

Life satisfaction linked to different independence-from-parents conditions in Italian emerging adults

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Abstract

The transition toward adulthood in Italy lasts longer than in other countries with respect to living with the family of origin, starting work, and gaining economic independence. This study aimed to analyse the transition to adulthood in Italian youths by exploring these developmental tasks. The first aim was to analyse gender and age differences in these developmental tasks. Given that these tasks are not necessarily achieved at the same time, the second aim was to establish if it might be possible to identify different clusters of individuals according to their residential, economic and employment conditions. The third aim was to explore life satisfaction in different clusters.

191 Italian emerging adults (65 males) aged 20 to 30 years ($M=24.40$) completed the Satisfaction with Life Scale and a specific questionnaire assessing residential independence, economic autonomy, and job stability. Results showed no gender differences in the three developmental tasks. However, older participants reported a higher level of independence. Cluster analysis identified three different groups: “totally dependent”, “partially independent” and “totally independent” from parental family, differently composed in terms of partnering. These groups do not differ in life satisfaction levels. Results are discussed focusing on different independence-from-parents conditions that characterize Italian emerging adults.

Keywords: life satisfaction; emerging adults; developmental tasks; Italian context.

Disclosure

Authors declare that they have no financial support or relationships that may pose conflict of interest.

Emerging adulthood across cultures

Emerging adulthood, the life stage ranging from 20 to 30 years, is a developmental phase in which young people feel that they are no longer adolescents, but they are not yet fully independent adults, and they are in a phase of transition (Arnett 2000).

This stage of life is characterized by important experimentation, identity exploration, tasks, and changes (Ross, Schoon, Martin and Sacker 2009; Schulenberg, Maggs and O'Malley 2003) that define adulthood. These include taking on responsibilities, making autonomous decisions, completing education, finding a job, establishing financial and residential independence, finding a partner, and starting a family (Cacioppo, Pace and Zappulla 2013).

It is important to clarify that this stage is not a universal life stage, but instead one that has emerged in some industrialized societies in which relevant social and economic changes have taken place (Arnett, 2000, 2011). Moreover, some authors have stated that this aspect may be considered reason for criticism, given that emerging adulthood is not a theory, due to the fact that theories should be applicable across space and time (Hendry and Kloep, 2007). However, as Syed (2015) suggested, changes in society change people, and this makes it necessary to formulate new theories.

In recent decades, these changes have led to the transition to adulthood being extended for many reasons, both in the United States and Europe, mostly linked to the extension of education and difficulty of finding a job. These social and economic changes have brought some authors, such as Arnett (2004), to affirm that emerging adulthood is not a positive time.

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3 For example, Côté (2000, 2006; Côté and Bynner, 2008), focusing attention on the change in
4 the labour demand, showed that higher rates of attendance in higher education may be due to
5 the fact that many emerging adults view university as the only route to a secure, well-paying
6 job. According to Arnett (2004), compared to the past when the adult status was achieved in a
7 limited range of time at the end of adolescence, upon completing education, finding a job and
8 forming a new family, a new life stage has now appeared, during which individuals stay for a
9 long period in an ambiguous social status where they have not fully acquired the autonomy
10 and responsibilities of adults. This tendency is common to all European countries (Arnett
11 2004; Reitzle 2006; Tanner and Arnett, 2009; Crocetti, Rabaglietti and Sica 2012; Crocetti,
12 Tagliabue, Sugimura, Nelson, Takahashi, Niwa and Jinno 2015; Scabini and Donati 1988),
13 but with some differences that led authors to identify three models of transition to adulthood:
14 the Nordic model, the British model, and the Mediterranean model (Scabini 2000). The
15 Nordic model is characterized by a long interim period between moving out of one's parental
16 home and starting a family. Young people leave the parental home on average between 21
17 (women) and 26 years of age (men), and the first marriage takes place from six to eight years
18 later (Buhl and Lanz 2007; Weick 2002). The British model is marked by premature
19 separation from family of origin and early marriage, but a postponed choice of parenting, so
20 that couples remain childless for a long time. Finally, in Mediterranean areas, many youths
21 live with their parents, either full time or part time, until their late 20s or even 30s. The
22 definitive departure of young people tends to coincide with marriage and finding a stable job
23 (Laudani et al. 2014).

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26 In summary, although with different trajectories - Arnett (2011) himself writing about the
27 "many emerging adulthoods" that can be seen within and between cultures - youths gradually
28 acquire autonomy from their parents, marking entrance into the adult world (Allen, Hauser,
29 Bell, and O'Connor 1994).

Life satisfaction and developmental tasks

Several authors have wondered whether becoming independent, in terms of leaving the parental home, getting a job, and being economically independent, might be considered a success during this life transition, thus resulting in a positive subjective evaluation of life. Given that life satisfaction is determined by the interaction between personal goals and the achievement of real goals (Diener 1984), it should be expected that the achievement of developmental tasks and overcoming life events (such as completing school, leaving home, finding a job, finding a partner, starting a family), improves the young person's life satisfaction. However, studies in this field have shown mixed results.

Concerning home transition, studies conducted in an Australian context reported inconsistent findings, given that some showed that residential autonomy affects life satisfaction, while others showed no immediate effect. Lee and colleagues made a longitudinal study, finding that young women who had moved from the parental home to independent living were reported to have significantly higher levels of mental health, life satisfaction, and lower levels of perceived stress than women who, having lived independently, moved back into the parental home, and those who never left (Lee, Gramotnev 2007; Bell and Lee 2006). Conversely, Qu and de Vaus (2015) showed that leaving the parental home does not lead to any immediate change in life satisfaction given that, on average, there was no change in life satisfaction from the year before leaving home to the year immediately afterwards. Gender differences were apparent four years after leaving home, with women being more satisfied than men. However, the living arrangement seemed to influence life satisfaction. Those who left home to live with a partner showed an increased level of life satisfaction in the years before leaving home, higher in women than men. On the

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3 contrary, those who left home but remained single had already experienced a sharp decline in
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5 life satisfaction in the years before leaving home (Qu and de Vaus 2015).
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8 Mixed results have also been found concerning transitions to employment. While Switek
9
10 and Easterlin (2018) found that the school-to-work transition has no significant impact on life
11
12 satisfaction, Lee and Gramotnev (2007) showed greater life satisfaction in women who
13
14 reached normal work transition than in those who did not (Lee and Gramotnev 2007).
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17 Studies on the link between role transition and life satisfaction, using different designs
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19 (cross-sectional *vs* longitudinal), have shown mixed results. Some emphasize how youths
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21 who face the responsibilities of adult life and achieve developmental tasks perceive an
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23 increased psychological well-being and life satisfaction (Galambos, Barker, and Krahn 2006;
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25 Galambos and Krahn 2008; Kins and Beyers 2010), while others negate this link (Switek and
26
27 Easterlin 2018; Qu and de Vaus 2015).
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33 **Italian context: developmental tasks and life satisfaction**

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35 Italy is the most accentuated expression of the Mediterranean model and one of the
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37 countries in the world where the transition to adulthood is prolonged with regards to
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39 completing education, starting to work, leaving the family of origin, and establishing a new
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41 family. There is a tendency for young people to prolong their education, delay entry into the
42
43 job market, and delay moving out of their family homes once a stable job is found, doing so
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45 only for marriage and parenthood (Livi Bacci 2008). Permanence in the family of origin is
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47 extended to the age of 29 for females and 31 for males (EU Youth Report 2012), also due to
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49 difficulties in entering the labour market and becoming economically independent. Italy has
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51 the highest level of unemployment in the European Union: 32.9% for the population from 25
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53 to 29 years of age (Schwartz, **Tanner and Syed, 2016**). Financial difficulties may be the main
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55 obstacle to obtaining their independence (Aleni Sestito and Sica 2014). All these obstacles
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3 delay the time of marriage and becoming parents (Livi Bacci 2008). In fact, the mean age of
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5 first marriage is 31 for females and 34 for males (ISTAT 2017).
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8 Due to previous economic difficulties, achievement of personal independence that
9
10 characterizes the adult stage may be delayed in Italian youths, making this transition phase
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12 particularly stressful (Pace, Cacioppo, Lo Cascio, Guzzo and Passanisi 2016). In addition to
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14 economic reasons and scarce career options that characterize Mediterranean countries, delay
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16 in the transition to adulthood may be due to traditional cultural values, typical of the Italian
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18 context, that emphasize connectedness over independence (Van de Velde 2008) and promote
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20 interdependence and family obligations (Piumatti et al. 2016). According to previous studies,
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22 Italian emerging adults seem to embrace both the individualism of the Western, Northern
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24 European and American cultures, in which there is a focus on achievement of autonomy, self-
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26 realization and professional growth (Scopesi and Bertani 2003), and the more traditional
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28 cultural values that promote relatedness, interdependence and family obligations (Piumatti et
29
30 al. 2016).
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36 These traditional values have emphasized connectedness over independence (Van de
37
38 Velde 2008). In some cases, the autonomy of young people is viewed as a risk factor for the
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40 parent-child relationship (Ingoglia and Lo Cricchio 2013). Differences exist between
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42 different geographical areas. While Southern Italy seems to embrace more traditional cultural
43
44 values, Northern Italy weds the individualism of the Western, Northern European and
45
46 American cultures, which focus on achievement of autonomy, self-realization and
47
48 professional growth (Scopesi and Bertani 2003). In other words, in Southern Italy, parents
49
50 give greater emphasis to the promotion of relatedness and interdependence in their children,
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52 values related to connection to close relationships, orientation to the larger community,
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54 respect and obedience of cultural and societal norms (Triandis 1995). In Northern Italy,
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56 family efforts may be centred on the realization of the individual in society, reflecting the
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3 parents' beliefs about personal choice, intrinsic motivation, self-esteem and self-
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5 maximization as the fundamental requirements for their children's successful achievement of
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7 autonomy (Walsh 2012).
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10 Given the specificity of the Italian context, we questioned whether personal autonomy
11
12 might be considered a success in Italian emerging adults, thus resulting in the positive
13
14 subjective evaluation of life, which is life satisfaction.
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17 Despite the relevance of these results, this aspect had not been previously analysed in the
18
19 Italian context. Studies have analysed the life satisfaction of emerging adults, not in relation
20
21 to objectives, but rather to subjective criteria. Specifically, these studies have explored the
22
23 relationship between emerging adulthood and life satisfaction, referring to the importance of
24
25 criteria for adulthood according to Arnett (2003), which includes being independent when
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27 getting a job, being able to form mature relationships, and being able to provide and care for
28
29 a family (Piumatti et al. 2016).
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33 Several studies have analysed the relationship between life satisfaction and ego identity
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35 status (Pace et al. 2016; Crocetti et al. 2012). Studies have shown that Italian emerging
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37 adults tend to experience greater foreclosure (characterized by strong commitments without
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39 having explored other possible alternatives), moratorium (adolescents' active exploration of
40
41 different alternatives without strong current commitments), and diffusion identity status (non-
42
43 active exploration of different identity alternatives without strong identity commitments)
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45 compared to Spanish counterparts, and that these less advanced identity statuses are related to
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47 lower life satisfaction (Crocetti, Rubini, Luyckx and Meeus 2008).
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51 Although we recognize the relevance of subjective criteria for adulthood in providing
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53 information about value of independence or interdependence that guide the emerging adults'
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55 choices, and identity status, i.e. of leaving the parental home, we also believe objective
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57 criteria is important in defining the real situation of emerging adults.
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3 The purpose of the present study was to explore three of the main developmental tasks
4 characteristic of emerging adulthood in the Italian context. The central mark of adulthood is
5 being independent, which is possible when an individual achieves residential and economic
6 independence and job stability. However, despite the differences that can emerge among
7 young people in these three developmental tasks, to our knowledge, no studies have
8 investigated this aspect. Therefore, the first aim of this cross-sectional study was to explore if
9 there were differences in gender and age linked to residential and economic independence
10 and job stability. These three developmental tasks are not necessarily reached at the same
11 time. For this reason, the second aim was to establish if it might be possible to identify
12 different clusters of individuals, taking into consideration their residential, economic and
13 employment conditions. The final aim of the present study was to explore life satisfaction
14 linked to different types of independence.
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33 **Method**

34 *Participants*

35 A total of 191 emerging adults (65 males and 126 females) aged 20 to 30 years ($M =$
36 24.40, $SD = 3.30$) were recruited for the present study from three university faculties
37 (Psychology, Political and Social Science) based in the cities of Florence and Pisa in
38 Tuscany, a region in the centre of Italy. All of the participants were of Caucasian origin and
39 came from the centre of Italy. These data were collected *via* the specific question, “Where do
40 you come from?”, which was in the sociodemographic section of the questionnaire. The
41 participants came from families of middle or high socioeconomic status (SES), with more
42 than 83% of the mothers and 71% of fathers having a high school diploma or university
43 degree.
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Procedure

In accordance with the ethical treatment of human participants of the Italian Psychological Association, participants were recruited by two trained researchers at the end of university courses. Students were asked to participate in the study, and those who accepted were invited in groups to a meeting room at the university to complete the questionnaires. After signing the informed consent form, participants anonymously completed a battery of questionnaires.

Participation was voluntary, no monetary reward was given for participation, and they could withdraw at any time without consequences. Inclusion criteria were: age range from 20 to 30 years, university student at the time of data collection, and born in central Italy (Lazio, Marche, Tuscany, Umbria). Participants were asked to anonymously complete a battery of questionnaires designed to gather information about personal, demographic and developmental task data (residential, working and economic autonomy), and to assess their life satisfaction.

Measures

In order to determine the level of the achievement of the developmental tasks, a specific questionnaire was developed. In particular, residential autonomy was measured by the following question: “what is your living condition?” rated on a 3-point Likert scale (1= at home with parents / with the family of origin; 2= out of the home of family of origin only for part of the week ■ example, off-site student ■; 3= out of the family home permanently). Working autonomy was assessed by the following question: “what is your working condition?” rated on a 3-point Likert scale (1= no job; 2 = occasional job; 3= stable and continuous job). Finally, economic autonomy was measured by the following question: “How financially independent are you?” rated on a 4-point Likert scale (1= Totally dependent on

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3 the parents / family of origin; 2= Partially dependent on the family of origin but on an
4 ongoing basis (e.g. monthly financial aid); 3= Occasionally dependent on the family of origin
5 (e.g. with financial help on special occasions or for extra expenses); 4= Totally independent
6 from the family).
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12 Participants were asked to indicate their romantic condition by responding to a specific
13 question: “What is your relationship status?” rated on a 4-point Likert scale (1= single; 2 =
14 dating; 3 = non-cohabiting couple; 4 = cohabiting or married).
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19 The Italian version (Di Fabio and Busoni 2009) of the Satisfaction with Life Scale
20 (SWLS), developed by Diener and colleagues (Diener, Emmons, Larsen and Griffin 1985),
21 was used to assess global life satisfaction. The SWLS comprised five items. Participants were
22 asked to give their answers on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7
23 (strongly agree). The internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach’s alpha) was .85 for this
24 sample.
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35 *Data analysis*

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37 Data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version
38 24 (2017). **In order to verify if parental education is linked to study variables, two**
39 **multivariate analyses of variance were conducted with maternal and paternal education level**
40 **as factor and the level of residential, working, and economic independence and the level of**
41 **life satisfaction as dependent variables.** In order to analyse gender differences referring to the
42 three developmental tasks, a chi square test was conducted. Age differences on the
43 developmental tasks were explored using the ANOVA test. A cluster analysis was carried out
44 to analyse different trajectories of the transition to adulthood in Italian young people, taking
45 into consideration the developmental tasks linked to leaving the parental family, entering the
46 job market and achieving financial autonomy. Specifically, the residential, working and
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3 economic autonomy statuses were clustered using Ward's method (1963) with squared
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5 Euclidean distance metric. This method is an agglomerative hierarchical cluster analysis
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7 procedure that puts together groups of cases whose scores produce minimal increases within
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9 cluster sums of squares (Everitt 1980). The Ward's technique starts by treating each
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11 observation as a cluster and gradually agglomerating them into a larger cluster on the basis of
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13 a proximity index. Determination of the most appropriate cluster solution was based on visual
14
15 examination of the dendrogram and on practical judgment and theoretical background (Hair,
16
17 Anderson, Taham and Black 1995).

21 Chi-square analyses and ANOVA test were carried out to examine whether demographic
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23 variables (gender, age and romantic relational status) were associated with cluster groups.
24
25 Finally, an ANOVA test was conducted to analyse life satisfaction linked to the different
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27 trajectories of the transition to adulthood in Italian young people identified by cluster
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29 analysis.
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35 *Results*

37 Frequencies on the distribution of the three developmental tasks and couple relationship
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39 status are reported in table 1.
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45 INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE
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49 No significant differences emerged on the level of residential, working, and economic
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51 independence and life satisfaction with respect to paternal [$F(1, 214) = .975, p = .307$] and
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53 maternal [$F(1, 214) = .463, p = .763$] education.
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56 No significant differences emerged between males and females with respect to residential
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58 autonomy ($\chi^2(2) = 1.46, p = .481$), working autonomy ($\chi^2(2) = 2.58, p = .275$) and economic
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3 autonomy ($\chi^2(3) = 1.50, p = .682$). On the contrary, significant differences emerged with
4
5 respect to age for the three developmental conditions. In particular, regarding residential
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7 autonomy, the ANOVA result was significant [$F(2, 188) = 69.05, p = 000, \eta^2 = .42$];
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9 participants that live outside of the family home permanently report a greater mean age ($M =$
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11 $28.04; SD = 2.03$) than subjects that live at home with parents / with the family of origin (M
12
13 $= 23.22; SD = 2.68$) and outside from the home of family of origin only for part of the week
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15 ($M = 22.81; SD = 2.65$). Regarding employment autonomy, [$F(2, 188) = 39.72, p = 000, \eta^2 =$
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17 $.30$] participants with stable and continuous jobs reported a greater mean age ($M = 27.05; SD$
18
19 $= 2.84$) than participants with no ($M = 22.86; SD = 2.56$) or occasional jobs ($M = 23.83; SD$
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21 $= 3.05$). Regarding economic autonomy, $F(3, 187) = 34.90, p = 000, \eta^2 = .36$, higher age
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23 corresponds with greater economic independence: participants totally dependent from an
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25 economic point of view on their parents / family of origin ($M = 22.76, SD = 2.40$) and
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27 partially dependent, but on an ongoing basis ($M = 23.40, SD = 2.72$), reported a lower mean
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29 age than those occasionally dependent on the family of origin ($M = 25.46, SD = 3.37$), and
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31 those who reported a lower mean age than participants totally independent from the family
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33 ($M = 28.06, SD = 2.23$).
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40 Cluster analysis delineated three distinct groups of emerging adults (see Figure 1).
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45 INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE
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49 Specifically, the first cluster consists of 70 (36.6%) participants. This group scored low
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51 levels on residential, job and economic autonomy, and represented emerging adults that have
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53 not achieved any of these three development tasks. We named them “totally dependent” on
54
55 parental family. The second cluster consists of 72 (37.7%) participants. Low residential
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57 autonomy, but high values of job and economic autonomy characterize this group. They are
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3 youth with working and economic independence but living with parents. We called them
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5 “partially independent”. Finally, the third cluster consists of 49 (25.7%) participants. This
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7 group reported higher levels in the three developmental conditions, and we called them
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9 “totally independent” from parental family (see Table 2).
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15 INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE
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19 No significant differences emerged in the three groups in terms of gender ($\chi^2(2) = .359, p$
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21 $= .836$). However, significant differences emerged with regards to mean age [$F(2, 188) =$
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23 $65.37, p = .000, \eta^2 = .41$]. The “totally dependent” and the “partially independent” groups
24
25 were younger than the “totally independent” group. Significant differences also emerged
26
27 regarding couple relationship status ($\chi^2(6) = 92.85, p = .000$). In particular, there was a
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29 greater number of married emerging adults in the “totally independent” group than in the
30
31 other groups, and a greater number of single and non-cohabitant couples in the “totally
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33 dependent” and the “partially independent” groups.
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38 Finally, ANOVA results regarding differences in life satisfaction with respect to these
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40 groups showed no-significant effect [$F(2, 188) = 1.93, p = .149$]. The three groups did not
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42 show different levels of life satisfaction. In table 3, the characteristics of the three groups
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44 with respect to gender, age, couple relationship status and life satisfaction are reported.
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56 Discussion 57 58 59 60

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3 The purpose of the present study was to explore life satisfaction in Italian emerging adults,
4 taking into consideration residential and economic independence, and labour stability, which
5 are the main developmental tasks characteristic of this age.
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10 Our findings showed that no differences exist concerning gender. Contrary to previous
11 studies that showed females leaving the family of origin earlier than males (29 vs 31 years)
12 (EU Youth Report 2012), our study showed that young women and men attained residential
13 independence at the same age. Working and economic conditions do not seem to differ
14 between male and female youths, in contrast with data that showed high gender inequality,
15 resulting in lower employment rates and lower retribution (with a consistent gender wage
16 gap) among young Italian women (ISTAT 2017; Baussola, Mussida, Jenkins and Penfold
17 2015).
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22 Differences exist in age linked to residential and economic independence and job stability
23 achievement. In line with literature, older emerging adults result to be autonomous from their
24 parents more than younger ones, thereby marking their entrance into the adult world (Allen,
25 Hauser, Bell and O'Connor 1994), although these three developmental tasks may not be
26 jointly attained.
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31 The second purpose of this study was to identify different groups in emerging adults,
32 conjunctly taking into consideration residential, economic and employment autonomy, and
33 exploring life satisfaction. Cluster analysis identified three groups of emerging adults:
34 “totally dependent”, “partially independent” and “totally independent” from parental family.
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39 The first group consisted of “totally dependent” youth, living in the parental home,
40 economically dependent on the family of origin and not having a stable job. This group of
41 youths was composed mainly by single and non-cohabitant couples. Moreover, “totally
42 dependent” youths presented a high level of life satisfaction that may be explained by
43 parental sustenance - not only tangible (practical and financial) but also emotional and
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3 psychological, for their life choices and studies. This is in line with previous research that
4 showed that students receive more support from their parents than nonstudents, and that
5 support contributes to their life satisfaction (Fingerman, Cheng, Tighe, Birditt and Zarit
6 2012). On the other hand, it is possible that the life satisfaction of this group is influenced by
7 the quality of parental relationship in terms of attachment (Guarnieri, Smorti and Tani 2015;
8 Ponti and Smorti, 2018).

9
10 The second group, "partially independent" was composed by youth who remain in the
11 parental home even though they have reached economic and employment independence. This
12 group of youths was composed mainly by single and non-cohabitant couples and displayed
13 levels of life satisfaction similar to those of "totally dependent" and "totally independent"
14 groups. However, given the discrepancy between the economic, working and residential
15 aspects, in the "partially independent" group we would expect to find lower levels of life
16 satisfaction compared to other groups (in which there is a congruence both in the direction of
17 independence and dependence); in line with the congruence of self. Thus, it would be
18 reasonable to question why individuals who are economically independent and have
19 employment choose to remain in the parental home. A first hypothesis is that these
20 individuals have difficulty finding adequate accommodations, so they remain in the parental
21 home even though they would like to leave and have residential independence. If this
22 hypothesis were true, we would have found lower levels of life satisfaction in the "partially
23 independent" group compared to other groups, but we did not. Another hypothesis, in line
24 with Italian culture, which promotes interdependence and family obligations (Piumatti et al.
25 2016) and encourages young people to remain in the parental home (Ingoglia and Lo
26 Cricchio 2013), is that these emerging adults do not intend to leave the family. Our findings
27 seem to support this last hypothesis. Life in the parental home can be very comfortable,
28 although it assumes the form of a "gilded cage" for young Italians, who may perform only a
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3 small amount of domestic work and benefit from the care and attention of their parents
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5 (Mencarini et al. 2017). Although youth with working and economic independence but living
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7 with parents showed relatively high life satisfaction, similar to “totally dependent” and
8
9 “totally independent” groups of emerging adults, it is possible that the preference for the
10
11 family home is linked to other variables, such as parental (over) involvement, which may
12
13 become overdependency. This can lead to child separation anxiety from attachment figures.
14
15 Future research should study this aspect. Given that the “partially independent” group is
16
17 composed by youth with a romantic relationship (they declare to be non-cohabitant couples),
18
19 it is possible that the choice to remain in the family context depends on the couple
20
21 relationship, in terms of length or quality. The question of whether emerging adults were not
22
23 ready to cohabit due to the shortness of their relationship, or were not able to live together
24
25 due to external circumstances, or felt some form of uncertainty regarding the future of their
26
27 relationship, or wanting to stay together forever, as previously shown by other scholars,
28
29 should be studied (Lesthaeghe 2010; van der Wiel, Mulder and Bailey 2018). Future research
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31 should investigate the link between the quality of couple relationships (in terms of romantic
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33 attachment, commitment ...) and the choice to be co-resident with parents in Italian youths.
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40 The third group emerging in our study, “totally independent” from family, is composed by
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42 youths who are economically and residentially independent and with job stability. This group
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44 is formed mainly by cohabitant and married individuals, thus suggesting that partnering and,
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46 in particular, marriage and cohabit timing, may play a role in determining when these
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48 independent young adults depart the home of origin. It could also reflect young people's
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50 traditionalism with respect to leaving the parental home mainly to form a new family.
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52 Compared to the other two groups, “totally dependent” and “partially independent”, the
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54 “totally independent” group presents similar levels of life satisfaction. We would expect that,
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56 given the economic difficulties that postpone the realization of personal independence
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3 characterizing the adult stage, residential and economic independence and job stability would
4 correspond to a high level of life satisfaction in this period of life. This level of life
5 satisfaction may be in an independent group, higher than in the partially independent one.
6
7 Our results show the opposite, and confirm previous studies conducted in different countries,
8 which show that youths who face the responsibilities of adult life and are residentially and
9 economically independent and have job stability do not perceive high levels of psychological
10 well-being and life satisfaction (Switek and Easterlin 2018; Qu and de Vaus 2015).
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15 In summary, the present study showed that the transition to adulthood in young Italian
16 students, despite economic difficulties, is influenced by cultural aspects that make it
17 particularly difficult to become independent, but this does not affect life satisfaction.
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22 The findings of the present study, although interesting, present some limitations. The first
23 is the sample selection, composed by university students that constitute a relatively privileged
24 group in wealthy Western societies. The fact is, studies in literature regarding emerging
25 adulthood consistently use university student samples. Starting from this consideration, it
26 would be reasonable to wonder if this developmental age of emerging adulthood might be
27 strictly linked to university students. Moreover, the fact that university samples constitute a
28 privileged sample is also confirmed by the high education level of the parents of our
29 participants. This high parental education level is linked to working, residential and economic
30 independence and life satisfaction of participants.
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35 Another limitation related to the sample composition is that it is unbalanced in terms of
36 gender, being composed mainly by females.
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41 The second limitation of this study is that we selected only university students who were
42 born in central Italy. The choice to select this geographic area was justified by the fact that
43 we wanted to exclude cultural differences, given that previous studies found differences in
44 developmental trajectories in Italian youth between north and south (Scopesi and Bertani
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3 2003; Piumatti et al. 2016). Future research should extend these findings to participants from
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5 northern, southern and central Italy. Moreover, we did not ask information from participants
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7 about how long ago they had left their home of origin and if this move coincided with going
8
9 to live with a partner. Considering that Qu and de Vaus (2015) found no differences in life
10
11 satisfaction in the period from the year before and year after the move from parental home,
12
13 but found significant differences four years later, further research should consider this
14
15 variable. Qu and de Vaus found greater life satisfaction for those who left home to live with a
16
17 partner. This aspect also requires further investigation.
18
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21 The last limitation concerns the cross-sectional design, which does not allow us to
22
23 determine the effect of the causal relationship between life satisfaction and independence
24
25 from parents. Thus, it is not possible to know if life satisfaction changes during the different
26
27 stages of acquisition of autonomy. In other words, it is not possible compare the level of life
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29 satisfaction within the group, but only between groups. For instance, we cannot deduce
30
31 whether the level of life satisfaction shown by the totally independent group varies before or
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33 after independence. We can only state whether the level of life satisfaction shown in this
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35 group varies compared with other groups. Future studies using a longitudinal design should
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37 verify the effect of the acquisition of developmental tasks on life satisfaction.
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42 Despite these limitations, this is the first study to our knowledge to try to identify different
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44 independence conditions in emerging adults, simultaneously investigating the
45
46 interdependence of economic and residential autonomy and career. This study allowed us to
47
48 highlight important results, showing that the achievement of adulthood represents a complex
49
50 task, characterized by different aspects that are not limited to the possibility of considering
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52 oneself independent (have a job, live outside the family of origin ...). Our results raise
53
54 questions about other aspects of the transition to adulthood, such as those linked to cultural
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56 values, family influence, and the quality of family and romantic relationships.
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Table 1. Frequencies distribution on the three developmental tasks

	N	%
Residential autonomy		
1. At home with parents / with the family of origin	115	60.2
2. Outside from the home of family of origin only for part of the week	27	14.1
3. Outside from the family home permanently	49	25.7
Working autonomy		
1. No job	81	42.4
2. Occasional job	52	27.2
3. Stable and continuous job	58	30.4
Economic autonomy		
1. Totally dependent on the parents / family of origin	76	39.8
2. Partially dependent on the family of origin but on an ongoing basis	42	22
3. Occasionally dependent on the family of origin	39	20.4
4. Totally independent of the family	34	17.8
Couple status		
1. single	59	30.9
2. in dating	24	12.6
3. non-cohabiting couple	79	41.4
4. cohabiting or married	29	15.2

Table 2. Means, standard deviations, and statistical comparisons of the three groups
on the three defining variables

	Totally dependent		Partially independent		Totally independent		<i>F</i> (2, 188) – value (groups comparison)
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Residential autonomy	1.37	.57	1.06	.23	2.94	.24	364.66***
Working autonomy	1.06	.23	2.13	.67	2.69	.59	152.00***
Economic autonomy	1.13	.34	2.33	.90	3.39	.79	148.18***

Note. *** $p < .001$

Table 3. Composition of cluster groups in terms of gender, age, and couple relationship status

	Gender		Age		Relationships status				Life satisfaction	
	M	F	M	SD	Single	In dating	non-cohabiting couple	cohabiting or married	M	SD
Totally dependent	25	45	22.76	2.36	27	7	35	1	23.37	6.14
Partially independent	25	47	23.58	2.89	24	12	36	0	21.54	6.45
Totally independent	15	34	27.94	2.27	8	5	8	28	23.47	6.58

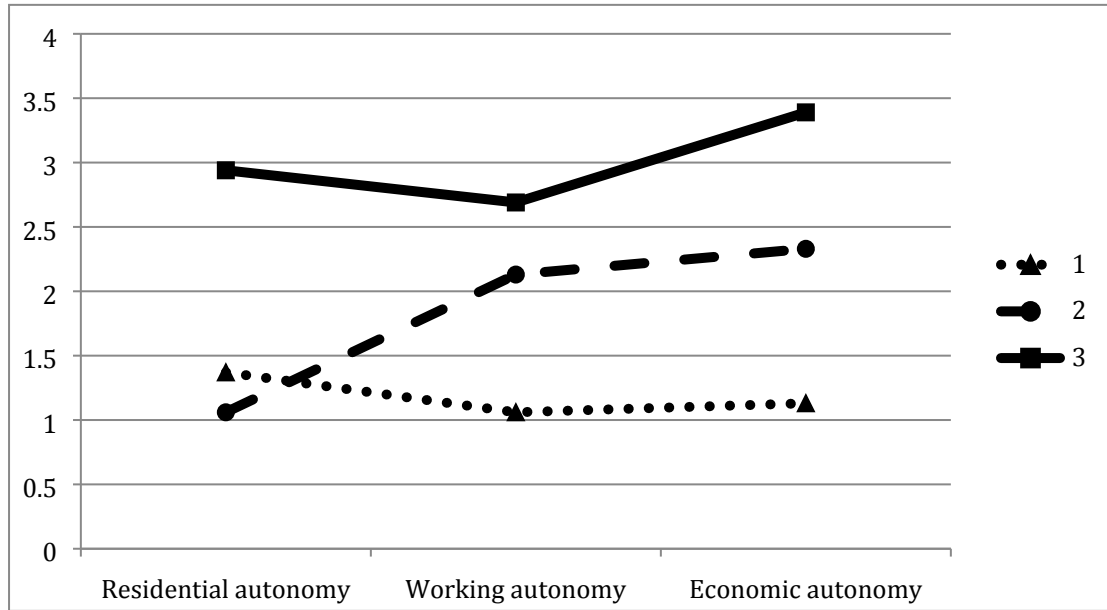


Figure 1. Mean scores by cluster. *Note:* The number refers to groups: 1. Totally dependent; 2. Partially independent; 3: Totally independent