

Parent-Child Relationships in Italian Families: Connectedness and Autonomy in the Transition to Adulthood

Eugenia Scabini¹
Catholic University of Milan - Italy

ABSTRACT - This contribution focuses on the changes in parent-child relationships during the transition to adulthood, that implies a modification of the balance of connectedness and autonomy. The principal aim was twofold: 1) to verify how relational support and style of decision making – respectively markers of family connectedness and autonomy - change from adolescence to young adulthood; 2) to compare the perceptions of parents and children through a measure of agreement. The sample was composed of 259 Italian families with a child between 17 and 25 years of age. Participants filled out a self report questionnaire including the Parent-Adolescent Support Scale and the Style of Decision Making Scale. Results highlighted that children perceived a significant increase in relational support and in autonomy from late adolescence to young adulthood. Furthermore, agreement between parents and children increased by aging. Therefore, near the transition to adulthood, parents and young adults are closer to each other than during late adolescence.

Key words: connectedness and autonomy; family relations; transition to adulthood; parent-child support; style of decision making.

The Slowdown in the Transition to Adulthood

Transitional phases reveal the relational patterns that in other moments are hidden to the researcher. Therefore, they constitute a privileged point of view that allow us to investigate the “relational pact” which is implicitly stipulated by family members. Like any other transition, the transition to adulthood is a “joint enterprise” that involves both generations: parents and children (Scabini, 1995; Youniss, 1983). In the present contribution the attention is focused on the transition to adulthood which has lately shown a relevant slowdown.

A finegrained distinction reveals the existence of a *double transition*: from adolescence to young adulthood and from the latter to “full-blown” adulthood. It is no longer a short span of time made up of precise steps, but a long transition characterised by numerous microtransitions (Breunlin, 1988) beginning in late adolescence. As a consequence, the contract stage of the family life cycle once called “the launching phase” (Carter & McGoldrick, 1980; Scabini, 1985) has been more recently replaced by a long period that may cover even more than one decade.

The increasing extension of the life stage between childhood and adulthood is a common phenomenon in European countries and it is even more emphasised in Italy (Cavalli & Galland, 1993). As a matter of fact, in recent years in Southern European countries, 66% of males and 44% of females aged between 25 and 29 years old lived with their parents, while in 1986 this proportion was about 51% for males and 29% for females (Cordon, 1997). The analysis of the numerous social, economic, and cultural

factors that affect this phenomenon is outside the scope of the present article; besides, there are many psychological dimensions upon which I would like to focus my attention.

In a recent past, the transition to adulthood was clearly mapped out by well defined markers which occurred in a clear sequence: Finishing school, entering the work force, and getting married. The ordering of these markers has now been altered by a modern life cycle which increasingly allows previously-made choices to be revised and reversed. The most widespread model is now one of experimentation and reversibility (Sciolla, 1993). Nowadays, young people may choose to study and work at the same time, to enter the job market and then leave it in order to attend specialisation courses, or to live with their girl- or boyfriend while finishing their education, and so on. It is like each individual tries to find his/her own path to adult status defining his/her own strategies: Many more opportunities are available, but at the same time young people seem to be much more confused and plagued by doubts.

In short, the transition to adulthood is progressively breaking down into a sequence of individual transition states, based on a variety of social and temporal models (Hurrelmann & Engel, 1989; Sherrod, Haggerty, & Featherman, 1993). The insertion of young people in adult society is characterised by profound insecurity in the labour market and uncertainty whether to start a family. Due to the economic recession in Europe, which has particularly affected the younger generation, job opportunities have become increasingly scarce. This is further compounded by the fact that young people have high academic and professional aspirations, and are looking for the best opportunities to realise themselves. Moreover, the decision to get married and to have children is postponed: Young people desire time for experimentation.

The slowdown of the transition to adulthood highlights the importance of the family of origin: in fact, this last one represents the warm nest in which to recover one’s strengths

1 Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Eugenia Scabini. Centre of Studies and Research on Family; Catholic University – Milan, Largo Gemelli, 1, Milan, Italy 20123.
E-mail: escabini@mi.unicatt.it

and to assemble a better equipment in order to face the uncertain and complex adult world. It might be useful to remark that this prolongation in the family context is possible because present-day families are more willing to support the younger generation, both affectively and economically.

There are reciprocal advantages for children and parents in this prolongation of cohabitation. Results emerged from some in-depth interviews administered to young adults and their parents highlighted some psychological needs fulfilled by this type of family typology (Scabini & Cigoli, 1997). Within the parental home, the young generation can construct an autonomous area and to have a “controlled” experience of the adult world: They want more time to think things over and to test themselves in both private and work contexts before taking on the responsibilities that a final choice entails. The concrete possibility to rely on their family, its support, affective warmth and help in case of need, enables young people to put off final assumption of adult responsibilities. “Forever young” is the dream of young people, but what is the parents’ dream? It is to be “forever parents”, forever a resource, forever an unfailing caregiver. This attitude is typical of Italy’s post-war generations, which are financially secure and not heavily burdened with children. Parents identify with and mirror themselves in their children. From our interviews, it is clear that parents are happy to be able to give their children what they themselves could not possibly have had in their youth in terms of both concrete and relational opportunities: Furthermore, they can now realise the ideal parent-child relationship they always wanted but never experienced because they grew up in stricter families. As a matter of fact, they employ a participative/egalitarian style based on dialogue, affection and understanding.

It is clear that for both generations there are good reasons for encouraging the prolongation of youth within the family, and there are reciprocal advantages in creating an ongoing family. Moreover, parents and children have the same representation of adult life as a difficult transition which is better to postpone in order to keep open the opportunities for self-fulfilment in the social world.

The “long” family of the young adult² may offer excellent opportunities for dialogue, exchange and emotional warmth, as well as the possibility for young people to fulfil themselves in the personal sphere (Scabini & Rossi, 1997). But, the “long” family can also become a source of relational encystment, if it breaks the generational continuity by implicitly discouraging young people from leaving the nest.

Connectedness and autonomy in the family relational network and the different roles of mother and father during the transition to adulthood

In contrast with past decades, young adults are given a great deal of freedom in decision making within the home by being able to negotiate processes in a familial context which is highly supportive and without serious conflict. Our research results are consistent with these conclusions (Marta, 1995; Scabini & Cigoli 1997). On the whole, young adults perceive communication with both their parents to be very open and almost problem free. They consider that the relationship with their parents is satisfactory and highly supportive. Even more emphatically, the perceptions of mothers and fathers convey with the image of a harmonious, conflict-free family, characterised by a good quality of parent-children relations and by high levels of satisfaction.

The transition to adulthood implies a regulation of distance within the family, that is a modification of the balance between connectedness and autonomy. The assumption that the transition to adulthood does not imply a disruption of family bonds but a transformation in the direction of a greater interdependence is commonly shared by researchers. As a matter of fact, from adolescence to young adulthood, a renegotiation of the parent-child relationship occurs, involving a bi-directional movement towards connectedness and autonomy among family members. At this stage of the family life cycle, the negotiation between parents and children reveals itself as a complex process such that young adults develop and separate their own point of view from those of their parents and, at the same time, make clear and justify their views in front of them. On the other side, parents have to allow young people the freedom to separate themselves and to communicate and reinforce parental values and perspective (Youniss & Smollar, 1985). But, paradoxically, too much autonomy destroys identity, because connections with others, and above all with parents, are necessary to identity formation and maintenance (Hinde, 1997). The trust on reliable bonds yields the young to shape his/her own identity. Therefore, connectedness and autonomy are strictly interwoven so that they can be seen as two aspects of the same course that is the process of reciprocal differentiation. This process refers to the ability of the family system to modify psychological distances within family members (Sabatelli & Mazor, 1985) in order to cope with the developmental tasks and changes deriving from family members and from the social environment (Anderson & Fleming, 1986; Purschner, Noack, Hofer, Kracke, Wild, & Buhl, 1998): it implies to balance the aspects of connectedness and autonomy in parent-child relation and to make them adequate for this new transitional phase (Scabini, 1995).

But what are the different roles of mother and father in the relational network? Results of much research are consistent in pointing out the central role of mother in the parent-child relationship. Adolescents, girls in particular, seem to perceive a more positive communication with their moth-

2 The expression ‘the “long” family of young adult’ was used by Scabini and Donati in 1988 to design an emerging phenomenon: the prolonged cohabitation of parents and children far beyond the average age of marriage, that in those years in Italy was 24 for females and 27 for males. This expression was later used to point out the phase of family life cycle (Scabini, 1995).

ers than with their fathers (Callan & Noller, 1986; Noller & Callan, 1990; Youniss & Smollar, 1985): she is usually the one to which they ask for advice and help (Greene & Grimsley, 1990). We can infer a kind of “relational loss of balance” in families with adolescents and young adults: the mother is the relational fulcrum of the family, while the father maintains a more peripheral position. Some studies carried out in Italy, confirm these findings (Carrà & Marta, 1995; Malogoli-Togliatti & Ardone, 1993) outlining that in the families of Italian adolescents and young adults the centrality of mother is even more emphasised. Several studies shed light to the fact that mother does not just have the task of child-rearing but also the function of socialisation and transmission of norms and values. As a matter of fact, some authors have demonstrated that mother has a predominant role in the elaboration process of educational and occupational aspirations of her children, in particular the ones of her daughter (Manganelli & Capozza, 1993; Rosnati, 1996). In other words, mothers influence the academic and work choices of their children. Thus, in Italian families even tasks traditionally assigned to fathers, such as guidance in the choice of work or career, are being performed by mothers.

Further results from our recent studies help us to complete this portrayal of Italian families. As family satisfaction may be considered, as many studies have demonstrated, an indicator of adequate functioning (Cumsille & Epstein, 1994; Scabini & Marta, 1996), we compared “satisfied” and “dissatisfied” families (Scabini, Lanz, & Marta, in press). It emerged that, in comparison with “dissatisfied” families, the father in “satisfied families” is a more important point of reference in planning the son’s or daughter’s future, and plays a more decisive role in their striving for individual-social self-fulfilment. These findings suggest therefore that the relational imbalance in favour of mother – we have previously described – can be rectified in families with adequate functioning by the significant presence and participation of the father.

The roles of fathers and mothers emerge even more clearly when we compare parent’s and children’s perceptions in those situations we can define “at risk”. Our studies have shown that fathers are able to perceive different levels of communication and support in relation to the level of psychosocial risk their children attribute to themselves, while the level of communication and support perceived by mothers does not vary according to their children’s level of risk (Marta, 1995). Thus, this research shows that the father displays a “finest perceptual accuracy” of family relationships and of offspring condition. Indeed, the mother is less likely to notice problematic aspects of her relationship with her children, and to perceive distress signals. We could say that mothers are somewhat “blind” to the psychosocial state of their children. This is probably due to the fact that mothers strongly identify themselves with their children and, therefore, have greater difficulty in describing their family situation in an objective way.

Agreement as a measure of closeness between generations

A measure of agreement/disagreement between parents and children can be considered a marker of the distance/closeness between generations. As a matter of fact, focusing the attention on agreement within family relationships means studying the extent to which perceptions are shared and/or comparing different family members’ points of view. In the latter perspective, agreement can be seen as an indicator of distance/difference within members of a dyad, affected by the process of regulation of distances (Kantor & Leher, 1975; Scabini, 1995).

Within the family, agreement leads to stability and support and facilitates the realisation of developmental tasks (Carlson, Cooper, & Sprandling, 1991). The study of agreement between parent and children in adolescence and young adulthood becomes particularly important for this phase of the family life cycle when the most important relational transformations occur. Research data are consistent in demonstrating that agreement changes according to the developmental stage (Alessandri & Wozniack, 1987, 1989; Carlson, Cooper, & Sprandling, 1991; Paikoff, 1991).

The concept of agreement between parents and children has assumed different meaning in the literature. It has been seen as a desirable characteristic of relationships and as an indicator of good family functioning (Moos & Moos, 1986; Olson, McCubbin, Barnes, Larsen, Muxen, & Wilson, 1983). Other authors have considered it as a measure of distance within family members and the degree of parent-child differentiation (Carlson et al., 1991). Although a high level of agreement between parents and adolescents is generally considered as a successful result of education, we have to emphasise that in families with adequate functioning there is always a significant amount of disagreement, which does not necessarily have negative outcomes on family relationship. Goodnow (1994, 1997) assessed that a moderate level of disagreement between parents and adolescents is completely acceptable and can be viewed as an indicator of the adequate development of adolescent’s autonomy and of the differentiation process within the family.

Therefore, parent-child agreement is a crucial dimension in adolescence and young adulthood, especially when we want to compare the two generations and the reciprocal changes that occur in these phases. This variable is assumed to be a marker of the distance/closeness between generations and, consequently, of the above mentioned process of reciprocal differentiation.

The development of parent-child relations during the transition to adulthood: A cross-sectional study

Are parents and offspring able to change their relationships in order to cope with the developmental tasks stemming from the transition to adulthood?

The cross-sectional study presented in this contribution was carried out in order to sketch a first—even if not final—answer to this question. In particular, the study presented here, aimed to detect whether there are significant modifications from late adolescence to young adulthood and whether there are differences according to the gender of both children and parents.

We focused on two dimensions, relational support and style of decision making. We considered these two variables as two crucial factors of family functioning in this stage of the family life cycle. More precisely, relational support is considered as the reciprocity of taking care, counting on, giving advice, self disclosure, reassurance of worth. It is generally associated with less psychological strain and less emotional dysfunction during periods of stressful life changes such as the transition to adulthood (Holahan & Moos, 1991; Holahan, Valentiner, & Moos, 1994). In recent years, a number of studies have highlighted the importance of relational support for adolescents' psychosocial functioning. As a matter of fact, family and social support has been found to be inversely related to behavioural problems such as substance use (Wills & Clearly, 1996), delinquency (Windle, 1992), emotional problems, and low self-esteem levels.

The second variable examined in this study was *style of decision making*. This represents a crucial variable in the study of transition to adulthood and provides information about the decision autonomy that is given to the child. Some studies have suggested that styles of decision making that allow and promote autonomy are associated with adequate family functioning (Bosma, Jackson, Zijlsling, & Zani, 1996; Steinberg, Muonts, Lamborn, & Dornbusch, 1991). Moreover, it emerged from these studies that adolescents whose parents have an authoritarian and coercive educational style are likely to be less autonomous, less confident about their competence, and more susceptible to peer pressure. On the other hand, adolescents whose parents adopt an inductive and democratic style are more capable of making their own decisions and formulate appropriate plans.

Furthermore, in order to investigate the role played by the family during the transition to adulthood, we have adopted a relational/intergenerational approach based on the analysis of exchanges between the two generations. As we have previously assessed, only an intergenerational approach enables us to look at the transition to adulthood as a family transition (Scabini & Cigoli, 1997). This assumption implies that we consider both parents' and children's standpoints, assuming the family as the unit of analysis. In particular, the focus is on relational support and style of decision making that are crucial dimensions in transition to adulthood: the former gives important information about connectedness and the latter about autonomy, which are the two fundamental aspects of the differentiation process as we have mentioned before. Moreover, we considered parent-child agreement that, as we have already noted, allows us to investigate the changes in the distance between the two generations.

According to this theoretical background, the principle aims of the present study could be summarised as follows: a) to establish whether parent-child support and style of decision making change over the transition and to verify whether there are parents' and children's gender differences, and b) to compare the perspectives of the two generations through the measure of the agreement.

Method

Sample

The sample was composed of 259 families each one including mother, father, and a young adult child. The resulting total number of subjects was 777. Of the children, 52.2% were boys and 47.8% were girls. On average, they were 20.7 years old (range = 17-25). They were all students, still living with their parents. The mean age of mothers was 49.7 years old. As regards to fathers, the mean age was 53 years old.

The sample of the 259 families was divided into two groups according to the children's age: the group of families with a late adolescent child aged 17-19 years old (48.3% of the entire sample) and the one with a young adult child aged 20-25 years old (51.7% of the entire sample). We have to underline that pupils finish high school at the age of 19 years in Italy. As a consequence, the first one is the group of families with children attending high school, and the second one is composed of families with children attending university. The two groups are comparable in terms of gender and socio-economic status. Data were obtained through high schools and universities.

Instruments

Participants filled out a self report questionnaire (in three different versions for mothers, fathers, and children) which included the following scales:

- *Sociodemographic questions* about age, gender, family composition, and socioeconomic status.
- *The Parent-Adolescent Support Scale*: This is an instrument composed of 26 items assessing the level of reciprocal support within the parent-child relationship. In particular, this scale investigates the level of openness in communication, taking care, counting on and reliability of the bond. On a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "I strongly agree" to "I strongly disagree", parents and children were asked to evaluate how much they give and take within the relationship (e.g., "I can count on my father/mother/children when I need for something", "If I were in trouble, I could tell it to my father/mother/child"). The scale yielded high reliability scores in this study (alpha = .91 for father/child version, .93 for mother/child version, .80 for mother version and .85 for father version).
- *Style of Decision Making Scale*: Each family member completed a checklist concerning 13 areas of decision

making according to the specific life-span stage that we studied (spending money, leisure activities and so on). Participants rated each item indicating whether the parents: a) dictated how the adolescent should behave, b) share the decision with the youth, and c) left the decision entirely up to the children. A total score for each of these different styles of decision making was computed separately. As a consequence, we obtained three measures: parental authority, sharing, adolescent/young adult autonomy. In this contribution we focus only on adolescent and young adult autonomy.

The internal consistency of the measure, as determined by Cronbach's alpha, was .80 for the youth's version, .71 for the mother's one and .82 for the father's one.

Results

We performed a MANOVA with one within-groups factor (Mother's and Father's Support perceived by adolescent/young adult) and two factors between (Children's Age and Gender). Mothers' and Fathers's Support perceived by the child were considered repeated measures because of the interdependence of scores as Bray, Maxwell, and Cole (1995) demonstrated. As a matter of fact, each subject assessed his/her relationships with both mother and father. Results of the within analysis revealed a significant effect of parent-adolescent support ($F(1,240) = 34.41, p < .001$). In particular, children perceive a more supportive relations with mother than with father. Regarding the between-subjects effects, results revealed an overall significant effect for age ($F(1,240) = 6.32, p < .05$). In particular, young adults reported a higher level of support with both parents than late adolescents. Neither gender differences nor interactions turned out to be significant.

A MANOVA with a within-groups factor (Mother's and Father's Support) and two factors between (Children's Age and Gender) was carried out. Mothers' and Fathers' Support were considered repeated measures because both judged their relationship with the same child (Bray, Maxwell, & Cole, 1995). No significant differences emerged when parents' variables were concerned.

Furthermore, paired t-tests revealed that children perceived a lower level of parental support than their fathers both in late-adolescence ($t(85) = -3.24, p < .001$) and in young adulthood ($t(81) = -2.64, p = .009$). Also mothers perceived a more supportive relationship than their offspring,

Table 1

Means and standard deviations of parent-child support according to children's age

Perceived Support	Late Adolescents		Young Adults	
	M	SD	M	SD
mother's support perceived by the child	3.69	.80	3.85	.70
father's support perceived by the child	3.42	.74	3.64	.61
support perceived by the mother	3.78	.55	3.90	.55
support perceived by the father	3.78	.50	3.88	.52

but in this case the difference failed to reach the statistical significance.

As regard to Style of decision making³, the MANOVA (two factors Age x Gender) revealed an overall significant age effect (Pillais = .22, $p < .001$) both in parents' and children's assessments (Mother: $F(1) = 24.57, p < .001$; Father $F(1) = 48.83, p < .001$; Children $F(1) = 18.33, p < .001$). This means that, in the perception of both generations, the degree of autonomy significantly increases from late adolescence to young adulthood. No gender differences nor interactions turned out to be significant.

The paired t-test showed a significant difference between parents and children: Both adolescents and young adults perceived a higher degree of autonomy than their parents (late-adolescents: Mother-child $t(124) = 7.81, p < .001$; father-child $t(124) = 9.38, p < .001$; young adults: mother-child $t(123) = -5.74, p < .001$; father-child $t(123) = 4.91, p < .001$).

A measure of agreement between mother-child, father-child, and mother-father was computed through a reversed discrepancy score on relational support and the style of decision making assessed by the youths. The agreement score could range from 1 (total agreement) to 0 (complete disagreement).

As regards the Agreement Index for Relational Support, the ANOVA with two factors between (Age and Gender) did not reveal any significant results.

In order to compare the Agreement scores in the three different dyads, we computed a series of t-tests: This analysis outlined an higher level of agreement within the mother-father dyad more than within the mother-child and father-child dyads (mother-father vs. mother-child $t(168) = 2.11, p < .001$; mother-father vs. father-child $t(168) = 3.99, p < .001$). Moreover, mother-child agreement is higher than father-child agreement ($t(168) = 2.08, p < .05$).

Table 2

Style of Decision Making: Means and standard deviations

Family Members	Late Adolescents		Young Adults	
	M	SD	M	SD
Child	.80	.13	.87	.10
Mother	.49	.37	.69	.31
Father	.41	.37	.69	.31

Table 3

Agreement between parents and children on Relational Support: Means and standard deviations

Agreement between	Late Adolescents				Young Adults			
	Males		Females		Males		Females	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Mother-child	.45	.54	.57	.36	.63	.29	.51	.43
Father-child	.37	.62	.40	.48	.55	.40	.47	.37
Mother-father	.64	.34	.64	.29	.63	.30	.57	.40

3 The nature of score of Style of Decision Making required that these procedure be applied after arcsine transformation had been employed.

Table 4

Agreement between parents and children on Style of Decision Making: Means and standard deviations

Agreement between	Late Adolescents				Young Adults			
	Males		Females		Males		Females	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Mother-child	.56	.36	.69	.32	.76	.26	.76	.29
Father-child	.54	.35	.59	.34	.72	.31	.82	.22
Mother-father	.85	.20	.76	.29	.81	.24	.80	.24

Different results emerged from data elaboration on the Agreement Index in Decision Making. The analysis of variance with two factors between (Age and Gender) revealed a significant effect of the Age factor on the Agreement between father and child ($F(1) = 26.93, p < .001$) and an interaction between Gender and the Agreement between mother and child ($F(1) = 5.87, p < .001$). In particular, father-child agreement is higher in young adulthood than in late adolescence. The significant interaction showed that females have a higher agreement with their mothers; on the whole, mother and young adults have higher level of agreement.

The paired t-test computed in order to compare the perceptions within the different dyads revealed that mother and father have a higher agreement than mother-child or father-child dyads (mother-father vs father-child $t(247) = 5.66, p < 0.001$; mother-father vs mother-child $t(247) = 4.23, p < .001$). This means that both parents evaluate the autonomy given to the child in the same way.

Discussion

The aim of the present contribution was twofold: First, to analyse the development of parent-child relationship from late adolescence to young adulthood and the existence of gender differences; second, to measure the agreement between parents and children considering it as an important marker of the distance/closeness between generations. The attention was focused on two variables, relational support and the style in decision making. We assumed that these two variables respectively indicated the degree of connectedness and autonomy between family members.

Results highlighted a significant increase of relational support when children's perception was considered. This finding is consistent with the literature that shows an improvement in the quality of relationships during young adulthood.

It is interesting to note that parents whose score is higher than that of their children do not change their perception of relational support during the same period. In other words, parents who have a more idealized perception of the relationship with their children seem to have some difficulty in perceiving changes within the family relational network. In a way, the transition is especially perceived by offspring more than by their parents.

Regarding relational support, although several research have pointed out the existence of gender difference during adolescence (Marta 1995; Noller & Callan, 1990; Youniss & Smollar, 1985), no one emerged from the present study. However, we could infer that these differences are toning down during young adulthood so that males and females have similar relational patterns with their parents at this stage. But only a longitudinal study could verify this hypothesis.

A similar pattern of results emerged from data regarding decision making: Both parents and children increase their perception of the child's autonomy from late adolescence to young adulthood. In this life span stage both generations perceive an increasing importance of autonomy for young adults in order to make decisions and face the transition to adulthood. But both adolescents and young adults perceive a higher degree of autonomy than their parents who on the contrary believe to be stricter.

From late adolescence to young adulthood, offspring perceive stronger bonds with both parents while the latter assessed a more positive relationship with their children but do not perceive any change. At the same time, both generations recognise an increase in autonomy. Taken together, these first results highlight that connectedness and autonomy do not have an opposite development in this transition but both increase significantly.

We could observe that parents and children have an opposite movement. Regarding relational support, youths modify their perceptions and are inclined to have lower scores than their parents. Regarding style of decision making, both parents and children modify their perception even if children reported higher scores than their parents.

Moreover, agreement between mother and father linked to relational support and the style of decision making is higher than that between both mother-child and father-child. The adult generation displays a higher level of perceptual congruence than the younger one. In other words, the distance across generations is higher than within the conjugal dyad.

The only gender difference founded is related to the agreement on decision making: Females have a stronger agreement with mother than males. This result confirms other research data highlighting that mothers have a closer bond with their daughters than fathers (Lanz & Rosnati, 1995; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Furthermore, agreement on the style of decision making between parents and children increases with age. Near the transition to adulthood, parents and young adults are closer to each other than during late adolescence.

To sum up, we can say that children are inclined to underestimate the issues related to the connectedness (relational support) and to overestimate the aspects related to autonomy. On the contrary, parents show an opposite result. In fact, they overestimate the connectedness aspects and underestimate the separation aspects. This generation of parents may be considered as the representative of the connectedness point of view, while the young generation

as the representative of the separation point of view. As time goes, the two generations reach a common point of view characterized by the interaction of connectedness and separation.

It is worthwhile noting the importance of using an intergenerational approach, based on the comparison between the two generations, in order to reveal their role in the transition to adulthood. Future research should verify, through a longitudinal study, the role played by the family relational network in slowing the transition to adulthood.

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Received March 3, 2000

Revision received July 5, 2000

Final version September 29, 2000

Accepted September 4, 2000 ■