Agency

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Developmental Tasks, Financial
Resources and Agency

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Mette Ranta

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UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

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ABSTRACT

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This research focused on young Finnish adults' personal financial situation and individual agency across young adulthood and their concurrent and longitudinal effects on key developmental tasks related to career and social relations as well as life satisfaction development. Furthermore, the separate studies analyzed transitions of 18–25-year-olds in the context of the global economic downturn that has been taking place since 2008. The key theoretical perspective was the life course theory (Elder, 1998) and multidisciplinary frameworks addressing the notion of agency. The research had three aims: to examine how financial resources influence youth development and life satisfaction; to give an overview of life situations and multifaceted transitions in the midst of personal and societal change; and to explain the role of agency in managing financial issues and developmental tasks. The research used data from the Finnish Educational Transitions Studies (FinEdu) longitudinal research project; specifically, questionnaire data on young adults aged 18 to 25. The quantitative analyses used variable- and person-oriented approaches. The results showed that individual agency, indicated by the use of achievement approach strategies and social approach strategies, was especially important in shaping life course transitions, success and satisfaction regarding developmental tasks at age 25, especially concerning use of social strategies. Participants' financial situation improved on an objective level from age 20 to 25, but the subjective perception did not; furthermore, financial issues did not have an effect on success and satisfaction regarding developmental tasks. The results also showed that there was no change in life satisfaction during the educational transition from general upper secondary school to further education and/or employment, but the analyses revealed a significant heterogeneity among the young adults' life satisfaction reflected in five life satisfaction trajectories. A high level of agency at age 19 was related to having a high life satisfaction trajectory, as was higher subjective financial situation at age 22. The results also showed that the highest frequency categories and profiles of personal goals and concerns at ages 20 and 23 were in the career domain, comprised of education, work and finances, with education prioritized at age 20 and work at age 23; romantic relationships were less frequent. The goal profiles were associated with related life status cross-sectionally and longitudinally, and to personal concerns – especially in the career domain.

Keywords: transitions, life course, career, agency, life satisfaction, financial situation, independence, longitudinal study, quantitative research methods

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TIIVISTELMÄ (FINNISH ABSTRACT)

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Polut aikuisuuteen: Kehitystehtävät, taloudelliset resurssit ja toimijuus

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Tässä tutkimuksessa tarkasteltiin 18–25-vuotiaiden nuorten aikuisten henkilökohtaista taloudellista tilannetta ja yksilöllistä toimijuutta varhaisaikuisuuden aikana ja niiden samanaikaisia sekä pitkittäisiä vaikutuksia uraan ja sosiaalisiin suhteisiin liittyviin kehitystehtäviin sekä elämäntyytyväisyyden kehitykseen. Tutkimuksessa myös analysoitiin nuorten aikuisten siirtymävaiheita kansainvälisen taloustaantumana aikana vuodesta 2008 lähtien. Perustana olevina teoreettisina lähtökohtina olivat elämänkulun näkökulma (Elder, 1998) ja toimijuuden monitieteelliset teoreettiset viitekehykset. Tutkimuksella oli kolme yleistä tavoitetta: tarkastella taloudellisten resurssien vaikutusta nuoruuden kehitykseen ja elämäntyytyväisyyteen, antaa yleiskatsaus elämäntilanteista ja monitahoisista siirtymävaiheista henkilökohtaisen sekä yhteiskunnallisen muutoksen keskellä ja selvittää toimijuuden roolia taloudellisen tilanteen ja kehitystehtävien hallinnassa. Tutkimuksessa käytettiin Finnish Educational Transitions Studies (FinEdu) -pitkittäistutkimusprojektin kyselylomakeaineistoa, joka oli kerätty 18–25-vuotiailta lukiotaustaisilta nuorilta aikuisilta. Kvantitatiiviset tutkimusmenetelmät noudattivat sekä muuttuja- että henkilöorientoitunutta lähestymistapaa. Tulokset osoittivat, että yksilöllinen toimijuus, mitattuna suoritusstrategioiden ja sosiaalisten strategioiden käytöllä, on erityisen tärkeää elämänkulun siirtymävaiheiden ja kehitystehtävien saavuttamisen sekä tyytyväisyyden kannalta 25 vuoden iässä. Erityisesti tämä koskee sosiaalisten strategioiden käyttöä. Taloudellinen tilanne parani objektiivisella tasolla 20 vuoden iästä 25 vuoden ikään, mutta subjektiivinen näkemys ei parantunut. Taloudellisilla seikoilla ei ollut vaikutusta kehitystehtävien saavuttamiseen tai tyytyväisyyteen. Tulokset osoittivat myös, ettei elämäntyytyväisyys muuttunut koulutuksellisen siirtymän aikana toisen asteen lukiokoulutuksesta kohti jatkokoulutusta tai työelämää. Sen sijaan analyysit, jotka paljastivat merkitsevän heterogeisuuden nuorten aikuisten elämäntyytyväisyydessä, johtivat viiteen eri elämäntyytyväisyyden kehityspolkuun. Korkea toimijuuden taso 19 vuoden iässä oli yhteydessä korkean elämäntyytyväisyyden kehityspolkuun, joka oli vastaavasti yhteydessä korkeampaan subjektiiviseen taloudelliseen tilanteeseen 22 vuoden iässä. Lisäksi tulokset osoittivat, että henkilökohtaisten tavoitteiden ja huolten frekvenssikategoriat ja profiilit 20 ja 23 vuoden iässä liittyivät useimmiten uraan eli koulutukseen, työhön ja taloudellisiin seikkoihin – koulutus ensisijaisesti 20 vuoden iässä, työ 23 vuoden iässä ja parisuhde vähemmän painotettuna. Tavoiteprofiilit olivat yhteydessä niihin liittyviin elämäntilanteisiin poikkileikkaus- ja pitkittäisnäkökulmasta sekä henkilökohtaisissa huolissa erityisesti uraan liittyvällä elämänelineella.

Avainsanat: siirtymät, elämänkulku, ura, toimijuus, elämäntyytyväisyys, taloudellinen tilanne, itsenäisyys, pitkittäistutkimus, kvantitatiiviset tutkimusmenetelmät

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I have been lucky to have gained valuable work experience at two universities during the past years; at my *alma mater*, the University of Jyväskylä, and at my hometown university, the University of Helsinki. The work for this

dissertation has been conducted at the Department of Psychology of the University of Jyväskylä, and at the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies (HCAS) and the Institute of Behavioral Sciences at the University of Helsinki. I would like to express my gratitude to all involved institutions for kindly providing me with the opportunity to carry out my research at both universities. I would especially like to warmly thank the Head of the Department of Psychology, Professor Jari-Erik Nurmi, for having offered me a postgraduate position at the Finnish Centre of Excellence in Learning and Motivation Research, funded by the Academy of Finland, at the early stage of my doctoral studies, and for giving me the freedom and trust to work independently on a remote basis from Helsinki. At HCAS, I would like to thank the Director, Professor Sami Pihlström, for providing an inspiring and international work environment, and for enabling me to gain additional work experience as a research assistant supporting numerous outstanding HCAS fellows.

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Espoo, May 2015
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LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

- I Ranta, M., Punamäki, R.-L., Tolvanen, A., & Salmela-Aro, K. (2012). The role of financial resources and agency in success and satisfaction regarding developmental tasks in early adulthood. In S. L. Blair (Ed.), *Economic stress and the family* (Contemporary Perspectives in Family Research, Vol. 6.) (pp. 187–233). Bingley: Emerald.
- II Ranta, M., Chow, A., & Salmela-Aro, K. (2013). Trajectories of life satisfaction and the financial situation in the transition to adulthood. *Longitudinal and Life Course Studies*, 4, 57–77.
- III Ranta, M., Dietrich, J., & Salmela-Aro, K. (2014). Career and romantic relationship goals and concerns during emerging adulthood. *Emerging Adulthood*, 2, 17–26.

Taking into account the instructions given and comments made by the co-authors, the author of the dissertation collected the data, conducted the analyses, and wrote the reports of the three publications.

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TIIVISTELMÄ (FINNISH ABSTRACT)

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1 INTRODUCTION

Young adulthood involves drastic changes in life. Particularly in the third decade of life, changes require greater decision making than at any other time (Grob, Krings, & Bangerter, 2001; Mortimer & Larson, 2002). Multiple, rapid and often simultaneous life transitions and changes take place, including moving out of the childhood home, starting a career, and becoming a parent (Almeida & Wong, 2009). Success in these multiple tasks influences current psychological functioning, such as life satisfaction and life goal progress (Salmela-Aro, 2009; Schulenberg, Sameroff, & Cicchetti, 2004), and may impact further developmental processes (Arnett, 2004; Zarrett & Eccles, 2006).

Developmental research has identified five key transitions – the “Big 5”¹ – that are faced during young adulthood: (1) leaving the parental home (i.e., independent living); (2) finishing education; (3) entering working life (i.e., educational attainment and work status); (4) forming a romantic relationship; and (5) becoming a parent (Elder & Shanahan, 2007; Settersten, 2007). This research examined *young adults’ success and satisfaction regarding these age-graded key developmental tasks*, focusing on the characteristics and timings of the transitions. Success and satisfaction are operationalized as the achievement and quality of developmental tasks, representing psychological and social accomplishments specific to the *young adulthood* life course phase.

During the diverse and demanding transitions in young adulthood, the level and development of young adults’ overall life satisfaction can change significantly due to the nature of the transitions, the long-term changes taking place, and the reorganizing of one’s life (Cowan, 1991). The transitions related to education and employment, in particular, are often marked by irregular and uncertain income, increasing individualization, and the challenging step into independent living (Wilska, 2004). This research focused on the personal financial situation of young Finnish adults embedded within the current financial challenges of the society. The fulfillment of developmental tasks is pursued in the context of simultaneous social and economic changes. In this research, the

1 Not to be mistaken with the “Big 5 personality traits.”

context refers to the current structural changes and uncertainty in the labor market due to the global economic downturn. The young adults examined were studied in the context of increasing global youth unemployment, with the largest increase having taken place from 2007 to 2012 in the developed economies (United States, Canada, Japan, and Australia) and the European Union. Altogether, 17% of 15–24-year-olds were unemployed at the peak of the Great Recession in 2009 and 18% in 2012, which is a significant difference compared to the adult unemployment rate of 7% (International Labor Organization, 2014). In Finland, youth unemployment also increased significantly during the economic downturn, from 2008 to 2009, and is currently at a high level as economic upheavals are still taking place (Official Statistics of Finland, 2014).

The inherently unstable nature of the transition phase can lead to uncertainty, ill-being and maladaptive functioning in different life domains, including in working life, and can decrease life satisfaction (Luyckx, De Witte, & Goossens, 2011; Wilska, 2004). Failure in or radical postponement of normative developmental tasks in the transition to adulthood predicts problems in well-being and development (Danzinger & Ratner, 2010; Heckhausen, 1999). Inevitably, young adults are expected to manage constantly changing circumstances, to increase flexibility, and to tolerate insecurity. However, individuals can adapt and are active agents of their own life. In this research, the role of agency was analyzed with respect to personal goals and the use of achievement and social strategies.

This research investigated to what degree individual agency and the individual's personal financial situation across young adulthood have concurrent and longitudinal effects on success and satisfaction regarding developmental tasks, numerous critical transitions and life satisfaction. Individual development is embedded in a contextual environment, and the analysis in this research focused on the transitions of 18–25-year-olds in the context of the economic upheaval in Finland that has been ongoing since 2008. The underlying theoretical approach taken in investigating these issues was the *life course perspective* (Elder, 1998a, 1998b), which focuses on contextual definitions of development.

This introduction proceeds with the description of the life course perspective regarding individual development, in particular, the interplay between psychological and contextual factors during young adulthood. Finally, the influence of agency and societal context on young adulthood development will be examined.

1.1 The life course developmental perspective

Psychosocial development follows specific and predictable paths that are regulated by the interaction between physical maturation, individual agency and aspirations, as well as by societal and cultural values and pressures (Brandtstädter, 1998; Bronfenbrenner, 1977). However, increasing interest in the

life course perspective has evolved as models of universal stages of human development have been seen as flawed (Alwin, 2012). In the life course perspective, individual development is studied by combining institutionalized developmental pathways with subjective experiences of developmental processes (Mayer, 2002). According to Elder (1998a, 1998b), the pioneering life course theorist, the life course perspective consists of four guiding paradigmatic factors or principles and theoretical elements: 1) *present sociohistorical context*; 2) *linked lives* (i.e., *network of social ties*); 3) *human agency*; and 4) *variations in timing of events, transitions and social roles*. Figure 1 (adopted from Elder & Giele, 2009) portrays how the life course perspective has been implemented in the themes and concepts of this research.

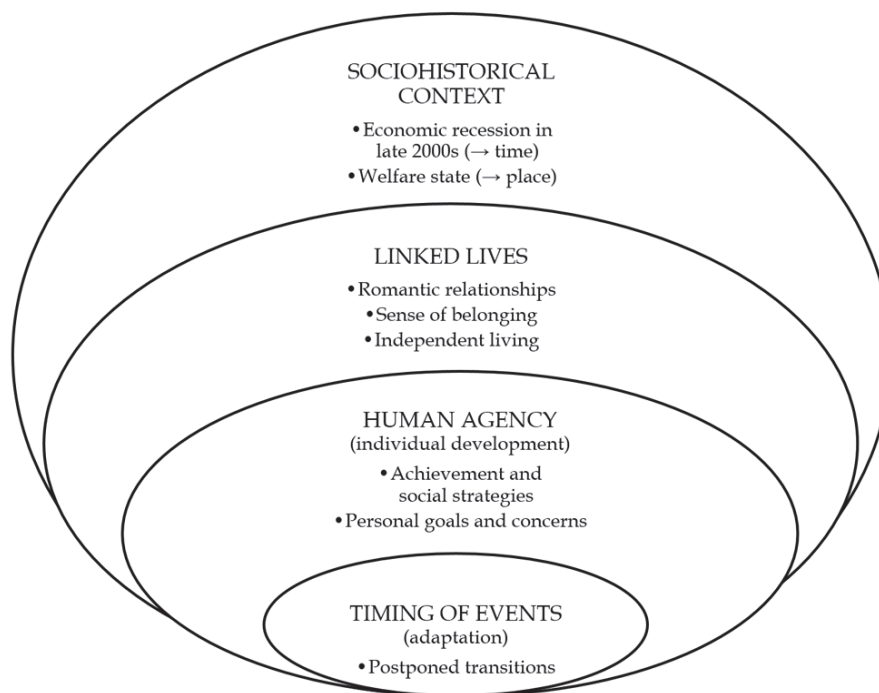


FIGURE 1 Linking the life course perspective to the study themes

In the life course perspective, development is examined within the context of historical time characterized by specific sociocultural resources, constraints and opportunities (Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011). This sociohistorical context (i.e., the current historical and geographical location) is defined by concurrent macro-sociological, national economy-level factors (Elder, 1998b; Elder, Johnson, & Shanahan, 2003; Settersten, 2003). In the present research, this refers to the ongoing downturn in the national economy of Finland, which is a social-democratic wel-

fare state. Furthermore, structure and process – individual and historical time – are linked, as is always the case in the life course tradition (Schoon, 2006). While the agendas of life-span psychology, introduced later, and life course sociology have been seen to increasingly diverge, both have complementary explanations for individual behavior and life success. This underlines the need for integrating the two disciplines (for a review, see Diewald & Mayer, 2009), which was one of the key aims of this research.

Life course theorists emphasize the interplay of social change, life transitions, and developmental trajectories, which provides a basis for both continuity and change in individuals' behavior and life experiences (Elder & Giele, 2009). A life course transition can be simply defined as an experience shared by a clear majority of the population that takes place at roughly the same time within an individual life course (Holdsworth & Morgan, 2005). For example, during the transition to adulthood, most young adults face important changes in the career and social relations life domains shortly before or after their 20s. The challenging life transitions, embedded in life course trajectories, consist of events and changes both in objective life status and subjective states, resulting in positive challenges or negative stress and requiring adaptation as well as psychological and social resources. Stress can become prominent if individuals face demands that exceed their capacities (Grob, 2001), particularly during uncertain historical and societal conditions (Almeida & Wong, 2009). This process can also be explained by the *demands-resources model* (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001), which states that environments offer demands and resources that influence individual development, with demands requiring effort and resources stimulating and supporting such effort.

1.2 Key developmental tasks in young adulthood

1.2.1 Content and timing

During young adulthood, multifaceted interpersonal and education-related demands and challenges take place that involve fulfilling associated developmental tasks (Nurmi, 2004; Salmela-Aro, 2011; Shanahan, 2000). The classic work by Havighurst (1948) presents eight developmental tasks in young adulthood between ages 19 and 30: (1) deciding on a partner; (2) living with a partner; (3) starting a family; (4) raising children; (5) maintaining a (family) household; (6) starting a professional career; (7) taking societal responsibility; and (8) finding an adequate social network. These developmental tasks can be conceptualized as achievement- and affiliation-related developmental tasks (Schulenberg, Bryant, & O'Malley, 2004). This research focused on the following achievement-related developmental tasks in young adulthood: completion of studies, secondary and tertiary school graduation, and entry into employment; as well as the following affiliation-related tasks: forming social relations related to moving

from the childhood home into independent living and forming a romantic relationship.

Researchers adopting the life course perspective have shown interest in the concept of transitioning and institutional change (Diewald & Mayer, 2009; Mayer, 2002). It refers to moving from one life stage to the next, such as the entry into employment, becoming an adult in legal terms, or becoming a parent. In the transition to adulthood, the main processes taking place are the transitions toward financial independence related to moving from the parental home into independent living. These transitions to adulthood rank high in importance, complexity and uniqueness, as the life plans formulated in adolescence meet the opportunities and constraints of post-adolescent life (Schulenberg & Schoon, 2012).

Preparing for adulthood takes a lot longer nowadays, especially for those young adults who have reliable resources to take advantage of. The notion of individualization in life course transitions, often referred to in emerging adulthood literature, has been questioned as there is increasing and persisting evidence of inequality in educational and career opportunities (Bynner, 2005; Furlong & Cartmel, 1997; Hendry & Kloep, 2007a, 2007b; Schoon & Eccles, 2014). Furthermore, variation in social expectations due to economic changes in society has resulted in discontinuities in traditional transitional processes (Grob, 2001). Familial and local opportunities and their structural factors, such as the socioeconomic class of the family, neighborhood, gender, ethnicity and other social inequalities of cultural separation, all influence the content and timing of transitions, at least to some extent, resulting in increased social inequality (Bynner, 2005; Côté & Bynner, 2008; Holland, 2007; Kehily, 2007). For example, having a high socioeconomic family background may offer an option to postpone transitional tasks in young adulthood (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007).

The order of pursuing and attaining different developmental tasks and transitions might also vary between young men and women, according to life course research and gender studies (Mortimer & Shanahan, 2004). Gender differences are, after all, socially determined and they define how individuals are socialized into being masculine or feminine already in adolescence, and prior that as well (Cobb, 2010). Traditionally, men have been seen to prioritize work and a high income (Cobb, 2010) while for women, intimate relationships and the family are of greater developmental significance (see also Almeida, 2002; Marttinen & Salmela-Aro, 2012). Career choice and career development is strongly sensitive to gender since men and women often pursue and attain different careers: for women, the value and interest content-wise of education and work are often more important, whereas men often emphasize more objective measures; achievements and rewards. Already in upper secondary level education, gender differences can be found in how young men and women choose different school subjects (Cobb, 2010) and have different educational aspirations, expectations, and concrete educational pathways (Schoon & Eccles, 2014). Young women, for example, often have a higher level of academic achievement (e.g., grade point average) at the end of comprehensive school, which may lead

them to higher educational expectations of themselves (Schoon, Martin, & Ross, 2007; Tynkkynen, 2013). Furthermore, while career expectations may be high for both genders, young men are often more likely to realize their expectations than women (Mello, 2008).

Because of these differences, studies have often used gender comparisons in examining career choice and progress. However, gender roles are more flexible today than in the past in terms of masculine and feminine qualities (Cobb, 2010) and gender differences have been shown to become less distinguishable over time, especially in the career domain and later career planning and development, being *equally de-standardized* (see also Schoon, 2006). Also in the relationships domain, interpersonal issues have been found to be more important for males than earlier assumed (Kroger, 2000).

In most cases, 30 is the age by which young adults imagine they will be finished with their identity explorations and are ready to commit themselves both in the career domain and in romantic relations (Arnett, 2004). However, the transitional ages are greatly context-dependent, both in historical and geographical terms, as outlined in the *developmental-contextual theory* by Bronfenbrenner (1979). For example, romantic relationships are influenced by the proximal social environment and peers as well as cultural values and beliefs about the acceptable age for forming a romantic relationship with transitional age deadlines often showing gender differences (Settersten, 2007).

In Western societies, the transition to adulthood is seen as complete when one has achieved normative developmental goals or tasks according to a “social clock” or timetable implying an appropriate order and timing for major life events (Neugarten, Moore, & Lowe, 1965; Pilcher, 1995). These “scripts of life” act as models for age-appropriate role behavior (Buchmann, 1989). According to “theories of social practices” pursued by Bourdieu (1972), Giddens (1979) and Foucault (1984a; 1984b), normative expectations of behavior explaining action are based on the collective knowledge of social and cultural communities (for a review of theories of practice, see Warde, 2005). Traditionally, sociological theories have explained actions by the rules of a social ‘ought’, a normative consensus on behavior, embedded in shared collective rules and values. However, newer cultural theories explain actions by reconstructing knowledge, which enables individuals to interpret the world according to “shared knowledge” based on a socially shared interpretation of the world instead of merely complying with mutual normative expectations (Reckwitz, 2002). For example, societal expectations are reflected in age attributed to developmental tasks, and thereby define whether young adults “solve” a task *early*, *on time*, or *late* (Elder & Giele, 2009). On the other hand, in contemporary societies, individuals also need to master non-normative developmental demands and challenges, that is, those that are not expected positive or negative life events (Wrosch & Freund, 2001). Furthermore, life course researchers have traditionally been interested in the actual timing of life events or specific transitions, paying less attention to proposed normative expectations and timing rules (Elder & Giele, 2009).

Chronological or physical age has thus been transformed into a “social” age by institutions, and social regulations guide individuals to take appropriate social roles according to their age and status (Buchmann, 1989; Pilcher, 1995). However, the criteria for adulthood have become less apparent and there are multiple and more complex markers, as well as more subjective age considerations in regard to achieving adulthood (Mary, 2012). Therefore, it is important that young adulthood should not merely be seen as a sort of contrast to adulthood, but as an important developmental period of its own. The development occurring in late adolescence is not separate from other life course phases, since it happens in the context of an individual’s past experiences, present life situation and context, and the anticipated (near) future (Settersten, 2003). This is in accord with the life course perspective: development is a lifelong process (Elder, 1998a, 1998b).

Furthermore, previously clearly marked stages and age-specific role transitions have become blurred (Featherstone & Hepworth, 1991). In earlier times, different life domains, transitions, and trajectories were highly intertwined and linked to each other, which Holdsworth and Morgan (2005, p. 2) have described as a “linked bundle of different transitions.” For example, the transition from the childhood home to independent living was seen to be closely related to the transition from being single to getting married as well as from education to employment. In modern times, however, gaining one transition, such as moving away from home, may signify diverse processes. Leaving the parental home is not necessarily related to cohabiting with a partner, nor is marriage always associated with parenthood. This phenomenon refers to transitional events being *interconnected* rather than simultaneous, the link often being referred to as *decoupling* or *disconnectedness* (Brückner & Mayer, 2005; Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011).

The concept of *transition* is also often criticized for its simplicity: moving from a supposed point of departure to arrival—‘youth’ to ‘adulthood’—does not acknowledge the *multiplistic spiraling* nature of the synchrony and circularity of transitional events (Wyn & White, 1997). For example, young adults can leave and re-enter education and shift from employment to unemployment and back multiple times. This multitude of *transitional transitions* conceptualized by sociologists of youth research highlights the construction of youth subjectively rather than statically determined by a fixed age (Miles, 2000).

The complex and holistic perspectives on the transitions are not always acknowledged in empirical studies that mainly focus on only one life domain or on either school-to-work transitions or those related to forming a lasting romantic relationship (Schoon, Chen, Kneale, & Jager, 2012; van Dulmen, Claxton, Collins, & Simpson, 2014). The fact that young adults struggle with combining several tasks in several life domains simultaneously needs to be addressed (Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011; Salmela-Aro, Kiuru, Nurmi, & Eerola, 2011). Alan France (2007) has introduced the concept of ‘blending’ of different developmental tasks as a process of combining, for instance, achievement-related tasks instead of merely concentrating on one developmental domain. For example, in career achievements, young adults tend to lead a ‘double life’ by combining

work and education concurrently, which significantly differs from the tradition of previous generations. In conclusion, these multiple transitions to adulthood should be investigated by using a holistic approach as opposed to examining only one isolated life domain on its own. The focus should not be on either career and romantic relationship life domains (or both) separately, but on the *interplay* between these domains (van Dulmen et al., 2014). The present research's contribution to the field is its interlaced analysis of multiple developmental tasks and transitions, specifically those related to career establishment (higher education and employment), gaining financial independence, and forming important social relations and a committed romantic relationship, all in the context of wider global and national changes.

1.2.2 Gaining financial independence

Educational completion and the early stage of career life foster financial independence, which brings increased responsibility for and control over one's personal life and thus requires competent life management skills. Between ages 18 and 25, with concurrent developmental processes taking place, young adults are expected to adopt increasing responsibility for themselves, to make independent decisions, and, in most cases, to gain financial independence (Lee & Mortimer, 2009; Nelson & Barry, 2005). By age 25 to 27, the developmental and social transitions young adults have or have not crossed influences the financial opportunities and constraints of adulthood (Galambos, Barker, & Krahn, 2006; Schulenberg, Bryant et al., 2004). Financial independence, in turn, has been seen to have a significant impact on multiple issues in young adulthood, including achieving other developmental tasks.

This effect can be identified objectively, for example, by an individual's change in living situation upon moving out of the childhood home (Billari, 2001; Lee & Mortimer, 2009; Modell, Furstenberg, & Hershberg, 1976), as well as in subjective terms, such as by the fact that experiences of economic uncertainty in a young adult's life may result in the postponement of transitional events (Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011). For example, young adults may invest and stay in higher education longer as a defense or avoidance strategy when facing unemployment and an uncertain labor market (Dietrich, 2012; Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Miles, 2000). According to this *alternative role hypothesis*, in countries where youth unemployment is high the education system may act as a "reservoir" for youth otherwise unemployed. Furthermore, a national, publicly-funded support system can financially enable this option (Mills & Blossfeld, 2005). This is the case in Finland, although new policies have been formed in order to restrict the time spent in education and to urge young adults to join the labor force at a younger age. Investing time in education and gaining a degree—in other words, human capital—has traditionally been seen to be beneficial in terms of increasing one's employment opportunities and competitiveness (Bell & Blanchflower, 2010; Järvinen & Vanttaja, 2001). However, at the European Union (EU) level, unemployment among young adults with a tertiary degree has risen more sharply than among those with a lower education (Bell &

Blanchflower, 2010). Nevertheless, unemployment across all age groups with higher qualifications is lower (Bell & Blanchflower, 2010), as is the risk for being only in temporary employment during an economic recession (de Lange, Gesthuizen, & Wolbers, 2013). Unemployment risk is also slightly higher for women than for men, although young men have been seen to be especially vulnerable in terms of social exclusion and the effects of economic recession. In Finland, for example, unemployment has been especially prominent in male-dominated fields, such as information technology, metal and pulp industries (Myrskylä, 2011). Women are more adaptive to the restructuring processes of society than are men, which becomes evident particularly during economic upheavals. However, regarding other life domains, the governmental and organizational family policies and life course circumstances also influence gendered actions and commitments relating to career and family life domains (Nilsen, 2012).

Conventionally, financial resources have been understood as the *objective financial situation*, that is, the monetary amount of disposable income of an individual. Psychological studies have also included family socioeconomic status as a measure of a financial situation, which can be a fairly limited representation of available financial resources. In this research, financial resources were conceptualized and measured not only objectively but also subjectively. *Subjective financial situation* was defined as the extent to which individuals feel their objective income is sufficient in relation to their consumption habits, life values and ambitions. Moreover, the concept of *economic pressure* relates to the practical side of the subjective financial situation, such as problems making ends meet, budgeting for basic necessities according to what one can afford, or making significant cutbacks in monthly expenditures (Conger, Conger, Matthews, & Elder, 1999). For economists, such assessments provide insights regarding the purchasing power of individuals and the methods they use to manage economic hardship (Baek & DeVaney, 2010).

Assessments of subjective family financial situations are as important in assessing psychological and social outcomes as objective measures (Gudmonson, Son, Lee, & Bauer, 2010). Perceived family economic hardship and financial concerns or a societal economic recession are seen to negatively affect family well-being (Elder & Caspi, 1988) and reduce youth adjustment as well as sense of control or mastery, meaning the degree to which the adolescent has confidence in his or her ability to influence future outcomes in life over time (Conger et al., 1999). Additionally, a weak family financial situation in childhood and adolescence has been seen to have an effect on cognitive ability and achievement (Elder & Johnson, 2003). Previous studies, also in Finland, have shown that economic difficulties decrease the quality of human relations (Solantaus, Leinonen, & Punamäki, 2004). Less is known, however, about how economic stress affects the transitions of young adults and what developmental risks it brings. Is economic stress related to relationship negativity among young couples, as was identified in the original model (Family Economic Stress Model, FESM; Conger & Elder, 1994) among parents?

To conclude, the aim of this research was to reveal how young adults individually adapt their financial goals to norms that guide specific life course transitions within a certain sociopolitical context, investigating what kinds of possibilities young Finnish adults feel they have and what kinds of choices and strategies they apply regarding their life management process (Helve, 2002).

1.2.3 Social relations

According to the “linked lives” concept of Elder’s (1998a) life course perspective, historical, economic and political changes, as well as shared circumstances in relationships with the family, peers, employers and institutions are interwoven in individual experiences and development. One of the key elements of the life course perspective is called *social embeddedness*, referring to the social ties an individual has to others through social roles and relationships as well as considering the social structures and institutions that individuals adhere to (Diewald & Mayer, 2009; Holdsworth & Morgan, 2005). Life transitions “are always *part of social trajectories* that give them distinct meaning and form” (Elder, 1998b, p. 1). Individuals have multiple trajectories, of which the developmental implications are basic elements of their life course (Elder, 1998b). The life course perspective demonstrates that social contexts are more than behavioral settings and the life course is therefore “institutionalized” (Diewald & Mayer, 2009). Social forces of time and place shape individual pathways in terms of age-related transitions (Settersten, 2003). Context might mean any kind of “wider social entity: class, community, welfare regime, state, or a broader historical current such as individualization” (Holdsworth & Morgan, 2005, p. 155). Additionally, social ties to “significant others” establish socialization processes by channeling action and individual decision making (Elder & Giele, 2009). Developing lives are *linked* interdependently and socially among, for example, family members and peers (Almeida & Wong, 2009; Elder & Giele, 2009).

In research on young adults, decision making is seen to occur through co-agency and co-regulation (Salmela-Aro, 2009; see also Dietrich, Parker, & Salmela-Aro, 2012) as young adults imply agency socially and collectively. In sociology, Bandura (2000) has defined this as *proxy* or *collective agency*. Leaving home and the transition to independence, for example, does not occur in isolation from significant and generalized others or the societal *context*, since these create the context and offer support—and this process generates negotiations with others (Holdsworth & Morgan, 2005).

Numerous changes occur in social networks during young adulthood, as one of the key developmental tasks is related to the detachment from one’s parents and connecting with peers and romantic partners. Young adults change during young adulthood in a number of ways that make them increasingly ready for commitment and eventually marriage. Marriage and cohabitation are examples of close interaction between a social institution and individual choices. Young adults become more capable of enduring intimacy; they appreciate developing a deeper emotional closeness and come to desire security and commitment in their romantic relationships (Arnett, 2004). However, this may not

directly lead to stepping into the institution of marriage, but is an example of the experimenting behavior that Arnett has defined as emblematic of the *emerging adulthood* age period, that is, experiencing a sense of gradual commitment through cohabitation, which is an option that was not as readily available to previous generations. Cohabitation differs from marriage not only in legal terms, but also in a psychological aspect, in that social pressure may propel emerging adults from cohabitation into marriage (Arnett, 2004).

Young Finnish adults move out of their childhood home relatively early and at an increasingly young age compared to their peers in other European Union member states. The median age is 20 for women and 21 for men (Choroszewicz & Wolff, 2010; Eurostat statistics, 2010). For comparison, up to 46% of 21-year-old women still lived with their parents in 1990. However, according to Eurostat statistics (2010), more than half of young men in Finland aged 18–24 years still live with their parents in their childhood home, and approximately 32% of women, portraying a significant gender gap, although also young men tend to move away from home increasingly early (Statistics Finland, 2013a).² It is fairly easy to rent an apartment and the housing supplement of the student financial aid package promotes leaving the childhood home (European Commission, 1997). First-time investments in buying an apartment are, on average, made at 28 years of age, although the number of these investments has recently dropped significantly: in 2013, such investments were made by 21,000 individuals, which is 40% less than in 2006 (Official Statistics of Finland, 2013a). Among 20–29-year-old adults, 21% have a housing mortgage of 77,624 EUR on average (Statistics Finland, 2013b).

While the majority of young adults move to live alone, cohabiting is increasingly common. This life stage also lasts longer than ever before as there have been clear postponements of marriage in Finland in recent years like in other Western countries as well (Statistics Finland, 2013a). Approximately one-third of Finnish young men aged 25 cohabited in 2012, and 37% of young women (compared to 25% and 28% of men and women, respectively, in 1990). The mean age for first marriage in 2012 was 30 for women and 33 for men (Statistics Finland, 2012).³ The mean age of having the first child has also risen steadily since the beginning of the 1980s. In 2012, it was 28 for women and 30 for men (Statistics Finland, 2013a). Significant differences within Finland need to be acknowledged, however; in the Hospital District of Helsinki and Uusimaa in the south, the mean age of women giving birth for the first time was 29.7 years in 2013 compared to 28.5 years elsewhere. This is partly explained by migration to the south for educational purposes, resulting in the postponement of parenthood (*Helsingin Sanomat*, 18 November 2014).

2 The proportion of young men living at home is mostly explained by their attendance in military service at this age.

3 In Study III there was a typographical error in these ages. The correct ages are those mentioned above.

Community and sense of belonging

Community refers to the sum of social relationships that arise from social interaction and common experiences and lead to attachment between people (Colclough & Sitaraman, 2005). *Sense of community* or *sense of belonging* is relevant to well-being, life satisfaction, and social identity (Davidson & Cotter, 1991; Prezza, Amici, Roberti, & Tedeschi, 2001; Prezza & Constantini, 1998). Also, *belonging* is often linked with having a sense of place and being part of a larger entity, either a smaller personal social circle (such as one's family) or a larger social network (such as in the concept of national or even global citizenship) (Henderson, Holland, McGrellis, Sharpe, & Thomson, 2007; Kehily, 2007). In young adulthood, typically a period of intensive changes, membership in a community, with its responsibilities and rewards, creates an important source of trust and well-being. At the societal level, the present economic uncertainty has influenced the increasing overall need for relationships by young adults, resulting in the search for "interdependence" rather than independence (Settersten, 2012). Social relationships offer support and resources, fostering development as the significance of institutional support decreases. According to Bauman (2001a; 2007), being part of a community also offers a significant sense of security and safety, especially in an insecure world; however, its nature is changing from being a 'structure' into a random network. Today, also peers within Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and social media domains have developed a sense of community or belonging, experiencing a change from being limited to a certain time and place (i.e., 'location-based' communities where individuals actively share mutual goals) to being part of larger and more complex communities involving numerous abstract goals and activities (Colclough & Sitaraman, 2005; Tuukkanen, 2014).

The popularity of social media serves as an example of a historical-cultural change that is relevant to young adults in maintaining their sense of community – also referred to as *social capital* (Bourdieu, 1984; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). Social capital has been seen as something generated from social networks, which offer *trust, opportunities and mutual support*, in other words, *reciprocity* (Putnam, 2002). *Linking social capital* is the cohesion fastened between and within social groups. Particularly in times of societal crisis and stress, social capital offered by parents, for example, can become significant in terms of coping with key developmental tasks in early adulthood (Helve & Bynner, 2007).

Social capital may, however, exist more strongly among those individuals who are already advantaged, widening the inequalities between social classes in the distribution of social capital, which has become an increasing concern among researchers worldwide (Putnam, 2002). According to Bourdieu (1984), several types of human capital are interconnected. For instance, the economic capital that young people have access to is linked to their social and cultural capital; their material conditions often depend on the financial assets of their parents or the welfare system. Personal financial resources are also gained through individual agency in employment, but in the education life phase such income is likely to be low.

Taking into account the diverse and vast social networks of young adults today, it is surprising that social capital has not been studied very comprehensively, with the exception of social capital relating to education and parents. Additionally, new studies on the motivational aspects of relationships have been conducted, for instance, regarding the shared motivations and the social, interpersonal goals of young adults, which are quite prevalent across young adulthood (Salmela-Aro, 2007). However, even though young adults might have strong ties to their families in childhood and they are able to significantly profit from the social capital adopted from their parents, young adults use different strategies in relating to their social peers and social networks (Helve & Bynner, 2007; Holland, 2007). Furthermore, the social networks that an individual has can strongly contribute to success. For example, for young adults, acquaintances can be quite influential in obtaining the first steps into employment (Putnam, 2002). Also younger adolescents, even children, can increase their own social capital by being active agents in the development and maintenance of social capital in families and neighborhoods; for example, during the educational transition to secondary school, they can actively use their own resources and networks to become more independent social actors. While the source of communal feeling may differ between individuals, the need for and the increasing significance of experiencing a sense of community and belonging is agreed upon, as modernization with its rapid social changes, diversity, and individualization as well as uncertainty is at hand (Colclough & Sitaraman, 2005; Weller, 2007).

In conclusion, in this research, sense of belonging was defined as a crucial developmental task in the transition to adulthood, involving social relationships in supporting positive development related to education, romantic relationships and independent living (Salmela-Aro & Schoon, 2009). Social relationships were studied in terms of forming a lasting romantic relationship and the living situation, that is, leaving the parental home for independent living, which is seen to also play a central role in other transitional events such as beginning further education (Holdsworth & Morgan, 2005).

1.2.4 Developmental tasks and life satisfaction

The changes occurring in young adulthood may have a profound effect on *overall life satisfaction*. More specifically, success in dealing with life course transitions related to career and romantic relationship life domains, for example, as manifested along various transitional pathways, may contribute to subsequent overall well-being⁴ (Schulenberg, Bryant et al., 2004). Studies have shown that attaining developmental tasks in young adulthood relatively early, and satisfac-

4 I use the concepts of *life satisfaction* and *well-being* alternatively; life satisfaction as a key measure in study II and well-being as a more general, overall concept. Life satisfaction was measured in study II using one component of Diener's (Diener et al., 1985; Diener & Oishi, 2000) global "Satisfaction with Life Scale" (SWLS). The importance is placed on the individual's own personal cognitive perception of life satisfaction, whose situation is compared to a standard one.

tion in specific life domains such as the career domain, is related to an overall higher level of life satisfaction and well-being (Schoon et al., 2012; Schulenberg et al., 2004), as has also been confirmed by several Finnish studies (Räikkönen, Kokko, Chen, & Pulkkinen, 2012; Salmela-Aro, Ek, Taanila, & Chen, 2012). For example, educational success has been seen to have a moderate impact on young adults' well-being (Kriesi & Buchmann, 2012). Also attainment in romantic relationships has been seen to be associated with higher levels of well-being. For example, studies by Galambos et al. (2006) and Howard, Galambos and Krahn (2010) showed that successful life transitions (here, defined as 'being employed and married') and good mental health during young adulthood (ages 18 to 25) predicted life and career satisfaction at age 32 in comparison to those who were still in the process of attaining these significant transitions. Furthermore, in Finland, Martikainen (2009) found that young adults who had a secure occupational status and were satisfied not only with their working status but also with their marital status showed an overall higher level of life satisfaction. Also, in a study by Schulenberg and colleagues (Schulenberg, Bryant et al., 2004), having or gaining a salutary trajectory of well-being across the transition to adulthood was related to success in developmental tasks, namely, work and romantic involvement.

On the other hand, young adults' lives may become unstable and complicated, and career lives disjointed, as some find difficulty and stress in adapting to the long-term changes taking place during the major life course phase of the transition to adulthood (Perren, Keller, Passardi, & Scholz, 2010). In particular, young adults have been shown to suffer from stress because of financial responsibilities in the transition to adulthood (Arnett, 2004). In that sense, late adolescence can be seen as *a period of life related to risk-taking* (e.g., Hechinger, 1992) that is characterized by individuals' ill-health and unhappiness (Hendry & Kloep, 2007a), anxiety (Hendry & Kloep, 2007b), maladaptive functioning leading to precarious trajectories (Côté & Bynner, 2008), negative self-esteem and depressive symptoms (Luyckx et al., 2011), and stress (Arnett, 2004), with young women showing more signs of depressive symptoms (Nolen-Hoeksema & Girgus, 1994; Mirowsky, 2006) and lower life satisfaction (Myllyniemi & Berg, 2013) than men.

However, despite the claim that most young adults would experience a "quarterlife crisis" (Robbins & Wilner, 2001), and regardless of the overflowing problematic discourse about "disadvantaged" youth (Miles, 2000), *the majority of young adults face their youth with no severe problems*, and life satisfaction, well-being and self-esteem (Galambos et al., 2006) actually increase during the transition to adulthood, that is, after the drop typically occurring during the teenage years (Arnett, 2004, 2007b; Myllyniemi & Berg, 2013; Schulenberg, O'Malley, Bachman, & Johnston, 2005; Schulenberg, Bryant et al., 2004). In a study on Finnish youth aged 10 to 29 years, 62% of youth were very satisfied with their life. Thus, many researchers conceptualize late adolescence as a prime time for a wide range of opportunities (Eccles et al., 1993; Graber & Brooks-Gunn, 1996;

Powers, Hauser, & Kilner, 1989). This research joined this school of thought and took a constructive perspective on the transition to adulthood.

The relation between individual growth and well-being has been conceptualized within several theoretical perspectives. The *life-span psychology* approach of Baltes (e.g., 2003) states that developmental change involves a joint occurrence of changes by either *gains* (i.e., growth) or *losses*. According to the *goal theory* approach, well-being depends on the fulfillment of needs and previously set goals (Diener, 2009). Furthermore, according to the *life-span model of motivation* (Salmela-Aro, 2009), the goals matching developmental tasks of a specific life stage contribute to well-being, especially concerning interpersonal and family-related goals (Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 1997).

Well-being also relies on material, social and cognitive *resources*, such as income, education, and social relationships (Ormel, Lindenberg, Steverink, & Verbrugge, 1999). Financial resources were the main focus of this research but agency defined by the capability to carry out action and personal goals also needs to be acknowledged in terms of a personal psychological resource (discussed in section 1.4.1). Moreover, well-being may also be related to how positive and negative personal life events are dealt with. This is related to the *comparison* of an individual life situation to a “standard used for judgment [...] based on socially shared notions of life success” (Kriesi & Buchmann, 2012, p. 24); for example, the way a young adult perceives his or her own life situation to be equal or even superior to a socially valued standard, “life as it should be” (Veenhoven, 2008, p. 47), is relevant for well-being.

One aim of this research, therefore, was to analyze the role of financial resources in determining life satisfaction. Ample evidence shows that a negative financial situation is related to a low level of life satisfaction or well-being (Jorgensen, Jamieson, & Martin, 2010). However, although young adults’ financial issues have been the focus of several studies also in Finland (Autio, 2006; Lintonen, Wilska, Koivusilta, & Konu, 2007; Wilska, 2001), there has been a lack of multidisciplinary research on how economic conditions affect life satisfaction. Research is also scarce regarding changes in young adults’ personal financial situation and the role of economic resources in attaining developmental tasks during the transition to adulthood in the process of constructing the future; accordingly, these were areas that this research set out to examine.

Furthermore, there is need for a multidisciplinary approach because studies using economic indices often neglect examining the quality and dynamics of social relationships as contributors to well-being (Strack, Argyle, & Schwartz, 1991). They also seldom analyze psychological variables in the relation between financial resources and well-being (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002). Psychological development studies, in turn, focus on cognitive, emotional and social well-being dimensions, but neglect considering broader economic and societal conditions as possible contributors to well-being. Interestingly, economic resources have been taken into account as affecting well-being mainly in studies concerning less developed countries (Easterlin, 2006; Kriesi & Buchmann, 2012).

To conclude, this research also contributes to existing research by examining life satisfaction development and heterogeneity between young adults and its association with personal resources, namely, young adults' agentic strivings and their objective and subjective financial situation. Only few studies (e.g., Salmela-Aro & Tuominen-Soini, 2010; Salmela-Aro & Tynkkynen, 2010) have focused on life satisfaction change, development or heterogeneity in young adults across an educational transition or in relation to individuals' personal financial situation. Studying changes in well-being usually requires longitudinal study designs with several measurements prior to the transition in focus (Perren et al., 2010). In this research, one of the aims was to examine whether there has been a change not only in young adults' financial situation but also in their life satisfaction immediately after the completion of their secondary education, as well as in later phases of young adulthood examined in regard to achieving independence and the entrance to adulthood. Secondly, another contribution of this research is its addressing the differences between individuals by adopting a person-oriented approach to analyzing the developmental course of life satisfaction, as described in the Methods section. The great heterogeneity among young adults' life satisfaction is thereby, accounted for (Arnett, 2007b).

1.3 Redefined stages of young adulthood

Returning to one of the key focuses of this research, that is, the content and timing of developmental transitions in young adulthood, there has been a tendency in post-industrialized Western society to see the overall transition to adulthood as extended and fragmented in many ways since so-called 'normative' transitions are not as explicitly clear as they have been in the past (Holland, 2007; Kehily, 2007). The transition to adulthood is often delayed into the near future, and this new life course phase between adolescence and adulthood is experienced as a period of *semi-autonomy* (Furstenberg, 2001), *semi-dependence* (Jones, 1995) or gradual change, or as being "in between" adolescence and adulthood (Arnett, 2004, 2006a). Similarly, the heterogeneity in the gradual changes from adolescence to adulthood among young adults is undeniable. Several theories and models that suggest multiple paths as well as postponement of the transition have been identified in young adulthood research. One of the latest key perspectives on the prolonged life course phase of adolescence as a new developmental stage between adolescence and young adulthood, from age 18 to 25 years, has been that of *emerging adulthood* as described by Arnett (e.g., 2000, 2004). According to this theoretical framework, the transition to work, or to adulthood in general for that matter, is delayed as young adults spend a longer time in higher education, searching for independence, and gradually preparing to depart from the childhood home and making independent decisions, although not yet adapting to the normative responsibilities of adulthood. Overall, five main features characterize emerging adulthood: 1) *identity exploration while trying various possibilities in the career domain*; 2) *and in romantic relationships*; 3)

instability; 4) *self-focused action*; and 5) *a feeling of being in between phases or in a transition phase* (Arnett, 2004).

While the end of adolescence and the beginning of emerging adulthood is fairly easy to define, a trickier question is when emerging adulthood ends and young adulthood begins. Adolescence in American society, for example, ends at about the age of 18 because that is the age at which most Americans finish high school and move out of their parent's household. In Finland, young adults normally enter the transition from upper secondary school to further education and/or employment at 19 years of age (see Figure 2; Finnish National Board of Education, 2012a). According to the Finnish legislation's Youth Act (Finlex, 2006), "youth" is defined as individuals under 29 years of age. Adult legal status is gained when turning 18 and brings the right to get married, leave church membership, buy mild alcoholic drinks and cigarettes, obtain a driving license, and vote in major elections (parish elections are already permitted at age 16); also, for men, the duty to serve in the military or join the civil service becomes mandatory.

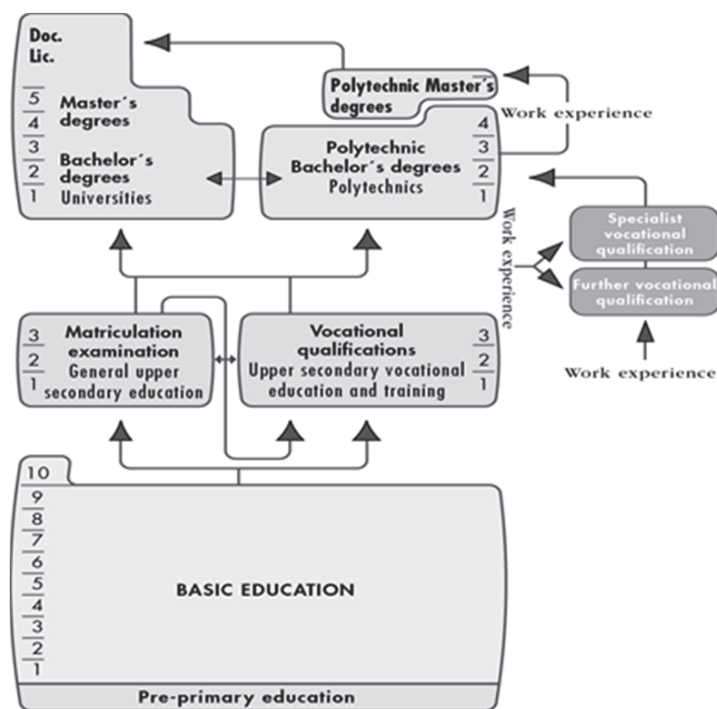


FIGURE 2 The education structure in Finland

At age 18 begins the freedom, exploration and instability that distinguishes this stage, referred to as emerging adulthood. Age 25 has also been noted as a sig-

nificant stage in young adulthood as most young adults have achieved self-sufficiency, established their own household, obtained a full-time job and engaged in close interpersonal relationships by then (Wald & Martinez, 2003). However, adolescence has nowadays extended itself well into the twenties, with the upper limit still considered “youth” having drifted upward from age 25 to 29 or even 30 (European Commission, 1997). For these reasons, age 25, as an estimated age of achieving adulthood, does not apply to everyone; viewing it as a crucial age for developmental tasks to be normatively fulfilled might be too simplistic as young adults in today’s society, even globally, often pursue experimentation and do not aim to settle down at such a young age. In that respect, age 30 appears to be the more significant marker, which Arnett (2004) has dramatically termed “the age 30 deadline.”

The prolonged transition from education to work is easy to identify as a concrete characteristic of the emerging adulthood period: the transition to work often takes longer as young adults extend their time in education (Salmela-Aro & Helve, 2007). However, even before this transition, young adults in Finland are faced with another challenge concerning career establishment, that is, the demanding entrance examinations and tough competition for entry into tertiary education (university or polytechnic education). This results in only roughly half of those completing the final matriculation examination being able to continue with higher education directly upon graduation from high school (Statistics Finland, 2009, 2010b), often causing at least one “gap year” between upper secondary and tertiary studies. Gap years in education have been proclaimed as being a serious societal problem (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2010). Subsequently, in many cases, Finnish higher education students entering the labor market are older than their peers in other European countries, being approximately 25 to 29 years old upon graduating from university; this is also due to the fact that most of the students pursue a Master’s degree, which is a common requirement in the Finnish labor market.

Along with the prolonged career transition comes a steep rise in the typical ages for marriage and parenthood over the last half century, described earlier. In terms of what emerging adulthood literature defines as identity exploration in the relationships domain and engaging in romantic relationships and commitment, the different situations young adults are in are extremely diverse. Young adults may be in a committed long-term relationship or, actually more commonly, more prone to casual encounters or non-committed relationships— or in some gradation along this continuum, these all being socially acceptable solutions in modern society (Arnett, 2006b). This life course stage also often includes periods of independent living and varied living arrangements prior to marriage. This is a radical shift not only in terms of the emerging adulthood tradition, but also with respect to the traditional “Big 5” markers of adulthood (Settersten, 2012). In this perspective, Shulman and Connolly (2013) propose a *transitional emerging adult romantic stage*: career life plans are integrated with the romantic relationship life domain, which is explored and shown commitment to only after experiencing successful career accomplishments.

The changes in achieving developmental tasks and, more specifically, the ambiguity of these achievements is partly due to the transitions not being especially institutionalized, nor containing formal rites, at least not in post-industrialized societies (Giddens, 1991; Grob, 2001; Pilcher, 1995). In the transition to adulthood, an individual's status or role usually alters gradually (unlike an event), although it can also be composed of very concrete changes, such as moving out of the childhood home. For instance, in the transition to independent living, the degree of financial independence varies significantly between young adults. Some transitions, such as this one, can signal multiple changes and decisions, and the decisions made within the process all affect the transition's progression (Elder & Johnson, 2003; Hagestad, 2003; Settersten, 2003).

In theoretical terms, the transition to adulthood can be divided into two types: *intrinsic* and *role* transitions (Grob, 2001). During an *intrinsic transition*, an individual accomplishes new skills and competences by adopting a new interpretation of the world. The *role transition* is more explicit, as it is related to chronological age, social roles and attaining a new status defined by the surrounding environment. These two types of transitions open new opportunities for further development, unless a lack of opportunities persists over an extended period within important transitional domains, such as in the transition from education to employment. Secondly, these transitions also require new strategies to cope with entirely unfamiliar experiences, such as in the work and romantic relationship life domains (Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011; Schoon, 2007).

Evidently, the transition to adulthood does not occur through a single event but through a gradual process of responsibility-taking and making independent decisions (Arnett, 2004). Modern changes in how achieving adulthood is perceived have had a profound transformational influence on, for example, young adults' view of the meaning and value of becoming an adult and entering adult roles like being a spouse and/or parent (Arnett, 2000). In other words, taking *responsibility* for oneself and making independent judgments in both small and large-scale decisions in everyday life is important during the transition to adulthood, but also more abstract issues such as beliefs and values seem to be seen as important markers of adulthood by young adults themselves, with increasing individualization taking place. In the United States, studies on emerging adulthood (Arnett, 1994, 1997, 1998, 2001) showed that the top three criteria for achieving adulthood, according to young adults themselves, are: acceptance of responsibility for oneself, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent. Simultaneously, a period of semi-autonomy, common a century ago, or *social semi-dependency*, has re-emerged—with prolonged dependence on families or society for economic and social support (Elder & Shanahan, 2007; Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Furstenberg, 2001). While the period of semi-autonomy persists longer, psychological maturation differs in nature and quality. The formation of selfhood and identity development are nevertheless evidently prolonged (Furstenberg, 2001). In sociological terms, the virtues of flexibility and adjustment with a readiness to change as required by the present situation, not only according to individual preferences, is what sup-

ports an individual (Bauman, 2007). This might be crucial for young adults in the changing and uncertain labor markets, for example. However, interestingly, this process may also challenge forming a stable romantic relationships because young adults remain unsure of who they are. The persisting popularity of cohabitation is one example of how interpersonal commitments are resisted: according to the *flexible partnership hypothesis*, young adults opt for a less binding commitment during times of uncertainty (Blossfeld, Klijzing, Mills, & Kurz, 2005).

In conclusion, whatever theoretical approach to examining the transition to adulthood is adopted, the increasing diversity, uncertainty and heterogeneity in the pace of young adults' progress along adult role transitions cannot be denied (Schulenberg & Schoon, 2012; Shulman & Connolly, 2013). Furthermore, while the scheduling of many life events is often postponed, the hypothesis regarding the "de-standardization" of the transition to adulthood in the career and family formation life domains has shifted from being blindly taken for granted at theoretical and empirical levels to becoming questionable and critically addressed (Brückner & Mayer, 2005; Nico, 2014). Different age expectations and social timetables have an effect on the social and personal meanings attached to life transitions and the experiences individuals have in connection with these changes (Almeida & Wong, 2009).

A clear culmination in the polarization of fast versus slow transition prevalence can be identified (Schulenberg & Schoon, 2012). Some individuals are offered increased opportunities while others may experience problems of marginalization and social exclusion (Schoon et al., 2012). Because of this diversity between young adults and the blending process of multitasking in young adulthood, it is especially important in developmental research to take individual differences in life situations and development (for example, timing) into account instead of merely addressing overall average development over time. The differences in such diversity can be identified, for example, by depicting specific trajectories, that is, the different educational and/or vocational paths of individuals (Tuominen-Soini, 2012). However, although the postponement of the transition to adulthood is commonly agreed upon, to my knowledge there have been few empirical sociological studies on the postponement theme specifically related to gaining financial independence and the issue of relevant psychological functioning during times of economic uncertainty. Furthermore, the integration of two crucial developmental tasks, that is, career and romantic relationship development, viewed from the perspective of life satisfaction and pursuing life course developmental tasks, aims to illuminate links between individual and societal characteristics that influence individual development and differences among young adults (Seiffge-Krenke, Luyckx, & Salmela-Aro, 2014).

1.4 Agency and personal goals

Discussions on the transition to adulthood have focused on the structural components that influence the way young adults grow up, slightly overemphasizing their impact as Miles (2000) has portrayed in his “transition debate” perspective, while omitting young adults’ subjective experiences and actions. According to Shanahan (2000), on the other hand, academic research has either focused on variability and individualization in transitional pathways or on the behavior of young adults as developmental processes to define their individual biographies. This division has resulted in the “failure to prioritize the actual views, experiences, interests and perspectives of young people as they see them” (Miles, 2000, p. 10). For example, in discussing education and work patterns, at worst, young adults are taken out of the youth equation and are treated as “troubled victims of economic and social restructuring,” while, in fact, they do actually negotiate their own circumstances in their everyday lives. Therefore, research on young adulthood should not concentrate on an “undifferentiated mass of people of similar age experiencing similar things, when what it should be describing is a highly differentiated group of people of similar age subject to a whole variety of experiences depending upon a range of personal circumstances.”

As societies become more complex, psychological functioning becomes increasingly important also in view of developmental tasks and life course outcomes (Heckhausen, 1999). Apart from this, the emergence of individualization has similarly resulted in increasing need for psychological capacities (Settersten, 2012) and resources, which is emblematic of not only early adulthood but of the entire adult life course in industrialized societies (Arnett, 2007b). Insecurity is the downward side of freedom: as a “free agent,” an individual is responsible for his or her choices and this often generates insecurity, a complex discomfort including uncertainty and unsafety (Bauman, 1988, 2001b). Some situations require young adults to make decisions despite uncertainties and in a context of exceeding possibilities, and they may realize that these decisions may not bring the anticipated results. As a result, new lines of research considering both psychological and sociological studies integrating the perspectives of individual *agency* and the illuminating concepts of sociology regarding the social structures in shaping lives has emerged, describing what Shanahan (2000) has supported and what this research adheres to. Agency can be defined and scrutinized according to various concepts and perspectives, depending on the approach and discipline. In this research, I have chosen to adopt the following perspectives and operationalization of agency: agency as agentic strivings (Johnson, Crosnoe, & Elder, 2011; Mortimer & Larson, 2002), biography (du Bois-Reymond, 1995; Furlong & Cartmel, 1997; Miles, 2001), achievement and social strategies (Eronen, Nurmi, & Salmela-Aro, 1997; Nurmi, Aunola, Salmela-Aro, & Lindroos, 2003; Nurmi, Salmela-Aro, & Haavisto, 1995), and personal goals (Little, 1983) and concerns.

1.4.1 Agentic strivings

Agency is a concept that is often introduced in youth research examining individual pathways and ways of “coping” with key developmental tasks in early adulthood. Agency is not only about the intention of carrying out a certain action but also about the capability and power to undertake certain actions. Agency is crucial for success in normative youth development and well-being during the transition to adulthood (Haase, Heckhausen, & Köller, 2008; Kriesi & Buchmann, 2012; Salmela-Aro, 2009; Schoon, 2007). Overall, having personal projects in life is essential for living a happy and virtuous life (Little, 2014). Young adults develop goals through *agentic strivings* that direct action and decision making rather than individuals passively coping with environmental influences (Mortimer & Larson, 2002). The life course transition to adulthood requires capabilities, decision making and negotiation to deal with imposed constraints and opportunities, reflecting individual agency (Diewald & Mayer, 2009; Salmela-Aro, 2009; Vuolo, Staff, & Mortimer, 2012). Young adults form *control beliefs* (mastery and control) and organize their lives not merely according to incoming events but also by life planning and making choices (Giddens, 1991). Young people construct their life course individually by selecting roles, situations, experiences, social relationships and settings within the opportunities and constraints provided by historical, economic and political circumstances (Elder et al., 2003; Elder & Giele, 2009). Control beliefs can be crucial for later attainment by promoting effective goal-related behavior (Lee & Mortimer, 2009). Mastery is defined by the young adult’s judgment concerning their ability to achieve these goals (Lachman & Weaver, 1998).

Agency, considered from a life course perspective, can also be studied by integrating it within the wider developmental psychological life-span model of motivation (Salmela-Aro, 2009), which posits that young adults follow and regulate developmental paths by choice and selection. Human development is shaped by a set of interacting spheres of influence and principles, including individual agency, timing of events, linked lives and the embeddedness of individual development in its sociohistorical context (Heckhausen, Wrosch, & Schulz, 2010; Nurmi, 2004; Salmela-Aro, 2009).

The timing and nature of life events can be seen as requiring active adaptation and strategies in order to attain individual goals (Elder & Giele, 2009). This individual process of agency, goal setting and cognitive and behavioral strategies does not, however, occur without the influence of the social context, which represents the fundamental basis of the life course perspective and is referred to as *agency within structure* (Elder & Johnson, 2003; Settersten, 2003). Psychological functioning during the transition to adulthood consists of the interplay between demands and resources on personal, social and environmental levels (Grob, 2001). The social environment, on one hand, allows possibilities, while, on the other hand, assigning restrictions to human actions. Similarly, young adults construct their own lives but not under *conditions* of their own choosing, as described by the *life politics* concept in sociology (Bauman, 2001b).

Nevertheless, young adults do gain freedom by formulating their identities instead of adopting them directly from previous generations or homogeneous societies (Giddens, 2001). The young adult as a “life politician” is aware of the *reflexivity* of contemporary social action and its effects, and notices that he or she owns a personal *life cycle* in which he/she is living but which he/she also reflexively organizes while classifying different options. It is important to note that the *life cycle* concept itself, in gerontological research, implies fixed categories in life: infancy, childhood, youth, adulthood, and old age; and it has roots in biology and developmental psychology (Pilcher, 1995). However, the life cycle perspective fails to take social contexts into account while life course research focuses more on biographical patterns in a changing social system (Featherstone & Hepworth, 1991).

Since young adulthood, as a life course phase in post-industrialized society, is characterized by uncertainty and endless possibilities, opportunities and decisions, the concept of *risk* needs to be given special attention (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1984). In a risk society, young adults have less control over surrounding social change and related risks. Young adults must be ready to take new actions, think ahead and predict new possibilities and risks in relation to the present in order to formulate a personal *biography* (see also Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Miles, 2001). Biography is a way of understanding how individuals experience uncertainty and maintain life management. As a concept, it has an important status in youth studies: biographical approaches have been used to study how young adults make sense of their lives during transitions or changes, and how they plan their future (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007). Du Bois-Reymond (1995) has introduced the notion of the shift from *normal biography* to *choice biography*, a phenomenon occurring throughout Europe. An increase in options occurs when there is a need to adapt to circumstances over which there is little or no control. Typical for Western societies, young adults face independence, multiple choices and freedom, yet also equipped with the down side of insecurity, anxiety and stress. Being faced with endless possibilities and choices but also societal demands and expectations regarding individual responsibility and decision making, this individualization may lead to an adjournment of decision making and transitions to a later life phase.

1.4.2 Achievement and social strategies

A key statement in this research is that young adults have different ways of anticipating and reacting to change. For some, change signifies challenges that elicit increased agency and well-being through new opportunities and desired social roles; to others, it means defeat, stress and insecurity leading to loss of agency (e.g., Almeida & Wong, 2009; Pearlin, Lieberman, Menaghan, & Mullan, 1981). In this research, agency and young adults’ agentic strivings (Johnson et al., 2011) were operationalized as strategies in achievement and social domains with which young adults approach and respond to changes and challenges relating to their success and satisfaction concerning developmental tasks (Haase et al., 2008; Heckhausen, 1999). Both achievement and social strategies reveal

the different ways in which young adults deal with the transition to adulthood and how they adopt strategies in order to cope in different life domains involving achievement and social relationships (Eronen et al., 1997; Nurmi, Salmela-Aro et al., 1995).

The achievement and social strategies can be either optimistic and approach-driven (functional) or pessimistic and avoidant (dysfunctional) (Eronen et al., 1997; Nurmi, Salmela-Aro et al., 1995). These cognitive and behavioral strategies that individuals employ in different achievement-related and social situations portray the differences in how challenging situations are perceived to be and how they affect not only well-being and other psychosocial functioning but also success in age-graded tasks. For example, it has been shown that occupational and educational aspirations during adolescence predict subsequent occupational and educational success (Dietrich et al., 2012; Schoon, 2007). A similar longitudinal effect was found in a Finnish study among university students: optimistic strategies predicted greater work engagement and lower burnout levels in early career life, possibly due to strengthening self-beliefs and active coping mechanisms (Salmela-Aro, Tolvanen, & Nurmi, 2009). However, only few studies have examined how achievement strategies contribute to the career domain over a longer time period and what the consequences of their use are. This research aimed to fill this gap in the literature.

1.4.3 Personal goals and concerns

Personal goals have been conceptualized as *future-oriented representations of what individuals strive for in different life domains* (Austin & Vancouver, 1996; Karniol & Ross, 1996), *personal projects* (Little, 1983; Salmela-Aro, 2001), *strivings* (Emmons, 1986), and *life tasks* (Cantor, Acker, & Cook-Flannagan, 1992). Personal projects consist of actions with which one aims to maintain or achieve desired outcomes, that is, goals (Little, 1983). For example, in young adulthood, a sense of mastery may become important as individuals strive toward occupational goals (Almeida & Wong, 2009).

Personal goals direct action, decision making and development, all in all, reflecting the ability to be active in choosing and influencing life paths. This is often also referred to as agency (Elder, 1998b; Heckhausen & Tomasik, 2002; Nurmi, 2004; Salmela-Aro, 2009). The challenges, demands and opportunities young adults experience channel the kinds of personal goals and strategies they construct, adapt to and pursue regarding life course opportunities (Heckhausen et al., 2010; Little, Salmela-Aro, & Phillips, 2007; Nurmi, 2004; Salmela-Aro, 2009). Additionally, personal goals and related agentic processes are influenced by changing social, psychological, cultural, temporal and historical life contexts, which means that they are situation-specific (Freund & Riediger, 2006; Little, 1983; Salmela-Aro & Little, 2007).

According to *developmental regulation theories* (Elliot, Thrash, & Murayama, 2011; Heckhausen, 1999; Heckhausen, Wrosch, & Fleeson, 2001; Heckhausen et al., 2010; Salmela-Aro, 2009), young adults' goals strongly direct their life paths by guiding and regulating their behavior, but they also predict concurrent life

situations and later accomplishment of set goals. Young adults also adjust their personal goals according to their current life situation and developmental transitions and tasks (Havighurst, 1948; Heckhausen et al., 2010; Salmela-Aro, 2009) within the opportunities and constraints for goal attainment, referred to as *optimized goal choice (optimization)* (Heckhausen, 1999). For example, having career-related goals during the post-education transition reflects an appropriate and successful transition for young adults (Heckhausen et al., 2010; Nurmi, 2004; Salmela-Aro, 2009).

Personal goals, as a concept, are therefore useful in analyzing the ways in which young adults deal with their numerous transitions and the developmental tasks they face. Personal goals act as a resource helping individuals to engage in actions that are in congruence with their goals in relation to societal expectations for solving developmental tasks, also defined as *phase-adequate engagement*, a recent complement to the life-span model of motivation (Dietrich et al., 2012; Salmela-Aro, 2009). Such goals can be either mutual to all, such as gaining independence from one's parents, or different, such as deciding on a career in a specific field of interest (Grob, 2001).

The complex network of numerous personal goals and the strategies aimed at achieving these goals, that is, *life planning*, play an important role in the way that individuals direct their development (Brandtstädter, 1998; Heckhausen & Tomasik, 2002; Nurmi, 1993). Similar as in other, more sociologically-driven definitions of agency, the focus is on the individual's ability and power to act in different ways than what has been spelled out by others, reflecting individual will (Giddens, 1984, 1991). Strategic life planning also fits well with research on young adulthood and related transitions: reflexive preparation toward the future and defining personal goals decrease uncertainty by controlling personal concerns, stress, vulnerability and upcoming subjective risks, bringing about cumulative advantages (Elliot et al., 2011; Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Giddens, 1991; Hellevik & Settersten, 2013; Smith, 1999).

The diverse options that individuals face in a risk society may cause anxiety and a "culture of fear" (Giddens, 1991). *Fears* can change rapidly over a relatively short time period, and cultural and societal changes reflecting uncertainty may create uneasiness and insecurity during the transition to adulthood (Lindfors, Solantaus, & Rimpelä, 2012). Results from a Finnish longitudinal study (Lindfors et al., 2012) focusing on young adults personal fears between 1983 and 2007 emphasized how occupational fears have remained stable over time but uneasiness about making wrong decisions has increased. Additionally, "internal" fears characterized by the individualistic perspective of society as part of the personal realm have gained more importance, including fears related to loneliness, and possible future relationships and family.

In this research, personal *concerns* of young adults, that is, *states individuals are concerned about or fear might come true* (Nurmi, Poole, & Seginer, 1995) were considered alongside agentic strivings and personal goals. The way these fears, or insecurities, are dealt with is largely related to the surrounding conditions at both individual and societal levels. A study by Hellevik and Settersten (2013)

found that young adults with greater personal subjective security and/or who were living in less favorable societal conditions were more likely to plan their lives than those with fewer personal resources. It is the latter which seems peculiar: individuals in positive circumstances plan less; perhaps this is because they generally take a stable future or multiple possible pathways for granted, whereas, in more challenging conditions, individuals need to prepare themselves for a future in conditions over which they have little or no control.

Fears, however, prompt individuals to take defensive action (Bauman, 2007). On a more positive note, during young adulthood, individuals develop aspirations and life goals which direct action and decision making (Salmela-Aro, 2009). Personal goals reflect the opportunities, demands and restrictions of individuals' current life stage and related developmental tasks and role transitions. In order to manage the transition to adulthood and respond to related expectations well enough, individuals may need to adjust personal projects to related requirements (Salmela-Aro, 2009, 2011; Salmela-Aro, Aunola, & Nurmi, 2007; Shulman & Nurmi, 2010). The developmental tasks of young adulthood, as a social age system (Salmela-Aro, 2001), are important to be considered when setting personal goals since they provide a basis for what is possible, acceptable and desirable at different ages (Hagestad & Neugarten, 1985; Havighurst, 1948). Young adults' goals are also influenced by how well an individual has achieved earlier goals within the transition to adulthood. For example, graduation and settling into employment result in a decline of education-related goals (Salmela-Aro et al., 2007). This suggests that young adults adjust and adapt goals in order to deal with changing life situations when the experienced demands and challenges change due to earlier decisions and related role transitions (see also Baltes, 1997; Heckhausen, 1999). Adjusting goals is an efficient way of coping with a situation where an individual is faced with challenges in achieving goals (Shulman & Nurmi, 2010).

Numerous developmental tasks concerning one's future in terms of education, working life, self-fulfillment, well-being, and forming a lasting romantic relationship and a family are faced, and therefore a crucial number of personal goals in young adulthood is related to these tasks (e.g., Nurmi, 1993; Salmela-Aro, 2001). These developmental tasks may last for several years and can consist of many sub-transitions (Salmela-Aro, 2009; Salmela-Aro et al., 2007). For example, adolescents' goals play a role in the choice of educational trajectories across different educational transitions, and these choices, in turn, extend to future vocational trajectories (e.g., Elder, 1985; Salmela-Aro, 2009). Therefore, this complex set of decisions concerning education and career together project a "career development trajectory" (e.g., Nurmi & Salmela-Aro, 2002). However, also social goals play an important role in the transition to adulthood, since the dominant social sphere gradually changes from that of the family members of the childhood home to that of peers, friends, and even more important with age, romantic relationships.

Goal contents, therefore, seem to change over the course of young adulthood. There is also evidence for individual variation both in the types of do-

main-specific goals (such as social, family-related goals) and in the accelerating increase of achieving such goals across the transitional period to adulthood (e.g., Salmela-Aro et al., 2007; Salmela-Aro, Mutanen, Koivisto, & Vuori, 2009). For example, studies have shown that among students, the two most common categories of personal goals were interpersonal and academic goals (Salmela-Aro, 1992), while among adults, goals related to occupation and family were predominant (Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 2004). Likewise, in the transition from education to employment, occupational goals (i.e., education and work) and family-related personal goals were the types of goals mentioned most often (Nurmi & Salmela-Aro, 2002; Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 2004). In another study, when university students were asked to name three personal goals, 14% mentioned a goal related to family, 21% mentioned a goal related to romantic relationships, and 20% mentioned a goal related to friends (Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 1996). Interpersonal goals are particularly prevalent before middle adulthood: among 25–34-year-olds, about 30% were more interested in family-related goals than were older participants (Salmela-Aro, Nurmi, Aro, Poppius, & Riste, 1992). Presently, it is also expected that young adults' educational expectations remain high and continue to increase toward adulthood even though the demanding period of educational transition may pose instability in career-related performance (Tynkkynen, Tolvanen, & Salmela-Aro, 2012). Moreover, it has been found that young adults' goals changed according to whether they succeeded in gaining employment or not (Nurmi & Salmela-Aro, 2002; Nurmi, Salmela-Aro & Koivisto, 2002; Salmela-Aro, 2009). The focus on educational goals decreased when young adults succeeded in gaining employment, while it intensified for those without a permanent work contract.

Generally, pursuing and appraising personal goals has been shown to benefit young adults' maintenance and development of subjective well-being (Little, 1983; Little et al., 2007; Vasalampi, Salmela-Aro, & Nurmi, 2010), whereas pursuing avoidance goals seems to have negative effects (Elliot et al., 2011). For example, research has shown that social goals are usually found to be related to high subjective well-being (Emmons, 1986; Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 1997). Similarly, career-related personal goals and goal engagement (occupational and educational aspirations) during the transition to higher education and employment reflect appropriate engagement and a successful transition, that is, the attainment of a desired career goal, especially among girls (Haase et al., 2008; Schoon, 2007). Having these goals and engagement is also associated with lack of stress in everyday life (Dietrich et al., 2012), and with high well-being and positive affect (Haase et al., 2008; Nurmi & Salmela-Aro, 2002). A study by Haase, Heckhausen, and Silbereisen (2012) also confirmed that occupational goal engagement is associated with well-being among young adults. Their results further emphasized the importance of a match between individual goal engagement and opportunities provided by society. They found that high goal engagement around the time of graduating from upper secondary school was associated with increased depression among young adults who faced unfavorable employment opportunities, whereas occupational goal disengagement at

graduation was associated to work quality. Thus, the ways in which young adults dealt with or adapted to their occupational goals were closely linked to changes in their well-being. More generally, in terms of the career domain, economic self-efficacy appears crucial in fostering achievement-relevant behaviors. Young adults striving toward personal goals in the economic realm are likely to be persistent in preparing and striving for a post-secondary education, and typically exhibit enhanced academic achievement and educational goals in upper secondary school (Grabowski, Call, & Mortimer, 2001). Additionally, high educational attainment can foster economic independence by increasing the likelihood of employment and stability of income in early adulthood. On the other hand, among youth with higher levels of economic efficacy, an emphasis on educational achievement would likely lead to a delay in family formation (marriage and parenthood) along with prolonged educational attendance, and higher levels of educational attainment and income.

Conclusion

In this research, young adults' achievement and social strategies, related developments, and changes in their personal goals and concerns as well as overall profile were examined in relation to times of societal economic uncertainty. The focus was on the transition to adulthood, with special emphasis on not only the career domain (including education, work, and finances) but also social relations, specifically the romantic relationship life domain as well as social belonging. To my knowledge, only few empirical, economically-oriented psychological studies regarding young adults have been conducted, especially combined with the life course perspective. Fairly little is also known about how the contents of personal goals and concerns change during this developmental period. Moreover, young adulthood has not been extensively studied from a "goal-setting perspective" (Shulman & Nurmi, 2010), nor regarding goal orientations based on content (Salmela-Aro et al., 2007). Furthermore, only few studies have investigated how individuals' earlier life course history and changes in their current life contexts influence personal goals, or how young people's goals direct their future life paths and transitions (Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 1997). This research aimed to fill these gaps in the field of young adulthood research.

1.5 Societal and contextual factors: The economic recession

In order to inspect the overall financial situation of young adults in Finland, historical time needs to be kept in mind. The recent and continuing economic recession has been seen as affecting those with low incomes the most, as such individuals are especially "economically vulnerable" to heightened strain due to even the smallest fluctuations (Gesthuizen & Scheepers, 2010; Rothwell & Han, 2010). Even in the earliest and ground-breaking life course study by Elder (1999), on *Children of the Great Depression*, young adults were seen to be the "lost" generation.

When recession is defined as a decline in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) lasting at least six successive months, Finland was in recession from 2008–2009 and has still not recovered as a new economic downturn is taking place (Statistics Finland, 27 February 2009). During the previous dramatic economic recession, in the early 1990s, participation in the labor market among youth under 20 dropped from 40% to 25%. Furthermore, 19% of young adults aged 20 to 24 were unemployed during and after that recession, with 12% youth unemployment still in 2000 (Hämäläinen, 2002). Youth unemployment across the entire age group (15 to 24) was 9.3% at the beginning of the 1990s, peaking at 34% in 1994, settling at 21% in the early 2000s, and improving to 16% before the recent recession yet returning again to 21% by 2010 (Dietrich, 2012). Thereafter, youth unemployment decreased to 20.5% in 2012, to 17.9% in September 2013, and remained at 17.9% in November 2014 (the overall unemployment rate for the entire population aged 15–74 years being 8.2%), and with the unemployment trend adjusted for seasonal shifts being 19.4% (Official Statistics of Finland, 2010, 2012, 2014). Moreover, during the global economic downturn between 2007 and 2009, young adults were nearly three times more likely to be unemployed than adults (UN, 2014), with great variation between countries. More than half of the OECD countries had youth unemployment rates of over 20%; but in Spain, for example, the youth unemployment rate was 45% in the early 1990s, falling to 22% in 2000 and rising dramatically again to 46% in 2010 (Bell & Blanchflower, 2010; Dietrich, 2012). While differences between countries are significant EU-wide, young adults, even in countries mastering the Great Recession fairly well, have experienced the transition to the labor market as more difficult than before. Interestingly, among older generations the trend is actually the opposite: in many EU countries, there has been an *increase* in employment during the recent recession, perhaps due to different industries having been affected differently by the recession and due to the demographics of employees. For example, young adults have been suffering more from the consequences of the economic downturn than older generations as they tend to work in the private sector, which is more sensitive to economic fluctuations (Ministry of Finance, 2010).

Labor market conditions are strongly influential in regard to young adults' transition to independent living and financial security, along with parental financial support and cost of housing (Eurostat statistics, 2009). Because of difficulties in the transition to employment, the process of gaining financial independence is often prolonged. According to the *market-income hypothesis* (Guerero, 2001), a stable income is the most significant predictor of the transition to independent living. Failure to achieve financial independence at the "normative" life stage may form a "pattern of dependency" that comprehensively affects other developmental tasks (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007). For example, a lack of stable income and insecurity in the employment sector may delay the *timing* of an individual's transition of becoming a parent, instead waiting for a financially more optimal time (Mills & Blossfeld, 2005). In Finland alone, the birth rate has been decreasing for a fourth consecutive year, declining steadily from 61,000

births in 2010 to 58,000 in 2013, and 57,200 in 2014 (*Helsingin Sanomat*, 22 October 2014; Official Statistics of Finland, 2014). Interestingly, the trend was the opposite during the previous economic downturn in the 1990s, when a “baby boom” actually emerged with 67,000 babies born in 1992, that is, 7,000 more than in 1987. The reasons for this trend seem to be related to concurrent welfare improvements in child home care allowances as well as to a change in attitude: the recession today is seen as being more severe, although it is not, and long-lasting uncertainty fades hopes for the future, which is reflected in the tendency not to have children. Whether this is a current trend related to societal circumstances or a more profound change relating to increased individualism of highly educated women, for example, is yet to be seen. According to recent national news (*Helsingin Sanomat*, 29 October 2014), the amount of childless women has increased at a significantly rapid pace in Finland compared to many other European countries, excluding Switzerland and Italy: in 2010, approximately 20% of Finnish women aged 40–44 were childless. However, it needs to be noted that a significant proportion of these women were not childless by choice.

Although structural uncertainty has a dramatic impact on young adults and may result in postponing crucial decisions, young adults also show flexibility. They can, for instance, switch rational strategies to cope with challenging situations, such as by postponing transitions and/or combining different roles (Blossfeld et al., 2005; Mills & Blossfeld, 2005). For instance, young adults frequently shift between “transitory and inconsistent states” in terms of residence and occupation (Shulman & Nurmi, 2010), and may sometimes also have to “regress” subjectively and objectively concerning certain markers related to their adult status. For example, they may adapt to the scarcity of financial resources by moving back to their childhood homes after having already experienced the transitional event of moving out (Hendry & Kloep, 2007b). This flexibility in constructing individual pathways can be visualized by a “yo-yo” metaphor that replaces the traditional description of a linear progression to adulthood along the life course (Walther, Stauber et al., 2002).

There has been increasing public concern over the growing trend of living with one’s parents and the related lack of achieving the “surest sign of adulthood,” that is, independent living (Settersten, 2012, p. 5). Thus, independent living, as a developmental task, is not always indicative of achieving or failing to achieve *economic* independence. Furthermore, even if independence is prominent during the transitional stage, with the young adult stepping into independent living, the emotional as well as economic attachment to his or her parents and other family members may remain. Similarly, a study (Rugg, Ford, & Burrows, 2004) on “housing biographies” of the diverse pathways of students with respect to renting accommodation, as a period of semi-autonomy, examined young adults under 25 years of age in regard to their behavior of switching between external study term and home-time living quarters, which is not accounted for in Finland and contributes to significant differences between young adults in Finland and their counterparts in many other countries. Housing in university or polytechnic campus facilities offers opportunities to experiment

with independence and budgeting while allowing routinized periodic stays at the parental home during holidays and upon graduating.

Another specific characteristic concerning young Finnish adults is that they frequently work alongside their academic studies. According to Statistics Finland data (2011a; Official Statistics of Finland, 2013b), more than half (55%) of Finnish students are employed whilst studying, with women and older students being more likely employed than men and younger students. Therefore, own earnings through employment are the main source of students' income, as is the case in most EU countries (Orr, Gwosć, & Netz, 2011). The income of young adults is to a great extent composed of salary, being approximately a third of the individual's overall income in adolescence and gradually increasing to 50% during higher education, and to about 70% in late young adulthood (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2014).

In addition to salary, young Finnish adults also greatly rely on governmental financial support, according to international comparisons (Eurostudent III, 2005–2008). In Finland, students in upper secondary, vocational or higher education receive governmental financial aid, which consists of a study grant, a housing supplement and a government guarantee for a student loan. Study grants and housing supplements are cash benefits and do not need to be paid back. Before the recession of the national economy in the early 1990s, the student financial aid system was mainly based on subsidized student loans. The system was reformed in 1992 with the abolishment of government loans as subsidies for students, as was the entire modern social welfare system, but the study grant sum was more than doubled. This resulted in the unpopularity of student loans and shifted students' focus from loan-based to employment-based income (Häkkinen, 2004; Häkkinen & Uusitalo, 2003). Currently, 1.3% of young adults less than 19 years of age have a student loan, and 29% of 20–29-year-old students have an average loan of 5,269 EUR (Statistics Finland, 2013b). The student loan is a normal bank loan granted by all Finnish banks upon application (Eurostudent III, 2005–2008). Young adults not participating in education may opt for unemployment benefits (either earnings-based, for members of an unemployment fund, or a basic daily allowance, or a means-tested labor market subsidy), social welfare and/or housing allowance. However, even though young Finnish adults may benefit from extensive financial governmental support, they find their economic situation challenging: a recent study regarding university students in Finland (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2014) reported that 61% of young adults were having difficulties in making ends meet.

To conclude, in this research, the role of young adults' personal economic resources in the success of achieving developmental tasks and related satisfaction were studied in the context of European economic upheavals from 2008 to 2011, which brought about financial insecurity, high overall unemployment and generally tougher economic conditions (Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011; Furlong & Cartmel, 2007). In sum, the recession may, in general, be experienced as a psychological threat rather than in terms of personal loss. However, concretely

among young adults, the recession could also signify a significant decrease in parental financial support and/or personal household income, an economic breakdown of the family or unemployment. In this research, however, the focus was not on the economic recession itself but on the phenomenon of young adults concurrently experiencing a turbulent and demanding life course period, the transition to adulthood.

This research links positive youth development (e.g., Larson, 2000) not only to the individual life course but also to historical time, namely, the time of the economic downturn in the 2000s. It aimed to understand how the economic downturn is reflected in the timing and diversity of developmental tasks, personal goals and concerns as well as life satisfaction of young Finnish adults.

1.6 Aims of the research

The first aim of the present research was to examine the underlying mechanisms of how financial resources influence youth development and life satisfaction in the demanding and crucial period of the transition to adulthood. The second aim was to provide an overview of the pathways of young adults' life situations and the multifaceted transitions taking place during the prolonged life course phase of searching for independence in the midst of numerous drastic personal and sociohistorical changes. Based on the life course perspective (Elder, 1998a, 1998b), the aim of undertaking the present research was to identify specific challenges in the transition to adulthood within the specific context of global and national economic upheavals. The third aim was to understand the role of young adults' agency in managing their personal financial situation and key developmental tasks.

The research consisted of three studies, herein referred to as Study I, II & III (see Appendix 1). In Study I, the role of individuals' personal financial situation and agency across young adulthood and during the recent economic recession was examined with regard to developmental tasks. Success and satisfaction regarding developmental tasks were operationalized as the fulfillment and quality of these tasks representing the psychological and social accomplishments specific to the age span of 19 to 25 years. It was hypothesized that the financial situation improves and young adults would gain financial independence from age 20 to 25, which would lead to attaining numerous developmental tasks by age 25 but also to economic pressure. Developmental tasks may also be attained with increased use of achievement approach strategies and social approach strategies and decreased use of achievement avoidance strategies and social avoidance strategies. A high initial level of using achievement approach and social approach strategies at age 19 and an increase from age 19 to 25, as well as improvements in the personal financial situation from age 20 to 25, were expected to be associated with high levels of success and satisfaction in developmental tasks and a low level of perceived economic pressure at age 25. Contrastingly, a high initial level of using achievement avoidance and social avoid-

ance strategies at age 19 and an increase from age 19 to 25 were expected to be associated with less success in developmental tasks.

Study II investigated, first, whether and how young adults' subjective life satisfaction changed from before and after the transition from general upper secondary school to tertiary education and/or employment. The second aim was to identify young adults' possible life satisfaction developmental trajectories at four assessment points (at 18, 19, 20, and 22 years of age). Thirdly, analyses were conducted to determine how financial resources, such as young adults' family socioeconomic situation, parental financial support, objective and subjective financial situation, as well as agency (i.e., the use of achievement strategies) are related to the identified life satisfaction trajectories. Lastly, the study assessed whether the trajectories differed according to gender, living situation and life situation (i.e., education and work). It was hypothesized that life satisfaction would remain fairly stable for the majority of young adults from age 18 to 22, although young adults' life satisfaction may vary due to their levels of agency at age 19 and personal financial situation at age 22.

Study III investigated two crucial developmental tasks at ages 20 and 23: career (including education, work, and financial situation) and engaging in a romantic relationship. The first aim was to identify young adults' most prominent goals and concerns, as well as changes experienced, from age 20 to 23. The second aim was to identify young adults' goal and concern profiles at ages 20 and 23. The third aim was to investigate how goals and concerns and young adults' respective profiles are related to their life situation regarding the career and romantic relationship life domains. It was hypothesized that the goals would be related to the individuals' present life situation in the career domain, shifting from education to work, whereas goals for forming a lasting romantic relationship would remain stable. Financial issues were expected to be highly prominent in personal concerns due to the transition to independent living during this age period and economic uncertainty in society.

2 METHOD

2.1 Samples, participants, and procedure

This research was part of the Finnish Educational Transitions (FinEdu) Studies (principal investigator Salmela-Aro), an ongoing (since 2003) longitudinal collaborative project between the Department of Psychology at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland and the University of Helsinki. The research data of the project were collected in Eastern Finland, in one city with approximately 120,000 inhabitants. The measurement points of the data collection are shown in Table 1, and detailed information on the participants of the studies in Appendix 1. The data gathered for the project pertain to two cohorts: ninth-grade students in lower secondary school, that is, comprehensive school (Cohort A: on average 15 years old, majority born in 1988, from all lower secondary schools in the specific city (9 schools, 49 classes in total)), and general upper secondary school (i.e., academic high school) students in their second year (Cohort B: on average 17 years old, majority born in 1986, from all general upper secondary schools in the specific city (6 schools, 28 classes in total))⁵. The transition columns represent the normative transition points from lower secondary to upper secondary education, and from upper secondary to tertiary education and/or employment.

Research data were collected through self-report questionnaires, either by mail or online. The response rate ranged from 59% to 83% (see Table 1), and participants were rewarded for their participation and/or raffles were held. Participants were allowed to resign from participation and were assured full anonymity and confidentiality of information. The data are stored in an ID-coded database and access is provided only to authorized researchers. In analyses, identifiable information is kept separate from the data itself.

5 In Finland, compulsory education is typically completed at age 16 (Grade 9), after which students can apply for the general (academic track) or vocational (vocational track) upper secondary education, both of them lasting approximately 3–4 years (see Figure 2; Finnish National Board of Education, 2012a). Fifty-five percent of young adults attend general upper secondary school (Official Statistics of Finland, 2011).

TABLE 1 FinEdu project data for this research

Cohort	TIME OF MEASUREMENT					
	January 2004	January 2005	January 2006	2008–2009	Spring 2011	
Cohort A: Lower second. school Year of birth: 1988	Time 1A Comprehensive school, 9 th grade, N=707 (332 female, 367 male, 8 unrep.), rr=74% Age=15	Transition		Time 4A Tertiary education/ employment 1 st -2 nd year, N=611 (329 female, 277 male, 5 unrep.), rr=71% Age=20/21 Study III	Time 5A Tertiary education/ employment 4 th year, N=599 (323 female, 266 male, 10 unrep.), rr=70% Age=22/23 Study III	
	Time 1B General upper secondary school, 2 nd year, N=614 (376 female, 237 male, 1 unrep.), rr=80% Age=17/18 Study II	Time 2 General upper secondary school, 3 rd year, N=636 (425 female, 211 male), rr=83% Age=18/19 Studies I, II	Time 3 Tertiary education/ employment, 1 st year, N= 449 (327 female, 122 male), rr=61% Age=19/20 Studies I, II, III	Time 4B Tertiary education/ employment, 3 rd -4 th year, N=422 (287 female, 132 male, 3 unr.), rr=59% Age=22/23 Studies I, II, III	Time 5B Tertiary education/ employment, 6 th year, N=497 (334 female, 159 male, 4 unr.), rr=70% Age=24/25 Study I	
	Transition					
Cohort B: General upper second. school Year of birth: 1986	Transition					
	Transition					

Note: rr = response rate. Response rate in the A-cohort refers to participants who replied at least once before during the course of the FinEdu project (N=858).

2.2 Measures

2.2.1 Career establishment

Educational attainment

Participants were asked two questions concerning their current education situation. The first question – “What do you currently do?” – was to be answered by choosing from alternatives such as, “I study at general upper secondary school”, “I study at university”, and “I study at a polytechnic institute”. The second question was: “Next, we ask you to write down all studies you have started after comprehensive school (general upper secondary school, university, polytechnic studies, etc.) and the relevant graduation dates with an accuracy of one year or indicating a current continuation of the studies.” In Study I, based on the participants’ responses to these two questions, educational attainment was coded as: (1) Not in education; (2) Studying at a polytechnic institute, university, vocational school or general upper secondary school; or (3) Graduated from a polytechnic institute or university.

Education and work status

Current employment status was assessed with two questions. In regard to the first question – “What do you currently do?” – a specific interest was taken in the participants who selected the answer options “I’m working”, “I work abroad”, or “I’m unemployed/temporarily dismissed”; with respect to the second question – “Does the work correspond to your education?” – the answer options were “No”, “To some extent”, and “Yes”. In Study I, participants’ *current employment status* was coded as: (1) Not in employment, unemployed or temporarily dismissed; (2) In employment nonrelevant to one’s education; or (3) In employment relevant to one’s education. In Study II, *life situation* was defined as: (1) Studying in university or a polytechnic institute; (2) Working; or (3) Combining educational and employment tasks.

In Study III, a *career status* measure, that is, individuals’ current education and employment, was examined. Current education was assessed based on participants’ answers in the educational attainment measure described above, in addition to their answer to the question: “Where are you studying?” Participants’ current employment was assessed with the following two questions: First, “What do you currently do?”, with answer options “I’m working”, “I’m unemployed”, and “I’m temporarily dismissed”; and second, “Does your work correspond to your education?”, with answer options “No”, “To some extent”, and “Yes”. Six categories were formed: (1) Working in a position relevant to one’s education; (2) Working in a position *not* relevant to one’s education; (3) Combining studying and working in a position relevant to one’s education; (4) Combining studying and working in a position *not* relevant to one’s education; (5) Studying only; and (6) Not in education or work.

Work quality

In Study I, a work quality variable was formulated as a latent factor from the following variables: (1) *Employment relevant to one's education*; (2) *Satisfaction with work*; and (3) *Belonging to the working community*. Employment relevant to one's education was assessed with the question, "Does your work correspond to your education?"; the answer options were: "No", "To some extent", and "Yes". Categorical variables were thereafter constructed using the coding: (1) Not in employment; (2) In employment nonrelevant to education; and (3) In employment relevant to education. Satisfaction with work was assessed with two questions, the first being, "How satisfied are you with your current job?"; and the second, "How much do you enjoy your current job?" Both were answered on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). A mean sum was calculated from the replies to these two questions, and the Cronbach's alpha (reliability) was .84. *Belonging to the working community* was measured with a question concerning sense of belonging, as described later.

2.2.2 Financial situation

Family socioeconomic status

Participants' family socioeconomic status (SES) was assessed with the question: "What is your mother's/father's occupation?" Participants' responses were classified into five socioeconomic categories using a standard classification system, in ranked order (Statistics Finland, 1989): (1) Not in employment (students, those retired, or those unemployed; i.e., those with a low income); (2) Self-employed; (3) Blue-collar occupation (e.g., construction workers, mechanics); (4) Lower white-collar occupation (e.g., secretaries, salespersons, nurses); and (5) Higher white-collar occupation (e.g., physicians, teachers, lawyers, managers). Applying the "Household Reference Person" definition (HRP; Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011; Statistics Finland, 2011b), the person with the highest occupation was used as a point of reference regarding family SES.

Objective financial situation

Self-reported objective financial situation was measured with the following question: "How much money (salary, financial support and other, added together) do you have for use monthly?" Participant were asked to specify how much money, in terms of Euros per month, he or she was earning from his/her salary, financial support (e.g., student or housing financial aid from the state), support from parents and relatives, loans (e.g., mortgage, study loans, consumer credit), or other sources. In the analyses, these amounts were summed up per person.

Subjective financial situation

Subjective financial situation, as the perceived sufficiency of one's personal income level relative to personal consumption habits and needs (Conger et al., 1990), was assessed with the following question: "Do you think your income

covers your expenses at the moment?" Ratings on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*extremely well*) to 5 (*poorly*). The scale was reverse-scored, with higher numbers indicating a better financial situation.

Economic pressure

Economic pressure was measured with four indicators of financial difficulties, in accordance with Conger et al. (1990): (1) Unmet material needs, in other words, *problems making ends meet*; (2) *Inability to pay bills*; (3) *Financial cutbacks and adjustments in expenditures*; and (4) *Subjective financial situation*. To measure problems making ends meet, the question posed was, "How much money do you have left over the day before your next paycheck or other income payment?"; with answers given on a 4-point Likert-type scale: 1 (*more than enough money is left over*) to 4 (*not enough money to make ends meet*). Inability to pay bills was assessed with the question, "Do you have difficulties paying monthly bills (e.g., electricity, mobile phone, water)?" with replies given on a 5-point Likert-type scale: 1 (*no difficulties*) to 5 (*great difficulties*). Financial cutbacks and adjustments in expenditures were measured with 13 items. An individual score of each *yes* response was calculated for each participant, with the total sum range being 13–26 and higher numbers indicating increased cutbacks and adjustments. The Cronbach's alpha (reliability) was .75.

2.2.3 Social relations

Dating / romantic relationship status

Dating (Study I), i.e., romantic relationship status (Study III), was assessed with the question, "What is your civil status?"; with answer options, "Single, or not in a romantic relationship", "Dating", "In a common-law marriage, i.e. cohabiting with a partner", "Married", "Legally registered relationship", and "Divorced". In Study I, these were recoded as "Single" or "In a romantic relationship". In Study III, the answer options were recoded as "Single", "Seeing someone or dating", "Cohabiting", "Married or in a legally registered relationship", or "Divorced".

Relationship quality

Relationship quality was approached as a latent factor and assessed through the following domains: (1) *Sense of belonging to an own family* (i.e., participant's spouse and possible children versus own parents and siblings; see below); (2) *Relationship atmosphere*; and (3) *Relationship satisfaction*. Sense of belonging to an own family was measured with the 'sense of belonging' question described below. Relationship atmosphere was measured with the question: "In every relationship, there prevails a certain atmosphere. Please evaluate the atmosphere in your relationship?" (Niemi & Rauste-von Wright, 1980). Participants were instructed to mark on a continuum of five which describes the atmosphere in their relationship most accurately on a semantic differential consisting of 13 contrasting relationship characteristics. One item had a low reliability (independence vs. clinging or relying) and was omitted, and a mean sum variable of

the remaining 12 items, with a Cronbach's alpha (reliability) of .94, was used in the final analysis. Relationship satisfaction was measured with three questions (Dyadic Adjustment Scale, DAS; Salmela-Aro, Aunola, Saisto, Halmesmäki, & Nurmi, 2006; Spanier, 1976). A mean sum variable was constructed and the Cronbach's alpha (reliability) of the sum variable was .72.

Living situation

Living situation (Study II) and moving from the childhood home (Study I) was assessed by asking about the current living situation: "I live in the same household with [...]"; with the following answer options: "My mother", "My father", "My mother and father", "My mother and stepfather", "My father and stepmother", "A cohabiting partner/my spouse", "Other singles/friends", "No one, I live alone", or "Some other person". In Study I, the answer options were recoded as "Still living at home" compared to "Living independently".

Sense of belonging

Sense of belonging, examined in Study I, was studied from several domain perspectives, namely *social belonging*, measuring how firmly the respondent feels akin to friends and to what extent he or she belongs to any social media community (i.e., online social communities, such as Facebook), *belonging to one's own family*, and *belonging to a work community* (e.g., Pessi & Saari, 2008). Participants were requested to answer on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*).

2.2.4 Life satisfaction

In Study II, young adults' life satisfaction was examined based on individuals' personal cognitive perception, reported using the "Satisfaction with Life Scale" (SWLS) developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985). The instruction was, "Please evaluate your life situation", and five items were estimated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*totally agree*) to 7 (*totally disagree*). A mean score was calculated for all items and the Cronbach's alpha (reliabilities) ranged from .85 to .88 across the four measurement points.

2.2.5 Agency: Personal goals, concerns, and strategies

Personal goals and concerns

Personality psychologists can study personal goals and concerns by examining what individuals aim to achieve with their goals or what they are concerned about. In this procedure, personal goals are typically assessed ideographically, which means that participants are asked to write down the goals they currently pursue and researchers then determine and label categories representing the various objectives and related future events in different life domains, such as education, employment, hobbies, and interpersonal relationships (Little, 1983; Little & Gee, 2007; Little et al., 2007). The participants of this research project filled in a revised version of the Personal Projects Analysis (PPA; Little, 2014; Little et al., 2007; Salmela-Aro, 2001, 2002; Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 1994; Sheldon

& Kasser, 1998), writing down four current personal goals and two personal concerns. Each goal and concern mentioned by the participants was classified into 1 of 30 categories similar to those used in earlier studies (Little et al., 2007).

Achievement strategies and social strategies

Young adults' life strategies for solving and coping with demands in achievement-related and social contexts was assessed using the "Strategy and Attribution Questionnaire" (SAQ) formulated by Nurmi, Salmela-Aro and Haavisto (1995). In this questionnaire, strategies are conceptualized as approach strategies and avoidance strategies. The questions were introduced with the following statement, "The following questions assess the way you take action", and participants were asked to rate the 20 items in the original questionnaire (15 used here, based on reliability through measurement models and previous studies; Salmela-Aro, Tolvanen et al., 2009; Salmela-Aro, Tolvanen, & Nurmi, 2011) on a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). In Study I, approach strategies and avoidance strategies in the achievement domain and social domain were used to form four sum variables: *achievement approach* (4 items), *achievement avoidance* (4 items), *social approach* (4 items), and *social avoidance* (3 items). In Study II, only achievement strategies were examined, using the same aforementioned items. The Cronbach's alpha (reliabilities) ranged from .71 to .84 in both studies.

The main concepts and measurement tools pertaining to all of the variables in this research are presented in Figure 3.

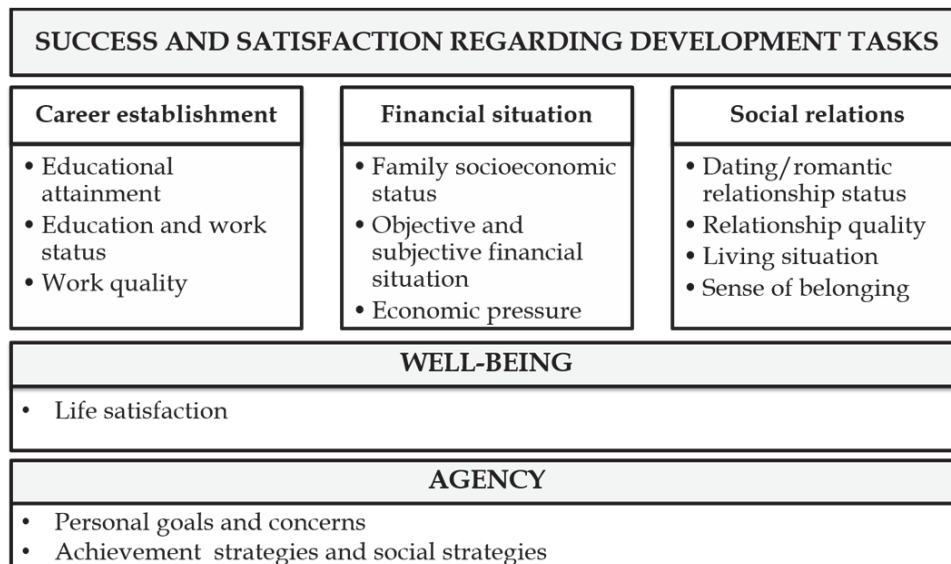


FIGURE 3 Overview of the main operationalized concepts

2.3 Data analyses

The empirical longitudinal data were analyzed with the following statistical programs: SPSS (Versions 22 and PASW 18), Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2012; Version 6.0 for Study I; Version 5.0 for Study II, and Version 6.1 for Study III), and RopStat (Vargha, 2007). The analytical methods adopted in this research consist of both variable- and person-oriented approaches.

Furthermore, common statistical methods were used. For example, in Study I, preliminary descriptive statistics were obtained from the data by examining the frequencies and Spearman correlations of the study variables; also, t -tests were conducted for linear and χ^2 -tests for categorical variables. In Study II, One-Way Analyses of Variance (ANOVAs) were conducted as a supplement to the person-oriented analyses in order to study the role of the financial situation and achievement strategies in the life satisfaction trajectories, with post hoc comparisons using the Games-Howell test to examine potential differences between groups. Missing data were handled by applying listwise deletion in these ANOVAs. Attrition analyses were conducted to test selection effects where applicable, and analyses were controlled for gender and family SES.

All studies were based on longitudinal data following the same individuals as they experienced various life transitions. In estimating the parameters of the different models, it was assumed that the missing data were *missing-at-random* (MAR). This means that even when the amount of missing data is large and dependent on other variables in the model, the selection effect is small. This method for handling missing data does not assign values in place of those that are missing but uses all of the data that are available in order to estimate the model. The *maximum likelihood ratio* (MLR) procedure used in the Mplus program produces maximum likelihood estimates with standard errors and χ^2 -test statistics that are robust with respect to non-normality; in other words, the variables are skewed (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2012).

2.3.1 Variable-oriented approaches

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) represents the variable-oriented approach of the statistical methodology used in this research; it is applied to capture measurement models in Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) as well as relationships between manifest or observed dependent variables and continuous latent or unobserved variables (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2012). Latent Growth Curve Modeling or Analysis (LGCM/LGCA; Bollen & Curran, 2006; Duncan, Duncan, & Strycker, 2006; Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2012) within a SEM framework has become more common in the social and behavioral sciences for the purpose of studying the intra-individual patterns of stability and change over time (George, 2009). SEM was used in Study I in order to form the measurement models of the latent constructs used in the research: achievement strategies and social strategies, and the developmental task outcomes of relationship quality, work quality, and economic pressure. Thereafter, a set of multivariate regres-

sion equations were examined regarding the individuals' financial situation, use of achievement strategies and social strategies, and developmental outcomes.

Furthermore, in Study I, the overall changes in young adults' financial situation and in their use of achievement strategies and social strategies were examined through univariate LGCM, separately for each construct; similarly as in Study II, where it was used to study life satisfaction development at the mean level. Both initial levels of the variables (i.e., the intercept) and average linear growth rates over time (i.e., the slope) were identified, and each goodness-of-fit of the estimated LGCMs was evaluated with specified indicators. Furthermore, in Study I, these separate growth curve models were then combined into one latent growth curve model, and success and satisfaction regarding progress in the developmental tasks were predicted by the levels and changes in use of the strategies and the financial situation. This is the benefit of LGCM: it is a useful tool for incorporating trajectories of multiple variables into a single analysis.

2.3.2 Person-oriented approaches

The person-oriented approach can complement the variable-oriented perspective in many ways. In the person-oriented approach, unobserved heterogeneity in a population is acknowledged by forming latent classes in the analyses, referring to subpopulations in the entire population (Lubke & Muthén, 2005). Individuals are classified into homogeneous groups through a focus on relationships of individuals among a group; in contrast to the variable-oriented approach, which focuses on relationships between variables (Muthén & Muthén, 2000). In the analyses using a person-oriented approach, classification procedures based on grouping individuals with similar variable value profiles were applied. The individual is seen as the main conceptual and analytical focus in the analyses, whereas in standard traditional statistical analyses, the variable is the main unit (Bergman, Magnusson, & El-Khoury, 2003). The person-oriented approach is, therefore, useful in mapping heterogeneity and non-normativity in developmental trajectories of individuals' longitudinal data, rather than restricting the research to merely analyzing mean level changes (Bergman & El-Khoury, 2003; Bergman, Nurmi, & von Eye, 2012). More specifically, the identification of distinct trajectories and consequences of the trajectories is a useful way of understanding heterogeneity in life course patterns and developmental trajectories, and has been beneficial in this research (Bergman & Andersson, 2010; Muthén & Muthén, 2000).

Person-oriented techniques used in this research were Latent Class Analysis (LCA; Muthén, 2001), Growth Mixture Modeling (GMM; Muthén, 2001, 2004; Muthén & Muthén, 2000; Muthén & Shedden, 1999), and Configural Frequency Analysis (CFA; Bergman et al., 2012; von Eye, 1990a, 1990b; von Eye, Spiel, & Wood, 1996). In Study II, young adults with similar patterns of life satisfaction developmental trajectories were grouped together through exploratory analyses within a longitudinal context in order to find the optimal number of latent classes of young adults that differ in their life satisfaction trajectories. This was

conducted with GMM, which is used with continuous variables to estimate mean growth curves for each class (Muthén & Muthén, 2000). The fit of the models and the identifying differences between model solutions were assessed using fit indices recommended by Hu and Bentler (1999) in order to find the number of latent classes that best fits the data, in addition to acknowledging conceptual and theoretical considerations.

Similarly, the person-oriented approach was also used in this research – specifically in Study III – to map developmental trajectories and goal appraisals of young adults’ goal and concern typologies or profiles in the career and romantic relations life domains using LCA and CFA. To elaborate, LCA, often referred to as ‘mixture modeling’ in more general terms, is used with categorical latent variables that “represent subpopulations where population membership is not known but is inferred from the data” (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2012, p. 209). LCA enables examining latent structures among a set of categorically scored variables and identifying underlying groups or classes and their diversity (Goodman, 1974; Lazarsfeld & Henry, 1968); a specific number of latent classes is identified that adequately captures the structure in the data, and estimated parameters describe the proportion of individuals belonging to each of the latent classes (latent class probabilities) as well as their distribution across the indicator variables within these classes (conditional probabilities) (Schoon et al., 2012). Classes are added stepwise until a model which best fits the data is identified according to goodness-of-fit indices, classification quality and usefulness. Parameters are estimated using the maximum likelihood (ML) criterion, since estimates are those most likely to account for the observed data (Clogg, 1995).

Finally, complementing the person-oriented approach framework of this research, CFA was used in Study III to examine the stability of and changes in personal goal and concern profile memberships over time, as well as the associations of goals and concerns with particular life situations. Extending from simple bivariate analysis, CFA uses a holistic approach and acknowledges interdependencies in the goals and concerns. In the analyses, the observed and expected frequencies of categorical data are studied, which in this case were profile membership and life situation, in a cross-tabulation; it is then considered whether these variables are larger or smaller than could be expected based on a chance model or if they occur more or less frequently than would be expected by chance (Tuominen-Soini, 2012). Types (cells with more cases than expected) and antitypes (cells with fewer cases than expected) emerge if variable associations exist.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Study I: The role of financial resources and agency regarding developmental tasks

The aim of this study was (1) to examine changes in young adults' financial situation (both objective and subjective) and agency during their life course transition to adulthood, namely, the transition from general upper secondary school to further education and/or employment in the context of the recent and continuing national economic recession, and to (2) investigate the different challenges these young adults have faced in the transition to adulthood in terms of their fulfillment of developmental tasks, also in terms of their satisfaction relating to attainments in career and social domains.

The results of the study imply that individual agency is especially important in shaping life course transitions. This agency, indicated by high usage of achievement approach strategies and social approach strategies, increased during the transition from upper secondary school to the "next stage" in life course development, from age 19 to 25, whereas the use of achievement avoidance strategies and social avoidance strategies decreased; see Figure 4, where the dotted vertical line on the horizontal axis refers to the time of the transition to tertiary education and/or employment.

Young adults' financial situation improved on the objective level from age 20 to 25, thus supporting the study's hypothesis. However, contrary to the hypothesis, the subjective financial situation remained the same. However, the subjective and objective financial situations were increasingly correlated with age. Young adults' subjective financial situation at age 20 was negatively correlated to changes in their objective financial situation. In other words, the more young adults were satisfied with their financial situation at age 20, the less improvement there was in their objective financial situation up to age 25; that is, these satisfied young adults did not aim to improve their financial situation from the present state.

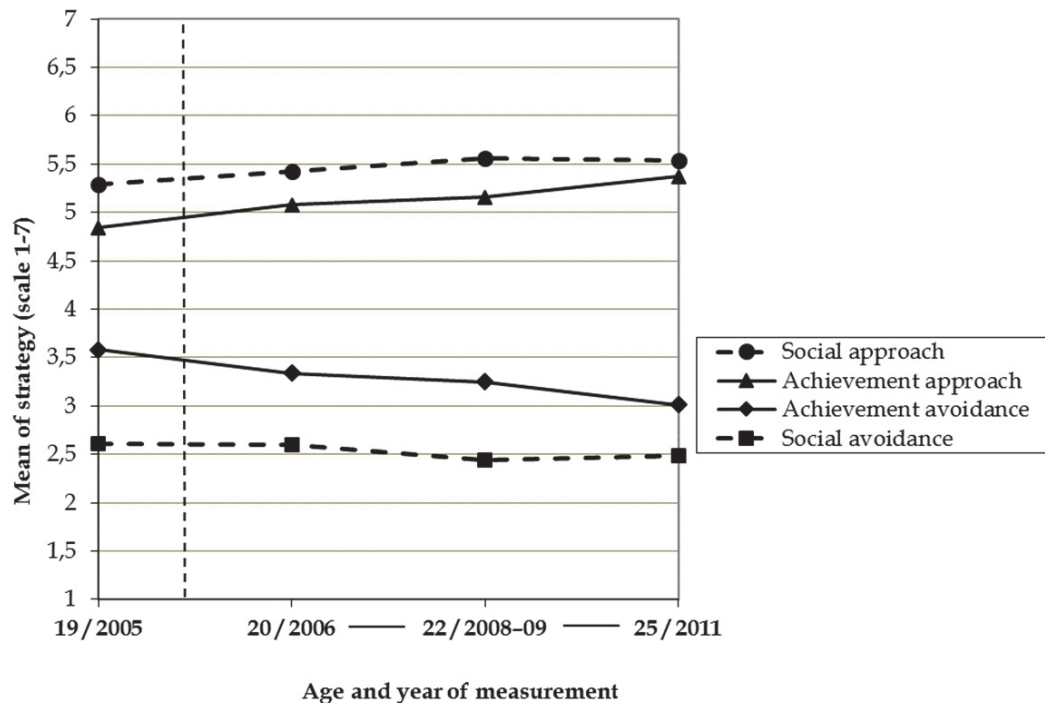
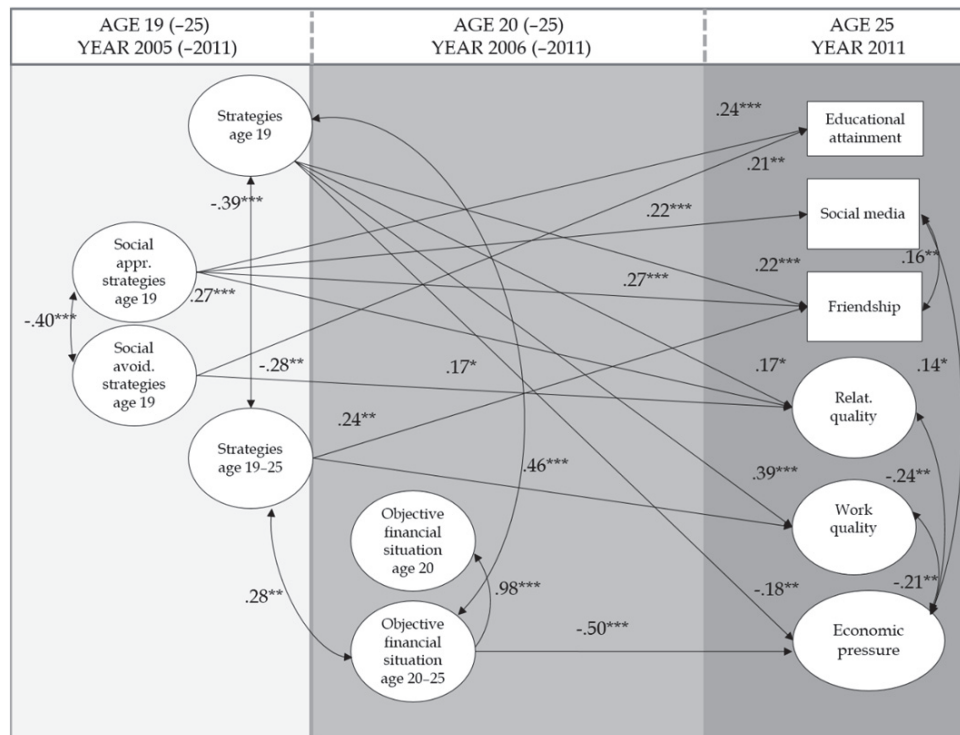


FIGURE 4 Latent growth curves for achievement and social strategies

Contrary to the study's hypothesis, the objective financial situation at age 20 and the change up to age 25 did not play a role in achieving developmental tasks at age 25. However, both a high level of agency at age 19 and an increase from age 19 to 25 were related to high levels of success and satisfaction regarding developmental tasks at age 25. In particular, the use of achievement approach strategies and social approach strategies at age 19 and increases in these strategies were related to having a stronger sense of belonging among friends at age 25. Social strategies also predicted success in educational attainment (i.e., the probability of continuing education after upper secondary school) and sense of belonging to social media. The use of achievement approach strategies and social approach strategies at age 19, especially social strategies, was associated with romantic relationship quality at age 25, whereas social avoidance strategies implied a low quality of this type of relationship.

The more young adults implied agency at age 19 and increasingly between ages 19 and 25, the more their objective financial situation (i.e., income) improved simultaneously. Furthermore, high levels of agency at age 19 and improvement in income from age 20 to 25 predicted low economic pressure at age 25. As for employment, high agency at age 19 and an increase up to age 25 predicted higher work quality at age 25. Working in a position relevant to one's education was

related to higher income at age 25. Young adults satisfied with their current work and in full employment experienced less economic pressure at age 25. In Figure 5, as follows, the detailed and significant paths and associations are shown as standardized estimates of the specific achievement and social strategies, general strategies, and objective financial situation predicting key developmental tasks, romantic relationship and work quality, and economic pressure.



Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

FIGURE 5 Strategies and objective financial situation predicting developmental tasks

3.2 Study II: Life satisfaction trajectories and the financial situation

One of the key aims of Study II was to identify how young adults' life satisfaction can be influenced by their personal financial situation. Using a person-oriented approach (Bergman et al., 2003), the following aims were pursued in this four-wave longitudinal study: (1) to investigate whether and how young adults' subjective life satisfaction changes during the transition to adulthood from age 18 to 22, and, in particular, before and after the transition from general upper second-

ary school to tertiary education and/or employment, which evidently includes other key transitions of young adulthood; (2) to identify young adults' possible life satisfaction developmental trajectories during the transition and whether there is any variation in relation to gender, family socioeconomic situation, parental financial support, living situation, and life situation; and (3) to examine how young adults' agency (i.e., use of achievement strategies) and personal financial situation are related to the identified life satisfaction trajectories.

The results of this study showed that, in general, there was no statistically significant change in life satisfaction from general upper secondary school to tertiary education and/or employment. However, significant individual variance in life satisfaction, both in initial mean levels at age 18 and linear mean change up to age 22, was identified; this made grouping individuals into latent classes arguable. The GMM model fit indices revealed five distinct life satisfaction trajectories differing in their initial levels of life satisfaction at age 18 and change from age 18 to 22 (see Figure 6; the dotted vertical line on the horizontal axis refers to the time of the transition to adulthood, i.e., to tertiary education and/or employment). There were two major classes with stable high trajectories of life satisfaction (Groups 1 and 2), one class with a significant decrease in life satisfaction (Group 5), one class with a significant increase in life satisfaction (Group 3), and one stable low class of life satisfaction (Group 4). The groups were named, in order of group size: "moderate-stable" (41% of participants), "high-stable" (27%), "moderate-increasing" (17%), "low-stable" (8%) and "high-decreasing" (7%). The vast majority (76%) of young adults had a stable life satisfaction trajectory throughout the transition, while the rest followed a trajectory characterized by change.

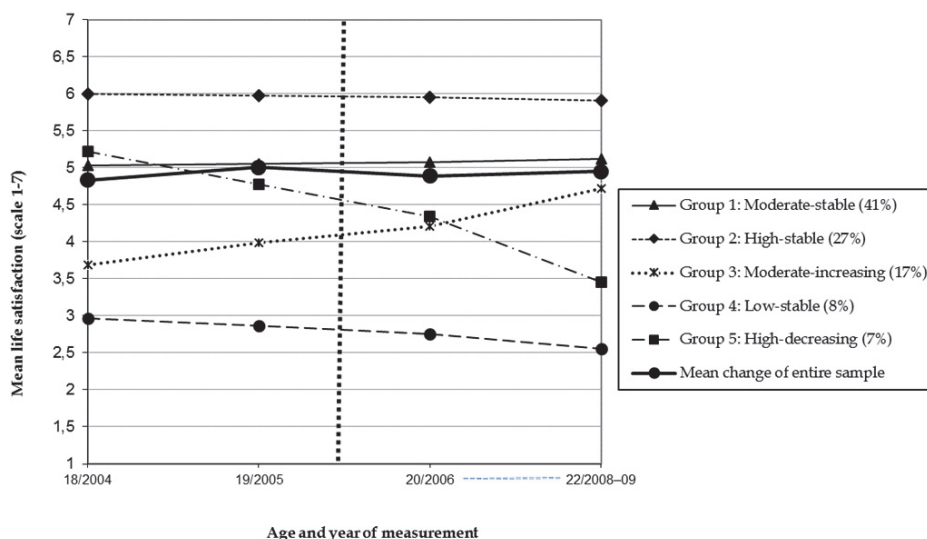


FIGURE 6 Life satisfaction trajectories

ANOVAs were conducted in order to examine group differences in financial situation and agency at ages 19 and 22.⁶ A high initial level of use of achievement approach strategies (i.e., agency) at age 19 was somewhat related to high-decreasing and high-stable life satisfaction trajectories. In turn, those using achievement avoidance strategies at age 19 were more likely to have a low-stable life satisfaction trajectory.

High life satisfaction trajectories were related to being in a positive financial situation at age 22. The two largest trajectories pertaining to stable and (fairly) high life satisfaction, moderate-stable and high-stable, indicated a better subjective financial situation at age 22 than the other trajectories. Additionally, the high-stable and moderate-stable trajectories indicated a slight leaning toward higher objective income levels, but this result was not as significant. Moreover, the differences between moderate-stable and moderate-increasing as well as between moderate-stable and low-stable in objective income levels were statistically significant: the *moderate-increasing*, *low-stable* and *moderate-stable* trajectories indicated statistically different mean objective income levels after the transition ($p < .05$). Finally, and interestingly, the trajectories did not differ significantly according to gender, parental financial support, and living situation and regarding family socioeconomic status and life situation, the trajectories differed only at the general level and not in terms of specific differences between the trajectories.

3.3 Study III: Career and romantic relationship goals and concerns

Study III investigated young adults' personal goals and concerns, which were categorized and measured in relation to personal projects (Little, 1983; Marttinen & Salmela-Aro, 2012). A particular focus was given to changes in personal goals and concerns in relation to age-specific developmental tasks as well as goal and concern hierarchies, that is, individuals' profiles of goals and concerns. Using both variable- and person-oriented approaches, the primary aim was to examine young adults' personal goals and concerns in the domains of career (including education, work, and finances) and committed romantic relationship formation. The aims pursued through the study were as follows. The first aim, (1), was to identify young adults' most prominent personal goals and concerns and changes in these from age 20 to 23. The research also identified how young adults differ in the emphasis they place on different life goals; accordingly, typologies or typical individual profiles of goal and concern patterns were formulated. Secondly, (2), the research was aimed at uncovering to what extent young adults' goals and concerns as well as respective profiles are related to their life situation in the ca-

6 Due to prolonged data collection processes, the referred time points and ages may differ. On pages 62 and 65 in the original published article, the referred data collection time point of age 19 is T2, not T1.

reer and romantic relationship domains or to individual characteristics (gender and family socioeconomic status). Thirdly, (3), the probabilities of young adults switching from one goal or concern profile to another between ages 20 to 23 were estimated. The fourth and final aim, (4), was to find out how goal profiles are related to personal concerns and whether personal concern profiles are related to goals in the career and romantic relationship life domains. Due to length restrictions, some of the detailed CFA goal and concern associations mentioned here were not included in the results section of the original publication.

The results showed that the most common personal goal categories were education and work, with education being prioritized at age 20 and work at age 23. The importance of these career-related personal goals is in line with developmental regulation models since they reflect the age-graded developmental tasks of education and work (Heckhausen et al., 2010; Nurmi, 2004; Salmela-Aro, 2009). Romantic relationship goals formed the second most prominent category. The most common personal concern categories pertained to career-related issues: financial issues, education, and work. LCAs yielded goal and concern profiles that were primarily related to the career domain, with the romantic relationship domain being less central (Seiffge-Krenke et al., 2014). Three goal profiles became apparent in the assessments of young adults at age 20 and 23: “Education” (61% at age 20; 37% at age 23), “work” (24% at age 20; 42% at age 23); and at age 20, “education and finances” (15%); and at age 23, a “multiple” profile consisting of the work, education and romantic relationship domains (21%) – see Figure 7. Three concern profiles were found: “No concerns,” that is, unlikely to mention any specific concerns (70% at age 20; 51% at age 23), “finances” (23% at age 20; 30% at age 23), and at age 20, “education and finances” (7%); and at age 23, “work” (19%). Neither goal nor concern profiles were significantly related to gender or family socioeconomic status.

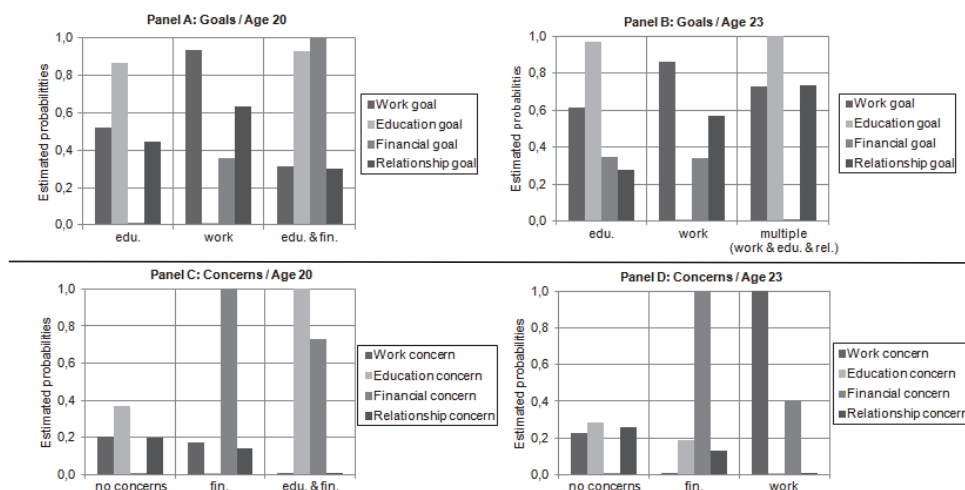


FIGURE 7 Goal and concern profiles at ages 20 and 23

Career and romantic relationship goals and concerns were associated with life status in these domains, both cross-sectionally and longitudinally, also reflecting developmental task (Havighurst, 1948) and developmental regulation theories (Heckhausen et al., 2010). However, young adults' life situation at age 20 was not found to predict life goals at age 23. Prioritizing education or work goals and concerns at age 20 predicted being in education and/or employment at age 23, and not prioritizing these predicted the opposite.

Goals were also strongly associated with concerns within and across specific life domains, especially in regard to the finances domain. As regards the personal concern profiles, the results showed that financial goals and concerns at age 20 were associated cross-sectionally, and at age 23 the trend was similar. Having financial goals at age 20 predicted having the finances-focused concern profile at age 23, possibly implying societal context changes. Similarly, young adults with the finances or the education and finances-focused concern profiles typically had financial concerns and had a finances-focused concern profile still at age 23. The concern profiles were also cross-sectionally related to work goals at both ages (20 and 23). At age 20, it was common for individuals with a finances-focused concern profile to have work goals. At age 23, young adults with a work concerns profile also had concurrent work-related goals, portraying notions of agency.

The results showed that at age 20, while being in work non-relevant to one's education, it was typical to have financial goals; this indicates that one either aims to improve one's financial situation by working or has long-term career plans in terms of financial goals. Career goals, overall, were predictive of status: with no work or education goals at age 20, it was unlikely to be working in a position relevant to one's education or to be in education at age 23; it was also unlikely to have education concerns at age 20 and to be working in a position relevant to one's education at age 23. Individuals' financial issues and romantic relationship status were also associated: at age 20, individuals living with a romantic partner, and, and at age 23, those seeing and dating someone, had financial concerns but not goals.

The analyses assessing transition probabilities showed, interestingly, that of the individuals with an education-focused goal profile, 38% remained having this profile from age 20 to 23 and 42% shifted to having a work-focused goal profile; the reciprocal effect was also high, 31%. The remainder, 20%, shifted to having the multiple goal (work, education and romantic relationship) profile. In the work-focused goal profile, 45% remained having that profile and 24% shifted to having a multiple goal profile. As regards the education and finances focused goal profile, 22% shifted to having the multiple goals profile, 30% to the work-focused goal profile, and a total of 48% to the education-focused profile.

Regarding the participants' concerns, the majority (59%) of young adults having the profile of no concerns at age 20 kept this profile up to age 23, while 19% shifted to having the finances-focused, and 22% to having the work-focused concern profile. Of the education and finances concern profile, 36% shifted to having the no concerns profile, 39% to having the finances-focused

concern profile, and 25% to having the work-focused concern profile. Of the finances-focused concern profile, half (50%) kept this profile, while the remainder shifted to having the no concerns profile (34%) or to having the work-focused concern profile (16%).

4 DISCUSSION

This research addressed key developmental tasks during an educational transition in young adulthood, which is characterized by instability as several transitions take place simultaneously during this life phase and imperative decision making concerning future life plans is required, especially in the career domain. The time span between ages 18 and 25 is one in which young adults are expected to take increasing responsibility for their lives as they are getting better at making independent decisions, and, in most cases, they do in fact, gain financial independence by age 25 (Lee & Mortimer, 2009). Moreover, the studies of this research, first, specifically aimed to clarify how the various changes in the life course phase of young adulthood are related to young adults' financial situation and experienced economic pressure. Their financial situation was assessed with both objective and subjective measures between ages 18 to 25 (from year 2004 to 2011). Secondly, economic stress, assessed through the appraisal of economic pressure and perceived economic hardship, was examined in Study I at the time that the participants were 25 years of age. Finally, in addition to the marker of the personal financial situation of young adults in their early 20s, the socioeconomic status of the parents was also acknowledged.

It is also evident that the current economic recession, from 2008 onward, has made the transition to employment more challenging and led to a downfall in young adults' personal financial situations. The macroeconomic climate has resulted in increased economic pressure and tougher challenges in attaining economic stability and self-sufficiency: important markers of adulthood affecting mental health (Stein et al., 2011). A recent UNICEF report (UNICEF Office of Research, 2014), for example, revealed that beyond monetary factors such as income and employment levels, the recession has affected well-being and life satisfaction levels negatively in relatively wealthy countries, such as Finland, and led to increased feelings of insecurity and stress. The recent decline in labor market opportunities, increased economic turbulence, and structural changes in working life as well as increasing youth unemployment all have related effects on young adults' transition to financial independence; the overall transition to adulthood and timing of developmental tasks, such as attaining independent

living and forming a committed romantic relationships (Danzinger & Ratner, 2010; Mortimer, & Larson, 2002; Vuolo et al., 2012), may be affected.

Interestingly, the results of this research, specifically Study I, imply that young adults' personal financial situation does not, in fact, strongly influence the success of the intrinsic and role transitions crucial in the transitional period of young adulthood (Grob, 2001). Furthermore, the apparent discrepancy between the macro-level national economic recession and young adults' relatively high economic satisfaction and low experienced economic pressure could be explained by high agency in a welfare state context along with adjustments in expenditures. The fact that young adults are active agents has been emphasized in all three studies. Through general agentic strivings and career goals, employment can be gained, thus improving one's financial situation and making financial independence possible while also decreasing the risk of financial distress. In the results, individuals' agency being associated with changes in their objective financial situation reflects young adults' ambition to shape their own financial development.

In addition to examining agency as psychological functioning, another general aim and benefit of the research was to study theoretically valid and evidence-based ways of how financial matters influence young adulthood life satisfaction levels and change across this life course phase, and functional and positive youth development across a longitudinal time span. Therefore, analyses and models explained the potential underlying mechanisms and links between financial security, normative youth development and life satisfaction in the salient years of young adulthood. The results from data collected during economic upheavals in 2008 and 2011 underline the persisting financial concerns of young adults. However, the results did not completely validate the argument that in such an unstable financial situation and perceived economic uncertainty, young adults tend to postpone decision making or important transitional events (Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011). The results, however, support the argument (e.g., Vuolo et al., 2012) that agentic psychological resources and functional transition strategies may protect young adults against financial societal insecurity and prolonged developmental tasks.

This research integrates psychological life-span developmental research (Baltes, 2003; Lerner & Hultsch, 1983) with sociological life course research (Elder, 1998a, 1998b; Settersten, 2003). In addition, it links sociological theories of agency (Giddens, 1984, 1991) and youth studies (Miles, 2000; Wyn & White, 1997), adolescence psychology (Eccles et al., 1993), and developmental science (Baltes, 1997; Elder, 1998b) in the analysis of the significant transition to adulthood; thus, a multidisciplinary approach is taken to the key elements.

In Study I, the aim was to analyze how young adults' strategies implying agency impact accomplishing developmental tasks both in the framework of life course transitions and in view of the global economic downturn. In Study II, the participants' life satisfaction trajectories, financial situation and agency were studied. Furthermore, Study III examined young adults' personal goals and concerns in relation to their life situations. The main findings of the studies as

well as their theoretical and practical implications are discussed next, followed by the general limitations of the research and recommendations for further studies.

4.1 Main findings and theoretical implications

4.1.1 The impact of subjective perceptions on the financial situation

In Studies I and II, the young adults' financial situations were assessed according to the traditional yet multidimensional *subjective* and *objective* division, with Study I also examining economic pressure. The results of Study I, substantiating its hypothesis, showed that young adults' financial situation, on average, improved on the *objective* level, that is, in terms of the amount of money they had for everyday use, from age 20 to 25; however, it did not improve on the *subjective* level, that is, in terms of the perceived sufficiency of their income in relation to their personal consumption habits. It can be assumed that as the amount of monthly income grows significantly, financial needs and aspirations grow in a linear fashion, although the gap between the young adults' objective and subjective financial situation decreased with age and was lowest at age 25. According to the life-span model of motivation (Salmela-Aro, 2009), young adults learn to gradually manage their finances and adapt consumption habits to available financial resources. However, due to the increasing financial commitments with age, young adults seem to be not entirely satisfied with their subjective financial situation. Furthermore, Study III results showed that 25–30% of all concerns were related to financial issues. The results also implied that financial concerns, yet also goals, persist throughout the young adulthood transition and in times of societal financial insecurity, such as in 2008. The reported levels of financial independence at age 25, assessed with respect to subjective economic pressure in Study I, also imply that young adults seem to cope with limited financial resources due to life course transitions of independent living and difficulties in achieving financial independence. When adding the influence of work-related goals and concerns, it becomes evident that "career stress" or concerns are significant for young adults, at least in the case of these academic track participants.

According to the results of Studies I and II, young adults seem to juggle with multiple sources of income and the income distribution varies significantly between individuals. At ages 22 and 25, a salary from employment or financial support from the state were the most significant sources of income, while parental financial support was minimal both in proportion and objective monetary amounts. There is a clear shift in responsibility of financial responsibility from being attributed to the parents to being expected of the state and young adults themselves. As young adults are more commonly engaged in employment corresponding to their education, their objective financial situation (i.e., income) improves, and, in turn, this reduces the risk of economic pressure at

age 25. Interestingly, in Study III, young adults aged 20 and working in a position not related to their education prioritized educational and financial goals. This possibly reflects a gap year of working between educational stages, at which time intrinsic work goals are not considered as important: the aim, during such a study gap, is to earn money for the time being with a view to continuing in the educational domain in the near future (Heath, 2007). Furthermore, having a loan was fairly uncommon, but this increased significantly with age: at 22 years of age, 20% of young adults had a loan (comprising a 5% relative contribution to total income), while at age 25 already 48% had a loan, but the amounts were fairly small.

In this research, economic pressure was defined as economic difficulties, the inability to afford basic necessities and to pay monthly bills, as well as making significant cutbacks and adjustments in expenditures—in line with the Family Economic Stress Model (FESM; Conger & Elder, 1994). Altogether, 76% of young adults had only *some* or *just enough* money left over before their next paycheck, referring to limited possibilities for saving money, and 13% did not have enough money to make ends meet. These results may also reflect the societal economic turbulence at the time of the measurements, in 2008 and 2011. The increasing popularity of loans from banks, friends and relatives, and consuming on credit, also imply financial difficulties in everyday life. However, these young adults do not seem to suffer from extreme financial hardship: bills are paid with little or no difficulty and cutbacks in expenditures are related to large purchases, clothing expenses and savings, all portraying relatively mild circumstances. These adjustments in financial behavior due to experienced financial difficulties and strain can also be seen as an indication of individual agency.

This research shows that financial independence signifies the successful fulfillment of developmental tasks in young adulthood and propels further developmental processes, such as engaging in further education and moving out of the childhood home, which require financial resources. Financial independence also enables increased responsibility for and control of one's personal life, but at the same time requires competent agency. For instance, the results of Study I showed that agency at age 19 and an increase in the use of agentic strategies up to age 25 were related to being in a better objective financial situation through the ambition to shape one's financial development. In turn, being in an improved financial situation was related to being less at risk of experiencing economic pressure at age 25. Even more importantly, and interestingly, neither the financial situation at age 20 nor its change up to age 25 predicted success or satisfaction regarding developmental tasks.

4.1.2 Life course perspectives on accomplishments of agency

Kehily (2007) has pointed out that youth research has kept pace with the important changes in the social structures and processes shaping young people's lives by developing new theories and placing greater emphasis on biographical approaches that emphasize examining individuals' feelings and actions in order

to more coherently understand the choices they make concerning transitional paths. Secondly, human development should not only be tied to the individual life course but also to the historical time and place as well as sociopolitical change in which decisions are made, as encompassed by the action-phase model of developmental regulation considering the contextual embeddedness of individual agency during life course transitions in order to promote positive development (Haase et al., 2008). In addition to life course perspectives, the definition of life-span development, as proposed by Lerner and Hultsch (1983, p. 18), emphasizes life transitions and related changes by examining between-person differences and how individuals influence that change: a person is “both a *product* of his or her biological, sociological, psychological and historical world, and a *producer* of it!” By adopting a longitudinal approach in this research, a significant contribution to life course research is made by comprehensively conceptualizing the key developmental tasks of young adulthood concerning career and social relations life domains and considering their individual agentic and social determinants (i.e., welfare support and national economic climate). The research also calls for interaction between life course and life-span approaches in order to inspect development embedded in wider macro-social conditions (Salmela-Aro & Schoon, 2009).

The interaction between the societal structure and individual agency gives shape to the trajectories of the life course (Bauman, 2001b). Additionally, decisions with long-range implications often need to be made in a relatively short period while having long term effects (du Bois-Reymond & Stauber, 2005). The life-span perspective focuses on goals directing action related to a specific developmental stage in life (Smith, 1999). Choice and goal-making are, in fact, the basis for subjective life management (Smith, 1999). A basic distinction relevant to personal goals is the approach-avoidance distinction adopted in this research. While approach goals direct an individual’s behavior toward a desired state, avoidance goals, also conceptualized as concerns or feared selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986), direct the individual away from undesired states (Elliot, 2008). Personal goals contribute to making an active effort, concentrating and performing developmental tasks within the demands of a specific age-graded life transition (Salmela-Aro, 2009). Success in achieving goals, in turn, contributes to feelings of competence and capability, also increasing personal strengths and ambitions, and thus stimulating enduring positive changes (Schoon, 2007).

Personal goals and agentic processes are influenced by changing social, psychological, cultural, temporal and historical life contexts, which means that they are situation and life domain specific (Freund & Riediger, 2006; Little, 1983; Salmela-Aro & Little, 2007). Bauman (2001b) suggests that individual decisions and actions can also be linked to the deeper causes of an individual’s fears and concerns. Similarly, according to the *expectancy-value model of motivated behavioral choices* (Eccles, 1987), educational and occupational goals are influenced not only by one’s own interests, values and expectations and beliefs of success, but also by sociocultural norms and the developmental tasks of young adulthood laid out by the cultural milieu and an ongoing interaction with the social envi-

ronment (see also Little et al., 2007; Salmela-Aro, 2009). For example, regarding gender socialization and gender identity formation, women and men often have different expectations, self-perceptions, goals, and values regarding career achievement which influence educational and career choices, even related to school subjects at an early stage (Schoon & Eccles, 2014).

Another important fact is that young adulthood development is not separate from other life phases, since it happens in the context and along the continuum of the past, present and anticipated future (Settersten, 2003; Wyn & White, 1997). For example, a lack of employment opportunities occurring on a continual basis resulting in unemployment and lack of a stable income during the school-to-work transition may cause constraints in further developmental tasks, such as in the transition to independent living (the *market-income hypothesis*; Guerrero, 2001). On the other hand, positive life events and attainment of developmental goals in a key domain may foster personal goals and action toward age-graded tasks in another domain (Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 1997). For example, cohabitation and attainment of key social goals seem to provide a basis for being interested in goals in another life domain, for example in achievement-related goals in the career domain (Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 1997).

While fulfillment in the career and romantic relationship life domains are interdependent (Lerner, Freund, De Stefanis, & Habermas, 2001), the simultaneous coordination of these two developmental tasks is highly unlikely. This notion is supported by the results of Study III, in that the occurrence of romantic relationship goals and concerns was relatively low and stable compared to those in the career life domain. The goal hierarchies assessed in this study showed that two-thirds of young adults had educational goals, with a shift toward work-related goals by age 23, both strongly reflecting career life domain importance. No profile was explicitly related to romantic relationship, although for young adults with a work-focused goal profile, romantic relationship related goals were mentioned next. These results support the hypothesis that romantic relationship goals and concerns would remain relatively stable during the transition to adulthood, since relationship-related transitions are frequently postponed (Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 1997). Furthermore, the romantic relationship life domain was also present to some degree at age 23, in the multiple goals profile. Interestingly enough, the majority of the young adults were in fact in a romantic relationship at the time of the assessment. The results might be explained by the fact that only young adults on the academic track (in education) were assessed, and they tend to highlight career goals (Oinonen, 2003), and the economic downturn may also have decreased the focus on other life domains. Developmental regulation theories, however, predict that individuals continue to set goals in the romantic relationship domain and capitalize on such attainment in the long run (e.g., Heckhausen et al., 2010). Earlier commitments to normative tasks, such as interpersonal relationships and family, will also strengthen the tendency to set similar goals later on (Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 1997).

Taking the Finnish context and the participants' academic background into consideration, it is highly probable that at the age of 20, the majority of young adults are in a gap year with no educational status and preparing for the entrance examination to higher tertiary education, which is presumably why educational goals were highly prominent in the goal categories. As for work goals, these gradually progressed with time along with work-related concerns, while educational concerns decreased from age 20 to 23. Goals and concerns in the education and work domains were related within a domain: young adults focused on work goals did not have educational concerns, while those with an education-focused goal profile did have such concerns, both at ages 20 and 23. The fact that young adults do not only have educational goals but also concerns, especially at age 20, extends previous research (Nurmi, Poole et al., 1995) and possibly reflects the Finnish situation in regard to the challenging transition to tertiary education.

Since the same issue is weighed both in terms of personal concerns and goals, the individuals show signs of action and striving for a successful transition (Oyserman, Terry, & Bybee, 2002; Salmela-Aro, Mutanen et al., 2009). Particularly in this crucial transition phase, it is important to have a "balanced" set of goals and concerns that prepare for potential transition-specific setbacks while aiming to achieve a successful life transition. As an example, in Study III, young adults with a financial concern profile had career-related goals, which reflects agency and may lead to a satisfying financial situation, as found in Study I. Financial goals and concerns also act as a motor for development in the career and romantic relationship life domains: a similar trend has been seen in Finnish statistics with respect to the association between financial security and transitions in the familial life domain (Oinonen, 2004).

Through adequate control beliefs, young adults strive toward agency and life management by improving financial resources, such as through employment (Sundblad, 2008). Such life management is based on the capabilities and individual agency that help in managing concurrent transitions and constructing the life course phase of young adulthood, thus contributing to adult well-being (Helve & Bynner, 1996). These capabilities may consist, for example, of higher educational attainment of these young adults in focus of this research with a general (academic) upper secondary level education. Nevertheless, young adults can be seen as future-oriented and rational actors (Salmela-Aro & Schoon, 2009; Sundblad, 2008). Through longitudinal youth research on this aspect, we are able to examine if there have been any changes in young adults' personal goals or concerns and how young adults build specific life management models. Young adults' switching from one goal or concern profile to another, for example, gave further insight into how life situations are perceived. Almost half of the young adults who participated in the research shifted from the work-focused goal profile at 20 to another profile at 23; but also reciprocal trends were identified, implying changing situations.

In Study I, young adults showing agentic strategies at age 19 and increasing usage of these strategies by age 25 predicted success in multiple life do-

mains: educational attainment, social belonging, and satisfaction with the quality of one's romantic relationship and work. One of the key contributions of the study was the portrayal of the social domain of agency. In this research, through its assessment of young adults' crucial and dynamic social relationships, this emphasis on social relations and the importance of the interdependencies of individuals has shown how the transition to adulthood is, in fact, *not* necessarily a movement from dependency to independence (Wyn & White, 1997). Social relationship engagement as well as the interaction with peers and family are important for fulfilling transitional tasks (Salmela-Aro & Schoon, 2009), which, in this research, was associated with the sense of belonging among friends and the social media, satisfaction with the quality of one's romantic relationship and work, and with the level of economic pressure. Young adults were fairly satisfied with the quality of their social relations in both their personal romantic relationship and their work domain (Study I). However, the level of sense of belonging was slightly higher in the romantic relationship life domain than in the working community. The use of social avoidance strategies, on the other hand, was associated with dissatisfaction with the quality of one's romantic relationship. Interestingly, other studies have also shown that social relationships can contribute to adaptive development through support systems by buffering against the negative effects of economic hardship and stress (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998).

In conclusion, another interesting finding in Study I relates to how agency seemed to be linked to the *quality* of (i.e., satisfaction with) the developmental tasks of Finnish young adults at age 25, in 2011, not so much to achieving (i.e., success in) normative life course developmental tasks, per se. The Finnish welfare state supports development, in objective terms, in many ways. For example, in the present research, it was found that early home-leaving was not dependent on differences between the initial levels of agency at age 19, directly after the transition from general upper secondary school, nor on the development of agentic strivings during the crucial years up to age 25. It is therefore important to acknowledge the diversity of life situations during this demanding life course phase and how these situations are subjectively perceived and experienced. For example, in terms of satisfaction with work, the personal attributes related to the quality of work may differ according to the individual's present situation. If one is working while being a first year student or in "odd jobs," the job in focus might mean different things than for a student working as graduation is approaching or thereafter.

4.1.3 Trajectories of life satisfaction

The extension of the analyses from statistically nonsignificant correlations between variables to more complex trajectory analyses was supported while accounting for the heterogeneity of life satisfaction in Study II. This approach resulted in five developmental life satisfaction trajectories: "*moderate-stable*" (41% of participants), "*high-stable*" (27%), "*moderate-increasing*" (17%), "*low-stable*" (8%), and "*high-decreasing*" (7%). While the majority of young adults had a sta-

ble trajectory across the transition to adulthood, a small proportion (7%) of young adults followed a decreased life satisfaction trajectory across the transition, similar to what Schulenberg and colleagues (Schulenberg, Bryant, & O'Malley, 2004) found in their study: Similarly, 7% of their sample decreased from a relatively high to a relatively low level of well-being in contrast to the normative trend and had difficulties in fulfilling developmental tasks, namely, related to work and romantic relationships. Additionally, 10% of the young adults in their study experienced increasing well-being, which was a turning point attributed to succeeding in these developmental tasks. In the present Study II, however, the life satisfaction trajectories differed only slightly according to life situation.

In Study II, the longitudinal role of the financial situation was portrayed against life satisfaction. A significant relation between positive life satisfaction trajectories and being in a positive financial situation was identified in this transitional life course phase. Young adults with a high-stable life satisfaction trajectory were satisfied with their financial situation. Young adults with a moderate-stable trajectory were in a good objective financial situation, and young adults with a low-stable or moderate-increasing trajectory had a fairly low level of objective income. In terms of overall correlations, the subjective financial situation was found to correlate with life satisfaction, but the objective financial situation not. This interesting finding implies that the subjectively experienced financial situation is more relevant than the actual income in regard to life satisfaction in the long run, while the results of Study I imply that the subjective perception does not improve with age. The young adults who were subjectively happy with their economic situation were constantly happy with life in general throughout the transition and vice versa, irrespective of gender or the family socioeconomic background.

As for agency, the use of achievement approach strategies before an educational transition was positively correlated to concurrent and later life satisfaction. The use of achievement avoidance strategies, on the other hand, was not typical for young adults with a high and stable life satisfaction trajectory, but it was common for those with a low-stable or a moderate-increasing life satisfaction trajectory. Young adults with a moderate-increasing trajectory also showed an increase in their mean level of using achievement approach strategies. In the moderate-stable trajectory, achievement approach strategies increased but life satisfaction remained stable. Moreover, in the high-decreasing life satisfaction trajectory, life satisfaction dropped even though the use of achievement approach strategies remained high and stable. These results imply that agency does have an effect on life satisfaction development, but it is not a guaranteed protective factor against evident decreases in life satisfaction. However, on a more positive note, the means of achievement avoidance decreased in all classes (as in Study I), possibly reflecting less cynical and more optimistic attitudes of young adults with age. In Study II, social strategies were not included in the analysis, which was a significant contribution of Study I.

4.1.4 Heterogeneity of pathways to adulthood

In Study I, success and satisfaction regarding developmental tasks at age 25 was analyzed with reference to this age being considered significant in terms of self-sufficiency, independent living, obtaining full-time employment and forming a romantic relationship (Wald & Martinez, 2003). However, variance with regard to going through different transitional events has been found to be greatest around age 25 (Cook & Furstenberg, 2002). This research portrays not only normativity, but also diversity in life situations and heterogeneity in engaging in different life situations, especially in the career and romantic relationship life domains, implying both normal and choice biographies (du Bois-Reymond, 1995).

The descriptive information of the demographics supports the evidence regarding the developmental trajectories and transitional progression of these young adults with a general upper secondary degree background. In Study III, 53% of the young adults aged 20 were in higher education, studying at the university or polytechnic level, increasing to 73% by age 23, and, in Study I, decreasing to 62% by age 25. Equally, the proportion of young adults not in education at age 20 was 32%, which dropped to 20% at age 23. As for employment, young adults in work relevant to their education increased from 8% at age 20 to 27% at age 23, and up to 52% by age 25 (Study I), regardless of whether or not they were simultaneously in education.

All in all, however, combining work with education increased significantly with age: at 20 years of age, 46% of the young adults examined were only in education, dropping to 40% by age 23. At 20 years of age, 22% of the young adults combined education and work, with up to 42% by age 22 (Study II), and decreasing to 38% at age 25 (Study I). At 25 years of age, 52% of the young adults were in employment relevant to their education.

Young adults seem to increasingly engage in long-term commitments relating to their career and romantic relationship life domains, since the duration of both employment contracts and romantic relationships were longer at age 23 than at age 20 (Study III). In that respect, from adolescence through young adulthood, work followed a course similar to that of romantic relationships. Regarding romantic relations, the first explorations begin in adolescence but become serious and enduring in young adulthood. And with work as with romantic relationships, young adulthood is a time not only of exploration but also of instability (Arnett, 2004). In this research, as expected, graduation from higher education did not occur early for these young adults with a general upper secondary (academic) background: at age 22, the majority of young adults were still studying, 34% at universities and 25% at polytechnics (Study II). By age 25, only 30% had graduated from university or polytechnic level education (Study I).

As for social relations, the studies showed that most young adults in Finland move into independent living quite early. By age 22 and 25 (Studies I and II), almost all (98%) of the young adults had moved from their childhood home.

Cohabitation is a popular option: at 22 years of age, 42% of young adults lived with a partner, increasing to 56% by age 25 (Studies I and II). In terms of romantic relationships in general (Studies I and III), dating gained a more prominent life status with age. Less than half (41%) of the young adults were single at age 20, decreasing to 34% at age 23 and only 26% by age 25. Furthermore, while the dating proportion dropped (38% at age 20, then 27% at age 23, and 18% by age 25), marriage and cohabitation increased with age: 21% at age 20, then 39% at age 22, and 56% by age 25. However, it needs to be underlined that a significant proportion of these young adults were not yet married at these ages, but living together.

As suggested by previous research (e.g., Billari, 2005), here also, there was a phenomenon of intertwined tasks and experiences in life domains, events and opportunities. This process is well defined as development *cascading* across different domains and time (e.g., Masten et al., 2004). Multiple life domains intertwine as young adults gradually shift from education and work, and sometimes back, and thus engage in multiple tasks and responsibilities, often simultaneously. In Finland, students in higher education tend to work alongside their studies. The transition to work has, in fact, shifted from a “school-to-work” transition model to a “school-and-work” model, which is actually more appropriate considering the restructured and challenging labor market. This implies that young Finnish adults are not actually experiencing a prolonged period of youth but a different type of transition as they engage in working life and being financially dependent already while studying (Mary, 2012). The results of Study I also showed that when young adults are in employment relevant to their education, they had an increased income at age 25; and, as they gain full-time employment and are satisfied with their work, the less economic pressure they experienced.

The methodological contribution of this research is its trajectory framework and comprehensive life course perspective for examining individual trajectories, continuities and changes of developmental tasks using a longitudinal data set (Settersten, 2003). Due to the fact that several life events tend to occur at a relatively similar time but to a comparatively different extent and with overall variance in timing between individuals undergoing the transition to adulthood, research focusing on transitions evidently requires a dynamic scientific approach that allows examining differences between individuals in adopting adult roles, such as in the career life domain (see also Ranta, 2013). A person-oriented approach was needed to examine individual trajectories of life satisfaction as well as profiles of personal goals and concerns across life domains. In other words, although personal goals in young adulthood have been shown to reflect age-graded developmental contexts, considerable heterogeneity in individual goal hierarchies needs to be acknowledged. As George (2009, p. 164) states, “a key feature of life course theory is identifying the interindividual (i.e., between-person) characteristics and experiences that predict intra-individual (i.e., within-person) patterns of stability and change: trajectories.” Such holistic approaches to life events and transitions in life course research are linked to

various types of methodologies, including new ones such as growth curve analysis, latent class analysis, and latent growth curve analysis (Giele & Elder, 1998; Mayer, 2009). In Study III, considering the dependencies among social role transitions and given that the domains of work and romantic relationships are intertwined (e.g., Edwards & Rothbard, 2000), empirical methods using latent class analysis that account for functioning within individuals across multiple domains are needed. Young adults have different ways of coordinating goals in different life domains and they emphasize different personal concerns. The interdependencies and prioritizations of goals and concerns across life domains and their relation to life paths, transitions and reciprocal influences is important in understanding how young adults concurrently cope with their multiple developmental tasks (Heckhausen et al., 2010; Schulenberg & Schoon, 2012; Seiffge-Krenke et al., 2014).

4.1.5 The prolonged nature of the transition to adulthood: Emerging adulthood

Young adults must negotiate a pathway to adulthood for themselves, the length and direction of it differs greatly between individuals (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Salmela-Aro, Kiuru et al., 2011; Schwartz, Côté, & Arnett, 2005). This also relates to the general shift from the traditional *normal biography* with normatively timed transitions to a *choice biography* with varied patterns (du Bois-Reymond, 1995), as elaborated in the introduction. The fact that young adults follow diverse patterns along their developmental pathways needs to be acknowledged, together with the concurrent discourse on the prolonged nature of the transition to adulthood and the tendency to postpone key developmental tasks. This life course phase has also been labeled “emerging adulthood,” as conceptualized by Arnett (2000, 2004) to define the delay of young adulthood as a new developmental stage between adolescence and young adulthood. However, the question of the validity of this concept has polarized sociologists and psychologists (Côté, 2013). In the media, public discussions and related research on young adulthood, the overarching assumption of young adults engaging in increasing freedom and exploration within a new and universal stage of human development has been seen as misleading (Settersten, 2012). For example, the same processes concerning the transition to adulthood take place for the majority of young adults worldwide. Those young adults privileged enough to be in an economically stable position are able to benefit from this age period and they see it as a time for optimal possibilities and decision making. Individual differences, varying social and economic conditions, and related encountered challenges are not acknowledged in the emerging adulthood concept (Bynner, 2005; Hendry & Kloep, 2007a, 2007b).

Young adults with access to social and economic resources, such as housing support and social policy incentives, are more likely to succeed in their developmental tasks (Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011) and thus experience higher levels of well-being (Schulenberg, Bryant et al., 2004). Access to social support and networks such as one’s family, friends and community is also expected to help

young adults to achieve a successful transition to adulthood (Wald & Martinez, 2003). The discussion on whether emerging adulthood and postponing key developmental tasks until the third or even fourth decade of life remains controversial. The dynamics of choice biography are vital in terms of financial independence. The fact that young adults from a middle-class environment have more opportunities for delaying the task of financial independence than do those from challenging socioeconomic backgrounds is undeniable, as is the fact that great differences between cultures remain (Arnett, 2007a; Hendry & Kloep, 2007a, 2007b). Study I found no effects of family socioeconomic status on the achievement of the key developmental tasks or the personal financial situation in young adulthood.

Nevertheless, demographic shifts and the postponement of key developmental tasks during young adulthood in Finland, as well as across Europe, are emblematic features of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2006b), which has also been acknowledged in recent research (Mary, 2012). Comparative research (Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011; Oinonen, 2003) has identified how romantic relationship formation and parenthood is often delayed until the completion of education (Statistics Finland, 2013a). Perhaps this is due to the lack of significance of social class and the shift of responsibility and support from the parents to the government, at least in Northern Europe, as pondered upon by Arnett (2006a). However, the fact that the school-to-work transition is a rigid and uncertain road is not only due to personal preferences and “emerging adults’ personal desires to try different possible educational and occupational paths until they find the one that provides the right identity match” (Arnett, 2006a, p. 118), but it is also due to the instability and uncertainty of the labor market itself.

Out of the key developmental tasks, the specific family-related issues including marriage (but excluding cohabitation) and having children were not explicitly investigated in this research. As young adults engage longer in higher education while also gaining experience in the labor market, the transition to financial security has in many ways become more complex than it was for previous generations (Settersten, 2012). This is especially the case in Finland, where the majority of young adults gain work experience while studying, nowadays. Because of these changes in the career domain, the traditional transitions related to social relationships, such as marriage and parenting, occur at a much later time because of the need for prior financial security (Settersten, 2012). They also account for possible gender differences as young men experience the transitions to marriage and parenthood at a later stage (Schoon et al., 2007). The issue of compulsory military service for young men in Finland also needs to be taken into account when discussing gender differences as it has an influence on the timing of educational and occupational pathways. Interpersonal issues are also often more salient for females than males although women do not find occupational concerns to be of less importance (Pulkkinen & Kokko, 2000). Late-adolescent females show a particular kind of relatedness, an awareness of themselves in relation to others, in their identity formation. For example, this means the integration and connection of life domains: career and family plans

and commitments (Archer, 1992). However, for both genders, high rates of divorce and separation may loosen the schedules of relationship formation determined socially. Similarly, the relationship status might be perceived as an easier task to “solve” or “change” than those related to other developmental tasks, such as changing the academic career into an entirely different one. Therefore, studying these life domains in regard to young adults under 25 years of age does not seem highly relevant as the age of 25 would seem relatively early in perspective of the transition to marriage or parenthood. This can also be identified in the interesting result of Study I in that neither financial situation nor agentic strivings had an effect on the developmental tasks of moving away from home or dating.

On the vocational track, on the other hand, these transitions are often carried out at an earlier age (Salmela-Aro et al., 2007), although in Finland the number of childless women with a low level of education is greater than in other Western countries, possibly due to the fact that these women usually have more short-term relationships (Miettinen, Rotkirch, Szalma, Donno, & Tanturri, 2014). One crucial feature of Finnish young adults, especially of those with an academic upper secondary educational background, is their engagement in higher education. The frequently high expectations and ambitious aspirations of young Finnish adults has resulted in the great number of young adults *applying* for tertiary education, and this number is growing steadily – in fact, by 18% from the school year 2007–2008 to 2010–2011; but the *acceptance* rate has not increased as much, only by approximately 7% (Finnish National Board of Education, 2012b). In 2012, over 40% of young Finnish adults, aged 20–29, were in education; this is a relatively high proportion, as in the OECD countries only Denmark had a larger share. Among young Finnish adults 25 to 34 years of age, 40% have gained a higher, tertiary-level education (OECD, 2014).

4.2 Practical implications

It has become evident that life course transitions and developmental tasks are shaped by historical, economic and political circumstances, in other words, historical time and place (Elder, Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2003). These circumstances and historical events have different meanings across countries and cultures and for individuals in different life stages (Elder & Giele, 2009). For example, recent life course developmental studies have shown that social changes in macroeconomic conditions (especially in the labor market), the historical and economic context, and global economic uncertainty and globalization may have effects on the transition to adulthood and the timing of developmental tasks (for a review, see Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011). This may result in challenges with regard to attaining economic stability and self-sufficiency, important markers of adulthood. Furthermore, youth unemployment, in comparison to unemployment at an older age, is seen to have a specific problematic feature in terms of “scarring” the future career: the probability of unemployment in the future increases (Bell &

Blanchflower, 2010), it decreases wage and other career-related development, and in some circumstances inevitably leads to social exclusion (Hämäläinen, 2002).

It is important to study economic and social structures of the contextual society alongside the individual life course, as both have an effect on the life management course in young adulthood (Helve, 2002). Wyn and White (1997, p. 5) proclaim that research on youth is also important because the transition to adulthood reflects both individual and collective processes: youth is the “result of social and political processes through which social inequality is constructed and reconstructed.” In societies with a strong public sector and the fundamental right of access to public services and support, such as in Finland, the transition is not so much interfered with by social divisions that cause delayed young adults to end up being labeled “losers.” Nevertheless, youth who are not able to succeed need to be acknowledged and supported in order to prevent social exclusion (Wald & Martinez, 2003).

The extension of young adulthood into later life course phases poses challenges for youth social work. Additionally, labor market entry programs and a social welfare system which support the smoothness of the school-to-work transition are needed (Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011). In recent times, young people have been at the center of Finnish political debates and they have been addressed in government programs and policy guidance documents. For example, the Youth Act legislation defines that the government will strengthen a new youth development program every four years, including youth policy objectives and concrete guidelines for county and municipal youth policy programs. The State also set up a youth policy advisory board to act as an expert body on youth policy (Finlex, 2006).

The political discussion on the exclusion of young adults and social cohesion has been dominated, above all, by the question of the *Youth Guarantee*. Similar to other Nordic countries, since early 2013, the *Youth Guarantee* for young people has been implemented to guarantee each young adult under 25 years of age as well as each recently graduated young adult under 30 years of age a workplace, traineeship, workshop, rehabilitation or a study place within three months of registering as unemployed. The general aim of the Guarantee is to promote apprenticeship training and youth development and thus to prevent social exclusion (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2012; Valtioneuvoston kanslia, 2011). However, this requires multiprofessional collaboration, not only between sector ministries but also between different institutions in society. Finding ways for students to find employment corresponding to their education and attained skills as well as collaborating with employers enhances youth employment (Finlex, 2006; Ministry of Employment and the Economy, 2012). Allocated support, as in all financial aid, also require active agency and participation; that is why, in the case of apathy, some sanctions apply in the form of decreased financial aid.

To this day, research on the effects of the Guarantee is lacking, and despite vast public discussion and debate resulting in the Guarantee achieving a some-

what symbolic status in society, contradictory views have been presented on how well the Guarantee has fulfilled its' mission since it has been in operation. Due to the weak economy, the aim of decreasing youth unemployment has not been achieved, as indicated by the fact that the number of unemployed young adults has actually increased and the time span of unemployment has in recent times still lasted over three months on average. The effects of the current economic recession seem to be so profound and strongly related to many other societal issues and problems (related to housing, low income, tight communal budgets, lack of workplaces) that the Youth Guarantee certainly cannot fix its consequences (Nayak, 2014). Government cutbacks in resources concerning education, training and workshop activities also pose challenges for the Guarantee (*Helsingin Sanomat*, 10 April 2014). Moreover, the target group of the Youth Guarantee is very heterogeneous, since career and family backgrounds can be very diverse. This poses challenges concerning the functionality of the Guarantee. Strong statements should be made with caution, however, as the Guarantee is still on the verge of achieving a strong status in society, and youth unemployment is in fact strongly sensitive to economic fluctuations (National Audit Office, 2014). Employment offices, municipalities, employers, educational institutions and other actors have intensified their cooperation and developed services for young people, and guided the youth to these services (Ministry of Employment and the Economy, 2014). However, it seems that the Youth Guarantee focuses on the education and labor market participation of young adults and functions best for young adults capable of life management and acting in a "self-service system," such as those with an academic background, like the young adults in focus in this research, while neglecting those in critical need of rehabilitation and life management strengthening services, contrary to the Youth Guarantee systems in other Nordic countries (Ahonen-Walker & Pietikäinen, 2014).

The risk of social exclusion becomes especially profound during the age span of 15–19 years of age. This concurs with transitional periods related to education, such as from basic education to upper secondary education as well as from graduation to working life (Ministry of Finance, 2010; Myrskylä, 2011). The exclusion risk increases for young adults without a completed education and for young adults not (yet) registered as unemployed (Myrskylä, 2012). Furthermore, age 25 is again an interesting turning point in terms of statistics: 90% of young adults without training before this age seem to be entirely without any further training (Myrskylä, 2011). In addition to young adults' level of education, their family background is also a protective factor. For uneducated youth, the risk of social exclusion is almost three times that of professionally skilled youth and two times greater if their parents have a low level of education, in other words, if they have a low socioeconomic background (Myrskylä, 2011).

The different configurations of events and the social contexts in which young adults live support making different decisions about the pathways to pursue, and these are the issues youth researchers must endeavor to understand (Helve & Bynner, 2007). Similarly, the heterogeneity of young adults' life

situations during the third decade of life needs to be acknowledged, referring to the simultaneous transitions concerning, for example, education and work. In the Finnish setting, the Eurostudent V (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2014) international comparison clearly portrayed that university students in their 20s are not a homogeneous group who “only” study.

The discussion in the media on youth and young adulthood is frequently problematized. Furthermore, in developmental research and in the public forum, the emphasis on the recent and continuous global economic recession has become a “primary lens” with respect to understanding young adults’ lives and delays in development, which is somewhat limiting. Emphasizing the social context diminishes individual factors and reasons for the situations, not acknowledging the fact that this process has taken place for decades (Settersten, 2012). The discussion on social exclusion, for instance, has increased considerably during times of recession: youth unemployment, early school leaving, polarization, and deprivation extending over generations, to name a few prominent issues (Moisio, 2000; Notkola et al., 2013). The exclusion discussion has been seen by some (Komonen, 2008) as a moral discourse by politicians, educators and the media portraying marginalized young adults as a social threat. However, the social integration discourse sees exclusion as a result of failed access to education and the labor market. These discussions on youth “productivity” and economic and labor-oriented objectives are thus problematic and individualistic. Furthermore, young adults are often conceptualized in youth politics by this limited perspective, despite the Guarantee which was intended to support the life management of young adults and to reform youth services in the first place (Harrikari, 2008). This is underlined by the fact that among Finnish citizens, the main security threat to Finland’s internal security was social exclusion during the peak of the economic recession in 2008 (Komonen, 2008; Ministry of the Interior, 2008).

Overall, countries differ in terms of how the transitions to adulthood are supported by society. State welfare policies, for example, influence young adults’ transitions by affecting their living situation, education and work, thus affecting their opportunity to fulfill certain developmental tasks. Personal financial responsibility, young adults’ high levels of agency and governmental financial support in a welfare state context versus relying on parental financial aid, together support individuals’ current life situation (education and/or work). The social and economic policies and the universal support of the Finnish tax-funded welfare system are examples of how socioeconomic structures interact with personal aspirations and accomplishments regarding developmental tasks, as suggested by the life-span tradition. The comprehensive social-democratic support system grants equal opportunities with economic incentives and benefits (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Furlong & Cartmel, 2007), which Buchmann and Kriesi (2011) have argued to be associated with success in developmental tasks and relate to the observed patterns in early home-leaving and nontraditional family formation, promoting individualistic choice-making and young adults’ need for autonomy but simultaneously “buffering” against

the negative impacts of global and national economic uncertainty and supporting financial independence (see also Blossfeld et al., 2005). The “cultural legacy of the individual’s priority over the family, further strengthened by welfare rights and benefits granted as individual entitlements” supports autonomy in cases of “earliest-early home-leaving” and early romantic relationship formation, although often resulting in a late timing of marriage (if at all) and entry into (nonmarital) parenthood, with great variance between young adults (Buchmann and Kriesi, 2011). Furthermore, public tertiary education is well developed and free of charge at all levels, and unemployment benefits support financial independence from the family and equal opportunities for all young adults.

However, the transition to further education often takes longer in Finland than in many other countries, and the diversity in employment contracts and the large extent of part-time and fixed-term employment characterize the Finnish labor market for young people aged 15–24 (Järvinen & Vanttaja, 2001). The economic recession in the early 1990s required companies to adopt new flexible practices, favoring part-time and fixed-term contracts, which posed new risks for young adults. These types of employment contracts can be terminated more easily, which makes economic fluctuations more severe for young adults than for older generations (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Järvinen & Vanttaja, 2001; Ministry of Finance, 2010). Therefore, the aforementioned importance of the age-25 limit for achieving full-time employment needs to be viewed with precaution in the context of Finnish society. Furthermore, governmental financial support is not endless especially in times of economic turbulence. For instance, support of the unusually large and aging baby boom generation requires public and private resources at the one end, and in the near future increasingly so with youth productivity needs on the other end. This may result in intergenerational conflicts over resources (Furstenberg, 2001).

This research aimed to provide useful information on the transition to adulthood in the face of this most recent sharp downturn of the worldwide economy, which is still evident today. The data set used was collected during the peak of the present economic recession which may also have new implications for the pathways of young adults in Finland today. As a comparison, during the previous national recession in Finland in the early 1990s, unemployment, poverty and social exclusion grew in the Finnish society (Blom & Melin, 1998). What is interesting, in terms of inequality during the recession phase, is that it is not determined by whether or not individuals are in employment: poverty and financial hardship are more often a problem for young adults and students, alongside the unemployed and the retired (Blom & Melin, 1998). During the recession of the 1990s, young adults’ consumption rate per households changed dramatically in their structure and nature. At the same time, the status of young adults as consumers did not meet the standards of other households: young adults under 30 years of age dropped their consumption levels by a fifth, whereas in other households the decrease was about 13% (Ylitalo, 2009).

During the present recession, youth unemployment among highly educated young adults, even at the doctorate level, has risen in many fields; even so, education has been seen to have a buffering function against economic turbulence. The postponing of other crucial developmental tasks has also been identified in Finnish society. Newspapers have discussed the effect of the recession leading to the postponement of parenthood among young adults due to economic uncertainty (*Helsingin Sanomat*, 29 October 2014). This postponement of the transition to adulthood, in terms of family processes, has many political and practical implications. Late entry into employment and an unstable career, reflecting uncertainty of the future, delays couples in having children. In turn, decreasing the proportion of fixed-term employment contracts would be one of the most beneficial ways of reducing such delays (Valtioneuvoston kanslia, 2004). The transition to independent living also has considerable and increasing political implications, since it is linked to the housing, employment and education issues that young adults face during this phase in life (Holdsworth & Morgan, 2005). The gap years in between upper secondary school and higher education have been proclaimed a serious societal problem (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2010), although contradictory views on the losses and gains of these years have been presented, particularly by young adults themselves in terms of subjective experiences. Policy strategies in Finland are strictly aiming to intensify the labor force in order to cope with challenging structural changes which includes reducing the number of gap years and supporting the “school-to-work” transition by restructuring the education system along the lines of the Bologna Process, also as part of an effort to standardize educational systems across Europe (Mary, 2012). Perhaps a tighter connection between education and work is needed, such as seen in the vocational job training opportunities provided in Germany, but also for young adults with an academic track background and for young adults already in higher education.

The Commission has also aimed to reinforce policy cooperation with the European Union (EU) Member States to develop specific action plans for tackling youth unemployment, although the situation is not as alarming in Finland as it is in many other Member States. This aim to prevent structural unemployment and social exclusion is identified throughout the EU, although in many countries youth poverty and housing shortage, substance abuse, tight communal budgets and a decreased number of workplaces interfere with this mission (Nayak, 2014). Individual and familial guidance and counseling on career decision making is needed in order to help young adults with their school-to-work transition as preparation for entering the labor market (Dietrich, 2012). However, the situation of the political economy poses challenges for concrete decision making as annual budgets are tight. Nevertheless, it seems contradictory to reduce the national polytechnic network and vocational funding by 260 million EUR while simultaneously discussing social exclusion issues. Moreover, the Finnish economy is expected to remain in this challenging position over the near future.

The Finnish youth legislation is currently being reformulated, with an interesting discussion taking place on the definition of youth and possible changes to minimize the legal age. Youth facing educational transitions at age 18 or 19 require services and aid, as do those in the challenging time span from 20 to 25 years of age, emphasized in this research as being a particularly crucial stage in terms of young adults facing numerous developmental transitions simultaneously and/or consecutively within a short period. Similarly, the value-driven focus of the legislation should be reconsidered: is the legislation implemented to solve problematic situations, frequently involved in general discourse, or is it more of a communal investment in the future, such as to prevent social exclusion? Furthermore, is the focus of the legislation on the responsibilities of the adults around young adults or on the rights and obligations of young adults themselves? These are fundamental questions that need to be addressed in policy making, which should also draw on youth research.

4.3 Limitations

The present research has, alongside its contributions, the following limitations. The results cannot be generalized to all young adults, nationally or internationally, without precaution. Only individuals living in one particular city participated in the research, and the retention rate could have been higher. Great effort had to be made to recruit the participants by mail or electronically (compared to data collections at schools) in combination with incentives. Although some participants dropped out of the study, attrition analyses were undertaken to confirm that those participants did not differ significantly, concerning key study variables, from the ones who remained in the study. Furthermore, possible effects of attrition and missing data on the study results have been overcome by using advanced statistical methodology.

The Finnish context and participants' academic background must be taken into consideration. Young adults in Finland are able to profit from extensive financial support from the government, which evidently has an effect on gaining financial independence during the life course phase of young adulthood. Therefore, other than in regard to Nordic countries, generalizations concerning young adults need to be made with precaution. It is also vital to bear in mind that even though this research consisted of data collected during an important educational transition, the data covered only a short time period and the sample consisted solely of young adults who attended or graduated from general upper secondary school, that is, the academic track, which also explains the high proportion of female participants in the study. Women were overrepresented in the sample and more research on agency and success and satisfaction regarding developmental tasks with separate data sets for men and women should be conducted, pertaining especially to Study I. Nonetheless, the gender distribution in the present data set reflects the overall distribution of students in Finland's general upper secondary schools, consisting of 57% women in 2009

(Statistics Finland, 2010a). In Study II, data missing from at least one measurement point were most likely to have pertained to male participants. In the same study, it is plausible to state that the homogeneity of life satisfaction trajectories across both genders can be explained by the participants having had the same educational background.

On a more concrete note concerning the theme of the financial situation, the analyses were conducted in regard to *individuals*, not *households*. This adds to the subjectivity of the measures and the results. As the number of respondents living with a partner or friend/s is relatively high, in future studies it would be relevant to take this into consideration when assessing material deprivation and lack of disposable income or material goods. Another limitation concerning income is the fact that objective income was measured as a sum and not according to the different income sources which were assessed. In terms of life satisfaction and economic pressure, objective financial situation may mean different matters even if the objective monetary amount is the same. For example, if the amount is composed entirely of a loan, it may cause economic pressure as well as decreased life satisfaction compared to a situation in which the income is financial support from parents with a high socioeconomic background. Further studies should take the different income sources into account in the analyses.

4.4 Recommendations for further research

Overall, the studies of this research focused on the age span from 18 to 25 years. It is expected that in focusing on young adults' lives through the late twenties, the diversity relating to their life situations will stabilize, acknowledged in these present studies. At the same time, new factors will arise, such as those relating to employment and life situations in terms of family status, which should be taken into consideration in the future studies. The age of 25 is after all, a fairly young age to study in terms of the transition to permanent work, a committed relationships and parenthood. In terms of the developmental perspective, in future studies it is vital to extend the focus to the years beyond age 25 as these young adults approach their 30s. This new horizon of research, from emerging adulthood to what Arnett (2012) calls "young adulthood,"⁷ has received fairly little theoretical and scientific interest. Because of the delay in achieving the traditional markers of adulthood, Arnett suggests that the traditional view of ages 18 to 25 as young adulthood is problematic and old-fashioned, as is seeing the entire age span from 18 to 40 as "early adulthood" (Arnett, 2004, 2007a, 2007b, 2012).

Future studies should aim to address the transitional events with an even more holistic perspective, sorting transitional events into sequences of events or

⁷ Not to be mistaken with the young adulthood terminology used in this research referring to the age span of 18 to 25 years of age.

“configurations of sequences” (Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011). The diverse life situations of young Finnish adults in their 20s and 30s and their individual development across time could be investigated as a pattern of situations covering multiple life domains. The complementary strength of sequence analysis, for example, in life course studies has been again acknowledged, with new technical improvements being available to capture the differentiation within individual life courses, as well as the de-standardization of the timing and order of life course patterns between young adults (Aisenbrey & Fasang, 2010).

However, even though the transition to adulthood has become increasingly diverse, adulthood is nevertheless still often measured using a split into qualitative versus quantitative approaches with quite traditional emblems and characteristics, such as in investigating the pursuit of economic independence from one’s parents (Helve & Bynner, 2007), although that transitional aspect is also often prolonged nowadays (Guerrero, 2001). Questionnaire data with self-report scales can be self-biased, and young adults’ responses may reflect their own assumptions regarding the associations between the themes of such a questionnaire. The qualitative nature of the personal goals and concerns examined in Study III could also be explored more extensively. Categorization simplifies the information available and conducting these analyses along specific statistical criteria carries some risks and uncertainty with respect to the final number of classes. The subjective “feelings” in the transition to adulthood are often neglected in official assessments, which mostly focus on the legal, social and objective perspectives relating to developmental tasks (Mary, 2012). As Holdsworth and Morgan (2005) point out, applying mixed methods to transition research would enable understanding the lives of young adults and their own experiences more comprehensively. Combining survey data to describe the trajectories with qualitative data on young adults’ experiences in transitions relating to their living situation, employment, education and relationships through in-depth interviews is also possible. As for life satisfaction and well-being, in addition to examining overall, general level and development, it would be interesting to investigate life satisfaction in terms of satisfaction with developmental tasks, such as in choice of education or relationship quality.

Finally, pertaining to the limitations of the study, further studies are needed to examine young adults from other educational backgrounds and in other educational transitions with a more representative and gender-balanced sample (as stated by Schulenberg, Sameroff et al., 2004). Also, the profound nature of social exclusion in youth demands further research in terms of the coping mechanisms in risky circumstances and the occurrence of resilience (Schoon, 2006). However, it is an extremely demanding task to have individuals at risk participate in questionnaire studies. In terms of the economic recession, in order to investigate the concrete effects of the economic difficulties at the individual-level, between-country comparisons might be beneficial in order to examine young adults in societies without the buffering effect of sufficient governmental support or with data sets comparable to the normative transitional times in the Finnish setting.

4.5 Conclusion

This research investigated the role of economic factors in young adulthood as determinants of life satisfaction during the critical transition to adulthood and the educational transition from general upper secondary education to higher education and working life. It also examined the effects of economic factors on the multiple developmental tasks of young adulthood amidst economic uncertainty. As the majority of related studies have been cross-sectional in nature, a longitudinal approach was used for this research in order to understand the different developmental processes in relation to individuals' financial situation and life satisfaction trajectories as well as temporality and contextual change (Diener & Seligman, 2002; Elder & Giele, 2009). The macrosociological economic context may shape individual pathways and the ways young people deal with their multiple post-school transitions, conceptualized as developmental tasks, during this critical young adulthood life course phase.

Young adults face a life course phase filled with exploration and decision making processes concerning education, employment and living situation, among others (Côté, 2002; Schwartz et al., 2005). Success in these developmental tasks and demands has been shown to be strongly associated with adaptive functioning, including planfulness (Settersten, 2012), motivation to succeed in the future, behavioral and emotional autonomy, and the capacity to handle stressful situations (Masten et al., 2004; Masten & Wright, 2010). Gaining independence underlines the *individualized nature of the transition* itself, which is carried out independently and in subjective terms, although in a social context. The results of the present research emphasize the diversity in young adults' personal goals, concerns and agency during a time of personal development as well as societal economic uncertainty. Lee and Mortimer (2009) suggest that developmental tasks in young adulthood are not only intervening factors in the attainment of financial independence but might also be influenced by economic self-efficacy. In this research, financial challenges and experiences of economic upheavals and insecurity have been investigated in regard to personal concerns. The research conceptualizes young adults as active agents, and explores their ways of improving the objective financial situation by acknowledging the presence of a realistic risk and pursuing occupational possibilities in order to improve their financial resources and be protected from financial distress (Sundblad, 2008).

The longitudinal analyses provide new insights into how a supportive societal infrastructure, sufficient social networks, commitments, and resources are all crucial for healthy youth development. Likewise, action and life management as supportive mechanisms through employment and education protect against economic stress and promote a smooth transition to financial independence. It is important to find new and multilevel pathways leading from objective economics via subjective experiences and meaning-making to developmental outcomes and well-being. As Marttinen and Salmela-Aro (2012) state, "goals

are the states of the future to be pursued.” Through longitudinal youth research of this manner we are able to examine if there have been any changes in individuals’ personal goals and concerns.

In today’s world, young adults are expected to adopt a new kind of young adult phase in life, which may be perceived as challenging since it involves adjustment to a new role in society. This kind of multifaceted transition to adulthood may also challenge individuals’ developmental resources as a whole. As options and individualization increases, the transition phase is increasingly seen as a stressful life phase involving anxiety, uncertainty and risks as the traditional sources of support and typical pathways to adulthood are prone to disappear (Settersten, 2012). On the other hand, it also generates excitement for a new freedom and wide open possibilities in which preparing for adult roles and the overall transition itself are often voluntarily prolonged (Arnett, 2004; Schwartz et al., 2005).

Two crucial factors have particularly contributed to the usefulness of the present research: first, it was based on a longitudinal data set, and second, extensive statistical analyses were undertaken. As such, this research contributes to the understanding of youth development with a longitudinal perspective on the role of individuals’ financial situation and other economic factors, as well as on potential, underlying mechanisms relating to financial security, well-being developmental trajectories, social relations, and normative youth development. It offers a comprehensive view of the multifaceted transition to adulthood, providing the risks and strengths, as well as vulnerabilities and resources, concerning positive youth development. The present research is also an answer to the need for research on developmental and life satisfaction trajectories of normative youth samples. Furthermore, it has a multidisciplinary focus, being firmly situated within the field of developmental psychology while also drawing on sociology and existing youth research in both disciplines. Accordingly, the research has yielded a new perspective on the topic of young adults’ financial situation, especially concerning economic factors and their effects on youth development as well as various influential antecedents and their consequences during this critically important transitional phase.

In general, more life course studies that consider the wider sociohistorical context of human development are needed. Furthermore, there seems to be a recent emphasis on the need for multi-wave studies instead of cross-sectional ones for studying the developmental processes underlying themes such as life satisfaction (Diener & Seligman, 2002). Sociological youth research in Finland lacks longitudinal studies and research with a life course perspective, with the exception of studies by Helve (2002) and recent research projects by the Finnish Youth Research Institute (2014). Yet, there are plenty of longitudinal studies on mental health in early adolescence in clinical and intervention settings (Ashman, Dawson, & Panagiotides, 2008; Marttunen, 2005). Additionally, personal experiences and individual human development need to be linked with macro-level sociological and economic changes (Diewald & Mayer, 2009; Elder & Caspi, 1988; Settersten, 2003; Shanahan, 2000). Large data sets allow developmental

trajectory analyses within such a context (Settersten, 2003). The life course perspective demonstrates that social contexts are more than behavioral settings—the social forces of time and place do shape individual pathways (Settersten, 2003).

Vast historical changes have taken place over the past half century in industrialized countries, in which the transition from education to work as well as that of entering marriage and parenthood are often postponed (Arnett, 2012). Development toward adulthood is related to individual competencies, the forming of relationships, and multifaceted personal and cultural identities established in late adolescence and young adulthood. The context and structures are important since multiple social settings and the overall social environment modify the ways in which young adults succeed in accomplishing their developmental tasks (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). This ecological life course perspective on human development emphasizes the different ways people respond to the effects of their context and the interaction between context and personal characteristics (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). According to the results of this research, and in line with the current discourse on the situation of young adults, young Finnish adults are, on average, “doing well” in terms of their life stage and well-being, although differences between individuals are becoming increasingly apparent. Moreover, the overarching, challenging economic climate has effects on young adults nationwide (and, increasingly so, globally). Even young adults not directly affected by the economic recession show increasing concern in their attitudes regarding the societal situation, also reflected in their financial behavior. This type of trend was also identified in the economic recession of the early 1990s in Finland.

The discussion on harsh economic circumstances has resulted in the growing interest in “risk and resilience” topics that focus on individuals in adverse conditions and the “protective” manner of personal characteristics and good psychosocial adjustment (Crockett & Crouter, 1995; Masten et al., 2004; Schoon, 2006). On the other hand, it is developmentally normative to experience instability during this life stage. All in all, as Hellevik and Settersten (2013, p. 10) state, the dramatic and changing global economic and social conditions provide a “natural laboratory for understanding the complex contributions of personal and societal security or insecurity on individual biographies.”

Furthermore, young adulthood should also not be seen as a contrast to adulthood but as a process, that is, a transition between the life phases of adolescence and adulthood in which multiple life domains cross each other as individuals gradually shift between education and work and thus engage in multiple tasks and responsibilities (Ranta, 2013). This is the fundamental basis of the life course perspective, which overcomes the problem of perceiving young adulthood as a static category and highlights its continuity linking past, present, and future (Wyn & White, 1997). Similarly, the *social* and *relational* processes involved in the transition to adulthood, the way young adults experience and negotiate their transitions, emphasizing age, social, economic and cultural significance and problematizing the meaning of adulthood as a categorical con-

struct reached through a “logical stage-by-stage progression through to endpoint” (Miles, 2000, p. 11), should all be acknowledged, also proclaimed by Wyn and White (1997). A good practical example is how the transformation of the labor market and economic turbulence affect experiences of growing up and social outcomes of young adults.

Another problematic and criticized characteristic of the notion of the *transition* to adulthood is the fact that the transition is seen as linear (Holdsworth & Morgan, 2005), with adulthood being a clearly defined status, a point of destination, while in fact many of the markers are “transitory, reversible and impermanent” (Wyn & White, 1997, p. 96). There is a need for a renegotiation on how achieving adulthood is to be perceived in research as well as in everyday discussion. Young adults increasingly experience returning to the childhood home, seen as “boomerang children” (ibid.). Cohabitation is gaining importance in comparison to marriage within both social and legal perspectives. Educational transitions are often lengthy and episodic, as leaving and re-entering education is increasingly an ongoing process. These trends have also been identified in Finland, and in this research.

Recent research in Finland (Mary, 2012) identified the reasons for the phase of young adulthood often being prolonged and for young adults’ difficulties in following the traditional markers of adulthood. For one, it is due to socioeconomic instability, but, on the other hand, also because of individual voluntary decision making, especially among highly educated youth. As life seems particularly unsettled along the border to adulthood, this time is likely to be characterized by anxiety, confusion and uncertainty (Arnett, 2004); but, at the same time, young adults have the possibility and the freedom to explore different options and extend young adulthood voluntarily and with excitement—*emerging adulthood*, as a concept and as a new period along the life course, fits well into this context. The obligations and responsibilities related to adult roles may offer security and stability on the one hand, but an end to independence, spontaneity and wide-open possibilities on the other. However, the notion of the “freedom” to control one’s life according to personal wishes has been seen as a privilege for individuals socially and economically fortunate (Hellevik & Settersten, 2013). While Arnett has, within his *emerging adulthood* concept, based his perspective on the notion of “free choice” and agency, including the voluntary prolongation of youth, he downplays the influence of structure, that is, the boundaries of and constraints on experiences and behavior (Côté, 2014; Hendry & Kloep, 2007a, 2007b). Furthermore, in answer to whether adolescence is characterized more by opportunity or vulnerability, recent brain research (Steinberg, 19 September 2014) has shown that prolonged adolescence supports the acquisition and strengthening of new skills due to the “plasticity” of the brain, in that it is highly influenced by experiences, both positive and negative. This implies that prolonging adolescence can have beneficial consequences as long as the context offers sufficient stimulation and challenges.

Additionally, although this important life course phase has certain age-related normative characteristics, individuals’ financial situations are very di-

verse as life situations differ greatly, especially in factors determining financial independence: education, employment, source of income, and living situation. These related transitions are also frequently interlinked: in young adulthood, one usually leaves the childhood home, begins further studies, familiarizes oneself with working life, and becomes engaged in social life and relationships. With the theoretical introduction on the theme of agency, the aim of this research was to emphasize that the transition to employment is an important factor in the transition to adulthood in regard to promoting financial well-being and coping with uncertainty (see also Ranta, 2013).

This research focused on the agentic and psychological resources and functional transition strategies, particularly in regard to individuals' financial situation (Giddens, 1991), that promote a smooth and successful transition to adulthood. Young adults are capable of strategic life planning as their own financial agents, and employment provides a profound base for life management, as do self-confidence, education and sufficient income; these factors also protect young adults in times of economic turbulence and financial distress (Vuolo et al., 2012). This research topic is important for learning how to enhance well-being and achieve optimal development, and in support of such aims also for decisions concerning societal preferences and financial allocations. These research results can be useful for family-related, educational, and economic policies. The results enhance our basic knowledge on developmental transitions and our understanding of cultural, historical and individual changes. The social changes taking place in society present new challenges for researchers in regard to understanding how life course transitions have changed in their timing and normativity. As Almeida & Wong (2009) point out, linking transitions and their timing along the life course to experiences of individuals will help to illuminate their importance for the well-being of individuals. Regardless of the nature of individuals' social location, relationships, or personal goals, they are all experienced through the individuals' personal adaptation to concrete situations, events and agency, and play an important role in coping with the uncertainties of young adulthood (Arnett, 2004; Elder & Giele, 2009).

YHTEENVETO (FINNISH SUMMARY)

Polut aikuisuuteen: Kehitystehtävät, taloudelliset resurssit ja toimijuus

Tässä tutkimuksessa tarkasteltiin 18–25-vuotiaiden nuorten aikuisten henkilökohtaisen taloudellisen tilanteen ja yksilöllisen toimijuuden (*agency*) roolia nuoruuden keskeisessä siirtymävaiheessa lukiokoulutuksesta kohti jatkokoulutusta tai työelämää ja yleisesti siirtymää aikuisuuteen itsenäistymisen kynnyksellä. Tähän ikävaiheeseen lukeutuu useita samanaikaisia itsenäistymiseen liittyviä kehitystehtäviä, jotka liittyvät paitsi koulutukseen ja työelämään myös asumistilanteeseen ja sosiaalisiin suhteisiin (mukaan lukien parisuhteen ja perheen perustaminen) (Almeida & Wong, 2009), joista monet liittyvät myös taloudelliseen itsenäistymiseen (Lee & Mortimer, 2009; Nelson & Barry, 2005). Näissä kehitystehtävissä menestymisen on katsottu vaikuttavan elämäntyytyväisyyden tasoon ja elämäntavoitteiden saavuttamiseen (Salmela-Aro, 2009; Schulenberg, Sameroff & Cicchetti, 2004). Toisaalta normatiivisten kehitystehtävien lykkäämisen tai niissä epäonnistumisen on todettu ennustavan pahoinvointia ja ongelmia kehityksessä (Danzinger & Ratner, 2010; Heckhausen, 1999).

Nuorten aikuisten siirtymävaiheet kohti aikuisuutta vaihtelevat huomattavasti yksilöiden välillä (Schulenberg & Schoon, 2012; Shulman & Connolly, 2013). Toisaalta normatiivinen aikuisuuden saavuttamisen määritelmä on vähitellen muuttumassa, kun siirtymävaiheita lykätään yhä myöhempään ajankohtaan, joko omasta tahdosta tai kontekstisidonnaisista syistä. Esimerkiksi taloustaantumana aikana siirtyminen työelämään vaikeutuu ja pitkittyy. Aikuisuuden saavuttamisen kriteerit ovat myös muuttuneet yhä vaikeammin havaittaviksi, moniulotteisemmiksi, monipuolisemmiksi ja subjektiivisemmiksi (Mary, 2012). Lisäksi kehitystehtävät limittyvät yhä useammin toisiinsa (Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011; Salmela-Aro, Kiuru ym., 2011), minkä vuoksi tutkimuksissa on tärkeää omaksua kokonaisvaltainen näkökulma siirtymävaiheisiin sekä tarkastella esimerkiksi työelämään ja parisuhteeseen liittyviä siirtymävaiheita samanaikaisesti (Schoon, Chen, Kneale & Jager, 2012; van Dulmen, Claxton, Collins & Simpson, 2014).

Tässä tutkimuksessa tarkasteltiin nuorten aikuisten siirtymävaihetta kohti aikuisuutta elämänkulun tutkimusperinteen viitekehyksestä (*life course perspective*; Elder, 1998a, 1998b) tutkien yksilön kehitystä institutionalisoituneiden kehityspolkujen ja kehitysprosessien subjektiivisten kokemusten avulla (Mayer, 2002). Elderin (1998a, 1998b; ks. myös Elder & Giele, 2009) mukaan elämänkulun viitekehys koostuu neljästä paradigmaattisesta periaatteesta tai teoreettisesta elementistä: nykyisestä sosiohistoriallisesta kontekstista, sosiaalisten suhteiden verkostosta, toimijuudesta sekä tapahtumien, siirtymien ja sosiaalisten roolien ajoitusten vaihtelusta. Elämänkulun tutkimusperinteen mukaan kehitystä tarkastellaan nykyisessä sosiaalisessa ja historiallisessa ajassa, joka tarjoaa tiettyjä voimavaroja, rajoitteita ja mahdollisuuksia (Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011). Tässä tutkimuksessa kontekstilla tarkoitetaan suomalaisen yhteiskunnan vuonna 2008 alkanutta taloustaantumaa sosiaalidemokraattisessa hyvinvointivaltiossa,

joka luo poikkeuksellisen ympäristön nuorten aikuisten kehitykselle. On todettu, etteivät nykyiset rakenteelliset muutokset työelämässä ja epävarmuus taloudellisen taantuman aikana tue nuorten aikuisten vakaata ja onnistunutta elämänkulun siirtymää koulutuksesta kohti työelämää (Danzinger & Ratner, 2010; Mortimer & Larson, 2002, Vuolo, Staff & Mortimer, 2012). Työn saaminen, työsuhteen pysyvyys ja oma toimeentulo aiheuttavat merkittävästi epävarmuutta. Elämänhallinta näyttäytyy haasteellisenä: vakinaisen työsuhteen epätodennäköisyyden vuoksi nuoren elämä muodostuu epävakaaksi, monimutkaiseksi ja työura hyvin katkonaiseksi. Nuorten aikuisten on jatkuvasti hallittava olosuhteiden muuttumista, siedettävä epävarmuutta ja tehtävä lukuisia samanaikaisia päätöksiä, jotka koskevat heidän kyseiseen elämänvaiheeseensa lukeutuvia kehitystehtäviä, kaikki taloudellisen epävarmuuden aikana. On huomattu, että talouden suhdannevaihtelut ja työmarkkinoiden rakennemuutokset näkyvät herkimmin etenkin nuorilla ja nuorilla aikuisilla heidän siirtyessään joustavasti elämänpiiristä toiseen sekä toimiessaan määrä- ja osa-aikaisissa työsuhteissa (Gesthuizen & Scheepers, 2010; Rothwll & Han, 2010). Aiempi 1990-luvun lama aiheutti paitsi työttömyyttä myös sosiaalista eriarvoisuutta, ja lamasta selviytyminen oli nuorten aikuisten kotitalouksille haasteellista. Nämä haasteet ja epävarmuudet väijäämättä vaikuttavat hyvinvoinnin tasoon sekä vaikeuttavat tulevaisuuden suunnittelua ja muita elämänkulun siirtymävaiheita, kuten perheen perustamista (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Mills & Blossfeld, 2005). Toisaalta nuoret aikuiset ovat joustavia ja sopeutuvat erilaisiin tilanteisiin. Valinnoillaan he usein kykenevät selviytymään haastavista tilanteista, mutta yksilöiden välillä on suuria eroja siinä, kuinka haasteellisina tilanteita koetaan (Blossfeld, Klijzing, Mills & Kurz, 2005). Lisäksi pohjoismaisen hyvinvointivaltion on katsottu ”suojaavan” taantuman vakavimmilta seurauksilta antamalla kaikille yhtäläiset mahdollisuudet taloudelliseen itsenäisyyteen. Suomi eroaakin monista muista Euroopan unionin jäsenmaista siinä, kuinka vakavana nuoret kokevat taloudellisen taantuman elämässään (Blossfeld ym., 2005; Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011).

Yhteiskunnallisten haasteiden keskellä psykologiset toiminnot ovat entistä tärkeämpiä myös kehitystehtävien toteutumisen ja elämänkulun etenemisen kannalta (Heckhausen, 1999). Yksilöllisyyden lisääntyminen on myös kasvattanut psykologisten kykyjen (Settersten, 2012) ja resurssien tarvetta länsimaissa, ei ainoastaan nuorten aikuisten keskuudessa vaan koko aikuisuuden elämänkuluksessa (Arnett, 2007b). Yhteiskunnallisesti haastavassa tilanteessa omasta toimijuudesta ja tavoitteiden asettamisesta sekä niihin pyrkimisestä tulee yhä tärkeämpiä vaikuttavia seikkoja siirtymävaiheen läpikäymisessä ja taloudellisessa elämänhallinnassa. Tässä tutkimuksessa yksilöiden toimijuutta tarkasteltiin sekä psykologisista että sosiologisista lähtökohdista (Shanahan, 2000). Toimijuus operationalisoitiin ja sitä tarkasteltiin pyrkimyksillä (Johnson, Crosnoe & Elder, 2011; Mortimer & Larson, 2002), elämäkerralla (du Bois-Reymond, 1995; Furlong & Cartmel, 1997; Miles, 2001), suoritusstrategioilla ja sosiaalisilla strategioilla (Eronen, Nurmi & Salmela-Aro, 1997; Nurmi, Aunola, Salmela-Aro &

Lindroos, 2003; Nurmi, Poole & Seginer, 1995) sekä henkilökohtaisilla tavoitteilla ja huolilla (Little, 1983).

Tutkimuksella oli kolme yleistä tavoitetta. Ensinnäkin siinä tarkasteltiin, kuinka taloudelliset resurssit vaikuttavat nuoruuden kehitykseen ja elämäntyytyväisyyteen nuoruuden kriittisessä ja vaativassa elämänvaiheessa. Toiseksi siinä pyrittiin antamaan yleiskatsaus nuorten aikuisten elämäntilanteista sekä monitahoisista siirtymävaiheista henkilökohtaisen ja yhteiskunnallisen muutoksen keskellä. Kolmanneksi siinä tarkasteltiin toimijuuden roolia taloudellisten asioiden ja kehitystehtävien hallinnassa. Tutkimuksessa pyrittiin huomioimaan näissä prosesseissa olevia yksilöiden välisiä eroja, ja siinä tarkasteltiin kyseiseen ikävaiheeseen liittyviä kehitystehtäviä ja niissä menestymistä (*success*) sekä tyytyväisyyttä (*satisfaction* eli laatua) kehitystehtäviin. Henkilökohtainen taloudellinen tilanne saatiin arvioimalla subjektiivinen taloudellinen tilanne (eli näkemys tulojen riittävydestä suhteessa kulutustottumuksiin), laskemalla objektiivinen taloudellinen tilanne (eli kuukausittainen euromääräinen tulo) ja selvittämällä taloudelliset paineet (eli toimeentulo-ongelmat), kuten *Family Economic Stress* -mallissa (FESM; Conger, Conger, Matthews & Elder, 1999; Conger & Elder, 1994). Lisäksi yhteiskunnan taloudellinen tilanne ja vanhempien sosioekonominen tausta otettiin huomioon.

Tutkimus koostui kolmesta osatutkimuksesta, joiden aineistona käytettiin Finnish Educational Transitions (FinEdu) Studies -tutkimusprojektin pitkittäistutkimusaineiston kahta otosta. FinEdu-tutkimusprojekti on vuodesta 2003 jatkunut seurantatutkimus, jonka osallistujia olivat tutkimuksen alkaessa yhden suomalaisen keskisuuren kaupungin kaikki peruskoulun yhdeksäsluokkalaiset (syntymävuosi 1988) ja lukion toisen vuosikurssin opiskelijat (syntymävuosi 1986). Projektin tavoitteena on tutkia nuorten koulutuksellisia siirtymävaiheita ja valintoja henkilökohtaisten tavoitteiden, motivaation ja hyvinvoinnin näkökulmasta. Projektin aineisto on kerätty kyselylomaketutkimuksena, ja vastausprosentti on vaihdellut 59:n ja 83:n välillä. Kyselylomakkeet sisälsivät osioita, jotka liittyivät nuorten koulutusvalintoihin, koulutus- ja työelämätilanteeseen, tulevaisuuden suunnitelmiin, taloudelliseen tilanteeseen, elämäntyytyväisyyteen ja sosiaalisiin suhteisiin. Lisäksi nuorten aikuisten elämänstrategioita mitattiin *Strategy and Attribution Questionnaire* -mittarilla (Nurmi, Salmela-Aro & Haavisto, 1995) ja henkilökohtaisia tavoitteita sekä huolia *Personal Projects Analysis (PPA)* -mittarilla (Little, 1983; Little & Gee, 2007; Little, Salmela-Aro & Phillips, 2007). Kvantitatiivisen aineiston tilastolliset analyysit noudattivat sekä muuttujaorientoitunutta (esimerkiksi rakenneyhtälömallintamista) että henkilöorientoitunutta (Bergman, Magnusson & El-Khoury, 2003) lähestymistapaa. Analyysit toteutettiin tilasto-ohjelmilla SPSS (versio 22 ja PASW 18), Mplus (versiot 5.0, 6.0 ja 6.1; Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2012) ja RopStat (Vargha, 2007).

Ensimmäisessä osatutkimuksessa tarkasteltiin nuorten aikuisten henkilökohtaisen subjektiivisen ja objektiivisen taloudellisen tilanteen sekä toimijuuden roolia kehitystehtävien saavuttamisessa varhaisaikuisuuden ja taloustaantumien aikana. Kehitystehtävissä menestymistä ja tyytyväisyyttä niihin operationalisoitiin kehitystehtävillä, jotka edustivat 19–25-vuotiaiden nuorten aikuis-

ten psykologisia ja sosiaalisia saavutuksia. Tulokset osoittivat, että vaikka nuorten aikuisten objektiiviset tulot kasvoivat 20. ja 25. ikävuoden välillä, oma subjektiivinen näkemys taloudellisesta tilanteesta eli rahojen riittävydestä ei muuttunut. Sen sijaan negatiivinen korrelaatio nuorten aikuisten subjektiivisen ja objektiivisen taloudellisen tilanteen välillä kasvoi iän myötä, eli mitä korkeammalla tasolla subjektiivinen taloudellinen tilanne oli 20 vuoden iässä, sitä vähemmän tulotaso nousi 25. ikävuoteen mennessä. Tulokset osoittivat lisäksi, että toimijuuden taso eli suoritusstrategioiden ja sosiaalisten strategioiden käyttö on erityisen tärkeä elämänsä nuoruuden kehitystehtävien saavuttamiselle ja niiden koetulle laadulle 25 vuoden iässä. Erityisesti tämä koskee sosiaalisten strategioiden käyttöä. Positiivinen suhtautuminen erilaisiin toimintaa vaativiin ja sosiaalisiin tilanteisiin – eli toimijuus – lisääntyi 19 vuoden iästä 25 vuoden ikään, kun taas negatiivinen suhtautuminen eli välttämisperusteiden käyttö väheni. Positiivisilla toimintastrategioilla nuoret aikuiset pyrkivät parantamaan objektiivista taloudellista tilannettaan ja välttämään taloudellista painetta 25-vuotiaana. Lisäksi positiivinen suhtautuminen sosiaalisiin tilanteisiin oli yhteydessä tyytyväisyyteen. Nuoret aikuiset olivat 25-vuotiaana yleisesti ottaen tyytyväisiä saavuttamiinsa työelämää, parisuhdetta ja taloudellista itsenäisyyttä koskeviin elämäntavoitteisiin. Esimerkiksi myönteinen suhtautuminen sosiaalisiin tilanteisiin oli yhteydessä koulutustasoon, yhteenkuuluvuuden tunteeseen ja parisuhdetyytyväisyyteen. Nykyinen taloustaantuma ei näyttäisi vaikuttavan merkittävästi nuorten aikuisten henkilökohtaiseen näkemykseen omasta taloudellisesta tilanteestaan. Lisäksi taloudellisilla seikoilla ei ollut vaikutusta kehitystehtävien saavuttamiseen ja tyytyväisyyteen.

Toisessa osatutkimuksessa tarkasteltiin, muuttuuko nuorten aikuisten elämäntyytyväisyys koulutuksellisen siirtymän aikana, ts. heidän siirtymässään lukiokoulutuksesta kohti jatkokoulutusta eli varttuessaan 18-vuotiaasta 22-vuotiaaksi. Toisena tavoitteena oli jäljittää nuorten aikuisten mahdollisia elämäntyytyväisyyden kehityspolkuja ikävuosien 18, 19, 20 ja 22 aikana. Kolmantena tavoitteena oli tarkastella, kuinka taloudelliset resurssit eli perheen sosio-ekonominen asema, vanhempien antama taloudellinen tuki, objektiivinen ja subjektiivinen taloudellinen tilanne sekä toimijuus (eli suoritusstrategioiden käyttö) ovat yhteydessä elämäntyytyväisyyden kehityspolkuihin. Lopuksi tutkimuksessa tarkasteltiin, eroavatko elämäntyytyväisyyden kehityspolut sukupuolen, asumismuodon tai elämäntilanteen (eli opiskelu- ja työtilanteen) mukaan. Tulokset osoittivat, että elämäntyytyväisyys ei muuttunut koulutuksellisen siirtymän aikana toisen asteen lukiokoulutuksesta kohti jatkokoulutusta tai työelämää. Sen sijaan analyysit, jotka paljastivat merkitsevän heterogeenisuuden nuorten aikuisten elämäntyytyväisyyden tasossa lähtötilanteessa 18 vuoden iässä ja sen kehityksessä 22 vuoden ikään, johtivat viiteen elämäntyytyväisyyden kehityspolkuun, jotka nimettiin seuraavasti: *kohtuullinen-vakaa* (41 %), *korkea-vakaa* (27 %), *kohtuullinen-nouseva* (17 %), *alhainen-vakaa* (8 %) ja *korkealaskava* (7 %). Suurimmalla osalla (76 %) nuorista aikuisista oli tasainen elämäntyytyväisyyden kehityspolku, mutta osa nuorista aikuisista koki myös elämäntyytyväisyydessä merkittävää nousua tai laskua. Korkea toimijuuden taso mi-

tattuna suoritusstrategioiden käytöllä 19 vuoden iässä oli yhteydessä korkean elämäntyytyväisyyden kehityspolkuun ja alhainen toimijuus alhaisen elämäntyytyväisyyden kehityspolkuun. Lisäksi korkean elämäntyytyväisyyden kehityspolut olivat yhteydessä positiiviseen taloudelliseen tilanteeseen 22 vuoden iässä. Kaksi suurinta tasaisen ja suhteellisen korkean elämäntyytyväisyyden kehityspolkua osoittivat korkeampaa subjektiivista taloudellista tilannetta 22 vuoden iässä. Näillä kehityspoluilla oli myös taipumusta korkeampaan objektiiviseen taloudelliseen tilanteeseen, mutta tämä tulos ei ollut yhtä tilastollisesti merkitsevä. Elämäntyytyväisyyden kehityspolut eivät eronneet tai ne erosivat toisistaan vain hieman vanhempien taloudellisen tuen, asumismuodon tai elämäntilanteen mukaan.

Kolmannessa osatutkimuksessa tutkittiin tarkemmin kahta tärkeää nuoruuden kehitystehtävää 20 ja 23 vuoden iässä: uraa (sisältäen koulutuksen, työelämän ja taloudellisen tilanteen) ja sitoutumista parisuhteeseen. Tavoitteena oli identifioida nuorten keskeisimpiä henkilökohtaisia tavoitteita ja huolia sekä niiden muutoksia 20 ja 23 vuoden iässä. Toiseksi tutkimuksessa identifioitiin nuorten aikuisten tavoite- ja huoliprofiileja samoissa ikäluokissa. Lopuksi tutkimuksessa tarkasteltiin, kuinka tavoitteet ja huolet sekä niitä vastaavat profiilit ovat yhteydessä vastaavaan elämäntilanteeseen: uraan ja parisuhteeseen. Tulokset osoittivat, että henkilökohtaisten tavoitteiden ja huolten frekvenssikategoriat sekä profiilit 20 ja 23 vuoden iässä liittyivät useimmiten uraan eli koulutukseen, työhön ja taloudellisiin seikkoihin – koulutus ensisijaisesti 20 vuoden iässä, työ 23 vuoden iässä ja parisuhde vähemmän painotettuna. Henkilökohtaiset huolet liittyivät myös uraan – taloudelliseen tilanteeseen mutta myös koulutukseen ja työelämään. Tavoitteet ja huolet erityisessä elämänalueessa olivat yhteydessä elämäntilanteeseen: erityisesti uraan liittyvät tavoitteet ja huolet ennustivat jatkokoulutuspaikan tai työpaikan saamista. Profiilit eivät eronneet toisistaan sukupuolen tai perheen sosioekonomisen taustan perusteella. Tavoiteprofiilit olivat yhteydessä niihin liittyviin elämäntilanteisiin poikkeileikkaus- ja pitkittäisnäkökulmasta ja henkilökohtaisissa huolissa erityisesti uraan liittyvällä elämänalueella.

Tämän tutkimuksen mukaan nuorten elämäntilanteet, asema yhteiskunnassa ja työmarkkinoilla sekä itsenäistymisen vaiheet vaihtelevat suuresti, minä vuoksi nuorten todellisia tuloja, toimeentuloa ja taloudellista tilannetta on haasteellista tarkastella ja hahmottaa. Toisaalta elämän kirjavuus tekee näistä tutkimuksista erityisen mielenkiintoisia. Tulotaso ja tulojen lähteet saattavat vaihdella yksilöittäin huomattavasti ja yhdenkin nuoren elämässä merkittävästi eri vuosina – jopa yhden vuoden kuluessa. Tulokset osoittivat, että nuorten tulot koostuvat useasta tulolähteestä. Iän myötä vanhempien taloudellisen tuen määrä vähenee ja palkkatulojen sekä yhteiskunnan taloudellisen tuen merkitys vahvistuu. Samoin lainan suosio lisääntyy ja määrä kasvaa. Nuorten elämäntavoitteet voivat ailahtella ja muuttua, mutta toisaalta monet nuoret pyrkivät suunnitelmallisuuteen ja rationaaliseen päätöksentekoon, mitä osoittaa uratavoitteiden ja huolten keskeinen asema näiden lukiokoulutuksen saaneiden nuorten aikuisten elämässä. Itsenäistymisen kynnyksellä taloudelliset kysy-

mykset tulevat entistä ajankohtaisemmiksi ja aikuistumisen kriteerinä ollut kyky hankkia oma toimeentulo liittyy edelleen yhä useamman muun kehitystehävän saavuttamiseen.

Tämä tutkimus oli luonteeltaan vahvasti monitieteinen, ja siinä pyrittiin ottamaan huomioon sosiologisesti paitsi taloudelliset ja yhteiskunnalliset voimavarat sekä perhetausta myös psykologiset erot nuorten aikuisten elämäntyytyväisyyttä, strategioita, tavoitteita ja huolia tarkastelemalla. Tutkimustulokset tarjoavat uusia näkökulmia nuorten elämäntyytyväisyyden kehityksestä ja taloudellisen – sekä henkilökohtaisen että vallitsevan yhteiskunnallisen – tilanteen vaikutuksista nuorten aikuisten elämäntyytyväisyyteen sekä yleiseen elämäntyytyväisyyteen aikuisuuden kynnyksellä. Tutkimustuloksille on selvä yhteiskunnallinen tarve, sillä teema on jatkuvasti esillä nuorisopoliittisessa keskustelussa, kun tarkastellaan nuorten aikuisten koulutuksen nivelvaiheiden ja työelämän siirtymävaiheen haasteellisuutta, nuorisotakuuta sekä nuorisotyöttömyyden merkittävää kasvua. Nuorisotyöttömyyden tasainen kasvu ja yhteinen huoli nuorten syrjäytymisestä ovat nostaneet esiin vakavan ongelman, joka liittyy ilman koulutus-, työ- tai harjoittelupaikkaa olevien nuorten aikuisten hälyttävän suureen määrään. Lisäksi vaikka peruskoulun jälkeinen nivelvaihe strategisena siirtymävaiheena on saanut paljon huomiota viime aikoina, on tärkeää, että myös täysi-ikäisten nuorten aikuisten haastavat elämäntilanteet saavat enemmän huomiota nuoruuden pitkittymisen, siirtymävaiheiden mutkistumisen ja elinympäristöjen muuttumisen johdosta.

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APPENDIX 1 An overview on the participants, research questions, measures and used data analyses of the studies

STUDY	PARTICIPANTS	MAIN RESEARCH QUESTIONS OR AIMS	MEASURES AND SCALE ALPHA RELIABILITIES	ANALYSES
<p>STUDY I The role of financial resources and agency in success and satisfaction regarding developmental tasks in early adulthood</p>	<p><i>N</i> = 730 (466 female, 264 male) Cohort B: 19, 20, 22, 25 years (once before and three times after transition) 2005, 2006, 2008-2009, 2011</p>	<p>Q1. How does agency change during transition to adulthood? Q2. How does subjective and objective financial situation change? Q3. How do the levels and changes in agency and financial situation predict success and satisfaction regarding developmental tasks (attainments in educational, work, and social domains: living situation, romantic relationship, social belonging to friendships and social media, relationship and work quality)?</p>	<p>Achievement strategies and social strategies: Strategy and Attribution Questionnaire (SAQ) (Cronbach's alpha reliabilities ranged from .71 to .84) (Nurmi et al., 1995) (Time 2-5B) Subjective financial situation: perceived income sufficiency (Time 3-5B) Objective financial situation: monthly income, Euros (Time 3-5B) Educational attainment: current life and education situations: not in education/studying/graduated (Time 5B) Living situation: at home/independent (Time 5B) Sense of belonging: friendships, social media (Time 5B) Satisfaction with respect to relationship quality: sense of belonging to own family, relationship atmosphere (Niemi & Rauste von Wright, 1980) (Cronbach's alpha reliability .94), relationship satisfaction (Dyadic Adjustment Scale, DAS; Salmela-Aro et al., 2006; Spanier, 1976) (Cronbach's alpha reliability .72) (Time 5B) Work quality: employment relevant to education, satisfaction with work (Cronbach's alpha reliability .84), belonging to working community (Time 5B) Economic pressure (Conger et al., 1990): unmet material needs, inability to pay bills, financial cutbacks (Cronbach's alpha reliability .75), and subjective financial situation (Time 5B) Gender (Time 1B/2), family SES (Time 1B/2)</p>	<p>Descriptive analyses: Spearman correlations, <i>t</i>-tests for linear variables, χ^2-tests for categorical variables Latent Growth Curve Modeling (LGCM) Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)</p>

STUDY	PARTICIPANTS	MAIN RESEARCH QUESTIONS OR AIMS	MEASURES AND SCALE ALPHA RELIABILITIES	ANALYSES
<p>STUDY II Trajectories of life satisfaction and the financial situation in the transition to adulthood</p>	<p><i>N</i> = 372 (278 female, 94 male) Cohort B: 18, 19, 20, 22 years (twice before and twice after transition) 2004, 2005, 2006, 2008-2009</p>	<p>A1. Investigate life satisfaction changes during the transition to adulthood</p> <p>A2. Identify possible life satisfaction developmental trajectories during the transition (variation in gender, family SES, parental financial support, living situation, life situation)</p> <p>A3/A4. Examine how agency (i.e., use of achievement strategies) and financial situation are related to the identified life satisfaction trajectories</p>	<p>Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener et al., 1985) (Cronbach's alpha reliabilities ranged from .85 to .88) (Time 1B-Time 4B) Achievement approach strategies and achievement avoidance strategies: Strategy and Attribution Questionnaire (SAQ) (Nurmi et al., 1995) (Time 2, Time 4B) Subjective financial situation: perceived income sufficiency (Time 4B) Objective financial situation: monthly income, Euros (Time 4B) Living situation, life situation (studying, working, combined) (Time 4B) Gender, family SES (Time 1B)</p>	<p>One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), post hoc comparisons/ Games-Howell test</p> <p>Latent Growth Curve Modeling (LGCM)</p> <p>Growth Mixture Modeling (GMM)</p>

STUDY	PARTICIPANTS	MAIN RESEARCH QUESTIONS OR AIMS	MEASURES AND SCALE ALPHA RELIABILITIES	ANALYSES
<p>STUDY III Career and romantic relationship goals and concerns during emerging adulthood</p>	<p>N = 1052 (660 female, 392 male)</p> <p>Cohorts A and B: 20 and 23 years</p> <p>2008-2009 & 2011 (A), and 2006 & 2008-2009 (B)</p>	<p>Q1. What kinds of personal goals and concerns are most prominent and how do they change from age 20 to 23?</p> <p>Q2. To what extent are goals and concerns related to life situation (education, employment, relationship)?</p> <p>Q3. What are the typical profiles of goals and concerns?</p> <p>Q4. To what extent are goal and concern profiles related to life situation?</p>	<p>Personal goals and concerns: Personal Projects Analysis (PPA; Little et al., 2007; Salmela-Aro, 2001) (Time 4A-5A, Time 3-4B)</p> <p>Career status: current education and employment: working in a position relevant/not relevant to education, combining education and working in a position relevant/not relevant to education, studying only, not in education or work (Time 4A-Time 5A , Time 3-4B)</p> <p>Romantic relationship status: single, seeing someone/ dating, cohabiting, married/legally registered relationship, divorced (Time 4A-5A, Time 3-4B)</p> <p>Gender, family SES (Time 1A, Time 1B/2)</p>	<p>Latent Class Analyses (LCA)</p> <p>Configural Frequency Analysis (CFA)</p>

ORIGINAL PAPERS

I

THE ROLE OF FINANCIAL RESOURCES AND AGENCY IN SUCCESS AND SATISFACTION REGARDING DEVELOP- MENTAL TASKS IN EARLY ADULTHOOD

by

Mette Ranta, Raija-Leena Punamäki, Asko Tolvanen, & Katariina Salmela-Aro,
2012

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Abstract:

Purpose – Our study focuses on the impacts of young adults' financial situation and agency on success and satisfaction regarding developmental tasks (attainments in educational, work and social domains) in the context of economic upheavals.

Methodology/approach – The study is part of the longitudinal Finnish Educational Transitions Studies (FinEdu), in which high school students (N=614 at baseline) participated once before and three times after graduation (ages 19–25) while progressing to tertiary education and employment.

Findings – Agency (indicated by achievement and social approach strategies) increased, whereas achievement and social avoidance decreased from ages 19 to 25. Financial situation improved from an objective but not subjective perspective. Both high and increasing levels of agency were related to high levels of success and satisfaction regarding developmental tasks at age 25. In particular, social approach was related to educational attainment, sense of belonging, and romantic relationship satisfaction. High initial levels of agency and an improved financial situation predicted low economic pressure at age 25.

Research implications – Both sociopolitical structures and individual agency are important in shaping life course transitions in early adulthood. The apparent discrepancy between the macro-level national economic recession and young adults' relatively high economic satisfaction could be explained by high agency in a welfare state context.

Social implications – The study shows important links between individuals' life course and the societal context of Finland, a secure Nordic welfare state in the midst of global economic upheavals.

Originality/value of paper – Our longitudinal study makes a significant contribution to life course research by comprehensively conceptualizing the developmental tasks and considering their individual and social determinants.

Keywords:

[Financial situation](#), [life course development](#), [agency](#), [latent growth curve modeling](#), [young adults](#)

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Introduction

The life course transition to adulthood involves intensive and multiple changes that challenge young adults' developmental resources. Young adults of 19–25 years engage simultaneously in transitions regarding education, employment, and social relations as they move from compulsory education to further education and/or employment, and from the parental home to romantic relationships and cohabitation. In addition to the drastic changes taking place in their personal lives, young adults today face profound changes in the surrounding society.

There is a general call to analyze life course transitions in a wider sociohistorical context, and to link personal experiences and individual human development with macro-level sociological and economic changes ([Diewald & Mayer, 2009](#); [Elder & Caspi, 1988](#); [Settersten, 2003](#)). In this study, we analyze the role of personal economic resources in the success of developmental tasks in early adulthood, notably in the context of European economic upheavals in the last half of 2000, characterized by financial insecurity, high overall unemployment, and generally tougher economic conditions ([Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011](#); [Furlong & Cartmel, 2007](#)). Young adults without work experience are seen as an *economically vulnerable* group in a global economic crisis, similar to low-income families ([Rothwell & Han, 2010](#)). Equally, as school-to-work transitions become increasingly unstable and unpredictable, young adults are at risk of failing to create their economic independence. The risk of unemployment is much higher for the youth than for adults in times of economic instability; for example, due to an increased amount of fixed-term contracts and seasonal employment ([Scarpetta, Sonnet, & Manfredi, 2010](#)). There are growing worries about youth unemployment permanently interfering in future planning and increasing risks for marginalization, poverty, and social exclusion in adult life ([European Commission, 2012](#)).

We examined how the macro-socioeconomic context may shape individual pathways and how the personal financial situation impacts the ways in which young people deal with their multiple school-to-work transitory developmental tasks. We studied the transition from Finnish upper secondary high school taking place at the age of 19 years and the consequent transitions up to the age of 25. Psychological stress theories ([Lazarus & Folkman, 1984](#)) and life course theories ([Elder & Caspi, 1988](#)) emphasize that individuals react differently to stress and changes. Young adults may have unique responses to financial stress and economic instability, as for some they signify challenges that elicit increased agency, and to others they mean defeat and insecurity leading to loss of agency. The concept of *agency* is used in the context of analyzing achievement and social strategies that reveal the different ways in which young adults deal with challenges and adopt strategies to cope in salient life domains ([Nurmi, Salmela-Aro, & Haavisto, 1995](#)). Following the tradition of life-span psychology, agency, in addition to achievement and social strategies, is crucial for success and well-being in transitions ([Salmela-Aro, 2009](#); [Schoon, 2007](#)), and it is therefore important to study how these strategies develop during the transition to adulthood and what kinds of strategies are associated with success in key developmental tasks in early adulthood. This is the contribution of our present study, examining the changes in achievement and social strategies and in financial resources in the context of macroeconomic conditions in Finland, and analyzing how these predict success and satisfaction regarding developmental tasks in young adulthood. The study integrates the tradition of life-span psychology of motivation with the theme of strategies (e.g., [Salmela-Aro, 2009](#)) and the

life course approach that emphasizes the embeddedness of individual development in sociohistorically changing contexts and socioeconomic structures ([Elder, 1998b](#); [Settersten, 2003](#)).

Although the multiplicity of transitions in early adulthood is widely agreed upon, in empirical research these transitions are often segregated into themes of school-to-work or relationship and family formation, or research is focused on only one domain ([Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011](#)). In this study, the life course transitions in early adulthood are studied comprehensively by simultaneously examining young adults' changes in living situation, education and work, romantic relationships, and social belonging including friendships and the social media. Further, both the success of and satisfaction with the transitions to working life, romantic relationships and financial independence are considered.

Financial Situation and Transitions

Although life course transitions in postmodern Western lifestyles are not specifically institutionalized and do not always contain formal rites, they are nevertheless important life stages as such ([Giddens, 1991](#)). In a time of multiple transitions, the lives of young adults can change either gradually or go through drastic changes, such as when moving out of the childhood home ([Elder & Johnson, 2003](#); [Hagestad, 2003](#); [Settersten, 2003](#)).

The transition to adulthood can be divided into two types: intrinsic and role transitions ([Grob, 2001](#)). During an *intrinsic transition*, young adults accomplish new skills and competences; for example, moving to an own household demands new organizing skills and the ability to plan personal finances. Similarly, dating and forming intimate relationships demand both emotional intimacy and autonomy. The *role transition* is more explicitly related to chronological age and the young adult's new social role being defined by the surrounding environment. For example, when entering working life, colleagues place new expectations on the behavior of the young adult. Both intrinsic and role transitions not only require new strategies in the midst of negotiating key life transitions concerning work and romantic relationships ([Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011](#); [Schoon, 2007](#)) but also earlier gained experiences, knowledge, and skills influence the degree of autonomy and independence in young adulthood ([Petrogiannis, 2011](#)).

Individuals' financial situation strongly influences the success of both intrinsic and role transitions. Financial independence enables increased responsibility for and control of one's personal life and requires competent life management. This time span, roughly from age 18 to 25, is one during which young adults are expected to take increasing responsibility, are better able to make independent decisions, and in most cases gain financial independence ([Lee & Mortimer, 2009](#)).

When successful, life course transitions open new opportunities for further development. Being in a good financial situation and employed are agreed to be associated with future planning, well-being, and self-confidence, and these in turn strongly influence individuals' life management and sense of capability (e.g., [Cunnie, MartinRogers, & Mortimer, 2009](#)). A study found that young adults who were employed and married showed higher levels of well-being – measured by life and career satisfaction and lack of depressive symptoms – in comparison to those who were still in the process of attaining these significant transitions ([Galambos, Barker, & Krahn, 2006](#)). Similarly, a study regarding Finnish young adults found that those who had a secure occupational status and were satisfied with their working and marital status showed an overall higher level of life satisfaction ([Martikainen, 2009](#)).

A lack of opportunities occurring on a continual basis within important transitional domains causes constraints in further developmental tasks. The transition from education to employment has become increasingly difficult in recent years in European societies ([Haase, Heckhausen, & Köller, 2008](#)), which can have comprehensive negative impacts as development occurs specifically through work challenges ([Hendry & Kloep, 2007](#)). In early adulthood, the failure to obtain a stable career or build a financially secure household makes the individual's whole life appear unstable. According to [Furlong and Cartmel \(2007\)](#), young adults' failure to obtain financial independence at an appropriate

time stage forms a “pattern of dependency” that comprehensively affects other developmental tasks. This might result in disturbances in identity establishment and individualization, which in turn make young adults passive in regard to social changes and fearful of the future that is seen as filled with risks and uncertainty. There is evidence that experiences in one life domain can have an impact on events and opportunities in another life domain as development cascades across different domains and time (e.g., [Dodge et al., 2009](#); [Masten et al., 2005](#)). For example, unemployment during the school-to-work transition often results in postponement of the housing transition. This accords with the *market income hypothesis*, stating that stable income is the most significant predictor of the transition to independent living ([Guerrero, 2001](#)).

With the growing financial uncertainties in society, research has focused on how families and young adults struggle to make ends meet and how they handle economic hardship ([Baek & DeVaney, 2010](#); [James, Brown, Goodsell, Stovall, & Flaherty, 2010](#); [Rothwell & Han, 2010](#)). Importantly, life course development studies have shown that changes in macroeconomic conditions, the historical economic context and more specifically, global economic insecurity, affect the transition to adulthood and the timing of developmental tasks (for a review, see [Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011](#)). Global insecurity can be seen to result in the postponement of significant transitions relating to employment, independent living and romantic relationships ([Danzinger & Ratner, 2010](#); [Settersten & Ray, 2010](#); [Stein et al., 2011](#)).

On the other hand, young adults have access to various social and economic resources, for example, through housing support and social policy incentives that are likely to scaffold their success in developmental tasks. Also, access to social support and networks involving family, friends, and communities is expected to help young adults in achieving the transition to adulthood successfully ([Wald & Martinez, 2003](#)). In this study, we examine how changes in young adults’ financial situation are related to success in key developmental tasks in early adulthood, in Finland.

Key Developmental Tasks in Early Adulthood

In Western societies, the completion of the transition to adulthood is seen as achieved when a series of transitional events has passed, including completion of education, entry into employment, leaving the childhood home, forming a romantic relationship, getting married, and having the first child ([Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011](#); [Furlong & Cartmel, 2007](#); [Schoon, 2007](#)). These events produce a period of life that is demographically dense, as many transitional events occur simultaneously or through a link to another event – a process known as *coupling/decoupling* or *interconnectedness/disconnectedness* ([Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011](#); [Rindfuss, 1991](#)).

Traditionally, a normative timetable or “social clock,” for the ordering of major life events existed, with designated times in the life span for when one is expected to adhere to certain life events, such as marriage and raising children ([Neugarten, Moore, & Lowe, 1965](#)). It is evident that the scheduling of many life events and the transition to adulthood has become, in many ways, destandardized in postmodern Western societies. Events are postponed to a later age, they occur at dispersed ages, are composed of fragmented involvement, and show variation in duration or in the sequence of events ([Arnett, 2012](#); [Brückner & Mayer, 2005](#); [Coles, 1995](#)). In Europe, the diversity within the transition to adulthood is considerable as school-to-work transitions vary greatly both between and within countries ([Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011](#)). There is evidence that variance with regard to going through the different transitional events is greatest around age 25 ([Cook & Furstenberg, 2002](#)). However, despite this diversity, age deadlines and optimal times for life course events and developmental tasks play a crucial role. It has been acknowledged that if the normative tasks are missed or radically postponed, it becomes costly to achieve them in later life ([Heckhausen, 1999](#)).

In this study, the transition to adulthood is depicted by two discrete processes: the social and demographic passages from an upper secondary education to the labor market and/or vocational and higher degree studies, and from the parental to the personal household and into romantic relationships, thus entering roles considered typical for adults ([Billari, 2001](#); [Zarrett & Eccles, 2006](#)).

These transitions provide examples of simultaneous changes in multiple domains. Beginning one's higher education may coincide with the transition to independent living, which requires a change in one's place of residence. Young adults have to make a number of imperative decisions, such as concerning their income, friendships, and work. Researchers agree that it is crucial to analyze the subjective attributes of independence as markers of development as well as the structural and normative elements in the transitions ([Petrogiannis, 2011](#)). Accordingly, we analyze both success and satisfaction regarding developmental tasks at the specific age of 25, which time is considered to be significant since by then most young adults have achieved self-sufficiency, established their own household, obtained a full-time job, and engaged in close interpersonal relationships ([Wald & Martinez, 2003](#)). In other words, by achieving a successful transition to adulthood by the age of 25, one has “made it” or has become “connected” so to speak.

Socioeconomic Context of Finland

Finland, a member of the European Union (EU) with a population of 5.4 million people, is a welfare state with political and cultural aims that are typical for the Nordic region. The government's policy goals include equal opportunity and full employment for all citizens, taking responsibility for citizens' welfare while placing a clear emphasis on services that are tax-funded and having a near-monopoly with regard to public service provision. Typically, the state and/or municipalities provide common social, health, and education services that are of a high quality ([Heikkilä & Rintala, 2006](#)).

Finland functions both as a Nordic welfare society and as a global player within the world economic market. Thus, young Finns' transition to adulthood is affected by multitude of unique national and cultural traditions, global economic insecurities, and societal welfare compensations. State policies, for example, influence transitions concerning living situation, education, and work, which in part influence developmental tasks in social domains. In Finland, young adults move out of their childhood homes relatively early compared to their peers in other EU member states, with the exception of Scandinavian countries ([Choroszewicz & Wolff, 2010](#)). The share of young adults aged 18 to 34 years and still living with their parent(s) varies from 20% or less in Finland, Denmark, and Sweden to 60% or more in Bulgaria, Malta, Slovenia, and Slovakia; this exceeds 50% in 16 of the EU member states. Overall, in many Western European countries, significant changes have occurred with regard to housing transitions in recent years and young adults' opportunities for choosing a form of independent living have diversified. Subsequently, many young adults experience various living arrangements, including living alone, with friends, with other students or colleagues, with relatives, or cohabiting with their girlfriend or boyfriend ([Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011](#)). It is therefore impossible to define a *normative* reference with regard to the different forms of living ([Furlong & Cartmel, 2007](#)).

The universal support of the Finnish welfare state provides an example of how the socioeconomic and political context and structures interact with personal aspirations and accomplishments regarding developmental tasks, as has been suggested by the life-span psychology tradition. The welfare, social, and economic policies of the Finnish state comprise a societal support system based on equal rights and grant each individual the rights to state-funded economic incentives and benefits ([Esping-Andersen, 1990](#); [Furlong & Cartmel, 2007](#)). [Buchmann and Kriesi \(2011\)](#) argue that this sociopolitical welfare system is related to the observed patterns in early home-leaving and nontraditional family formation, which in turn promote individualistic choice-making and young adults' need for autonomy and readiness for situations requiring experimentation. Thus, the welfare state financially supports certain values of autonomy, but may underestimate young adults' own responsibilities and agency. Also, the welfare, social, and economic policies can reduce the negative impacts that global and national economic uncertainty have on young adults and their progress concerning developmental tasks ([Blossfield, Klijzing, Mills, & Kurz, 2005](#)). Subsequently, changes within the economy may not have as dramatic an impact on young adults' economic situation in Finland as would be the case in countries without an equivalent welfare program.

Governmental financial aid is also strongly evident in educational patterns. Education in Finland is publicly provided and free of charge at all educational levels. As in most EU countries, in Finland employment and one's own earnings are the main source of students' income, along with financial support from the state ([Orr, Gwosć, & Netz, 2011](#)). Students receive governmental financial aid that consists of a study grant, a housing supplement, and a government guarantee for a student loan, of which the first two are cash benefits from the state and do not need to be paid back. The student loan is a normal bank loan granted by all Finnish banks upon application ([EUROSTUDENT, 2005–2008](#)). This comprehensive financial benefit system supports cultural autonomy on the one hand, and financial independence in a relatively financially secure context on the other, and may therefore affect transitional events.

Compared to other EU countries, Finnish university and college degree students are older on average ([Orr et al., 2011](#)). This is due to a combination of their beginning studies at an older age and the study programs being longer in duration. A specific feature in the Finnish educational system is the interrupted educational pathway after upper secondary school, before continuing to higher education. Up to two in three Finnish students (cf., 159,000 students in total) did not directly continue studying after upper secondary school in 2010, but had experienced at least one gap year, for example, by working or traveling before beginning higher educational studies ([Orr et al., 2011](#); [Saarenmaa, Saari, & Virtanen, 2010](#)). The median age for the completion of studies has risen in Finland, as is the case across Europe over recent decades ([Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011](#)).

In the early 1990s, the Finnish economy was hit by a severe economic recession, after which time it began a period of exceptionally rapid growth from the mid-1990s, signified by the expansion of the Information and Community Technology (ICT) industry ([Dahlman, Routti, & Ylä-Anttila, 2005](#); [Rantala, 2001](#)). The sharp global economic recession from 2008 to 2009 hit the Finnish economy hard once again, from which it has still not recovered as a renewed global economic slowdown is taking place. Unemployment peaked at 9%, with the youth unemployment rate for ages 15–24 reaching 23% in early 2010 ([Official Statistics of Finland, 2010](#)). This is also the case in many other EU member states, where youth unemployment has risen dramatically since May 2011 and remained at a historic, high level of 22.4% at the beginning of 2012 ([European Commission, 2012](#)). In Finland, the unemployment rate has slowly decreased to 7.7% in the general population and to 20.5% among young adults aged 15–24 ([Official Statistics of Finland, 2012](#)), but experts proclaim that it may start to increase again (OECD, 2010, 2012).

The research data of the Finnish Educational Transitions Studies ([FinEdu, 2012](#)) research project used as the basis for the present research focused on young adults undergoing their transition to adulthood with measurement points in 2005, 2006, 2008, and finally in 2011 when the participants reached age 25. It is interesting to analyze whether the global and local economic climate is reflected in young adults' financial resources, agency, and fulfillment of developmental tasks. At the same time, the age of 25 needs to be viewed with precaution as regards Finnish society, as the transition to further education and employment often takes longer than in other countries.

The Role of Agency According to Achievement and Social Strategies

As societies and social systems become more complex, adequate psychological functioning becomes increasingly important ([Heckhausen, 1999](#)), also in view of developmental tasks and life course outcomes ([Diewald & Mayer, 2009](#)). In the frameworks of both life-span psychology and life course research, individuals construct their own way of life, development, and future as they select personal experiences, social relationships, and life settings within the opportunities and constraints provided by historical, economic, and political circumstances ([Elder & Johnson, 2003](#); [Salmela-Aro, 2009](#)). This selection process occurs through *agentic strivings* ([Johnson, Crosnoe, & Elder, 2011](#)) and *strategies* through which individuals deal with and solve *developmental tasks* ([Haase et al., 2008](#); [Heckhausen, 1999](#)).

Researchers emphasize that the life course transition to adulthood is a crossroad between individual resources, characteristics and strategies, and structural opportunities and constraints ([Clausen, 1991](#); [Elder & Shanahan, 2006](#); Heinz, 1999, 2009). Social and cultural environments are considered pivotal in affecting the life course, as illustrated by the concept of *agency within structure* ([Elder & Johnson, 2003](#); [Giddens, 2001](#); [Salmela-Aro & Schoon, 2009](#); [Settersten, 2003](#)). The aforementioned unstable macroeconomic changes can contribute to the postponement of developmental tasks, but social relationships and adequate support, in turn, can contribute to an adaptive development by buffering the negative effects of economic hardships and stress ([Masten & Coatsworth, 1998](#)). “Significant others” and social relations play an important role in future planning and achievement among young adults, as they channel decision making through co-agency and co-regulation ([Salmela-Aro, 2009](#)). Thus, agency also functions socially and collectively. As young adults work together, they produce something they are unable to do on their own, defined as *proxy* or *collective agency* by [Bandura \(2000\)](#).

Agency is defined as the capability to act in a way that is different to what has been spelled out by society, reflecting individual will ([Giddens, 1991](#)). Life-span theory suggests that young adults may perceive changes in their life as challenges, and employ active achievement and social strategies to cope with them. These strategies and their development in early adulthood are identified in this study as a token of agency, and we examine how they affect success and satisfaction regarding later developmental tasks.

We use the concepts of *achievement strategies* and *social strategies* as an operationalization of agency in order to assess the ways in which young adults approach and respond to situations when facing challenges and problems ([Eronen, Nurmi, & Salmela-Aro, 1997](#); [Nurmi, Aunola, Salmela-Aro, & Lindroos, 2003](#)). These strategies can be either optimistic and approach-driven (*functional*) or pessimistic and avoidant (*dysfunctional*). Strategies are imperative and highly important in early adulthood to promote success and accomplishment in major developmental tasks and challenges ([Cantor, 1990](#); [Nurmi, 1993](#); [Salmela-Aro, Tolvanen, Nurmi, 2009](#)). For example, in a study by [Salmela-Aro et al. \(2009\)](#), the high and increasingly optimistic achievement strategies among university students predicted a high level of work engagement and a low level of work burnout later in working life. Another longitudinal study on young adults in educational transitions, that by [Eronen \(2000\)](#), found that functional achievement and social strategies predicted success regarding transitional events related to education and peer relationships, as well as well-being. These achievement and social strategies apparently require successfully developed social skills, which have been found to relate to successful future planning as well as to problem solving and coping with different challenges, and these, in turn, are necessary for the successful pursuit of educational and occupational goals ([Heckhausen, 1999](#); [Langston & Cantor, 1989](#); [Määttä, Nurmi, & Stattin, 2007](#)).

Social Relationships and Sense of Belonging

In the present study, we consider *sense of community* or *sense of belonging* as a developmental task, in addition to the traditional transitional tasks concerning school, work, and relationships ([Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011](#); [Furlong & Cartmel, 2007](#); [Schoon, 2007](#)). Community refers to the sum of social relationships that arise from real-life social interaction and common experiences and lead to attachment between people ([Colclough & Sitaraman, 2005](#)). In the period of intensive changes in early adulthood, membership in a community, with its responsibilities and rewards, creates an important source of trust and well-being. [Elder's \(1998a\)](#) concept of “linked lives” illustrates how historical, economic, and political changes are interwoven in individual experiences and shared relationships. Sociologists and social psychologists define sense of community as social relationships relevant to well-being, life satisfaction, and social identity ([Davidson & Cotter, 1991](#); [Prezza, Amici, Roberti, & Tedeschi, 2001](#); [Prezza & Constantini, 1998](#)). Also, belonging is often linked with having a sense of place and being part of a larger entity, these being either a smaller personal social circle (such as one's family) or a larger social network (such as in the concept of national or even global citizenship) ([Henderson, Holland, McGrellis, Sharpe, & Thomson, 2007](#)).

Through the modernization process, sense of community and belonging have developed from being limited to a certain time and place (i.e., “location-based” communities where individuals actively share mutual and mundane goals) to including complex and larger communities involving numerous and abstract goals and activities ([Colclough & Sitaraman, 2005](#)). As modernization – with its rapid social changes – increases, diversity, individualization and uncertainty, and the need for a sense of community and belonging increases in parallel ([Colclough & Sitaraman, 2005](#)). The popularity of social media serves as an example of historical-cultural changes that are relevant to young adults in maintaining their sense of community – also referred to as social capital ([Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007](#)). Young adults in contemporary societies have access to a diversity of means for communicating and connecting. Typically, the Internet with its social media is not dependent on physically or geographically bounded interaction to maintain users’ sense of community, and serves as an example of a changing societal context affecting developmental tasks.

The impact of individuals’ financial situation on the quality of family relationships has been identified in numerous studies, many of them adopting the Family Economic Stress Model (FESM, [Conger, Conger, & Martin, 2010](#); [Conger, & Elder, 1994](#)). The foci in this study are peer and romantic relationships in early adulthood. In line with the FESM, we considered these as transitional developmental tasks and analyzed the role of participants’ personal financial situation, both *objective* (actual income level) and *subjective* (personal appraisal of income level), impacting these salient relationships in early adulthood.

Research Questions

We analyzed possible preconditions for a successful transition to adulthood with respect to a Finnish longitudinal data set. Young adults create their own developmental environment by responding to challenges and selecting experiences in their own unique ways, which we conceptualized as agency and assessed according to the participants’ achievement and social strategies ([Salmela-Aro et al., 2009](#); [Salmela-Aro, Tolvanen, & Nurmi, 2011](#)). Yet agentic processes are embedded in sociohistorical contexts ([Elder, 1998b](#); [Sameroff, 2010](#); [Settersten, 2003](#)); subsequently, we studied the changes in young adults’ financial situation and in their achievement and social strategies within the challenging context of European and global social and economic upheavals in the late 2000s. We further analyzed whether the changes in young adults’ financial situation and in their achievement and social strategies affect their success and satisfaction regarding developmental tasks, defined and operationalized in relation to the life domains of education, work, living situation, and romantic relationships ([Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011](#); [Furlong & Cartmel, 2007](#); [Schoon, 2007](#)), as well as sense of belonging ([Davidson & Cotter, 1991](#); [Henderson et al., 2007](#)). The successful fulfillment of developmental tasks in early adulthood was expected to be related to the transition to financial independence ([Arnett, 2004](#); [Lee & Mortimer, 2009](#)), and we examined how young adults’ *objective* and *subjective* financial situation changes across the transition to adulthood and how these, together with changes in agency (achievement and social strategies), are associated with their perceived economic pressure at age 25. Our initial research questions and hypotheses were 1.

How do achievement and social strategies (approach vs. avoidance) change during the transition to adulthood from ages 19 to 25? We hypothesize (H1) that, on average, the use of achievement approach and social approach strategies increases, whereas the use of achievement avoidance and social avoidance strategies decreases during the transition, due to the increased level of independence.

2.

How does the financial situation (*objective* and *subjective*) of young adults change during the transition to adulthood from ages 20 to 25? We hypothesize (H2) that, on average, the young adults’ objectively and subjectively viewed financial situation improves during the transition, and that the majority of young adults are in the process of gaining financial independence.

3.

How do the levels and changes regarding the young adults' achievement and social strategies and their financial situation predict the fulfillment of the key developmental tasks at age 25? We hypothesize (H3) that high levels and an increase in the use of achievement approach and social approach strategies are associated with high levels of success and satisfaction regarding the key developmental tasks (i.e., educational attainment, moving from the childhood home, dating, sense of belonging as well as relationship and work quality) and a low level of perceived economic pressure, whereas high levels and an increase in the use of achievement avoidance and social avoidance strategies are associated with less successful and less satisfying accomplishments in key developmental tasks.

4.

We further hypothesize (H4) that high levels with respect to one's objective and subjective financial situation, and improvements in these across time, will be associated with high levels of success and satisfaction regarding the developmental tasks.

Method

Participants

The present study is part of the Finnish Educational Transitions Studies ([FinEdu, 2012](#)), an ongoing longitudinal study in which adolescents from upper secondary schools participated. The data was collected through self-report questionnaires addressed to all upper secondary high school students (6 schools, 28 classes) in one medium-sized Finnish city with a population of circa 97,000 inhabitants. At the beginning of the study, participants were in their third year of upper secondary high school ($M_{age}=19.10$, $SD=0.38$). Women are overrepresented in the sample, which actually reflects the overall distribution of high school students in Finland, consisting of 57% women in 2009 ([Statistics Finland, 2010](#)). The reported data stems from four measurement points, administered once *before* (2005=T1) and three times *after* (2006=T2, 2008=T3, and 2011=T4) graduating from upper secondary school in early adulthood.

At the first measurement point 636 (83%; 425 female and 211 male, aged 19), at the second measurement point 449 (61%; 327 female and 122 male, aged 20), at the third measurement point 422 (59%; 287 female and 132 male, 3 unreported, aged 22), and at the fourth measurement point 497 (70%; 334 female and 159 male, 4 unreported, aged 25), young adults answered the questionnaire. The dropout rates from T1 to T3 (39–41%) were considerable due to the data at T1 having been collected directly at the schools, whereas the subsequent data collections were carried out by mail. The participation rate rose again (by 18%) from T3 to T4, perhaps due to greater incentives having been offered to participants in the form of movie tickets or gift vouchers.

Measures

Achievement and Social Strategies

Achievement and social strategies were measured at T1–T4 by using the Strategy and Attribution Questionnaire (SAQ, [Nurmi et al., 1995](#)). The SAQ consists of 20 items describing different types of strategies that people employ to solve and cope with demands in both achievement-related and social contexts. These types of strategies are conceptualized as approach and avoidant strategies. In our study, we applied 15 items as in previous studies ([Salmela-Aro et al., 2009](#); [Salmela-Aro, Tolvanen et al., 2011](#)) where the measurement models have resulted in 15 items that convey these types of strategies (approach vs. avoidance) in a reliable manner. The participants were instructed to evaluate how well each statement corresponds with their own ways of acting, using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Four sum variables were constructed, indicating approach and avoidance strategies in achievement and social domains as follows: (1) The *achievement approach scale* measures the extent to which people expect to succeed in a task and are not overly apprehensive of failure (4 items, e.g., “When I get ready to start a task, I am usually certain that I will succeed in it”). The Cronbach's alpha reliabilities for the achievement approach

strategies were 0.81, .75, 0.80, and 0.84, respectively at T1, T2, T3, and T4. (2) The *achievement avoidance scale* measures the extent to which people tend to behave in ways that prevent them from – rather than help them in – carrying out a task (4 items, e.g., “What often occurs is that I find something else to do when I have a difficult task in front of me”). The Cronbach's alpha reliabilities for the achievement avoidance strategies were 0.82, 0.84, 0.84, and 0.84, respectively at T1, T2, T3, and T4. (3) The *social approach scale* measures the extent to which people are optimistic about social situations (4 items, e.g., “If there are some difficulties, it helps to talk them over with another person”). The Cronbach's alpha reliabilities for the social approach strategies were 0.76, 0.76, 0.78, and 0.80, respectively at T1, T2, T3, and T4. (4) The *social avoidance scale* measures the extent to which people have a tendency to avoid social situations and feel anxious in them (3 items, e.g., “I often feel uncomfortable in a large group of people”). The Cronbach's alpha reliabilities for the social avoidance strategies were 0.78, 0.80, 0.74, and 0.71, respectively at T1, T2, T3, and T4.

Financial Situation

Participants' financial situation was measured with two questions concerning the young adults' self-reported objective and subjective financial situation at three measurement points, T2 to T4. Self-reported *objective financial situation* was measured with the question, “How much money do you have for use monthly?” Participants were asked to report their amount of monthly income including salary (EUR), financial support (e.g., student/housing financial aid from the state), support from parents and relatives, loans (including mortgage/study loans, consumer credit), or other types of income. In the analyses, these amounts were summed up. *Subjective financial situation* was measured by examining the perceived sufficiency of the personal income level relative to personal consumption habits and needs (Conger et al., 1990), asking, “Do you think your income covers your expenses at the moment?”; the replies were evaluated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*extremely well*) to 5 (*poorly*). The scale was reverse-scored for a higher score to indicate a better financial situation.

Success in Developmental Tasks

Participants indicated their level of success regarding the following developmental tasks at T4: (1) educational attainment; (2) moving from the childhood home; (3) dating; and (4) sense of belonging. Participants' education was assessed with two questions, the first referring to the young adults' current life situation, that is, “What do you currently do?”; the answer options included, for example, “*I study at high school*”/“*I study at university*”/“*I study at a polytechnic institute.*” The second question was, “Next, we ask you to write down all studies you have started after comprehensive school (high school, university, polytechnic studies etc.) and the relevant graduation dates with an accuracy of one year or indicating a current continuation of the studies.” Based on participants' responses to these two questions, the participants' educational situation was coded in the following manner: 1 (*not in education*), 2 (*studying at a polytechnic institute/university/vocational school/high school*), and 3 (*graduated from a polytechnic institute/university*).

Moving from the childhood home was assessed with the comment to be completed being, “I live in the same household with...”; the answer options were 1 (*my mother*), 2 (*my father*), 3 (*my mother and father*), 4 (*my mother and stepfather*), 5 (*my father and stepmother*), 6 (*a cohabiting partner/my spouse*), 7 (*I live in a single apartment/friends*), 8 (*I live alone*), and 9 (*another person*). The answer options were recoded as 1 (*still living at home*, consisting of responses 1–5), and 2 (*living independently*, consisting of responses 6–9).

Dating was assessed with the question, “What is your civil status?”; the answer options were 1 (*single*), 2 (*dating*), 3 (*common-law marriage*), 4 (*married*), 5 (*legally registered relationship*), and 6 (*divorced*). The answer options were recoded as 1 (*single*, consisting of response 1), and 2 (*in a relationship*, consisting of responses 2–5). No participants reported having divorced.

Sense of belonging was conceptualized according to several related domains, namely, friendships, the social media (i.e., online social communities), own family, and the working community (e.g.,

[Pessi & Saari, 2008](#)). Social belonging was measured with two questions enquiring, first, how firmly the respondent feels akin to friends, and second, to what extent he or she belongs to any social media community (e.g., Facebook). The participants were requested to answer on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*).

Satisfaction with Developmental Tasks As Regards Relationship And Work Quality

Satisfaction with respect to relationship quality was approached as a latent factor constructed of the following manifest variables measured at T4: (1) sense of belonging to an own family; (2) relationship atmosphere; and (3) relationship satisfaction. *Sense of belonging to an own family* was measured with the *sense of belonging* question described earlier. The term “own family” refers to the participant's spouse and possible children, not to his or her parents and siblings. *Relationship atmosphere* was measured with a question derived from [Niemi & Rauste-von Wright \(1980\)](#), namely: “In every relationship, there prevails a certain atmosphere. Can you evaluate the atmosphere in your relationship?” Participants were provided a semantic differential consisting of 13 opposites and were instructed to mark, on a continuum of five, which describe the atmosphere in their relationship most accurately. The correlation of one item – *independence vs. clinging* – was low with other items (between 0.24 and 0.37) and was therefore omitted. A mean sum variable was constructed with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.94. *Relationship satisfaction* was measured with three questions (Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS); Salmela-Aro, Aunola, Saisto, Halmesmaki, & Nurmi, 2006; Spanier, 1976): (1) “How satisfied are you with your current relationship?”; (2) “How often does your relationship invoke contradictory feelings?”; and (3) “To what extent are you able to discuss all things in your relationship?” Possible responses ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). A mean sum variable was constructed (after reversing the answers of the second question). The Cronbach's alpha reliability of the sum variable was 0.72.

Work quality was approached as a latent factor constructed of the following three manifest variables from T4: (1) employment relevant to one's education; (2) satisfaction with work; and (3) belonging to the working community. *Employment relevant to one's education* was assessed with the question, “Does your work correspond to your education?”; the answer options were 1 (*no*), 2 (*to some extent*), and 3 (*yes*). Categorical variables were constructed: 1 (*not in employment*); 2 (*in employment nonrelevant to my education*); and 3 (*in employment relevant to my education*). *Satisfaction with work* was assessed with two questions, the first being, “How satisfied are you with your current job?”; and the second, “How much do you enjoy your current job?” Both were answered on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). A mean sum was calculated from the replies to these two questions, and the Cronbach's alpha reliability was 0.84. *Belonging to the working community* was measured with the *sense of belonging* question described earlier.

Economic Pressure

Economic pressure was measured at T4 with four indicators according to [Conger et al. \(1990\)](#): (1) Unmet material needs, in other words problems making ends meet; (2) inability to pay bills; (3) financial cutbacks and adjustments in expenditures; and (4) subjective financial situation. To measure *problems making ends meet*, the question posed was, “How much money do you have left over the day before your next paycheck or other income payment?”; answers could be made on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*more than enough money is left over*) to 4 (*not enough money to make ends meet*). *Inability to pay bills* was assessed with the question, “Do you have difficulty in paying monthly bills (e.g., electricity, mobile phone, water)?”; replies could be given on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*no difficulties*) to 5 (*great difficulties*). *Financial cutbacks and adjustments in expenditures* were measured with 13 items, and the participants were instructed to state whether they had made the cutbacks (No=1; Yes=2). The items were, for example, “Used long-term savings for daily expenses; Moved into more affordable housing; Postponed large purchases; Bought things on credit more than before; Took a loan from the bank; Took a payday loan.” An individual score of each *yes* response was calculated for each participant, ranging between

13 and 26 with higher numbers indicating increased cutbacks and adjustments. The Cronbach's alpha reliability was 0.75.

Background Information

Information on participants' *gender* was taken from the first data collection of the FinEdu research project in 2004, and in cases where the information was not available, the data from T1 in 2005 was used. Data on participants' *family socioeconomic status* (SES) was taken from the same source and was measured by asking participants to report their parents' occupation. The participants' responses were classified into five socioeconomic categories using a standard classification system ([Statistics Finland, 1989](#)). The five categories were (1) *not in employment* (students, retired or unemployed; i.e., those with a low income), (2) *self-employed*, (3) *blue-collar occupation* (e.g., construction workers, mechanics), (4) *lower white-collar occupation* (e.g., secretaries, salespersons, and nurses), and (5) *higher white-collar occupation* (e.g., physicians, teachers, lawyers, and managers). Applying the "household reference person" definition (HRP; [Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011](#); [Statistics Finland, 2011](#)), we have used the person with the highest occupation as a point of reference regarding family SES. In the case of the self-employed, the occupation of the other parent was taken into account, except in cases where the other parent was not in employment or the information was missing.

Analysis Strategy

The analyses were conducted along the following steps. First, preliminary descriptive analyses were performed by using Spearman correlations and *t*-tests for linear and χ^2 -tests for categorical variables. Second, to examine the changes in young adults' financial situation and in their achievement and social strategies, we conducted univariate *latent growth curve modeling* (LGCM) separately for each construct ([Bollen & Curran, 2006](#); [Duncan, Duncan, & Strycker, 2006](#); [Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2010](#)). Thirdly, these separate growth curve models were combined into one latent growth curve (LGC) model and success and satisfaction regarding progress in key developmental tasks at T4 were predicted by the levels of and changes in the use of achievement and social strategies and participants' financial situation. The measurement models of the latent constructs (i.e., achievement and social strategies, and developmental task outcomes of relationship quality, work quality and economic pressure) were arrived at using *structural equation modeling* (SEM).

The SEM and LGCM analyses were conducted using the Mplus 6.0 statistical software program ([Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2010](#)). The missing-data method implemented in the Mplus program by default enabled all the observations in the data set to be used in estimating the parameters of the models, and it assumes that missing data is *missing-at-random* (MAR). That means that even when the amount of missing data is large and dependent on other variables in the model, the selection effect is small.¹ Furthermore, when this dependence is controlled for, we can assume that the data has met the MAR criteria. This method does not assign values in place of those that are missing, but uses all the data that are available to estimate the model. The used MLR procedure produces maximum likelihood estimates with standard errors and χ^2 -test statistics that are robust with respect to nonnormality ([Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2010](#)).

LGCM within a structural equation framework was applied to estimate the initial levels (intercept) and average linear growth rate changes (i.e., slope) for achievement and social strategies from T1 to T4, and for financial situation from T2 to T4, during the transition to adulthood. LGCM estimates the means and variances of the growth components and whether they are statistically significant, as well as whether there is individual variation regarding the initial levels and linear growth. In this study, the intercept mean of achievement and social strategies (approach vs. avoidance) indicated the average latent mean of the construct at T1. In regard to young adults' financial situation, the intercept mean indicated the average latent mean of the financial situation, considered from both objective and subjective standpoints, at T2.

The five goodness-of-fit indicators of the estimated models (SEM and LGCM) were evaluated, with the following values indicating a well-fitting model according to Muthén (1998–2004): (1) a nonsignificant χ^2 -test value, (2) Comparative Fit Index (CFI; [Bentler, 1990](#)) with a value of ≥ 0.95 , (3) Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) with a value of ≥ 0.95 , (4) Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA; [Steiger, 1990](#)) with a value of ≥ 0.06 , and (5) Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR; [Hu & Bentler, 1998](#)) with a value of ≥ 0.08 .

Results

Descriptive Results

[Table 1](#) shows the percentage distribution of the demographic variables of the participants in 2004 or at T1 and the young adults' objective financial situation, success in key developmental tasks and perceived economic pressure at age 25 (T4). [Table 2](#) shows the sample's Spearman correlation matrix, scales, and means (*M*) and standard deviations (*SD*) pertaining to the participants' achievement and social strategies from T1 to T4, their financial situation from T2 to T4, and to their key developmental tasks at T4.

[Table 1](#) shows that a majority of participants were in education, yet a majority were also in employment. In terms of their living situation, almost all (98%) participants had undergone the transition of moving from the childhood home to independent living. The great majority were in a relationship, and circa one-fourth were single. [Table 2](#) shows that on average, participants were satisfied with their relationships, and their sense of belonging to an own family (cohabitation, marriage) was rated as being high. Participants were, in general, satisfied with their current work, while their sense of belonging to the working community was moderate.

[Table 1](#) also shows that salary and financial support from the state were significant sources of income. However, parental financial support was not as strongly evident, with 62% reporting that they were receiving an average monthly amount of 72 EUR from their parents, and over half were receiving less than 100 EUR per month. Less than half of all the participants (48%) had a loan, with the average amount borrowed being 194 EUR monthly and 34% having taken a loan of less than 100 EUR per month. Furthermore, 40% of the participants reported having other unspecified types of income, but again, the contribution of these types of income was nonsignificant as it was less than 100 EUR per month in 36% of all cases.

Economic pressure indicated the degree of financial independence and the ability to cope with the challenges of such pressure. Concerning making ends meet, the majority (76%) felt that they had only some or just enough money left over before their next paycheck, with 13% reporting that they did not have enough money to make ends meet. However, participants' reports revealed that almost all of them (93%) had little or no difficulty in paying their bills. Regarding cutbacks in expenditures, the most significant cutbacks had been made in postponing large purchases ($M=1.63$; on a range from 1 to 2), decreasing clothing expenses ($M=1.54$; on a range from 1 to 2), and using long-term savings for daily expenses ($M=1.44$; on a range from 1 to 2). Buying things on credit more than before was evident for 20% of participants, while 32% had borrowed money from friends or relatives, and 30% had taken a loan from a bank during the previous year.

Latent Growth Curve Models for Achievement and Social Strategies

The first aim of the present study was to examine how young adults' achievement and social strategies change during the transition to adulthood. The initial levels and linear changes of the approach and avoidance achievement and social strategies were simultaneously estimated within one model. In this model, the levels and growth factors were allowed to correlate. The fit of the model was good: ($\chi^2=169.30(89)$, $p=0.000$; CFI=0.97; TLI=0.96; RMSEA=0.04; SRMR=0.05). χ^2 was significant, which is common in large samples.

The levels and changes in achievement and social strategies are presented graphically in [Fig. 1](#). As hypothesized (H1), on average, the use of achievement approach strategies increased from T1 to T4:

the means of the intercept (initial level) and slope (linear change) of the achievement approach strategies were statistically significant (*Intercept* $M=4.86$, $SE=0.04$, $p<0.001$; *Slope* $M=0.17$, $SE=0.01$, $p<0.001$). Also as hypothesized, achievement avoidance decreased across time: the means of the intercept and linear slope of the achievement avoidance strategies were statistically significant (*Intercept* $M=3.58$, $SE=0.05$, $p<0.001$; *Slope* $M=-0.19$, $SE=0.02$, $p<0.001$). As hypothesized (H1), the use of social avoidance strategies decreased: the means of the intercept and linear slope of social avoidance strategies were statistically significant (*Intercept* $M=2.59$, $SE=0.04$, $p<0.001$; *Slope* $M=-0.04$, $SE=0.02$, $p<0.01$). In conclusion, as hypothesized, from the age of 19 to 25, the use of achievement approach and social approach strategies increased, whereas the use of achievement avoidance and social avoidance strategies decreased.

The correlations between the level factors of the strategies were high and statistically significant, with the exception of the correlation between social approach with achievement avoidance strategies ($-0.04(.05)$, $p=ns$). The level of achievement approach correlated positively with the level of social approach ($0.15(.06)$, $p<0.05$), and negatively with the levels of achievement avoidance ($-0.45(0.05)$, $p<0.001$) and social avoidance ($-0.62(.05)$, $p<0.001$). The level of social avoidance correlated positively with the level of achievement avoidance ($0.44(0.05)$, $p<0.001$), and negatively with the level of social approach ($-0.35(.05)$, $p<0.001$). These correlations indicate that, in general, the higher the level of approach strategies in both achievement and social domains, the lower the level of avoidance. The correlations between the slope factors of all of the subscales were high and statistically significant, as follows: slopes of achievement approach with achievement avoidance ($-0.67(0.10)$, $p<0.001$) and social avoidance ($-0.94(.14)$, $p<0.001$); and, social avoidance with achievement avoidance ($0.64(.08)$, $p<0.001$). These correlations between *changes* in strategies were similar to the correlations found between their *levels*: the more the use of approach strategies increased with time, the more the use of avoidance strategies decreased. Because of these high correlations between achievement and social strategies, and between their changes, a second-order factor structure for both the *level* and *slope* was devised for the following analyses.

Latent Growth Curve Models of Participants' Financial Situation

The second aim of the study was to examine how young adults' financial situation changes during early adulthood from ages 20 to 25. In the initial analyses, the LGCM for subjective financial situation and objective financial situation were created separately. The LGCM of participants' subjective financial situation fit the data well: ($\chi^2=2.81(1)$, $p=0.09$; CFI=0.96; TLI=0.88; RMSEA=0.06; SRMR=0.03). In contrast to the hypothesis (H2), on average, there was no significant change in participants' subjective financial situation across T2 (age 20 years) through T3 (age 22 years) to T4 (age 25 years), as indicated by the nonsignificant linear slope (*Slope* $M=-0.07$, $SE=0.04$, $p=ns$). The intercept (i.e., initial level) of the subjective financial situation was statistically significant (*Intercept* $M=3.40$, $SE=0.06$, $p<0.001$).

Further, the model for objective financial situation fit the data well: ($\chi^2=0.90(1)$, $p=0.34$; CFI=1.00; TLI=1.00; RMSEA=0.00; SRMR=0.01). As hypothesized (H2), participants' objective financial situation improved from T2 to T4, indicated by a positive and statistically significant linear slope (*Slope* $M=3.98$, $SE=0.19$, $p<0.001$). The intercept (initial level) of the objective financial situation was statistically significant (*Intercept* $M=4.98$, $SE=0.17$, $p<0.001$). We can thus conclude that the young adults' objective financial situation improved in the transition, but their subjective perception of the financial situation did not.

We continued the analyses by combining the models for the subjective and objective financial situations into one model, and then examined the change over time. We omitted the slope of the subjective financial situation from the model due to its statistically nonsignificant mean and variance. Because our interest was on the outcome of the financial situation at T4, when the participants were 25 years of age, we ran the analyses by using T4 as the reference point (i.e., fixing the loadings of the three measurement points T2, T3, and T4 to -2 , -1 , and 0 , respectively). The

model was modified further by adding the residual correlations of the subjective and objective financial situations to the model for each time point, that is, T2, T3, and T4, respectively. This model fit the data well: ($\chi^2=14.38(9)$, $p=0.11$; CFI=0.98; TLI=0.96; RMSEA=0.03; SRMR=0.05). The results showed that the correlation of the level of the subjective financial situation with the level of the objective financial situation was statistically significant (0.21(0.10), $p<0.05$). The residual correlation was strongest at T4 (0.62(.08), $p<0.001$), compared to T3 (0.28(0.06), $p<0.001$) and T2 (0.22(.08), $p<0.01$), indicating that the correspondence between the young adults' subjective and objective financial situation increases with time. The correlation between the level of the subjective financial situation and the linear change in the objective financial situation was negative and statistically significant ($-0.25(0.12)$, $p<0.05$), meaning that the higher young adults' initial subjective satisfaction was with respect to their financial situation, the less improvement there was in their objective financial situation over time.

Success and Satisfaction Regarding Key Developmental Tasks

The third aim of the study was to examine how the levels of and changes in the young adults' use of achievement and social strategies, and those concerning their financial situation, assessed during their transition to adulthood predict success and satisfaction with respect to their developmental tasks when they reached age 25. Based on the results yielded by the previous LGCM of the young adults' financial situation and achievement and social strategies, we combined this information into one model in which the developmental tasks constituted the outcomes (see [Fig. 2](#)). First, this combined model included the initial level (intercept) and linear change (slope) of the participants' objective financial situation, with T4 as the reference point, and fixed loadings of T2, T3, and T4 to -2 , -1 , and 0 , respectively. Second, the second-order factor structure of the achievement and social strategies was included. To model the correlational structure between the first-order factors using the second-order factor, all four intercept factors of the strategies were set free to load on the second-order level factor, and all three related slope factors were set free to load on the second-order slope factor using the fixed (at 1) variance as a reference. Since the mean and variance of the linear slope for social approach were found to be statistically nonsignificant, these were omitted from the present model. The standardized loadings for the second-order strategy-intercept factor were achievement approach 0.82, achievement avoidance -0.65 , social approach 0.16, and social avoidance -0.76 . As regards the slope, the second-order slope factor loadings were achievement approach 0.96, achievement avoidance -0.69 , and social avoidance fixed to -1 . Specific factors were added to the model, capturing the residual variances of each first-order level factor and of the slope factors regarding the strategies. Defining specific factors made it possible to find specific associations between certain achievement and social strategies (intercept and/or slope) and outcome variables (developmental tasks), particularly the ones that were independent from the second-order factors. Third, the key developmental tasks – educational attainment, living situation, dating, and sense of belonging – were added to the model as outcomes of the levels and changes in participants' achievement and social strategies (approach vs. avoidance), as well as those of the objective financial situation.

Additionally, we were interested in whether the achievement and social strategies and the objective financial situation would have an effect on relationship quality, work quality, and economic pressure at T4. After testing the measurement models, these three latent outcome factors were added to the final model. The standardized loadings of the variables regarding relationship quality were relationship atmosphere 0.87, relationship satisfaction 0.88, and sense of belonging to own family 0.45. The standardized loadings of the variables regarding work quality were sense of belonging to the working community 0.67, satisfaction with work 0.74, and being in employment relevant to one's education 0.50. The standardized loadings of the variables concerning economic pressure were inability to pay bills 0.79, problems making ends meet 0.75, cutbacks in expenditures 0.76, and subjective financial situation -0.74 . All loadings were statistically significant at the $p<0.001$ level.

Because the results pertaining to the key developmental tasks were indicated by categorical variables, we first ran the model without these variables in order to assess the model fit indices and the modification indices. The model fit the data well ($\chi^2=625.83(401)$, $p=0.000$; CFI=0.95; TLI=0.94; RMSEA=0.03; SRMR=0.06). After this, we were able to add the categorical variables to the model. Because of limited use of computer memory in the categorical data analysis, we regressed these developmental tasks with respect to the second- and first-order factors of participants' achievement and social strategies one at a time to find the statistically significant paths. In the final model, family SES was controlled for in order to explain all of the dependent variables (i.e., the developmental tasks and economic pressure) separately. The analyses yielded a very similar model fit to that without the SES ($\chi^2=624.99(401)$, $p=0.000$; CFI=0.95; TLI=0.93; RMSEA=0.03; SRMR=0.05) and did not indicate any statistically significant results for the effect of SES on the study variables, with minor exceptions participants from higher white-collar families reported more use of achievement approach strategies at T1 than did participants from blue-collar families ($p<0.05$), and a higher use of these strategies at T2 than did participants from other socioeconomic classes ($p<0.05$). Participants from higher white-collar families also reported less use of social avoidance strategies at T3 and T4 than did the other participants ($p<0.05$). Furthermore, the standardized coefficients of the model remained similar (differences in statistically significant coefficients being <0.02).

[Fig. 2](#) shows the standardized model results and the statistically significant paths of the initial levels of (intercept) and changes in (slope), first, the general factors of achievement and social strategies (*Intercept, Strategy* and *Slope, Strategy*), second, the specific factors of the social approach and social avoidance intercepts to the indicators of the developmental tasks – while controlling for SES. The statistically significant developmental paths were to success in educational attainment and belonging to social media and friendship, as well as satisfaction with one's relationship and work (quality), and also economic pressure. In addition, the statistically significant path of the level of (intercept) and change in (slope) the objective financial situation was found to lead to economic pressure.

The results of the final predictive model substantiated the hypothesis (H3) concerning levels and changes of participants' use of strategies, but not with respect to their financial situation (H4). First, high initial levels (intercept) of achievement approach and social approach strategies (i.e., agency) and an increase in these strategies (slope) were related to having a stronger sense of belonging among friends. Besides the impacts of strategies in general, social strategies, in particular, predicted success in developmental tasks along the lines of our hypothesis: a high initial level of social approach strategies predicted the probability that young adults' would continue their education after upper secondary school, as well as young adults' strong sense of belonging among friends and the social media. Contrary to our hypothesis, a high level of specific social avoidance strategies was also related to continuing one's education or having already graduated from further education.

As regards, on the one hand, predicting satisfaction with the quality of individuals' romantic relationship and work, and, on the other hand, anticipating the level of economic pressure, the results were once again in accordance with our hypothesis (H3). A high initial level of achievement and social approach strategies was associated with a high level of satisfaction regarding the quality of one's romantic relationship, and a high initial level of social avoidance strategies were associated with low satisfaction. A high initial level of and increase in approach strategies in general predicted higher work quality at age 25. Furthermore, a high initial level of achievement and social strategies at T1 (when participants were 19 years of age) predicted low levels of economic pressure at T4 (when participants were 25 years old).

The results of the model did not substantiate our hypothesis (H4) that a high initial level and improvements regarding participants' financial situation would predict success and satisfaction in regard to the developmental tasks they were facing at the age of 25. An improvement (significant positive slope) in the objective financial situation across time predicted low economic pressure at

age 25. However, no significant paths between participants' financial situation and developmental tasks were found.

Some of the relations between the manifest variables and the first- and second-order factors of the participants' achievement and social strategies are of interest, although not all are shown in [Fig. 2](#). The stronger an individual's sense of belonging to the social media was, the greater he or she perceived the experienced economic pressure to be (0.14, $p < 0.05$). A higher relevance of work to education was positively and significantly associated with individuals' objective financial situation at age 25 (0.62, $p < 0.001$); and the higher participants rated their subjective financial situation at age 25, the better was their objective financial situation (0.36, $p < 0.001$) and the fewer problems they had in making ends meet (-0.26 , $p < 0.001$).

The results further revealed associations between the levels and changes regarding achievement and social strategies and participants' financial situation. The higher the initial level of functional achievement and social strategies and the more the use of these strategies increased over time, the more the objective financial situation improved. The variables measuring developmental tasks and perceived economic pressure were also associated with each other. The participants who were satisfied with their work and had full employment reported less economic pressure. Those suffering from high economic pressure were less satisfied with the quality of their relationships.

Discussion

Our overall aim was to provide information on the transition to adulthood in times of sharp upheavals in the national and world economies. Macroeconomic factors can shape individuals' lives and pathways, and financial difficulties and perceived economic uncertainty are suggested to interfere with the successful fulfillment of developmental tasks ([Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011](#)). Our results partly give evidence that both sociopolitical structures and individual agency are important in shaping life course transitions in early adulthood.

We analyzed how young adults' financial situation changes during the transition to adulthood, that is, from upper secondary school up to the age of 25. The two foci were the *objective* financial situation, referring to monetary income level, and young adults' *subjective* perception regarding the sufficiency of their income in relation to their personal consumer habits and needs. Our hypothesis that the financial situation will improve during the transition to adulthood was substantiated concerning objective finances, but not with regard to the subjective perception of the finances during the transition. This discrepancy may lie in the phenomenon that while the monthly amount of money the young adults had for use grew significantly, their needs and aspirations increased at the same rate. Economic independence signifies the successful fulfillment of developmental tasks in early adulthood, and many of the core transitions, such as those related to further education and moving into an own household, require stable financial resources. Interestingly, the gap between the young adults' objective and subjective financial situation decreased as they became older, and the discrepancy was lowest at the age of 25. This result might indicate, in accordance with the life-span model of motivation ([Salmela-Aro, 2009](#)), that young adults gradually learn to manage their finances and adapt their consumer habits to available financial resources, and subsequently feel more satisfied with their available income. The result can also reflect the fact that they were salary earners and were, as such, more responsible with the sufficiency of money. Finally, the results of our correlation analyses showed that the more individuals' employment corresponded to the participants' educational field or vocation, the higher was his or her objective income level, indicating that with increasing age, young adults will probably find better work and/or are likely to receive a rise in salary.

When the participants were 25 years of age, in 2011, we also examined their economic resources and financial independency in more detail. Economic pressure is a multidimensional concept that reflects both economic difficulties and active ways of dealing with it through cutting back expenditures and making other adjustments ([Conger & Elder, 1994](#)). Results reveal that even though there were no

drastic problems with the participants' capability to pay their bills, the majority felt that they had only *some* or *just enough* money left over before their next paycheck; in other words, they had trouble making ends meet. The years 2008 and 2011 were characterized by considerable economic instability throughout Europe, including Finland. Our results also suggest that, in an unstable societal economic context, young adults are active and struggle to make ends meet ([Baek & DeVaney, 2010](#); [James et al., 2010](#); [Rothwell & Han, 2010](#)).

The transitions of the young adults in our study reflect the Finnish sociopolitical context. More than a third (38%) of the participants were struggling while combining employment and studies, which is characteristic of Finnish students ([Official Statistics of Finland, 2009](#)). When the participants were 25 years of age, salary and governmental support were the most significant sources of income among young adults in our sample. Parental financial support was the third significant source. The results thus concur with the general trend in Finland of shifting the responsibility of financial security from parents to the state and individuals themselves. A culture of emphasizing work ethos was also prominent among the young adults in our sample.

We hypothesized that the use of achievement approach strategies and social approach strategies would promote success and satisfaction regarding major developmental tasks, whereas a dominant use of social avoidance strategies was expected to prevent success and to decrease the level of satisfaction regarding major developmental tasks. This effect has been confirmed in the past with respect to work-related behavior, showing that task-avoidant individuals are less successful in dealing with demands, possibly due to expecting failure ([Salmela-Aro et al., 2009](#)).

Our hypothesis was confirmed in that the use of social approach strategies was associated with the fulfillment of developmental tasks, as indicated by the attainment of further education, a stronger sense of belonging, and greater satisfaction with the quality of relationships. The use of social avoidance strategies, interestingly, equally predicted the continuation of one's education beyond upper secondary high school, yet it also predicted dissatisfaction with one's romantic relationship. The social domain of agency was thus highly important in contributing to both success and satisfaction regarding developmental tasks. Also as hypothesized, the extent of using functional achievement and social strategies was associated with individuals' sense of belonging among friends, with their satisfaction regarding the quality of their relationships and work, and with the level of economic pressure. An increase in the use of these strategies over time was related to satisfaction with one's work. As regards participants' financial situation, an increase in individuals' objective financial situation predicted low economic pressure at age 25.

The finding of the importance of the social domain with regard to the fulfillment of developmental tasks concurs with earlier research emphasizing that good social relationships are crucial for adolescent development and well-being ([Henderson et al., 2007](#); [Horwitz, White & Howell-White, 1996](#); [Myers, 2000](#)). This is also in line with suggestions that functional social relationships with peers and family, and engaging in intensive interaction with one's social environment, predict successful transitional tasks, especially as regards education and satisfaction with one's relationships ([Salmela-Aro & Schoon, 2009](#)). The two indicators of the sense of belonging to friendship and to the social media are emblems of the significance of social relationships and networks in young adults' lives today.

Our study makes a significant contribution to life course research by comprehensively conceptualizing the developmental tasks. It is noteworthy that the levels of and to some extent improvements in agency, as indicated by the use of approach vs. avoidance strategies, predicted success in multiple domains: educational attainment, social belonging, and satisfaction with one's romantic relationship and work. Moving from the childhood home was not a function of achievement or social strategies, perhaps reflecting the Finnish context. The early moving out of the childhood home is highly common and may not depend on individual differences in agency.

Research suggests that agentic psychological resources and functional transition strategies may protect young adults during macro-level economic upheavals ([Vuolo, Staff, & Mortimer, 2011, November 7](#)). Our results concerning the role of achievement and social strategies predicting developmental tasks can be interpreted as supporting this argument. The fact that young adults are active agents is emphasized in various ways in our study. It can be argued that through employment, thus improving one's income and financial situation as a resource, young adults can protect themselves from financial distress. Our results show that the initially high levels and increase in the use of functional achievement and social strategies were associated with the subsequently better objective financial situation, which reflects these young adults' ambitions to shape their own financial development. Improvement toward a better objective financial situation during the transitional years, in turn, predicted low economic pressure at age 25. Our results emphasize the importance of both financial matters and agency. More importantly, however, financial issues did not predict success or satisfaction regarding traditional developmental tasks; their role was limited to the economic domain of life, such as solving economic pressures.

The apparent discrepancy in comparing the macro-level national and international economic situations with the participants' individual economic satisfaction and relatively low level of perceived economic pressure may also indicate youths' agency when viewed in the framework of life-span psychology of motivation and adjustment ([Salmela-Aro, 2009](#)). Macro-level economic conditions can alter psychological conceptions of oneself and enhance identity formation, as has been shown in another longitudinal study conducted in a Finnish setting and which covered several economic upheavals ([Fadjukoff, Kokko, & Pulkkinen, 2010](#)). Our study extended the focus from young adults' financial difficulties to their feelings of economic strain and their subsequent behavioral adaptations and coping with the economic pressure. The young adults made efforts to handle their financial problems and exhibited an influence over their own financial resources to make ends meet ([Conger et al., 1990](#)). Individuals' adjustments in their financial behavior can also be seen as indicators of agency.

Early adulthood is viewed as a staging ground for later adulthood, where crucial decisions affecting the future are made ([Crockett & Crouter, 1995](#)). Our results reflect both normative and more varied and diverse transitions, conceptualized as *normal biography* and *choice biography* by [du Bois-Reymond \(1995\)](#). For instance, in our sample only 2.5% were not studying or working at the age of 25 years. We do not know whether this was their own choice, subsidized by the relative freedom that the social security system of the Nordic welfare state provides financially, or as a result of social and economic constraints that these young adults did not have control over.

We could not validate the argument that, in an unstable financial situation in society, young adults would be tempted to adjourn their decision making and a perceived economic uncertainty may result in the postponement of important transitional events ([Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011](#)). The majority (62%) of the young adults in our study were in education, and 30% had already graduated from university or a polytechnic institute. Second, almost all (98%) of the young adults were living independently, with a great majority (56%) cohabiting with a spouse. Already 11% of these 25-year-olds were married or in a registered relationship. Seen in the context of the Finnish welfare state with its free, publicly provided education system, participants' SES did not have a significant effect on our study's results.

Psychological life-span studies commonly focus on individual trajectories, continuity, and developmental change in empirical longitudinal settings ([Cobb, 2010](#); [Salmela-Aro, 2009](#); [Settersten, 2003](#)). The sociological life course approach, on the other hand, focuses on developmental implications of historical and sociopolitical changes, and shows how human development and individual lives are shaped by a set of principles, including timing of normative life events, linked lives, and age-graded social pathways. We recommend combining the psychological and sociological life-span approaches. Development does happen in a certain sociohistorical and cultural context, and in interaction with "significant others" ([Evans, Schoon, & Weale, 2010](#)) as

such, individual developmental progress cannot be understood by focusing on the individual in isolation since individual decision making is bounded by social institutions and wider macro-social conditions ([Salmela-Aro & Schoon, 2009](#)). This study provides insights into how agency increases during the transition to adulthood, measured by achievement and social strategies that cover crucial domains of achievement and social challenges. The sociopolitical context of the Nordic welfare state shaping the transition to adulthood can be recognized in the high share of participants in further education and independent living.

Sociological life course research has been criticized for not taking the role of agency and individual experiences in the transition to adulthood seriously enough ([Diewald & Mayer, 2009](#); [Elder & Johnson, 2003](#); [Settersten, 2003](#)). Our results suggest that the real-world environment with its constraints and restrictions also allows possibilities for human action and agency in attaining developmental tasks. This phenomenon is increasingly emphasized in life course research ([Elder & Johnson, 2003](#)) and psychological accounts of agency. It has also been introduced in the *action-phase model of developmental regulation* ([Haase et al., 2008](#); [Heckhausen, 1999](#)), which explicitly addresses the contextual embeddedness of individual agency during life course transitions to promote normative development. In conclusion, interaction between the sociological and psychological fields of research could be fruitful, and cooperation may contribute to a better understanding of individual adaptation in times of social change ([Evans et al., 2010](#)).

Research concerning young adults' overall financial situation is a topic of much current societal debate. There has been concern over numerous fundamental questions affecting young adults, addressing financial issues, the growing rate of unemployment, the length of university studies, the role of parental and governmental aid in young adults' financial situation, and youth in working life and their housing situation – to name but a few. Research on these issues would be of sociopolitical significance, as they concern both economic and social structures as well as individuals' future plans and well-being.

The growing income differences between households and the rising poverty of young adults is another current concern, both politically and socially. According to Finnish statistics ([Wilska, 1999](#); [Ylitalo, 2009](#)), young adults' income and consumption decreased dramatically during the national recession of the early 1990s. At the same time, the status of young adults as consumers did not meet the standards of other types of households: Young adults under 30 years of age dropped their consumption levels by a fifth, while the decrease in other households was about 13% during the recession in the early 1990s. The same process can be expected in the current economically unstable society. When defined as a decline in gross domestic product lasting for at least six successive months, Finland was in a recession in 2008–2009 ([Statistics Finland, 2009, February 27](#)). However, the results of this study suggest that the current situation of young adults in Finland is not as pessimistic and gray as might be expected, and that success and satisfaction regarding the developmental tasks in early adulthood, in 2011, are to a large extent in good shape.

The present study has the following main limitations, alongside its contributions. First, the results cannot be generalized to all young adults, nationally or internationally, without precaution. Only young adults living in one particular city were given the chance to participate in the study, and the retention rate could certainly have been higher. However, according to attrition analyses concerning the key concepts (agency and financial situation), systematic differences between the participants who dropped out of our study and those who continued were minor. Second, the young adults that were studied all had an upper secondary high school background, which is also largely the reason for the overrepresentation of women in the sample. Further studies are needed to examine young adults from other educational backgrounds such as vocational school, with a more gender-balanced sample and with regard to other educational transitions.

Third, the analyses here are conducted in terms of *individuals*, not *households*, which adds to the subjectivity of the measures and results. As the number of respondents living with spouses or friends

is relatively high, in future studies it would be relevant to take this into consideration when assessing financial adjustments and lack of material resources, as disposable income may be in mutual use in many cases. However, it is not inevitable that money earned by one or both partners would form the so-called household income, to be distributed equally, although in low-income households this is more often the case ([Addo & Sassler, 2010](#); [Jenkins, 1991](#)).

The fact that several changes and events can occur within a relatively short time period, also showing great individual variation in extent and content, requires a dynamic scientific approach. It is important to examine individual variety in the types of transitions and how they function, and to consider the wider sociopolitical context. Future studies should aim to expand the holistic view of transitional events by viewing these as “configurations of statuses” and sequences of events, as suggested by [Buchmann and Kriesi \(2011\)](#), and as discussed in research by [Salmela-Aro, Kiuru, Eerola, and Nurmi \(2011\)](#) who formulated patterns and typologies of family- and work-related roles.

Despite its' limitations, the contribution of the present study is that it shows important links between individuals' life course and the context of historical time and place, in this case Finland, a secure Nordic welfare state in the midst of global economic upheavals. As regards young adults' agentic strategies and the quality of their working life, relationships and financial situation, opportunities and challenges in early adulthood should be understood in a wider sociohistorical context, including macro-sociological factors, individual factors, and personal experiences.

Foot notes

- ¹ We tested the missing data on achievement and social strategies, financial situation, gender, and socioeconomic status at T1–T4 by comparing the young adults who took part in the study at every measurement point with those for whom data was missing for at least one of the three or four measurement points, depending on the measure. The results of the missing data analyses regarding the young adults who participated at every measurement point ($N=197$) compared to those for whom data was missing for at least one of the four measurement points ($N=534$) in the missing data analyses showed that there was a small selection effect with respect to achievement and social strategies, and especially with regard to participants' social approach strategy. Those individuals who did not participate at each one of the four measurement points had slightly lower scores on achievement approach at T1 ($M=4.76$, $SD=0.92$) than those who did participate each time ($M=5.01$, $SD=0.89$, $t(627)=3.28$, $p<0.001$). Similarly, those who did not answer at all four measurement points had slightly lower scores on social approach at T1 ($M=5.24$, $SD=1.25$) than those who did participate each time ($M=5.44$, $SD=1.16$, $t(627)=1.97$, $p<0.05$). At T3, the statistically significant differences again occurred in regard to social approach; that is, those who did not answer at all four measurement points had slightly lower scores on social approach ($M=5.48$, $SD=1.03$) compared to those who had participated each time ($M=5.74$, $SD=1.00$, $t(374)=2.53$, $p<0.05$). At T4, the same result was found; that is, those who did not participate at all four measurements points had slightly lower scores on social optimism ($M=5.47$, $SD=1.05$) than those who had participated each time ($M=5.69$, $SD=1.04$, $t(434)=2.15$, $p<0.05$). As regards participants' financial situation, there was no selection effect in terms of the respondents' subjective financial situation between those who did not respond at all three measurement points ($N=506$, $M=3.27$, $SD=1.15$) and those who had responded each time at T4 ($N=225$, $M=3.32$, $SD=1.24$, $t(485)=-0.45$, $p=0.651$, ns), as was also the case regarding the respondents' objective financial situation (those with missing data $N=510$, $M=1269$, $SD=745$; those with data for all measurement points $N=221$, $M=1311$, $SD=808$, $t(483)=-0.59$, $p=0.555$, ns). With regard to gender, the majority (64%) of participants in our study were female, which reflects the overall distribution of upper secondary high school students in Finland having consisted of 57% women in 2009 ([Statistics Finland, 2010](#)). Results concerning attrition between measurements showed that there was a significant selection effect favoring female participants as women (34%) were more likely than men

(19%) to answer at all four measurement points ($\chi^2(1, N=683)=15.74 p<0.001$). However, the results indicated only a slight selection effect ($\chi^2(4, N=677)=11.31 p<0.05$) with respect to family socioeconomic status in that participants' from a family background of entrepreneurship were more likely to participate in all four measurement points (52%) compared to participants with parents with another socioeconomic status (25–39%).

Figures

Tables

[j](#) [a](#) [v](#) Table 1 Distribution (%) of Demographic Variables in 2004/2005 (T1) and Young Adults' Objective Financial Situation, Success in Key Developmental Tasks, and Perceived Economic Pressure at T4.

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Table 1 Distribution (%) of Demographic Variables in 2004/2005 (T1) and Young Adults' Objective Financial Situation, Success in Key Developmental Tasks, and Perceived Economic Pressure at T4.

Gender

Female	6 4 3. 6 8 6
Male	3 2 6. 6 2 4
<i>Mother's socioeconomic status</i>	
Entrepreneur (self-employed)	4. 3 2 0
Higher white-collar employee	2 1 7. 9 5 5
Lower white-collar employee	5 3 0. 5 3 6
Blue-collar worker	1 8 1. 1 4
Not in employment	6. 4 5 6
<i>Father's socioeconomic status</i>	
Entrepreneur (self-employed)	1 7 1. 5 3
Higher white-collar employee	3 2 9. 6 8 4
Lower white-collar employee	1 1 7. 1 3 5
Blue-collar worker	2 1 5. 6 2 7
Not in employment	6. 4 5 3
<i>Objective financial situation (source of monthly income)</i>	
Salary	6 3 9. 4 8 7

Financial support from the state	7 5 1. 1 7 6
Support from parents and relatives	6 4 2. 4 1 7
Loan	4 3 8. 4 3 8
Other type of income	4 2 0. 8 1 9
<i>Living situation</i>	
Still living at home with parents	2. 1 2 1
In cohabitation/married	5 2 6. 8 3 0
Single apartment/cohabiting with friends	1 5 1. 7 5 7
Living alone	2 1 8. 4 6 2
Living with someone else	1. 7 4 7
<i>Dating</i>	
Single	2 1 6. 3 4 1
Dating	1 9 8. 1 3 1
Common-law marriage	4 2 4. 2 6 1
Married or legally registered relationship	1 5 0. 3 7 3
<i>Educational attainment</i>	

Not in education	7. 3 7 8
Studying at a university/polytechnic institute/upper secondary school/vocational school	6 3 1. 0 9 7
Graduated from university or a polytechnic institute	3 1 0. 5 4 1
<i>Employment</i>	
Not in employment, unemployed, temporarily dismissed	3 1 2. 5 5 2
In employment nonrelevant to one's education	1 7 6. 5 0
In employment relevant to one's education	5 2 1. 4 5 1
<i>Education and employment</i>	
Not in education or employment	2. 1 5 2
In either education or employment	3 1 1. 5 2 0
In both education and employment	3 1 8. 8 3 4
Graduated and working	2 1 8. 3 1 5
<i>Economic pressure</i>	
Problems making ends meet	
More than enough money is left over	1 5 1. 3 2
Some money is left over	3 1 7. 7 1 6

Just enough money is left over	3 8. 4	1 8 2
Not enough to make ends meet	1 3. 3	6 3 3
Inability to pay bills		
No difficulty	6 4. 0	3 0 4
Little difficulty	2 9. 3	1 3 9
Slight difficulty	4. 2 0	2 0
Significant difficulty	1. 5	7 7
Extreme difficulty	1. 1	5 5

Table 2 Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of the Study Variables.

3

Table 2 Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of the Study Variables.

1 Ach. ap. ¹	—					
2 Ach. av. ¹	-.36*	—				
3 Soc. ap. ¹	.26*	-.07	—			
4 Soc. av. ¹	-.38*	.34*	-.33*	—		
5 Ach. ap. ²	.55*	-.33*	.14*	-.30*	—	
6 Ach. av. ²	-.28*	-.26*	-.20*	.24*	-.44*	—
7 Soc. ap. ²	.10	.06	.56	-.19	.20	-.06

				*	*	*															
				*	*	*															
8 Soc. av. ²	$\bar{.}2$	$\bar{.}2$	$\bar{.}2$	$\bar{.}6$	$\bar{.}4$	$\bar{.}3$	$\bar{.}3$														
	8	2	2	4	4	5	1	-													
	*	*	*	*	*	*	*														
	*	*	*	*	*	*	*														
9 Ach. ap. ³	$\bar{.}4$	$\bar{.}2$	$\bar{.}1$	$\bar{.}3$	$\bar{.}5$	$\bar{.}2$	$\bar{.}1$	$\bar{.}3$													
	4	1	4	7	5	6	4	7	-												
	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*													
	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*													
10 Ach. av. ³	$\bar{.}2$	$\bar{.}4$	$\bar{.}1$	$\bar{.}2$	$\bar{.}3$	$\bar{.}5$	$\bar{.}3$	$\bar{.}3$	$\bar{.}3$	$\bar{.}3$											
	9	8	8	8	0	3	0	5	6	3	-										
	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*											
	*	*	*	*	*	*	8	*	*	*											
11 Soc. ap. ³	$\bar{.}0$	$\bar{.}0$	$\bar{.}4$	$\bar{.}1$	$\bar{.}1$	$\bar{.}0$	$\bar{.}2$	$\bar{.}5$	$\bar{.}2$	$\bar{.}1$	$\bar{.}9$	$\bar{.}0$									
	8	2	*	*	0	7	*	*	4	*	*	8	-								
			*	*			*	*	*	*	*										
			*	*			*	*	*	*	*										
12 Soc. av. ³	$\bar{.}1$	$\bar{.}2$	$\bar{.}2$	$\bar{.}5$	$\bar{.}3$	$\bar{.}2$	$\bar{.}1$	$\bar{.}6$	$\bar{.}4$	$\bar{.}4$	$\bar{.}3$	$\bar{.}3$									
	9	1	3	4	9	5	9	7	6	1	2		-								
	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*										
	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*										
13 Ach. ap. ⁴	$\bar{.}4$	$\bar{.}2$	$\bar{.}1$	$\bar{.}2$	$\bar{.}5$	$\bar{.}3$	$\bar{.}2$	$\bar{.}4$	$\bar{.}5$	$\bar{.}3$	$\bar{.}1$	$\bar{.}3$									
	1	0	4	8	0	3	3	1	9	0	4	6	-								
	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*									
	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*									
14 Ach. av. ⁴	$\bar{.}2$	$\bar{.}4$	$\bar{.}1$	$\bar{.}3$	$\bar{.}3$	$\bar{.}5$	$\bar{.}1$	$\bar{.}3$	$\bar{.}3$	$\bar{.}6$	$\bar{.}5$	$\bar{.}3$	$\bar{.}4$	$\bar{.}3$	$\bar{.}4$						
	4	5	1	4	6	1	9	6	2	5	0	0	4	4		-					
	*	*	4	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	3	*	*	*							
	*	*		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*							
15 Soc. ap. ⁴	$\bar{.}1$	$\bar{.}0$	$\bar{.}4$	$\bar{.}2$	$\bar{.}1$	$\bar{.}0$	$\bar{.}5$	$\bar{.}2$	$\bar{.}1$	$\bar{.}9$	$\bar{.}1$	$\bar{.}2$	$\bar{.}5$	$\bar{.}1$	$\bar{.}2$	$\bar{.}1$	$\bar{.}2$	$\bar{.}1$	$\bar{.}3$		
	7	2	*	5	3	5	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	-
	*	2	*	*	*		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	
	*		*	*			*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	
16 Soc. av. ⁴	$\bar{.}2$	$\bar{.}1$	$\bar{.}1$	$\bar{.}4$	$\bar{.}2$	$\bar{.}2$	$\bar{.}2$	$\bar{.}5$	$\bar{.}3$	$\bar{.}3$	$\bar{.}1$	$\bar{.}6$	$\bar{.}5$	$\bar{.}4$	$\bar{.}3$						
	0	7	7	9	4	2	7	8	7	1	8	0	2	7	2	-					

	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
17 Obj. fin. ²	.0	.0	.1	-	-	.1	-	.0	.0	.0	-	.1	.0	.1	-	-	
	4	7	2	2	0	7	1	5	2	9	5	2	0	4	1	-	
			*	*	1		*	*				*	*	*	2		
18 Obj. fin. ³	.1	-	.0	-	.1	-	.0	-	.2	-	-	.2	-	.1	-	.2	
	6	0	6	0	5	0	9	1	1	5	0	5	1	5	1	0	
	*	2		7	*	9	2	*	*	5	8	*	*	*	*	*	
19 Obj. fin. ⁴	.1	-	.1	-	.0	-	.1	-	.1	-	-	.1	-	.0	.1	.2	
	0	0	0	0	7	0	1	2	6	1	6	3	2	8	5	8	
	*	9	*	9		2	*	*	*	4	*	*	*	*	*	*	
20 Sub. Fin. ²	.1	-	.0	-	.1	-	.0	-	.1	-	.0	-	.1	-	.1	-	
	2	0	2	0	8	1	4	2	1	0	1	0	8	0	0	3	
	*	9		7	*	*	*	*	*	4		4	*	5	*	2	
21 Sub. Fin. ³	.1	-	.0	-	.0	-	.0	-	.1	-	.0	-	.1	-	.1	-	
	1	1	3	0	8	0	5	0	5	8	3	0	3	5	8	1	
	*	0		6	8	8	1	*	*	*	7	*	*	*	*	9	
22 Sub. Fin. ⁴	.1	-	.0	-	.1	-	.0	-	.1	-	.0	-	.1	-	.0	-	
	6	5	0	4	1	1	5	3	6	1	0	1	7	7	0	1	
	*	*		*	0	1	*	*	*	4	*	*	*	*	6	1	
23 M. ends	-	.1	.0	.1	-	.0	-	.0	-	.1	-	.1	-	.1	-	-	
	8	2	1	0	1	7	0	9	8	2	2	4	3	7	0	0	
	*	*		*	2	5		*	*	*		*	*	*	5	6	
24 Pay bills	-	.1	.0	.1	-	.1	-	.1	-	.1	-	.1	-	.2	-	.1	
	3	9	3	3	9	5	0	4	1	7	5	4	4	7	0	3	
	*	*		*	*	*	*	*	1	*	*	*	*	*	*	0	
25 Cutbacks	-	.1	.0	.0	-	.0	-	.0	-	.1	-	.0	.1	-	.0	.1	
	1	0	1	9	1	4	0	7	0	4	1	1	0	2	1	0	
	4	*			0	4		4	*	*			2	1	*	1	

	*											*							
	*											*							
26 Educat.	.07	-.08	.14*	-.02	.04	.01	.06	.06	.09	-.07	.21*	-.07	.02	-.05	.08	.00	.01	.01	-.07
27 Move	.12*	.02	.11*	-.08	.04	.01	.07	.02	.02	-.03	-.02	-.02	-.02	-.02	.05	-.02	.09	.05	
28 Dating	.01	.01	.02	-.02	.05	-.06	.02	-.02	.03	-.06	-.01	-.08	.06	.11*	.01	-.07	.05	.07	
29 B. friend	.09	-.05	.13*	-.02*	.15*	-.05*	.22*	-.02*	.07	-.02	.21*	-.05*	.23*	.16*	.29*	.14*	-.05*		
30 B. media	-.01	.08	.10*	-.03	-.01	.15*	.12*	-.04	.02	.07	.18*	-.04	.06	.01	.15*	-.07	.11	.05	
31 B. fam.	.01	-.07	.22*	.19*	-.00	-.01	.19*	-.05	.05	-.08	.18*	.16*	.09	.17*	.20*	.19*	.10	-.03	
32 R. atmos.	.06	.17*	.14*	.20*	.11	-.06	.15*	.22*	.05	-.08	.29*	-.02	.19*	-.04	.27*	.22*	.04	.01	
33 R. satisf.	.10	.17*	.11	.20*	.15*	-.02	.22*	-.05	.03	-.03	.31*	-.05	.18*	-.02	.22*	.23*	-.00	.01	
34 Emp. rel.	.11	-.07	.09	-.08	.07	-.03	.06	-.07	.21*	.17*	-.06	-.05	.12*	.20*	.07	.01	.09	.10	

	*	*	*	*	*	*														
	*	*	*	*	*	*														
26 Educat.	.26	-.05	.04	.18	-.18	-.14	-.14													
	*	*	*	*	*	*	*													
27 Move	.14	-.01	.07	-.07	-.01	.02	.04	.08												
	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*												
28 Dating	.08	-.08	-.00	.05	-.03	-.02	-.02	.02	.03											
	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*											
29 B. friend	-.04	.05	.00	.02	.05	.02	.03	-.02	-.03	.01										
	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*										
30 B. media	.04	-.08	-.05	-.04	.09	.11	.10	-.06	.01	-.08	.23									
	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*									
31 B. fam.	.05	.11	.07	.05	-.05	.11	.12	.07	.08	.21	.11	.01								
	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*								
32 R. atmos.	-.00	.22	.16	.14	-.04	-.13	-.16	-.09	.06	.08	.30	.04	.34							
	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*							
33 R. satisf.	.03	.19	.14	.16	-.02	.14	.21	-.06	.04	.13	.18	-.04	.31	.66						
	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*						
34 Emp. rel.	.58	-.12	-.03	.23	-.22	-.18	-.15	.39	.08	.02	.03	-.00	.07	-.04	-.03					
	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*					

35 Emp. Sat.	.12*	.06	.01	.16*	-.12*	-.23*	-.13*	.04	-.04	-.03	.03	.05	.0*	.10	.10	.20*	.20*	-
36 B. work.	.32*	-.09	.02	.13*	-.18*	-.08	-.07	-.01	-.02	.08*	.18*	.15*	.15*	.11*	-.01	.33*	.38*	-
Scale	-	15	15	15	14	15	14	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11
M	1288	344	347	349	246	149	123	118	119	403	302	406	406	403	403	209	306	302
SD	744	124	120	129	.86	.74	.27	.57	.15	.41	.89	1.13	.93	.62	.77	.90	.84	1.19

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II

TRAJECTORIES OF LIFE SATISFACTION AND THE FINANCIAL SITUATION IN THE TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD

by

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Trajectories of life satisfaction and the financial situation in the transition to adulthood

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Abstract

The aims of this study were (1) to investigate young adults' life satisfaction changes during the transition to adulthood, (2) to identify possible life satisfaction developmental trajectories during the transition, and (3) to examine how individuals' agency and personal financial situations are related to the identified life satisfaction trajectories in the contexts of life-span and life course theories of development. The present study is part of the longitudinal Finnish Educational Transitions (FinEdu) study, in which a total of 372 (278 female and 94 male) young adults filled in questionnaires at four measurement points, that is, twice before (at 18 and 19 years of age) and twice after (at 20 and 22 years of age) the transition from upper secondary high school to tertiary education and/or employment. Growth Mixture Modelling revealed five trajectories of life satisfaction: low-stable (8%), moderate-stable (41%), high-stable (27%), moderate-increasing (17%), and high-decreasing (7%). The vast majority (76%) of young adults had a stable life satisfaction trajectory throughout the transition. High levels of achievement approach strategies at age 19 were somewhat related to high-decreasing and high-stable life satisfaction trajectories. In turn, those using achievement avoidance strategies at age 19 were more likely to have low-stable or moderately-increasing life satisfaction trajectories. Positive life satisfaction trajectories were related to being in a positive financial situation at age 22. The two largest trajectories indicated better objective and subjective financial situations than did the other trajectories.

Keywords: young adulthood, life satisfaction, agency, developmental trajectories, longitudinal study, financial situation, person-oriented approach, Growth Mixture Modelling

Introduction

Financial situation and employment have been seen as some of the most important correlates of life satisfaction and sources of self-confidence, life management and capability in young adulthood (Cunnie, MartinRogers, & Mortimer, 2009). However, the diverse transitions and individual changes taking place in this life course phase may alter both the development of life satisfaction as well as the personal financial situation. Additionally,

macro-economic changes in society, such as during an economic crisis, may lead to changes in mental health due to perceived economic pressure (Stein et al., 2011). Both of these reasons highlight the importance of examining individuals' life satisfaction in relation to their financial situation. Although a large body of research has been conducted on young adults' and adolescents' financial situation, with topics including consumer

behaviour motivation and purchasing power (e.g., [Noble, Haytko, & Phillips, 2008](#)), disposable income and parental financial support (e.g., [West, Sweeting, Young, & Robins, 2006](#)), relatively less research has examined the role of individuals' financial situation in this crucial and demanding life course phase from late adolescence to early adulthood in relation to their life satisfaction.

As societies prosper, differences in life satisfaction are less frequently due to differences in income. High life satisfaction does, however, often have positive outcomes, including economic ones relating to higher income and better job performance, rather than the other way around ([Diener & Seligman, 2004](#)). In turn, financial well-being, that is, having a stable economic situation with little debt and greater financial satisfaction, does seem to positively affect overall life satisfaction in this particular life course phase of young adulthood (e.g., [Shim, Xiao, Barber, & Lyons, 2009](#)). However, regarding change in overall life satisfaction, only a few studies have focused on its development or heterogeneity across an *educational transition*, which often involves distinct changes that are either positive or negative and which also might change the related quality of life satisfaction (e.g., [Salmela-Aro & Tuominen-Soini, 2010](#); [Salmela-Aro & Tynkkynen, 2010](#)) and well-being (e.g., [Haase, Heckhausen, & Silbereisen, 2012](#)).

In this study, we examine — through longitudinal research — whether young adults' life satisfaction changes, and what kinds of life satisfaction trajectories can be found across the challenging developmental transition in young adulthood, after upper secondary high school, into tertiary education and/or employment, between ages 18 and 22. Secondly, we examine young adults' financial situation and agency in relation to their life satisfaction.

Financial challenges and life satisfaction

The phase of young adulthood is, according to Rindfuss (1991), demographically “dense” in that a great number of changes and demographic events occur simultaneously, such as moving out of the childhood home and taking part in further education and/or employment. These demographic markers of the transition to adulthood are also linked to financial independence ([Lee & Mortimer, 2009](#)). Graduation and the beginning of employment foster financial independence, which

may affect other markers of adulthood and life course events relating to education, employment, moving out of the childhood home and establishing a family ([Billari, 2001](#); [Lee & Mortimer, 2009](#); [Modell, Furstenberg, & Hershberg, 1976](#)).

These transitional life events which initiate long-term changes and a reorganisation of one's life (Cowan, 1991) may have a profound effect on overall life satisfaction, either through stimulated personal growth, or dysfunction and stress ([Perren, Keller, Passardi, & Scholz, 2010](#)). Success in dealing with life course transitions and the relatively early completion of adult transitions in the education and work domains, for example, as evidenced by various transitional pathways, may contribute to young adults' subsequent life satisfaction and well-being ([Räikkönen, Kokko, Chen, & Pulkkinen, 2012](#); [Salmela-Aro, Ek, Taanila, & Chen, 2012](#); [Schulenberg, Sameroff, & Cicchetti, 2004](#)). Instability in life satisfaction and its relation to contextual circumstances have also been witnessed in a study by Lucas and Donnellan (2007). Evidently, some young adults find difficulty in adapting to the changes and challenges taking place during the major life course phase of the transition to adulthood, and the inherent instability of the transition may make this life course phase confusing and unsettling, characterised by individuals' ill-health and unhappiness ([Hendry & Kloep, 2007a](#)), anxiety ([Hendry & Kloep, 2007b](#)), maladaptive functioning leading to precarious trajectories ([Côté & Bynner, 2008](#)), and negative self-esteem and depressive symptoms ([Luyckx, De Witte, & Goossens 2011](#)). On the other hand, on the basis that the majority of young adults face no severe problems in their youth, many other researchers see late adolescence as a prime time for a wide range of opportunities ([Eccles et al., 1993](#); [Graber & Brooks-Gunn, 1996](#); [Powers, Hauser, & Kilner, 1989](#)) and the transition also as a turning point for positive personality trait change, as in a study by Lüdtkke, Roberts, Trautwein and Nagy (2011) where high school (upper secondary) students were found to be “more agreeable, conscientious and emotionally stable” after the transition from high school to college.

Success in developmental tasks, such as in forming stable employment careers in this life course phase, demands active behaviour and agentic strivings from young adults ([Vuolo, Staff & Mortimer, 2012](#)). According to the life-span model

of motivation ([Heckhausen, Wrosch, & Schulz, 2010](#); Nurmi, 2004; Salmela-Aro, 2009), individuals follow and regulate their personal developmental paths by choice and selection. This is related to adapting and pursuing developmental and personal goals that reflect changes in life course opportunities. This agentic process does not, however, occur independently from changing social contexts: social structure, culture and historical life context (Freund & Riediger, 2006; Salmela-Aro & Little, 2007). The life-span model of motivation is guided by the sociological life course approach to human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Elder, 1998a), which states that human development is shaped by a set of interacting spheres of influence and principles, not only including individual agency but also the timing of events, linked lives and the embeddedness of development in its socio-historical context.

During a transition period, individuals need to negotiate their lives according to the constraints and opportunities imposed on individual agency (Elder, 1998a). As regards agency, the focus is on the individuals' ability and power to act in a way that is different to what has been spelled out for her or him (Giddens, 1991). During the transition from school to work, personality and psychological orientations fostering achievement and indicating agentic striving, may also help young adults to cope with economic turbulence and the current structural changes in working life, uncertain labour markets and tougher economic conditions that may challenge young adults' passage into adulthood ([Mortimer & Larson, 2002](#)), life management and school-to-work transitions (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; [Marks, 2005](#)). An unfortunate life event, such as unemployment, within an important life course transition, may have an impact on the individual's life satisfaction. On the other hand, individuals with better psychological readiness may be more capable of meeting the challenges of such a concurrent life event and life course transition. In this study, agency is operationalised in terms of achievement strategies, to assess how young adults approach challenging life situations. These strategies are usually operationalised as being either approach optimistic (functional) or avoidant (dysfunctional) (Eronen, Nurmi, & Salmela-Aro, 1997; [Nurmi, Aunola, Salmela-Aro, & Lindroos, 2003](#)).

Prior studies (e.g., [Roberts, Osadchaya, Dsuzev, Gorodyanenko, & Tholen, 2003](#)) have shown that

economic reforms and tougher labour market conditions have not influenced young adults' life course transitions relating to housing and family formation as much as new individual lifestyle options and choices. Young adults seem to be able to accommodate their consumption to their individual income level as they conduct individual comparisons to others (Roberts, Osadchaya, Dsuzev, Gorodyanenko, & Tholen, 2003). A recent study by Stein et al. ([2011](#)) showed that in accounting for variation in levels of psychological distress among 21 year-old college students, greater personal financial strain of the economic crisis — specifically on personal, individual lifestyles — was much more salient compared to felt family economic pressure, as seen in a study by Conger and colleagues ([1999](#)). Nevertheless, in the prolonged transition to adulthood, young adults are increasingly financially dependent on their parents ([Johnson and Benson, 2012](#)) in times of youth unemployment, this financial dependency can have a profound risk on self-efficacy ([Mortimer, 2012](#)). Family social class background and income do need to be considered as factors affecting the possibilities for independence and options for deciding on taking a break from developmental tasks in young adulthood, as wealthy young middle-class adults with supportive parents tend to have an advantage in this regard (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007).

Perren et al. ([2010](#)) have noted that studying changes in well-being over time requires time-consuming longitudinal study designs, with several measurement points that start before the transition. In the present study, life satisfaction development is viewed across the transition to adulthood, and more specifically, during the transition from upper secondary high school to employment and/or further education. The study has a longitudinal perspective, reflecting the recent emphasis on the need for such longitudinal multi-wave studies, rather than cross-sectional ones, in order to understand different developmental processes ([Diener & Seligman, 2002](#)). Another limitation concerning earlier studies on life satisfaction among young adults, is their focus on the developmental course of life satisfaction solely at the mean level (e.g., [Costello, Swendsen, Rose, & Dierker, 2008](#)), not addressing the possibility that individual trajectories could be different. In line with Salmela-Aro and Tynkkynen ([2010](#)), a possible approach is to use person-oriented (Bergman,

Magnusson, & El-Khoury, 2003) trajectory analysis (Nagin, 1999; Nagin & Land, 1993; Nagin & Tremblay, 1999), or Growth Mixture Modelling (GMM; Muthén, 2004; Muthén & Muthén, 2000; Muthén & Shedden, 1999), which may be more fruitful methods for examining human development.

Transition to adulthood in Finland

The focus of this study is on young adults' (aged 18 to 22) transition to adulthood, from completing upper secondary high school education to beginning their tertiary education and/or employment in Finland. In addition to the educational transition taking place, young adults gain legal adult status in Finland on becoming 18 years of age, which includes the right to marriage, leaving church membership, buying mild alcoholic drinks and cigarettes, obtaining a driving licence, and the right to vote; and for men, the responsibility to serve in the army or civil service.

The welfare regulations, social policies and legislation of the Scandinavian countries emphasise societal universal support systems and individual rights to state-granted economic incentives and benefits (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Furlong & Cartmel, 2007). The universal support of the Nordic welfare state provides a good example of how the socio-economic and political context and its structures interact with personal aspirations and accomplishments regarding developmental tasks. Buchmann and Kriesi (2011) argue that this socio-political welfare system is related to the observed patterns in early home-leaving and non-traditional family formation. Such regulations and policies may reduce the negative impact that global and national economic uncertainty has on individuals and their life course transitions (see also Ranta, Punamäki, Tolvanen, & Salmela-Aro, 2012). As a result, structural changes in the economy may not have as dramatic an impact on young adults' economic situation in Finland as in countries without welfare programs (Blossfield, Klijzing, Mills, & Kurz, 2005).

The impact of governmental financial aid is also strongly evident in educational patterns. Education in Finland, at all levels, is state-provided and tuition is free of charge. This, as well as the fact that students are provided with state benefits, supports equal opportunities for all young adults irrespective of family background. Students attending upper secondary school, a vocational institute or higher education institute, receive government financial

aid, which consists of a study grant, a housing supplement and a government guarantee of a student loan. Study grants and housing supplements are cash benefits from the state and they do not need to be paid back. The student loan is a normal bank loan granted by all Finnish banks upon application (EUROSTUDENT, 2005–2008). Before the recession of the national economy in the early 90s, the student financial aid system was mainly based on subsidised student loans. The system was reformed in 1992 with the abolition of government loans as subsidies for students, but the study grant amount was more than doubled. This resulted in the unpopularity of student loans and shifted students' interest from loan-based to employment-based income (Häkkinen, 2004; Häkkinen & Uusitalo, 2003). Consequently, according to recent Statistics Finland data (2011a), more than half (55%) of Finland's students are employed whilst studying.

The participants of this study were students who attended upper secondary high school, which approximately 50% of Finnish young adults attend (Official Statistics of Finland, 2011). After a three- to four-year period in upper secondary school, graduates may (among other options) apply for tertiary education and/or enter working life. A special problem of the Finnish educational system is the issue of late entry into higher education after upper secondary school (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2005). Because competition for admission to higher education is extremely tough, only roughly half of those completing the final matriculation examination move into higher education in the same year as their earlier graduation from secondary level, as is also the case regarding the transition from secondary education to employment (Statistics Finland, 2009, 2010b).

Even though young Finnish adults move out of their childhood home relatively early compared to others in the European Union member states, there is a significant gender gap present. In the European Union countries in 2008, about 76% of young adults aged 18–24 still lived with their parents in their childhood home (71% of women, 81.5% of men). Finland and Lithuania shared the second-widest gender gap for this measure (21 percentage points (pp)), below Bulgaria's gender gap of 23 pp (Eurostat Statistics, 2010). Leaving the childhood home is often related to financial security as factors involved include receiving financial support from

parents, labour market conditions, and the cost of housing (Eurostat, 2009). In the European Union in general, 44% of 15-30 year olds consider that young adults cannot afford to leave their parental home and 28% agree that not enough affordable housing is available. In Finland, however, it is fairly easy to rent an apartment and the housing supplement of the student financial aid package promotes early transitions.

Aims and hypotheses

The overall aim of this longitudinal study was to bring forward comprehensive information concerning the role of economic determinants acting on life satisfaction during the transition to adulthood, by using a person-oriented approach. Specifically, our research questions were:

- (1) How does young adults' life satisfaction change during the transition to adulthood?
- (2) What are the possible types of life satisfaction trajectories emerging during the transition to adulthood? Do these trajectories differ according to gender or family socio-economic status, parental financial support, living situation or life situation?
- (3) How are achievement strategies (i.e., agency), associated with the identified life satisfaction trajectories?
- (4) How is the financial situation of young adults', during the transition to adulthood, associated with the identified life satisfaction trajectories?

Based on previous studies, we tested the following hypotheses: (H1) life satisfaction remains fairly stable during the transition to adulthood for the majority of young adults (Eccles et al., 1993; Graber & Brooks-Gunn, 1996; Powers, Hauser, & Kilner, 1989); (H2) due to differences between young adults, and as seen in the studies by Perren et al. (2010) and Salmela-Aro and Tynkkynen (2010) concerning normative educational transitions, different trajectories of life satisfaction can be found as some individuals experience an increase and some a decrease in life satisfaction, while most do nevertheless encounter stability; (H3) active agency and the use of achievement approach strategies (see Perren et al., 2010; Eronen, 2000) are significantly associated with life satisfaction;

and (H4) a positive financial situation is related to high life satisfaction (Ervasti & Venetoklis, 2010; Jorgensen, Jamieson, & Martin, 2010; Shim et al., 2009). As can already be identified from the theoretical introduction, our perspective on the transition to adulthood attempts to integrate the sociological life course transition approach with the psychological markers of agency, in examining life satisfaction development and the financial situation in the transition to adulthood.

Method

Data

The empirical data of the present study was taken from the ongoing longitudinal Finnish Educational Transitions (FinEdu) Studies, gathered using written self-report questionnaires addressed to all upper secondary high school students (6 schools, 28 classes) living in the same mid-sized Finnish city (population = 105,000). During their transition to adulthood, participants filled in questionnaires for data collection twice in upper secondary school *before* the transition (in their second and third years, at 18 and 19 years of age, referred to as Time 1/2004 [T1] and Time 2/2005 [T2]), and twice *after* the transition (at 20 and 22–23 years of age, referred to as Time 3/2006 [T3] and Time 4/2008-2009 [T4]), from upper secondary high school to the commencement of higher education and/or employment. At the first measurement point, 614 (response rate 80%; 376 female and 237 male, 1 unreported), at the second measurement point 636 (83%; 425 female and 211 male), at the third measurement point 449 (61%; 327 female and 122 male), and at the fourth measurement point 422 (59%; 287 female and 132 male, 3 unreported) young adults answered the questionnaire. Because the focus of our study is on the educational transition period, the measurement taken immediately after graduating from high school (upper secondary school) (i.e., T3) was of special interest. Therefore, only those respondents who provided responses to at least one item on life satisfaction at T3 were included in the final sample of the study ($N = 372$; 278 female [75%] and 94 male [25%]).

Measures

Life satisfaction was measured using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) by Diener, Emmons, Larsen and Griffin (1985). Participants rated five items (for example, "I am satisfied with

my life”, and “The conditions of my life are excellent”) on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 7 (*totally agree*). A mean score was calculated for all items. The Cronbach’s alpha reliabilities ranged from .85 to .88 across the four measurement points, indicating a high level of internal consistency with respect to the life satisfaction variable.

Achievement strategies were assessed in relation to achievement *approach* and achievement *avoidance* strategies measured at T1 and T4 by four-item scales taken from the Strategy and Attribution Questionnaire (SAQ; [Nurmi, Salmela-Aro, & Haavisto, 1995](#)). *Achievement approach strategies* measured the extent to which people expect to succeed in a task and are not overly apprehensive of failure, e.g., “When I get ready to start a task, I am usually certain that I will succeed in it”. *Achievement avoidance strategies* measured the extent to which people tend to behave in ways that prevent them from carrying out a task, e.g., “What often occurs is that I find something else to do when I have a difficult task in front of me”. Responses were given on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The Cronbach’s alpha reliabilities at T1 were .81 for achievement approach and .82 for achievement avoidance.

Financial situation was measured by two questions with regard to participants’ subjective and self-reported objective financial situation at Time 4 (T4). Participants’ *subjective financial situation* was measured by examining perceived income sufficiency in terms of personal consumption habits, with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*poorly*) to 5 (*extremely well*) corresponding to the question, “Do you think your income covers your expenses at the moment?” Participants’ self-reported *objective financial situation* was measured with the question, “How much money do you have for use monthly?” The participants were asked to report the amount of their monthly income, including salary (EUR), financial support (e.g., student/housing financial aid from the state), support from parents and relatives, loans (including mortgage/study loans, consumer credit), and other types of income. In the analyses, these amounts were summed. *The income distribution* of the respondents varied. 44% of respondents received a salary ($M = 518$ EUR monthly, $SD = 520$), 57% received financial support from the state ($M = 405$ EUR monthly, $SD = 119$),

42% received financial support from family or other relatives ($M = 99$ EUR monthly, $SD = 105$), 20% had a loan ($M = 150$ EUR monthly, $SD = 218$), and 12% indicated receiving money from other sources ($M = 254$ EUR monthly, $SD = 662$). The relative contribution of these different sources to total income at age 22 was as follows: 40% was received as a salary, 41% as financial support from the state, 7% as financial support from family or other relatives, 5% as a loan, and 5% from other sources. These descriptive data are comparable to figures for the majority of young adults in Finland. As in most European Union countries, employment and one’s own earnings are the main source of students’ income, along with financial support from the state (Orr, Gwosć, & Netz, 2011). Parental financial support was minor in comparison, as was the popularity of loans, as discussed earlier. The findings thus concur with the general trend in Finland of a shift in responsibility for financial security away from the parents and toward the state and the individuals themselves ([Ranta et al., 2012](#)).

Background information

Respondents’ *gender* was asked at the initial measurement time (T1). *Family socio-economic status (SES)* was measured by asking the participants to report their parents’ occupations. In cases where this information was not available at the initial measurement (T1), this data was used from T2. Answers were classified into five socio-economic categories using a standard classification system (Statistics Finland, 1989). The five categories were: 1) *not in employment*, 2) *self-employed*, 3) *blue-collar occupation*, 4) *lower white-collar occupation*, and 5) *higher white-collar occupation*. Out of those who replied, the occupational distribution of participants’ fathers was as follows: 7% were not in employment (students, retired or unemployed, all seen as having a low income), 13% were self-employed, 25% worked in blue-collar occupations (e.g., construction workers, mechanics), 16% worked in lower white-collar occupations (e.g., secretaries, salespersons, nurses), and 39% worked in higher white-collar occupations (e.g., physicians, teachers, lawyers, managers). For mothers, the occupational distribution was as follows: 7% were not in employment, 6% were self-employed, 13% worked in blue-collar occupations, 47% worked in lower white-collar occupations, and 27% worked in higher white-collar occupations.

Applying the household reference person definition (HRP; [Department for Communities and Local Government 2011](#); [Statistics Finland 2011b](#)), we have used the person with the highest occupation as a reference for family socio-economic status. In the case of self-employment, the occupation of the other parent was taken into account, except if the other parent was not in employment or the information was missing. As a result, the household socio-economic status was as follows: 2% not in employment, 5% self-employed, 11% blue-collar, 35% lower white-collar, and 47% higher white-collar.

In terms of *living situation*, at the age of 22, most of the respondents had moved from their childhood homes into independent living: only 2% lived with their parent/s, 20% lived with a friend or roommate, 33% lived alone, 42% lived with a boyfriend/girlfriend or husband/wife, and 3% had some other living arrangement. In terms of *life situation*, the majority of participants were still studying at the age of 22, mostly in university (34%) or at a polytechnic institute (25%). Many participants were in a life situation characterised by combining different tasks, as 42% were simultaneously studying and working.

Attrition analyses

As noted earlier, the final sample comprised those participants who provided responses to at least one item on life satisfaction at T3 ($n = 372$). A series of t -tests was conducted with respect to these 372 participants in order to compare their life satisfaction scores with those who participated at all measurement points ($n = 200$) and those with missing data at some measurement points ($n = 172$). No significant differences were found. By using the missing data procedure (see next section for more details), we were able to supply data on all of the participants in the analyses.

With regard to gender, the majority (64%) of participants in our entire sample of 733 respondents were female, which reflects the overall distribution of high school (upper secondary) students in Finland as 57% of these constituted women in 2009 ([Statistics Finland, 2010a](#)). The t -test showed a significant selection effect favouring female respondents, $t(400) = -3.96, p < .001$. This is a limitation of the study and will be discussed further in the Discussion section. However, a parallel t -test confirmed that there was no selection

effect [$t(717) = -.06, p = .95, ns$] in terms of family socio-economic status (see above).

Analysis strategy

Analyses were conducted in three phases. First, to answer our first research question on how life satisfaction changes during the transition to adulthood, Latent Growth Curve Modelling (LGCM; Duncan, Duncan & Strycker, 2006; [Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2007](#)) was conducted to estimate the average initial level and slope of life satisfaction among the participants.

The goodness-of-fit of the estimated LGCM was evaluated according to the following indicators: (1) χ^2 -test; (2) Comparative Fit Index (CFI; [Bentler, 1990](#)) with a cut-off value of $\geq .95$; (3) Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA; [Steiger, 1990](#)) with a cut-off value of $\leq .08$; and (4) Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR; [Hu & Bentler, 1998](#)) with a cut-off value of $\leq .09$.

To answer our second research question on whether different types of life satisfaction trajectories emerge during the transition to adulthood, the analyses of this longitudinal data set were extended into Growth Mixture Modelling (GMM; Muthén, 2001, 2004; [Muthén & Muthén, 2000](#); [Muthén & Shedden, Muthén & Shedden, 1999](#)). GMM can be used to examine unobserved heterogeneity in the development of an outcome over time, by identifying homogeneous subpopulations that differ with respect to their developmental trajectories within the larger heterogeneous population. GMM is exploratory by nature, which means that there are no specific a priori assumptions regarding the number of latent classes to be found. Typically, in running GMM, a series of models are specified. The best-fitting model is then selected based on a list of criteria, including the goodness-of-fit indices and conceptual considerations. In this study, the following goodness-of-fit indices were used to evaluate the models: Akaike's Information Criteria (AIC), Bayesian Information Criteria (BIC) and Adjusted Bayesian Information Criteria (aBic) of the alternative models. Entropy values were also examined, with values close to 1 indicating a clear classification. Following Marsh, Lüdtke, Trautwein, and Morin (2009) and Bowen, Lee and Weller (2007), groups of $\geq 5\%$ of the sample were considered the smallest to give an acceptable solution. Practical usefulness, theoretical justification and interpretability of the latent group

solutions were also taken into consideration (see also Bauer & Curran, 2003; Marsh et al., 2009; Muthén, 2003). The analyses were controlled for gender and SES.

Both LGCM and GMM analyses were conducted with the Mplus 5.0 statistical software programme (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2007), using the *missing-at-random* (MAR) approach to missing data, which uses all of the available observations in the data set when estimating the parameters of the models. This model does not assign values for data that are missing but it uses all of the data that are available to estimate the model using the full information *maximum likelihood ratio* (MLR). Because the variables were skewed, the parameters of the LGCM and GMM analyses were estimated using the default MLR estimator (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2007).

Finally, to answer the third and fourth research questions, we used One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to examine if the life satisfaction trajectory groups differed in terms of their achievement strategies and financial situation. Post hoc comparisons using the Games–Howell test were used to examine the differences between groups. Missing data was handled by applying listwise deletion in these ANOVA analyses.

Results

Descriptive results

The sample correlation matrix, scales, means (M), standard deviations (SD) and Cronbach α reliabilities for the key variables are shown in Table 1.

Development of life satisfaction

The first research question was concerned with the longitudinal change in young adults' life satisfaction during the transition to adulthood. To answer this question, we specified a Latent Growth Curve Model with a linear slope for change in life satisfaction across the four measurement points. The model fit the data well [$\chi^2 = 15.79(5)$, $p < .01$; CFI = .97; RMSEA = .08; SRMR = .06].

The intercept (i.e., initial level) of life satisfaction was statistically significant, but the linear slope was not [*Intercept* $M = 4.90$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < .001$; *Slope* $M = 0.01$, $SE = 0.02$, $p = ns$]. This indicated that, on average and as hypothesized (H1), there was no significant longitudinal change in life satisfaction across the four measurement points. Interestingly, the variances of both the intercept and the slope were significant (variances = 0.92, $p < .001$ and 0.04(0.01), $p < .01$, respectively), indicating significant individual variances both in the initial levels and in the rate of change. Consequently, although the model showed no linear change in life satisfaction development on average, supporting our hypothesis (H2), there was significant heterogeneity among individuals. This indicated that a single latent trajectory was not able to sufficiently capture the heterogeneity of the changes in life satisfaction. Therefore, we aimed to identify different classes of life satisfaction trajectories in the next phase of analysis.

Table 1. Correlations, scales, means, standard deviations, and reliabilities for the variables used

Variables	Scale	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. Life satisfaction T1	1–7	4.83	1.20	.85	-						
2. Life satisfaction T2	1–7	5.01	1.22	.88	.58**	-					
3. Life satisfaction T3	1–7	4.89	1.21	.88	.52**	.58**	-				
4. Life satisfaction T4	1–7	5.00	1.11	.86	.44**	.46**	.58**	-			
Financial situation											
5. Objective financial situation T4	-	834	498	-	.13	.11	.15*	.04	-		
6. Subjective financial situation T4	1–5	3.27	1.19	-	.16*	.19**	.20**	.19**	.45**	-	
Achievement strategies											
7. Achievement approach T1	1-7	4.96	.88	-	.40**	.51**	.36**	.23**	.16*	.10	-
8. Achievement avoidance T1	1–7	3.58	1.27	-	-.23**	-.29**	-.20**	-.19**	-.07	-.07	-.42**

Notes. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

T1 = Time 1/2004, at 18 years; T2 = Time 2/2005, at 19 years; T3 = Time 3/2006, at 20 years; T4 = Time 4/2008-2009, at 22–23 years of age

Identifying life satisfaction trajectories

GMM procedures were employed to identify the different life satisfaction trajectories. Two- to six-class models were tested. Similar to the LGCM procedures, the loadings for T1 (age 18), T2 (age 19), T3 (age 20) and T4 (age 22) were fixed to 0, 1, 2, and 4. Table 2 shows the fit indices and class frequencies for different growth mixture solutions. All of the entropy values were acceptable, ranging from .677 to .779. The six-class solution was considered unsatisfactory because it included a trajectory with a very small class (2%). Both the aBIC and AIC favoured the five-class model over the four-class model. The BIC index of the four-class solution was lowest (BIC = 3,735.69), but it did not differ substantially from that of the five-class solution (BIC = 3,736.84). As a result, the five-class model was considered to be optimal.

To further confirm whether this five-class model with a linear slope fit the data better than an alternative model with a nonlinear slope, we ran a model with loadings for T1, T2, T3 and T4 as being

respectively: 0, 1, 2, and *. The loading for T4 was set as free, allowing non-linear change. The results for this alternative model were: BIC = 3,739.84, aBIC = 3,679.56, and AIC = 3,665.38. Compared to the five-class model with a linear slope (BIC = 3,736.84, aBIC = 3,679.73, and AIC = 3,666.30), this alternative model did not fit the data better. Moreover, this alternative model included a class consisting of only 1% of the sample, which was unsatisfactory.

Finally, we conducted a quadratic model with loadings for T1, T2, T3 and T4 as 0, 1, 4 and 16, respectively. The results of this quadratic alternative were: BIC = 3,737.15, aBIC = 3,708.59, and AIC = 3,701.88. This alternative model did not fit the data better, and further confirmed the five-class model with a linear slope as optimal. Having tested these alternative models, we concluded that the five-class model with a linear slope yielded the best fit. The subsequent analyses were based on this five-class model.

Table 2. Fit indices and class frequencies based on estimated posterior probabilities for growthmixture models of life satisfaction with different numbers of latent trajectory groups

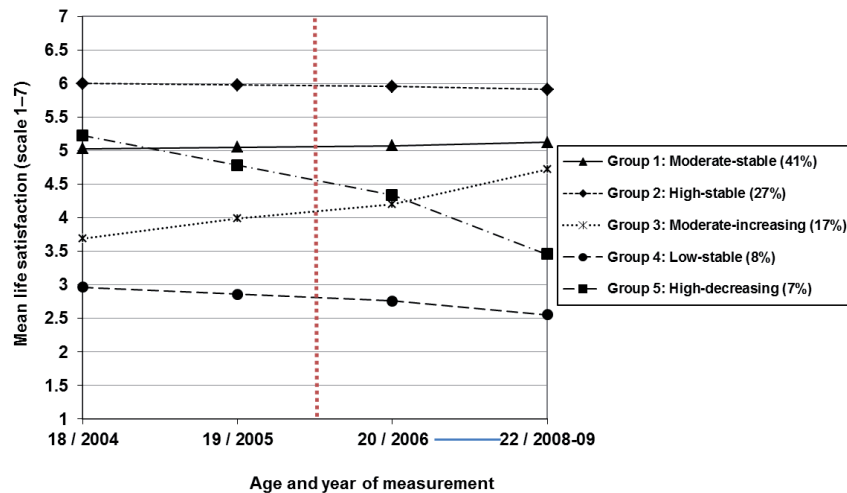
Number of groups	BIC	aBIC	AIC	Entropy	Number of estimated parameters
1	4,133.52	4,114.49	4,110.01	-	6
2 ($n_1 = 27\%$, $n_2 = 73\%$)	3,841.17	3,812.61	3,805.90	.779	9
3 ($n_1 = 47\%$, $n_2 = 44\%$, $n_3 = 9\%$)	3,743.47	3,705.40	3,696.45	.752	12
4 ($n_1 = 14\%$, $n_2 = 33\%$, $n_3 = 8\%$, $n_4 = 45\%$)	3,735.69	3,688.10	3,676.91	.697	15
5 ($n_1 = 7\%$, $n_2 = 27\%$, $n_3 = 17\%$, $n_4 = 8\%$, $n_5 = 41\%$)	3,736.84	3,679.73	3,666.30	.677	18
6 ($n_1 = 2\%$, $n_2 = 26\%$, $n_3 = 18\%$, $n_4 = 7\%$, $n_5 = 6\%$, $n_6 = 41\%$)	3,737.07	3,670.45	3,654.78	.702	21

Notes. BIC = Bayesian Information Criteria; aBIC = Adjusted Bayesian Information Criteria; AIC = Akaike Information Criteria. The chosen option is marked in bold.

Figure 1 displays the estimated growth curves for the different latent trajectories of life satisfaction across the transition to adulthood, and the results of the final Growth Mixture Model are presented in Table 3. The latent trajectories of life satisfaction were labelled *low-stable* (8%), *moderate-stable* (41%), *high-stable* (27%), *moderate-increasing* (17%), and *high-decreasing* (7%). The *low-stable* trajectory had a low initial level of life satisfaction and this condition remained stable over time. The largest trajectory, *moderate-stable*, showed a moderate level of life satisfaction that remained stable over time. The *high-stable* trajectory showed a very

high initial level of life satisfaction that remained stable over time. The *moderate-increasing* trajectory was characterised by a moderate initial level of life satisfaction that increased over time. The smallest trajectory, *high-decreasing*, was characterised by a high initial level of life satisfaction that showed a significant decrease over time. The results showed that most of the young adults —over three-quarters (76%) — followed a stable trajectory of life satisfaction, while the minority (24%) followed a trajectory characterised by change.

Figure 1. Life satisfaction trajectories



Note. The red dotted vertical line on the horizontal axis refers to the time of the transition to adulthood, i.e., to tertiary education and/or employment

Table 3. Estimation results of the final Growth Mixture Model with five latent classes (unstandardised estimates; standard errors in parentheses)

	Low-stable (N = 30; 8%)	Moderate-stable (N = 153; 41%)	High-stable (N = 100; 27%)	Moderate-increasing (N = 64; 17%)	High-decreasing (N = 25; 7%)
Mean structure					
Level	2.96 (0.19)**	5.03 (0.23)**	6.00 (0.13)**	3.69 (0.26)**	5.22 (0.30)**
Linear change	-0.10 (0.10)	0.02 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.03)	0.26 (0.08)**	-0.44 (0.13)**

Notes. Variance is kept equal across the different latent groups.

** $p < .001$

As part of the second research question, the aim was to investigate whether the life satisfaction trajectories differed according to gender and family socio-economic status as background information, and parental financial support, living situation and life situation at the age of 22 (T4). The trajectories differed slightly according to family socio-economic status (SES) [$\chi^2(16, N = 370) = 30.03, p < .05$] and life

situation [$\chi^2 = 12, N = 268 = 22.15, p < .05$]. However, post hoc tests did not identify specific statistically significant differences between the trajectories. Gender [$\chi^2(4, N = 372) = 5.30, p = .26, ns$], parental financial support [$\chi^2(104, N = 252) = 100.19, p = .59, ns$], and living situation [$\chi^2(20, N = 369) = 17.12, p = .65, ns$] did not differ significantly between trajectories.

The third research question investigated the relationship between achievement strategies and the identified life satisfaction trajectories in the transition to adulthood.

All effects and pairwise mean comparisons between the life satisfaction classes are summarised in Table 4. At age 19, the pairwise comparisons of means revealed initially rather high achievement approach strategies in two life satisfaction trajectories, namely, the *high-stable* and *high-decreasing* trajectories, and relatively high achievement avoidance strategies in the *low-stable* trajectory. Because a statistically significant result was found in both, post hoc comparisons using the Games–Howell test were computed and these indicated that the differences in achievement approach strategies, for example, between the *high-decreasing*, *moderate-increasing*, and *low-stable* trajectories, between the *high-stable* and *moderate-increasing* trajectories, and between the *low-stable* and *moderate-stable* trajectories were statistically significant ($p < .05$). Moreover, statistically significant differences in achievement avoidance strategies were found, for example, between the *high-stable*, *moderate-increasing* and *moderate-stable* trajectories.

In terms of the achievement strategies at T4, at the age of 22, pairwise comparisons of means further revealed relatively high achievement approach strategies in the *high-stable* and *moderate-stable* life satisfaction trajectories, and rather high achievement avoidance strategies again in the *low-stable* trajectory. Post hoc comparisons using the Games–Howell test indicated that the differences in achievement approach strategies between the *high-stable* and *moderate-increasing*, between the *high-stable* and *low-stable* trajectories, and between the *low-stable* and *moderate-stable* trajectories were statistically significant ($p < .05$). Moreover, a statistically

significant difference in achievement avoidance strategies was found between the *high-stable* and *low-stable* trajectories.

As shown in Table 4, the highest mean levels in achievement avoidance strategies were present in the same trajectories over time, the *low-stable* and the *moderate-increasing*. However, for achievement approach strategies, the levels at age 19 were highest in the *high-decreasing* and the *high-stable* trajectories, but at age 22, the second highest level was in the *moderate-stable* trajectory instead of the *high-decreasing*.

The role of the financial situation

The fourth aim of the study was to investigate how the subjective and objective financial situation of participants would be associated with the identified life satisfaction trajectories.

As noted above, all effects and pairwise mean comparisons between the life satisfaction classes are summarised in Table 4. The pairwise comparisons of means revealed rather high levels pertaining to individuals' subjective financial situation at the fourth measurement point in two life satisfaction trajectories, namely, the *high-stable* and *moderate-stable* trajectories. The post hoc comparison using the Games–Howell test indicated that the difference in individuals' subjective financial situation between the *high-stable* and *moderate-increasing* life satisfaction trajectories was statistically significant ($p < .05$). Moreover, the differences in objective income level at Time 4 between the *moderate-stable* and *moderate-increasing* trajectories as well as between the *moderate-stable* and *low-stable* trajectories, were statistically significant. The extension of analyses from statistically non-significant correlations shown in Table 1, to the need for complex trajectory analyses, is also supported.

Table 4. Mean differences in achievement strategies and self-reported objective and subjective financial situation between life satisfaction classes

	Moderate-stable		High-stable		Moderate-increasing		Low-stable		High-decreasing		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
<i>T2 Achievement strategies</i>													
Approach	4.90 _{ef}	.77	5.56 _{cde}	.68	4.45 _{ac}	.82	4.31 _{bdf}	.96	5.07 _{ab}	.96	$F(4, 348) = 26.74$	0.000	.24
Avoidance	3.70 _c	1.25	3.04 _{abc}	1.14	3.85 _a	1.25	4.33 _b	1.26	3.35	1.13	$F(4, 348) = 8.55$	0.000	.09
<i>T4 Achievement strategies</i>													
Approach	5.30 _c	.68	5.54 _{ab}	.89	4.99 _{ac}	.65	4.44 _{bc}	1.01	4.98	.98	$F(4, 244) = 8.60$	0.000	.12
Avoidance	3.21	1.11	2.77 _a	1.28	3.40	1.15	4.03 _a	1.32	3.07	1.41	$F(4, 244) = 4.64$	0.001	.07
<i>T4 Financial situation</i>													
Subjective	3.36	1.11	3.56 _a	1.15	2.87 _a	1.06	2.76	1.25	2.80	1.61	$F(4, 247) = 3.90$	0.004	.06
Objective	890 _{ab}	498	882	628	645 _a	318	662 _b	241	882	353	$F(4, 245) = 2.51$	0.042	.04

Note. Class means in a row sharing the same subscripts are statistically different at the $p < .05$ level according to the Games–Howell test.

Discussion

The first aim of this four-wave longitudinal study was to investigate the level and change in life satisfaction during the major transition to adulthood. The second aim was to examine whether there was evidence of differing life satisfaction trajectories during the longitudinal course of the transition to adulthood. Thirdly, we were interested in whether achievement strategies (i.e., agency) at ages 19 and 22 were associated with the identified life satisfaction trajectories. The final aim was to examine whether the financial situation of young adults was associated with these trajectories.

Based on results from similar studies, it was expected that most young adults would show high and stable life satisfaction (H1) (Salmela-Aro & Tynkkynen, 2010). Because of the significant differences among individuals, the present study called for a person-oriented approach to studying individual development (Bergman et al., 2003; Bergman & Andersson, 2010). A single growth trajectory would have oversimplified the heterogeneity of the changes in young adults' life satisfaction during the transition, as some individuals experience an increase and some a decrease in life satisfaction (H2), although most pass the stage with significant stability (Salmela-Aro & Tynkkynen, 2010). In this study, it was possible to identify meaningful latent *classes* of individuals according to the initial levels and the longitudinal changes in their life satisfaction across the four measurement points. Adopting this multiple trajectories approach resulted in a model of five developmental trajectories. In regard to the role of financial factors, in accordance with our hypothesis (H4), an association of positive life satisfaction trajectories with positive subjective and objective financial situations was identified to some degree in this transitional life course phase of young adulthood. The results also showed that the subjective perception of income is by far more important than the actual income, and this constitutes one of the key findings of our study. Evidently, the subjective perception is related to other personal and situational background factors, such as those relating to one's living situation which is a strong indicator of financial independence.

A multi-disciplinary framework fits well into the theme of young adulthood as a life course phase, with both life satisfaction and participants' financial

situation in focus. The psychological life-span approach focuses on trajectories, continuity and developmental change, and often requires longitudinal studies (Cobb, 2010; Settersten, 2003). The sociological life course approach, on the other hand, focuses on the developmental implications of historical variation which indicate that human development and individual lives are shaped by a set of principles including individual agency, timing of events, linked lives and age-graded social pathways, as well as by the embeddedness of development in socio-historically changing contexts (Elder, 1998a; Settersten, 2003). The interaction of developmental psychology and the life-span approach with life course sociology has received little attention in previous research. Nevertheless, an increasing number of researchers are starting to integrate these perspectives in their research, for example in a recent study by Vuolo et al. (2012) examining how individuals with different psychological features react to the current recession.

As is often the case in life course research, this study is also concerned with the transition from one life stage to another (e.g., Settersten, 2003). Young adulthood is viewed as a staging ground for adulthood, when decisions affecting subsequent development are made (Crockett & Crouter, 1995). In this study, the achievement strategies reflecting notions of agency were measured before the transition from upper secondary school to further education and/or employment. The strategies were closely linked to life satisfaction, both in regard to initial level and development, supporting our hypothesis (H3). Achievement approach strategies (having the belief of being able to succeed in challenging tasks), were at age 19 related to high life satisfaction trajectories (*high-decreasing* and *high-stable*). Similarly, achievement avoidance strategies were untypical for participants in the *high-stable* trajectory but related significantly to those in the *low-stable* trajectory. Interestingly, the *moderate-increasing* trajectory also showed a slightly higher level of achievement avoidance strategies. These results indicate that life satisfaction and achievement strategies go hand in hand, as individuals with a high level of achievement approach strategies tend to have a high level of life satisfaction, and on the contrary, a high level of achievement avoidance strategies was somewhat related to a low level of life satisfaction.

Interestingly, the differences between classes remained similar from ages 19 to 22, although overall, the means of achievement avoidance strategies decreased within time in all of the classes. A closer look revealed that individuals in the *moderate-increasing* life satisfaction trajectory showed an increase in the mean level of achievement approach strategies, indicating that for this class achievement approach strategies and life satisfaction increase in parallel. However, the relation between agency - conceptualised as a high level of achievement approach strategies with a low level of achievement avoidance strategies - and life satisfaction is not entirely clear. In the *moderate-stable* life satisfaction trajectory, even though achievement approach strategies increase, life satisfaction remains rather stable (although high). Furthermore, participants in the *high-decreasing* life satisfaction trajectory had a decreasing level of life satisfaction even though the level of their achievement approach strategies remained high and fairly stable. This indicates that although, in average, personal strivings and strategies have a significant effect on life satisfaction development, they cannot be entirely seen as protective factors against an evident decrease in life satisfaction.

Where these agentic attributions refer to the psychological dimension of this study, it is important to note that development does not solely occur in one particular type of context and individual developmental progress cannot be understood by merely focusing on the individual in isolation (Salmela-Aro & Schoon, 2009). Youth sociologists must develop multi-disciplinary and international collaborations, and address the new research themes from the angle of a rapidly changing society with regard to events that have far-reaching implications for young adults (Furlong, 2011). For example, the economic downturn and changes in the labour market have led researchers and policymakers to believe that the transition to employment is highly problematic, and historically this can be seen as a repetitive and global phenomenon, at least in light of studies concerning Australia in the early 1980s and 1990s (Marks, 2005) and the United States in the late 2000s (Vuolo, Staff, & Mortimer, 2012).

In this study, the link between participants' financial situation and life satisfaction is viewed within the framework of the important transitions that take place during the phase of young

adulthood, when financial issues arise as a new concern in everyday life during the shift to independent living and working life. Research concerning young adults' overall financial well-being can be seen as a topic of much current societal debate pertaining to directing the critical eye of research at fundamental questions about students financing their studies, the role of parents in their children's financial situation, and youth in working life, to name but a few. Such research of socio-political significance, concerning both the economic and social structures of the society in addition to individual factors, is important.

Since the research data of our study was collected during times of economic difficulties in Finnish society in the late 2000s, this study also provides some insight into youth development and young adults' financial situations during such a time. Most individuals in different life course phases and transitions absorb greater economic tensions without long-term damage, but they survive societal and individual crises in different ways (Roberts, 2001). According to Finnish statistics (Wilska, 1999; Ylitalo, 2009), young adults' income and consumption levels decreased dramatically during the national recession of the early 1990s. At the same time, the status of young adults as consumers had not met the standards of other types of households: young adults under 30 years of age dropped their consumption levels by a fifth, while the decrease in other households was about 13%.

Accordingly, our study aimed to provide useful information in face of the present, most recent economical downturn. The data sets' fourth measurement point was gathered during the peak of the present economic recession in 2008, which gives additional significance to the factor of participants' financial situation being featured in this particular data set. The present study links human development not only to the individual's life course, but also to the historical time and place, thus having a wider socio-historical context (Elder, 1998b; Settersten, 2003). In general, more life course studies that consider the social context of human development are needed, and large data sets allow developmental trajectory analyses within such a context (Settersten, 2003). The life course theory demonstrates that social contexts are more than behavioural settings — the social forces of

time and place do shape individual pathways (Settersten, 2003).

The present study has the following main limitations that should be considered. First, one should be careful when generalising the findings to young adults of other countries. The study has been conducted in Finland, where young adults are able to profit from extensive financial support given by the state. It is also vital to bear in mind that even though our study includes data collected during an important educational transition, the data covered a short time period only. The validity of the overall link between financial situation and life satisfaction is therefore limited, even though this link has also been identified in numerous other studies. A further limitation of this issue is that in the self-reported scales of the questionnaire, the same reporter provided information on the different topics — life satisfaction, financial situation, and agency — and this may have influenced the observations of the associations between these factors. Additionally, only participants living in one city were given the chance to participate in this study and the retention rate could have been higher. Concerning the issue of attrition, we cannot be sure whether those who dropped out of the longitudinal research setting differed in their life satisfaction trajectories or their financial situation from those who participated until the end, although attrition was examined. Participants about whom information was missing for at least one of the measurement points were most likely to be male, which is also a clear limitation of our study. Additionally, the young adults being studied all had an upper secondary high school background which might explain the homogeneity of the life

satisfaction trajectories across genders. Further studies are needed to examine the life satisfaction trajectories of young adults from other educational backgrounds and in other educational transitions.

Despite these limitations, the present study contributes to the understanding of human development by having longitudinally analysed the role of young adults' financial situation in relation to their life satisfaction. Methodologically and with respect to the data set used, our study's major advantage is its focus on developmental and life satisfaction trajectories pertaining to normative youth samples. The data of the study has been gathered both before and after the educational transition from upper secondary high school to further education and/or employment and is therefore of special interest as this transition often also encompasses other distinct changes in the transition to adulthood. Furthermore, using a multiple trajectories approach, this study has added value to existing research by providing a new multidisciplinary perspective on the topic of young adults' financial situation and changes in life satisfaction. The complexity of addressing participants' financial situation has been acknowledged in this study by examining it as a multi-dimensional construct, including both objective and subjective factors. What is *objective*, i.e., real and concrete, is the monetary income received monthly from various resources, but how each individual reflects upon it and estimates whether it is sufficient to support their personal consumer habits, is highly *subjective*. Additionally, because of greatly varying consumption habits, what one person considers to be a low income may be considered a fortune by someone else.

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III

CAREER AND ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP GOALS AND CONCERNS DURING EMERGING ADULTHOOD

by

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Career and Romantic Relationship Goals and Concerns During Emerging Adulthood

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Abstract

This study examined emerging adults' personal goals and concerns in the domains of career (including education, work, and financial issues) and romantic relationship. A particular focus was on goal and concern hierarchies, that is, individuals' profiles of goals and concerns. A total of 1,052 Finnish emerging adults (63% female) were followed at ages 20 and 23. Latent Class Analyses yielded goal and concern profiles that were primarily related to career, whereas romantic relationships were less central in individuals' goal and concern hierarchies. Career and romantic relationship goals and concerns were associated with life status in these domains. Especially prioritizing career goals and concerns predicted being in education and/or employment. Our findings suggest that given the diversity of goals and concerns in emerging adulthood, it is crucial to take a holistic approach and investigate the interdependences and prioritizations among different career and romantic relationship goals and concerns.

Keywords: personal goals, concerns, career, romantic relationship, finances

Career and Romantic Relationship Goals and Concerns During Emerging Adulthood

During emerging adulthood, changes in various life domains occur simultaneously and young people need to make decisions concerning income, social relationships, and career plans (Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 1997; Zarrett & Eccles, 2006), which, in turn, may challenge their developmental resources. According to developmental regulation theories (Heckhausen, Wrosch, & Schulz, 2010; Salmela-Aro, 2009), emerging adults' goals direct their life paths by guiding and regulating behavior. Prior studies on the role of goals in emerging adults' development have typically concentrated on one life domain at a time, such as their career (e.g., Dietrich, Jokisaari, & Nurmi, 2012; Haase, Heckhausen, & Köller, 2008) or romantic relationships (e.g., Dhariwal, Connolly, Paciello, & Caprara, 2009; Roberts, Osadchaya, Dsuzev, Gorodyanenko, & Tholen, 2003). However, given the diversity of emerging adults' life paths, it is crucial to take a holistic approach and to investigate the interdependence of education, work, finances, and relationships simultaneously (Schulenberg & Schoon, 2012). This study focused on emerging adults' personal goals, meaning the future-oriented states, outcomes, or representations of what they strive to achieve (Austin & Vancouver, 1996) and on their personal concerns, meaning the states they are concerned about or fear might come true (Nurmi, Poole, & Seginer, 1995). We examined how prominent career (including education, work, and finances) and romantic relationship goals and concerns were among Finnish emerging adults aged 20 and 23 years. Furthermore, we examined whether individual profiles of goals and concerns could be identified that reflect different goal and concern hierarchies. Finally, we examined the association of emerging adults' goals, concerns and respective profiles with their life situation in the career and romantic relationship life domains.

Two interrelated processes are central to the period of emerging adulthood: First, the demographic passage from education to employment, and second, the changes in relationships when progressing from the parental to the personal or cohabited household and into a romantic relationship (Arnett, 2000; Billari, 2001; Zarrett & Eccles, 2006). Many of the developmental transitions taking place in emerging adulthood emphasize individualism and taking personal responsibility as adulthood criteria (Nelson & Barry, 2005) and are therefore closely related to the transition to financial independence and life management (Arnett, 2000; Lee & Mortimer, 2009).

For example, graduation and the beginning of employment foster financial independence, which may affect other markers of adulthood and life course events relating to education, employment, moving out of the childhood home, and establishing a family (Billari, 2001). Consequently, in our study on personal goals and concerns, we focused on the domains of education, work, finances, and romantic relationships.

Personal goals both direct people's life paths and are influenced by their life situation. It has been argued that the demands, challenges, and opportunities people experience at a particular time channel the construction of personal goals and concerns (Little, Salmela-Aro, & Phillips, 2007). According to developmental regulation theories, individuals typically select and adjust their personal goals according to current developmental tasks and transitions (e.g., Heckhausen, Wrosch, & Schulz, 2010; Salmela-Aro, 2009), which suggests that during emerging adulthood individuals emphasize career and romantic relationship goals (see, e.g., Dietrich, Shulman, & Nurmi, 2013; Marttinen & Salmela-Aro, 2012). Moreover, individuals are assumed to set goals in response to their life situation. For example, finding employment after graduation predicted a decrease in educational goals, whereas for emerging adults without a permanent work contract the goal ambitions related to education and self-fulfillment increased (Nurmi, Salmela-Aro, & Koivisto, 2002). It has further been argued that having and pursuing goals in a certain domain predicts young peoples' life situations (e.g., Heckhausen et al., 2010; Salmela-Aro, 2009). Research has shown that the more goals related to family formation emerging adults had, the more likely they were to be dating or to get married and have children later on (Salmela-Aro, Aunola, & Nurmi, 2007). Similarly, career-related goals in the transition to higher education and employment predicted the attainment of a desired career goal (Haase et al., 2008), positive well-being, and less everyday stress (Dietrich et al., 2012; Haase et al., 2008).

While a number of studies have been conducted in the career and romantic relationship domains, research on financial goals and concerns is scarce. Given that financial independence is closely related to other transition markers of adulthood, a focus on goals in this domain seems warranted. It could be assumed that high educational attainment could foster economic independence and financial goals by increasing the likelihood of employment and stability of income in early adulthood. On the other hand, among emerging adults with higher levels

of economic efficacy, emphasizing educational achievement could lead to a delay in marriage and parenthood along with prolonged educational attendance and higher levels of educational and income attainment.

Taking into consideration the numerous developmental life tasks emerging adults must simultaneously resolve, it is crucial to examine how individuals actually coordinate relationship- and career-related goals (Shulman & Connolly, 2013). Moreover, while some studies (e.g., Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 1997; Salmela-Aro et al., 2007) have examined cross-domain links between goals in one domain and people's life status in another domain, we argue that a person-oriented approach is a more straight-forward way of addressing multiple goals and concerns and related individual goal hierarchies. It can be assumed that while some individuals have a profile defined by a focus on a single life domain—such as on either work, education, finances, or a romantic relationship—others divide their attention across multiple domains (Heckhausen et al., 2010).

Emerging Adulthood in Finland in Times of Economic Uncertainty

Before we go over the research questions of our study, we provide a brief overview of Finnish emerging adults' life situation concerning education, work, finances, and romantic relationships. In Finland, education, at all levels, is state-provided and tuition is free of charge. Upper secondary education has two tracks, that is, academic and vocational schools in which young people are educated for 3 or 4 years. The present study focuses on emerging adults in the academic track, who upon graduating from upper secondary school typically face a progression to university or another type of tertiary-level education. A specific feature of the Finnish educational system is the interrupted educational pathway after upper secondary school, before continuing to higher education. Partly because of the tough entrance examinations of universities and polytechnics, up to two out of three Finnish students experience at least one gap year before or during their post-secondary studies (Orr, Gwosc, & Netz, 2011).

As in most European Union countries, employment is the main source of students' income, along with financial support from the state (Orr et al., 2011). According to recent Statistics Finland data (Official Statistics of Finland, 2013), more than half of all students were employed

during their studies. Women and older students are more likely in employment alongside their education than men and younger students. Following the trend occurring in other European countries, the education-to-work transition in emerging adulthood has become increasingly difficult in recent years (Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011).

Regarding the transition to forming a lasting romantic relationship and on to independent living, young adults move out of their childhood homes relatively early in Finland compared to their peers in other European Union member states (Choroszewicz & Wolff, 2010). 68% of females and 41% of males have moved away from home by age 20 (Statistics Finland, 2011). There has been a clear postponement of marriage in recent years, as in other Western countries: in Finland, the mean age for women's first marriage is 33 and for men it is 30 (Statistics Finland, 2012).

The Present Study

This longitudinal study examined emerging adults' personal goals and concerns in the domains of career—comprising education, work, and financial issues—and romantic relationships. At the time of the data collection, Finland was faced with societal economic upheavals with relatively high overall unemployment and financial uncertainty (Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011). The data used pertains to two young adult cohorts, born in 1986 and in 1988, who had graduated from upper secondary school in the academic track. Data collections were carried out when participants were 20 and 23 years old.

Our first research question was: What kinds of personal goals and concerns are most prominent during emerging adulthood, and how do these change from age 20 to 23? First, we hypothesized that the majority of goals and concerns would be related to establishing both a career and romantic relationship (Dietrich et al., 2013; Marttinen & Salmela-Aro, 2012; Salmela-Aro, 2001). Second, no drastic changes in the prevalence of career goals and concerns were expected to occur between the ages of 20 and 23. Emerging adults with an upper secondary education typically remain in education until the completion of a university or other tertiary degree. The focus of goals and concerns, however, may switch from education to work. Third, since emerging adults seem to postpone transitions in the romantic relationship domain (Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 1997), we hypothesized that romantic relationship goals and concerns would remain relatively stable. Fourth,

we specifically expected that financial concerns would be highly prominent at the age of 20, due to the transition to independent living that many young people face at that age, especially women.

Financial concerns were further expected to remain at a constantly high level due to the economic insecurities in society during the years of the data collection.

Our second research question was: To what extent are goals and concerns related to emerging adults' life situation, i.e., being in education vs. employment, being in a relationship? In accordance with developmental task theory (Havighurst, 1948), we expected that having goals and concerns in a specific domain would be associated with emerging adults' respective life situation, both cross-sectionally and longitudinally.

The study's third research question was: What are typical profiles of emerging adults' goals and concerns? We expected to find distinct goal and concern profiles reflecting different hierarchies of individuals' goals and concerns. Individuals can have a profile defined by a single focus on one life domain (work, education, finances, or romantic relationship) or multiple domains simultaneously. Given the relatively long time span between the two measurement points, these profiles can be assumed to differ somewhat at ages 20 and 23.

Finally, our fourth research question was: To what extent are goal and concern profiles related to emerging adults' life situation? Going beyond simple bivariate analyses of participants' goal and concern contents and life situation, a person-oriented profile approach acknowledges the interdependences and prioritizations in emerging adults' goals and concerns. Similar to the second research question, we expected that the profiles of emerging adults' goals and concerns reflect and predict their life situation.

Method

Participants and Design

This study is part of the Finnish Educational Transitions (FinEdu) Studies¹. The participants were 1,052 (63% female) emerging adults from a medium-sized Finnish city with a population of

¹ More information on the study and related research materials can be obtained from the first author.

circa 97,000 inhabitants. The participants were graduates from upper secondary school (senior high school) who had made a transition to either tertiary education and/or employment. They were assessed twice, at age 20 and at age 23. The data of two cohorts were combined in the present analysis: A cohort born in 1986 ($n = 499$) and a cohort born in 1988 ($n = 553$). For the 1986 cohort, the assessments were carried out in 2006 and 2008/2009, and for the 1988 cohort, the assessments were carried out in 2008/2009 and 2011.

Women were overrepresented in the study, which reflects the overall distribution of academic upper secondary students (senior high school level) in Finland, consisting of 57% women in 2009 (Statistics Finland, 2010). According to the Statistics Finland (1989) classification system, the family socioeconomic status of the two cohorts, born in 1986/1988, was respectively: 1%/2% not in employment, 2%/4% self-employed, 10%/11% blue-collar, 42%/35% lower white-collar, and 45%/48% higher white-collar.

Measures

Personal goals and concerns. Participants were asked to write down up to four current *personal goals* in response to the following instruction based on a revised version of Little's idiographic Personal Project Analysis Inventory (Little et al., 2007; Salmela-Aro, 2001): "People have many kinds of issues and goals they think about, hope for, and try to accomplish. Consider the personal projects you have in your life at the moment. These projects may be related to any life domain, such as education, work, family or self-related issues." They were given four numbered lines on which to write their responses.

Participants were also asked to describe two of their current *personal concerns* in response to the following instruction: "People have many kinds of concerns and worries that they think about. Consider the personal concerns you have in your life at the moment. These may be related to any life domain, such as education, work, family or self-related issues." They were given two numbered lines on which to write their responses.

Each goal and concern mentioned by the participant was classified into one of 30 categories by two evaluators working independently. The categories were similar to those used in earlier studies (Little et al., 2007). The analyses for this study focused on the following four categories: *education* (specific degrees, application procedures, etc.; e.g., "to finish my Master's

degree” (goal); “graduating in time” (concern)), *work* (occupation, career, getting a job, etc.; e.g., “to find a good job” (goal); “getting a summer job” (concern)), *money and financial issues* (wealth, investments, etc.; e.g., “to buy an apartment” (goal); “my personal money issues” (concern)), and *romantic relationship* (dating, relationship, marriage, having children, etc.; e.g., “to find a partner and have children” (goal); “finding a partner” (concern)). Other goals and concerns were related to: *self* (independence, loneliness, etc.; e.g., “to grow as a person” (goal); “lack of energy to accomplish things” (concern)), *other relationships* (own parents, paternal family, friends, etc.; e.g., “to make new friends” (goal); “my mother’s health” (concern)), and *other* (hobbies, appearance, societal issues, etc.; e.g., “to learn to play an instrument” (goal); global warming” (concern)). The content of each goal category was coded for further analyses, based on a dichotomous scale: 0 = *no goals mentioned in this category*, and 1 = *at least one goal mentioned in this category*.

Career status. Current *education* was assessed with the following three questions: “*What do you currently do?*”, with answer options including, for example, “*I study at the upper secondary level (senior high school)*” / “*I study at university*” / “*I study at a polytechnic institute*”; “*Where are you studying?*”; and “*Next, we ask you to write down all studies you have started after upper secondary school (senior high school): university, polytechnic studies etc.)*”. Participants’ current *employment* was assessed with the following two questions: “*What do you currently do?*”, with answer options “*I’m working*” / “*I’m unemployed*” / “*I’m temporarily dismissed*”; and, “*Does your work correspond to your education?*”, with answer options “*No*” / “*Yes*” / “*To some extent*”.

Based on this career status information, six categories were formed: (1) *working in a position relevant to one’s education*; (2) *working in a position not relevant to one’s education*; (3) *combining studying and working in a position relevant to one’s education*; (4) *combining studying and working in a position not relevant to one’s education*; (5) *studying only*; and (6) *not in education or work (NEET)*. Our perspective on the NEET group differs from the official definition as we judge individuals according to their subjective view of not being in education or employment, as opposed to official registry data. Current employment information regarding the 1986 cohort was not collected in 2006, therefore analyses involving career status at age 20 are based on the 1988 cohort only. Table 1 shows the distribution of participants’ career status. The mean length of work contracts at age 20 was 1 year, and for age 23 it was 1 year and 3 months.

Romantic relationship status was assessed with the question, “*What is your civil status?*”; and the response options were: 1 (*not in a relationship*), 2 (*seeing someone*), 3 (*dating*), 4 (*common-law marriage, i.e., cohabiting*), 5 (*married*), 6 (*legally registered relationship*), and 7 (*divorced*). The answer options were recoded as: 1 (*single*), 2 (*seeing someone or dating*), 3 (*cohabiting*), 4 (*married or in a legally registered relationship*), and 5 (*divorced*). See Table 1 for the distribution of participants’ romantic relationship status. The mean duration an individual had been in his or her current romantic relationship (dating, cohabiting, or married) was 2 years at the age of 20, and 3 years at the age of 23.

Analysis strategy

Latent Class Analysis (LCA) was used to identify personal goal and concern profiles. LCA is a model-based clustering procedure based on a latent variable framework (Vermunt & Magidson, 2002). Using binary indicators as inputs, categorical latent variables are constructed that represent unobserved subgroups (latent classes) characterized by different configurations of goals and concerns. Classes are added stepwise until a model is identified which best fits the data. The comparative model fit and the number of classes in the final model were assessed using the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC), the Bootstrap Likelihood Ratio Test (BLRT), and the entropy index. A decrease in BIC when an additional class is added indicates an improvement in model fit. However, recent simulations suggest that the BLRT is a more reliable indicator of the number of classes (Nylund, Asparouhov, & Muthén, 2007). Moreover, the classification quality (indicated by a high entropy value and high average latent class probabilities) and usefulness of the solution, determined by the interpretability of the classes, were considered to be important criteria because the aforementioned statistical criteria may not always offer a straightforward solution (Nylund et al., 2007; Schulenberg & Schoon, 2012). The assigned latent class membership of each person was saved and used in further analyses.

Configural Frequency Analysis (CFA; Bergman, Magnusson, & El-Khoury, 2002; von Eye, Mair, & Mun, 2010) was used to examine associations of goals and concerns with particular life situations. CFA is a χ^2 -based procedure used with categorical data that compares the observed to the expected frequencies for each cell of a cross-tabulation. It tests whether individual cell

frequencies are higher or lower than expected by chance. ‘Types’ (T) are (typical) patterns that are observed *more* frequently than expected by chance, while ‘antitypes’ (A) are the (untypical) patterns observed *less* frequently. In contingency tables larger than 2 x 2 cells, CFA thus allows more complex and detailed interpretations than the standard χ^2 -test. With CFA, it is possible to know exactly where (i.e., in which cell) a deviation from chance has occurred. Moreover, the overall χ^2 -test might report the sum of weak effects as being statistically significant, while the *p*-values for individual cells are corrected for the number of cells examined. In our results section, we will report only those effects where in addition to the overall χ^2 -test, the adjusted *p*-values for individual cells reached statistical significance.

The analyses were conducted using the Mplus statistical software program (Version 6.1, Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2010) for LCA, and with RopStat (Vargha, 2007) for the CFA. The parameters of the LCA models were estimated using full-information maximum likelihood estimation (Little’s MCAR test: $\chi^2 = 104,222$, $df = 84$, $p = .067$), which enabled all observations in the data set to be used.

Results

What Kinds of Personal Goals and Concerns Do Emerging Adults Have?

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of the goal and concern categories. The two highest frequency categories of personal goals were education and work goals, at both ages, with education being the prioritized goal at age 20 and work at age 23. Personal goals related to romantic relationships were third-most prominent. Personal concerns were mostly related to financial issues, education, and work. Among the concerns that are not in the focus of this article, self-related concerns were also mentioned frequently.

Are Goals and Concerns Related to Emerging Adults’ Life Situation?

The results of the CFA revealed associations of career (education, work, and finances) and romantic relationship goals and concerns with life status in these domains, both cross-sectionally and longitudinally. Career status and financial goals at age 20 were related, suggesting that it was typical to work in a position not related to one’s education when having financial goals (observed *n*

= 34, expected $n = 19.5$. Overall $\chi^2 = 22.987$, $df = 5$, $p < .001$. Cell $z = 3.388$, *adj. p* < .05).

Moreover, it was untypical to have no work goal at age 20, but at age 23 to be working in a position related to one's education (observed $n = 14$, expected $n = 26.5$. Overall: $\chi^2 = 14.882$, $df = 5$, $p < .05$. Cell: $z = -2.310$, *adj. p* < .10). Education goals showed a similar result. It was untypical to have no education goal at age 20, but at age 23 to be studying (observed $n = 54$, expected $n = 80.2$. Overall: $\chi^2 = 32.418$, $df = 5$, $p < .001$. Cell: $z = -3.070$, *adj. p* < .05). As regards concerns, it was untypical to have education concerns at age 20, and at age 23 to be working in a position related to one's education (observed $n = 8$, expected $n = 19.6$. Overall: $\chi^2 = 16.785$, $df = 5$, $p < .01$. Cell: $z = -2.457$, *adj. p* < .05).

The results further showed that financial goals and concerns were associated with relationship status. At age 20, it was typical to have financial concerns and to be cohabiting (observed $n = 62$, expected $n = 44.71$. Overall: $\chi^2 = 16.414$, $df = 4$, $p < .01$. Cell: $z = 2.589$, *adj. p* < .05). Moreover, at age 23, it was untypical to have financial goals and to be either seeing or dating someone (observed $n = 40$, expected $n = 59.6$. Overall: $\chi^2 = 13.666$, $df = 4$, $p < .01$. Cell: $z = -2.576$, *adj. p* < .01).

What Are Typical Profiles of Emerging Adults' Goals and Concerns?

Table 3 summarizes model fit information of models with different numbers of latent classes. The results showed that the three-class solution for both goal and concern profiles at age 20 fit the data best. The results regarding personal goals revealed three *goal profiles*, sorted by areas of interest: (1) *education* ($n = 487$, 60.6%); (2) *work* ($n = 196$, 24.4%); and (3) *education and finances* ($n = 121$, 15.0%); see Figure 1, Panel A. In relation to this, three types of *concern profiles* were recognized and sorted according to the areas of interest they represented: (1) *no concerns (unlikely to mention any concerns)* ($n = 537$, 70.2%); (2) *finances* ($n = 177$, 23.1%); and (3) *education and finances* ($n = 51$, 6.7%); see Panel C. The average latent class probabilities for being assigned to a specific *goal profile* were .79, .99 and .99, respectively; and for being assigned to a specific *concern profile*, they were .97, 1.00 and 1.00, respectively.

At age 23, the three-class solutions for goals and concerns were also chosen as the final model.² The *goal profiles* were: (1) *education* ($n = 304, 37.5\%$); (2) *work* ($n = 339, 41.8\%$); and (3) *multiple (work, education, and romantic relationship)* ($n = 168, 20.7\%$); see Figure 1, Panel B. The average latent class probabilities for being assigned to a specific goal profile were .87, .97 and .66, respectively. The three *concern profiles* were: (1) *no concerns (unlikely to mention any concerns)* ($n = 400, 51.2\%$); (2) *finances* ($n = 231, 29.5\%$); and (3) *work* ($n = 151, 19.3\%$); see Panel D. The average latent class probabilities were 1.00, 1.00 and .64, respectively.

Table 4 shows the probabilities for moving from a certain profile at age 20 to a different profile at age 23. Stability in a person's profile was common for the no concerns and the finances concern profiles, with around 50% of individuals keeping these profiles over time. Keeping a work goal profile was also common. For the other profiles, changing to another profile was about as likely as keeping a similar profile over time.

We also tested whether or not profiles were related to gender or socioeconomic status (SES). Gender and SES did not affect the profiles, with the exception of participants' SES and concern profile membership at age 20 (Overall: $\chi^2 = 26.229, df = 12, p < .01$). It was untypical for participants with a blue-collar family background to have a finance-focused concern profile (observed $n = 55$, expected $n = 79.07$. Cell: $z = -2.801, adj. p < .05$).

Are Goal and Concern Profiles Related to Emerging Adults' Life Situation?

Our final research question was to examine associations between *goal and concern profiles* and *romantic relationship and career status*. Concerning *romantic relationship status*, we found that at age 20 it was typical to have an *education and finances* concern profile if cohabiting (observed $n = 19$, expected $n = 10.00$. Overall: $\chi^2 = 22.336, df = 8, p < .01$. Cell: $z = 2.706, adj. p < .01$). Furthermore, concerning *career status*, we found that at age 20 it was also typical to have an

However, for both models at age 23 there was some uncertainty as to which solution to choose. For goals, fit indices favoured a two-class solution, for concerns, fit indices favoured a three-class solution. The two-class solution for goals yielded an *education goal profile* ($n = 472$) and a *work goal profile* ($n = 339$) but did not include the *multiple goal profile*. Average latent class probabilities for this model were both 1.00. The two-class solution for concerns yielded a *no concerns profile* ($n = 512$) and a *finances concern profile* ($n = 270$). Average latent class probabilities for this model were 1.00. In both cases, the three-class solutions were in line with theoretical considerations. Moreover, a three-class solution potentially yielded more differentiated information. Thus the results with three classes are reported. We also examined the associations between goal and concern profiles based on two latent classes and life situation, gender, and SES. The results were the same as for profiles based on three latent classes.

education and finances goal profile if working in a position not relevant to one's education (observed $n = 23$, expected $n = 10.74$. Overall: $\chi^2 = 34.659$, $df = 10$, $p < .001$. Cell: $z = 3.632$, $adj. p < .05$). Moreover, it was untypical to have a work-focused goal profile at age 20 and to be in education at age 23 (observed $n = 45$, expected $n = 65.89$. Overall: $\chi^2 = 33.519$, $df = 10$, $p < .001$. Cell: $z = -2.651$, $adj. p < .01$).

Discussion

Our results showed that *education* and *work* goals were the most prominent goals emerging adults had. Personal goals related to *romantic relationship* were third-most prominent. These findings are in line with previous research and corroborated our hypothesis stating that the majority of emerging adults' personal goals would be related to career and romantic relationships (Dietrich et al., 2013; Marttinen & Salmela-Aro, 2012; Salmela-Aro, 2001). However, the frequency of romantic relationship goals and concerns (10-15%) was relatively low compared to the findings of other studies (e.g., Dietrich et al., 2013). Moreover, as hypothesized, education was the prioritized goal at age 20, and work at age 23. Our findings extend the literature on emerging adults' goals by showing that many young people also have *concerns* regarding their education, especially at age 20 (see also Nurmi et al., 1995). Similarly to goals, education-related concerns decreased across time, while work-related concerns increased. By contrast, and in line with our hypothesis, the prevalence of goals and concerns in the romantic relationship domain remained quite stable (Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 1997). As expected, concerns about financial resources were highly prominent. This could be related to the transition to independent living, which, for the first time in their life, challenges young people's financial resources significantly. It also provides some insight into emerging adults' views on their personal financial situation in light of the economic downturn in Finland that took place in 2008 and 2011, during which time the data were collected.

Our results further showed that emerging adults differed with respect to their goal hierarchies. We found goal and concern profiles that were defined according to the emphasis emerging adults placed on different life goals and concerns. At age 20, around two-thirds of emerging adults had a strong focus on educational goals, while by age 23 the most common profile was characterized by work goals. The strong presence of career-related goals in the goal hierarchies

of emerging adults reflects the importance of this life domain during the early 20s. Regarding concerns, the majority of emerging adults at both ages, 20 and 23, fit the profile of no concerns. However, 25–30% of emerging adults had a profile marked by financial concerns (also combined with educational concerns at age 20). Our additional analysis further showed that having a financial concern profile was associated with having educational and work goals. This could reflect individuals' agency, such that in order to approach or solve a certain concern they set certain goals to improve their personal situation. A financial concern may thus provoke striving for career-related goals, which, in turn, is likely to lead to a satisfying financial situation (see also Ranta, Punamäki, Tolvanen, & Salmela-Aro, 2012). Generally, financial goals and concerns could also be a motor for development in the career and romantic relationship life domains. For example, sociological research indicates associations between a secure financial situation and family formation (Oinonen, 2004).

A surprising result was that there was no profile that focused solely on the establishment of a romantic relationship. The romantic relationship goal was mentioned as a secondary goal in some profiles, particularly in the work-focused profile, and, at age 23, in the multiple goal profile where individuals expressed having simultaneous education, work, and romantic relationship goals. This finding surprises, as the majority of emerging adults in our sample were actually in a relationship, and developmental regulation theories predict that people capitalize on such attainment and continue to set goals in the romantic relationship domain (e.g., Heckhausen et al., 2010). However, our results accord, for example, with a cross-cultural comparison by Seiffge-Krenke et al. (2010), in which future-related career stressors were seen as more stressful than romantic stressors. At least two explanations are possible for our finding. First, we sampled only emerging adults on the academic educational track. It might be that career goals are the norm for these education-oriented emerging adults while romantic relationship goals and concerns are downplayed and the romantic relationship transition is therefore postponed (Oinonen, 2003). In turn, participants with a vocational background have been shown to be keener on family formation at an earlier stage (Salmela-Aro et al., 2007). Second, our data was collected during times of economic difficulties in Finnish society in the late 2000s. In the same manner as this might have contributed to an emphasis on financial goals and concerns, the economic downturn might have

decreased the importance of relationship-related goals and concerns. As attainment of financial independence becomes increasingly difficult due to unstable labor markets and low and unsteady income, young adults tend to postpone family formation, especially marriage and parenthood (Oinonen, 2004).

Our final aim was to examine the relations between the goals and concerns emerging adults had in light of the life situation they were in. We hypothesized that we would find cross-sectional and longitudinal effects both from goals to life situation and from life situation to goals. In accordance with developmental task (Havighurst, 1948) and developmental regulation (Heckhausen et al., 2010; Salmela-Aro, 2009) theories in the field of psychology, we found that having certain goals and concerns predicted emerging adults' respective life situation. Especially having career goals and concerns predicted being in education and/or employment. The results concerning goal and concern profiles lend further support to this conclusion and provide more detailed information on how a person's goal hierarchy relates to their life situation. For example, those who had a job unrelated to their education at age 20 simultaneously prioritized education and financial goals. This could reflect emerging adults in a gap year who do not necessarily pursue intrinsic work goals in their job but rather work to earn money until they get to university (Heath, 2007). Future research could pursue the relations between life situation and goal/concern profiles in even greater depth. For example, a person's life situation can also be seen as a pattern of situations in multiple life domains, and could be studied as such. Moreover, future studies could include a measure of individuals' financial life situation in order to test whether financial difficulties or financial stress relate to finance- or work-focused goal and concern profiles (cf. Dietrich et al., 2012; Ranta et al., 2012).

Limitations of our study were as follows. First, our study was conducted in Finland, where young adults are able to profit from extensive financial support provided by the state. Participants had an upper secondary school background, which is also largely the reason for the overrepresentation of women in our sample. Further studies are needed to examine young adults from other educational backgrounds, such as vocational school. Second, goals and concerns were measured with open-ended questions, meaning that the first goal/concern mentioned primes further answers. Moreover, answers were vastly heterogeneous and categorizing the goals leaves out important, detailed information on this qualitative type of data. Third, a limitation concerning the

LCA methodology lies in the temptation to attach too much meaning to a latent class or its label. Not all individuals in a latent class show the exact goal and concern profile as suggested by the latent class label (see Johnson, Hicks, McGue, & Ianoco, 2007). Moreover, grouping individuals to clusters is associated with uncertainty. For example in the LCA concerning goals at age 23 the statistical criteria pointed towards the two-class solution more than towards the three-class solution. This was also reflected in lower certainty when classifying individuals to either the education goal profile or the multiple goal profile and indicates some uncertainty concerning the true existence of the multiple goal profile. However, our additional analyses showed that the multiple goal profile and the education goal profile had unique associations with other variables (i.e., mentioning certain concerns), which does support the multiple goal profile as being distinct. Also such a profile is in line with developmental task theory (Havighurst, 1948), according to which relationship goals should increase in importance across emerging and young adulthood.

In conclusion, through taking a person-oriented perspective on career and romantic relationship goals, we found that emerging adults have various ways of coordinating goals pertaining to different life domains, and they have different ways of emphasizing personal concerns. The interdependencies of goals and concerns across life domains and their relation to individuals' life paths are thus an important area for future research, as they increase our understanding of how young people tackle the developmental tasks of emerging adulthood.

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CAREER AND ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP

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Table 1

Distribution (%) of Career Status and Romantic Relationship Variables at Ages 20 and 23

	Age 20		Age 23	
	%	N	%	N
<i>Education</i>				
Not in education or in other type of education (free university, courses)	31.9	139	19.8	167
Upper secondary level education (academic high school / vocational)	14.9	65	7.1	60
Polytechnic	23.6	103	32.7	275
University	29.6	129	40.4	340
<i>Employment</i>				
Not in employment, officially unemployed, or temporarily dismissed	56.7	244	43.6	363
In employment not relevant to one's education	34.9	150	29.5	246
In employment relevant to one's education	8.4	36	26.9	224
<i>Education and work status</i>				
Working in a position relevant to one's education	4.4	19	8.2	70
Working in a position not relevant to one's education	16.1	70	7.4	63
Studying and working in a position relevant to one's education	3.9	17	18.1	154
Studying and working in a position not relevant to one's education	18.4	80	21.5	183
Studying only	46.0	200	39.7	338
Not in education or employment (NEET)	11.3	49	5.1	43

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Romantic relationship status

Single	41.3	368	33.8	290
Seeing someone or dating	37.5	334	26.8	230
Cohabiting	20.0	178	34.4	295
Married or in a legally registered relationship	1.0	9	4.6	39
Divorced	0.1	1	0.4	3

Table 2
Total Distribution in Goal and Concern Categories of Ages 20 and 23

	Goals				Concerns			
	Age 20		Age 23		Age 20		Age 23	
	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>
<i>Focus categories</i>								
Education	20.8	648	16.9	531	19.0	272	12.2	179
Work	18.7	582	24.0	755	9.8	141	14.0	206
Money and financial issues	6.5	202	7.8	246	16.1	231	18.7	275
Romantic relationship	12.8	400	14.2	447	9.1	131	10.3	151
<i>Other categories</i>								
Self	7.5	233	9.1	287	17.5	251	18.9	277
Other relationships	6.9	215	4.7	146	11.9	171	9.7	142
Other	26.8	837	23.3	731	16.6	237	16.2	238
Total	100	3117	100	3143	100	1434	100	1468

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Table 3

Model Fit Indices and Entropy by Number of Classes from Exploratory Latent Class Analysis (LCA) of Personal Goals (Age 20, N = 804; Age 23, N = 811) and Concerns (Age 20, N = 765; Age 23, N = 782)

	Classes	BIC	BLRT	Entropy
<i>Goals</i>				
Age 20	1	4079.358	-	-
	2	4014.756	.00	.81
	3	4023.801	.00	.87
Age 23	1	4151.774	-	-
	2	4113.711	.00	1.00
	3	4132.117	.07	.72
<i>Concerns</i>				
Age 20	1	3352.126	-	-
	2	3350.454	.00	1.00
	3	3353.038	.00	.93
Age 23	1	3504.052	-	-
	2	3483.711	.00	1.00
	3	3478.039	.00	.91

Note. BIC = Bayesian Information Criteria; BLRT = Bootstrapped Likelihood Ratio Test. No chi-square test could be calculated for models with 4 latent classes because these models were not identified (i.e., had negative degrees of freedom).

The chosen model is marked in bold.

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Table 4

Goal and Concern Profile Transition Probabilities from Age 20 to 23

Age 20	Age 23	Transition probability	<i>n</i>
<i>Goal profile</i>			
Education	Education	.38	138
	Work	.42	151
	Multiple (work, edu., rel.)	.20	73
Work	Education	.31	52
	Work	.45	75
	Multiple (work, edu., rel.)	.24	40
Education & finances	Education	.48	28
	Work	.30	45
	Multiple (work, edu., rel.)	.22	21
<i>Concern Profile</i>			
No concerns	No concerns	.59	241
	Finances	.19	78
	Work	.22	89
Finances	No concerns	.34	43
	Finances	.50	65
	Work	.16	21
Education & finances	No concerns	.36	13
	Finances	.39	14
	Work	.25	9

Note. Transition probabilities were obtained by using the participants' saved latent class membership. N (goal profile transition probabilities) = 623, N (concern profile transition probabilities) = 573. Abbreviations: edu. = education; rel. = romantic relationship.

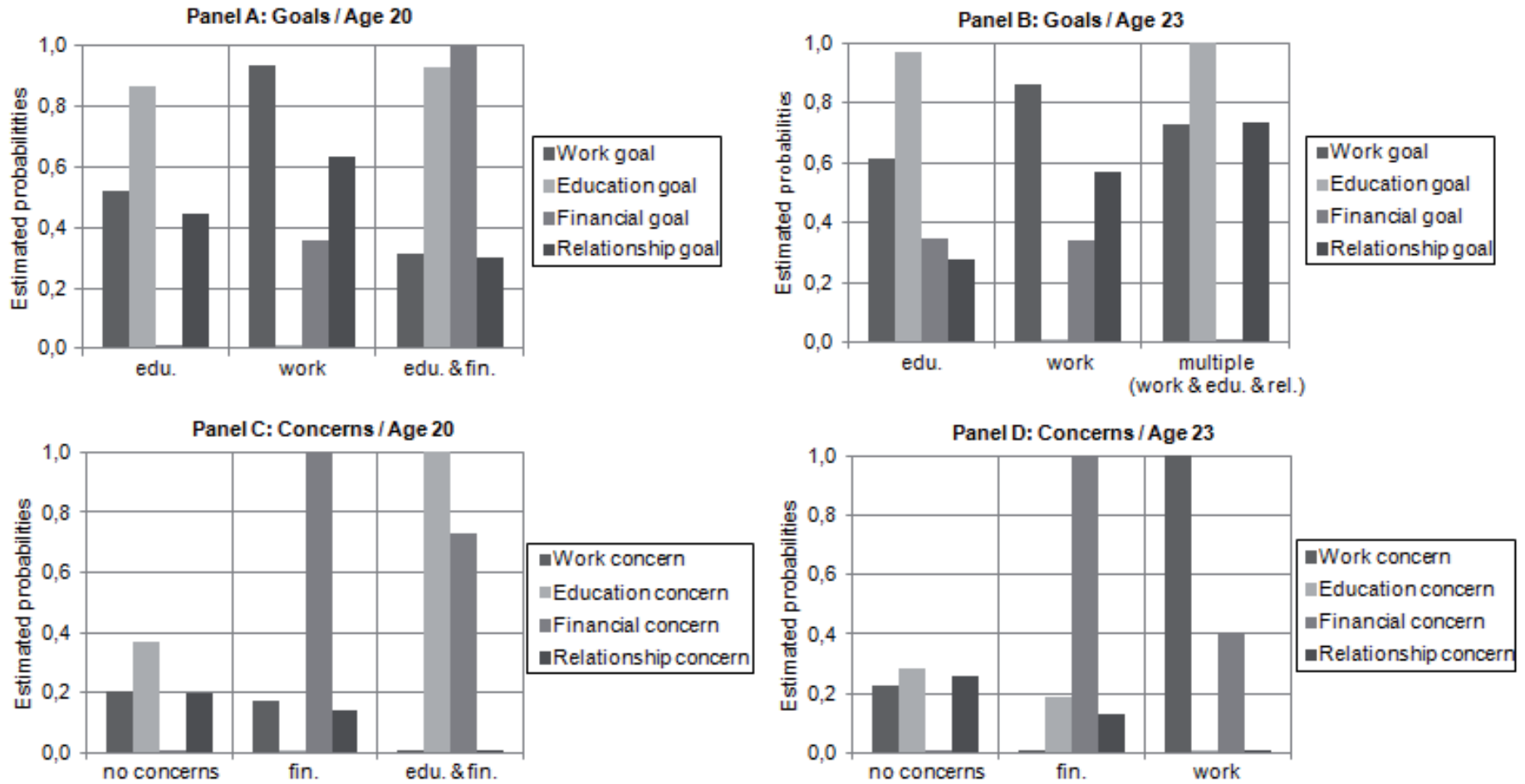


Figure 1. Goal and concern profiles at ages 20 and 23, with estimated probabilities in four categories.

Note. Abbreviations: edu. = education; fin. = finances; rel. = romantic relationship. More information on effect size differences between classes concerning estimated probabilities can be obtained from the first author.