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**"Let's not forget the family": A systematic review on family relationships during emerging adulthood**

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### **Nota Introdutória**

A presente dissertação corresponde a um manuscrito em preparação:

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## **"Let's not forget the family": A systematic review on family relationships during emerging adulthood**

### **Abstract**

The new features of the third decade of life might bring implications for family relationships and development. The current study aims to describe how relationships between emerging adults and their families are and evolve over emerging adult years. Throughout a systematic review of literature, we extracted data from 38 empirical studies, meeting the defined inclusion criteria: published since 2000, included emerging adults and/or their relatives as participants, and focused on family relationships or processes. The results showed that most studies were focused on the parent-child relationship, providing insight into the relational renegotiations occurring between them during emerging adulthood, and into intergenerational discrepancies in the way parents and children view their relationships. Family systems and family support were also found to be of substantial relevance during this developmental stage. Additionally, sex, age, living arrangements, family structure, socioeconomic status (SES), ethnicity and cultural contexts emerged as intervening factors, influencing family relationships in varied ways. Implications for future research stress the need to move from a family-related research to a family research, considering family as the unit of analysis and collecting data from multiple family members; conducting longitudinal studies, to better understand changes in family relationships across emerging adulthood; and focusing on family relationships beyond the parent-child dyads, namely on siblings' and grandparents-grandchildren' relationships. In conclusion, this review provided a renewed picture on family relationships in this period of the family life cycle, drawing attention to the diverse challenges that individuals and families must overcome nowadays, contributing to clinicals' insight on individual and familial shifts across the transition to adulthood.

**Key Words:** family relationships, emerging adulthood, transition to adulthood, family life cycle.

## **“Não vamos esquecer a família”: Uma revisão sistemática sobre as relações familiares durante a adultez emergente**

### **Resumo**

As novas características da terceira década de vida podem trazer implicações importantes para as relações familiares e desenvolvimento. O presente estudo pretende descrever como são e evoluem as relações entre adultos emergentes e as suas famílias durante essa etapa. Através de uma revisão sistemática da literatura extraímos dados de 38 estudos empíricos, que cumpriam os critérios de inclusão definidos: publicados desde 2000, com adultos emergentes e/ou os seus familiares como participantes, e focados nas relações ou processos familiares. Os resultados mostram que a maioria dos estudos se focou na relação parento-filial, fornecendo evidências relativas às renegociações relacionais que ocorrem entre eles durante a adultez emergente, e sobre as discrepâncias intergeracionais no modo como pais e filhos percebem as suas relações. Os sistemas e o suporte familiares foram também reconhecidos como especialmente relevantes durante este período desenvolvimental. Adicionalmente, sexo, idade, residência dos adultos emergentes, estrutura familiar, nível socioeconómico, etnia e contextos culturais emergiram como fatores intervenientes, influenciando as relações familiares de diversas formas. Implicações para estudos futuros enfatizam a necessidade de passar de uma investigação relacionada com a família para investigação familiar, considerando a família a unidade de análise e recolhendo dados de vários membros do sistema; de conduzir estudos longitudinais para compreender melhor as mudanças nas relações familiares durante a adultez emergente; e de focar em relações familiares para além das díades pais-filhos, nomeadamente nas relações entre irmãos e avós e netos. Em conclusão, esta revisão forneceu uma nova moldura das relações familiares ao longo deste período do ciclo vital da família, chamando a atenção para os múltiplos desafios que os indivíduos e as famílias têm de ultrapassar nos dias de hoje, contribuindo para um maior conhecimento dos clínicos nas mudanças individuais e familiares dos indivíduos durante a transição para a adultez.

**Palavras chave:** relações familiares, adultez emergente, transição para a adultez, ciclo vital da família.

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## Introduction

Over the past decades, demographic shifts have lengthened and complexified the transition to adulthood. Nowadays, most young people in industrialized societies spend a longer time in education, achieving traditional markers of adulthood – such as living independently, entering in a stable full-time job, marriage, and parenthood – later in life (Arnett, 2006; Buchmann & Kriesi 2011; Eliason, Mortimer, & Vuolo, 2015). In this scope, Arnett (2000) proposed emerging adulthood as a new stage of development from the late teens through the twenties. Accordingly, the period between the end of adolescence and the entry into adulthood is no more a brief transition, but a distinct period of the life course, characterized by change and exploration of possible life directions (Arnett, 2000; 2015).

Naturally, the changing nature of the transition to adulthood leads to important implications for family relationships and development. According to Scabini, Marta, and Lanz (2006), reaching adulthood is a process that either occurs within the family of origin or depends on the family of origin. In spite of the growing body of research devoted to the emerging adulthood field, as far as we know, less attention has been given to the implications of this new individual developmental life stage on the family system. Therefore, the purpose of the current study is to characterize family relationships during emerging adulthood years and to understand how do they transform and evolve over time, by reviewing empirical research on the topic published since 2000.

Based on interviews with people aged 18-29 living across the US, Arnett (2006; 2015) defined emerging adulthood as the age of (1) identity explorations, of trying out various life options that will further define the structure of their adult lives in terms of love relationships, work, and ideology; (2) instability, resulting from continued identity explorations and involuntary changes (e.g., being fired) (Arnett, Žukauskiene, & Sugimura, 2014); (3) self-focus, as individuals have less daily social roles or obligations compared to other life stages, and they have time to get to know themselves better; (4) feeling in-between, as they tend to view themselves as being neither adolescents nor adults; and (5) possibilities and optimism, because many different future paths remain possible and individuals tend to keep high hopes and expectations regarding their future lives. The ambivalence and in-



between-ness qualities of this period might be explained by the gradual nature of the main criteria that emerging adults perceive as necessary for reaching adulthood, established in previous studies (Arnett, 2001; 2015; L. J. Nelson & Barry, 2005): the acceptance of responsibility for one's self, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent. In addition, it has been demonstrated (L. J. Nelson et al., 2007) that emerging adults' parents also tend to see them as neither adolescents nor fully adults, and that they also agree with their children regarding the relational maturity criteria importance. Accordingly, emerging adults' main developmental tasks concern becoming responsible for themselves, instead of sharing responsibility for their actions with parents, and gaining self-sufficiency, namely becoming financially independent (Arnett, 2001; Tanner, 2006). Therefore, the transition to adulthood is a process that inevitably happens in relation to others, namely the family of origin (Tanner, 2006).

Previous conceptualizations on the family life cycle (e.g., Author citation, 2000; Carter & McGoldrick, 1988; Duvall, 1957) have acknowledged that the transition to adulthood represented an important moment in the family development course, encompassing parent-child separation and its acceptance, as well as the renegotiation of roles within family relationships. For instance, within the Duvall (1957)'s pioneer theory of the family life cycle, the sixth stage corresponded to "families with young adults", in which the launching of the children is a main developmental task to be achieved, while maintaining a supportive home base. To Carter and McGoldrick (1988), a new family life cycle starts with the stage in which young adults must establish a differentiated self, separated from the family, enter the labour world, and achieve financial independence.

More recently, Tanner (2006) underlined that it is at the beginning of the emerging adulthood that relations between individuals and their families of origin most radically shifted. This author introduced the concept of recentering, as a primary task of emerging adulthood from a developmental systems framework. Recentering consists in a relational rearrangement between the emerging adults and their families, encompassing shifts in power, agency, responsibility, and dependency, which ultimately leads to the replacement of parent regulation by self-regulation (Tanner, 2006). Also highlighting the inextricably relational nature of the transition to adulthood,

Italian scholars (Scabini et al., 2006) argued that this process is a joint transition, as both children and parents are involved in the process. Families with emerging adult children face unique challenges (Aquilino, 2006): to acknowledge the child's emerging adult status, the development of filial and parental maturity, and the interplay of emerging adults' autonomy and dependency needs. In fact, they have reached an adult status in some domains (e.g., making their own decisions) but not in others, if they, for instance, continue to be economically dependent of their families. This contradiction is bound to influence family relationships and the transition to adulthood in unique and varied ways. Moreover, the global economic crisis from 2008 and the subsequent macroeconomic instability added momentum to the already changing nature of the transition to adulthood process (Igarashi, Hooker, Coehlo, & Manoogian, 2013). Under such circumstances, the achievement of development tasks, such as reaching financial self-sufficiency and the launching process, becomes particularly challenging for individuals and families (Stein et al., 2011). Therefore, a clearer understanding on the interplay between the new features of the third decade of life and family dynamics is highly needed.

Stemming from a systemic meta-perspective and a life course framework (Elder, 1994), recognizing that individual lives are influenced by their changing historical contexts as well as the interdependence of human lives, the current study aims to provide a comprehensive and up-to-date picture on family relationships and processes during emerging adulthood, by reviewing recent empirical research on this domain. Furthermore, we intend to provide a renewed reflection about the experience of family members and the whole-family system during the transition to adulthood of their children, framing emerging adulthood years into a family life cycle perspective. This aim assumes particular relevance due to the new challenges that emerging adults and families currently face, deeply intertwined with the extension of the transition to the adulthood period and the postponement of most transition markers of adult status (Buchmann & Kriesi 2011).

## **Method**

### **Data Sources and Literature Search**

A systematic literature search was conducted in Web of Science (core

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collection), SocINDEX, and PsycINFO from 2000 until October 2017 (inclusively). The search strategy used in all databases integrated the following search terms (limited to the title): (“emerging adult\*” OR “young adult\*” OR “transition to adulthood” OR “adolescence to adulthood” OR “college students”) AND (“famil\*” OR “parent\*” OR “grandparent\*” OR “sibling\*”). Arnett’s emerging adulthood theory was officially introduced in 2000, which supported the year-range of the searches. In addition to the date of publication, limitations were created with regard to language (English). Adding to the electronic searches, the reference lists of the final selected records were manually examined to identify other relevant studies for the review.

### **Selection of Studies**

The results of the electronic searches were merged in Mendeley, where the duplicated records were electronically removed. Altogether, 1521 non-duplicated records were identified, 1395 of which were excluded. The inclusion criteria for this review were as follow: (a) empirical studies that used quantitative or qualitative methods or both; (b) studies whose participants were emerging adults and/or emerging adults’ relatives; (c) assessment of family relationships or processes as a variable (quantitative studies) or category/theme (qualitative studies). According to Arnett (2000), emerging adulthood starts in the 18th year of life, when people reach majority in most contexts. Regardless of Arnett’s first publications being primarily focused on the age period of 18-25, the current literature regarding emerging adulthood is not limiting it just until the mid-twenties. In fact, accepting emerging adulthood until thirty years-old may be more accurate internationally, especially because of the median ages for marriage and parenthood, which in some countries are higher than thirty years-old (Arnett, 2015). Thus, for the purposes of this review, we defined the age-range period for emerging adulthood starting from 18 years-old until the mid-thirties.

In the first step of the screening process, the first two authors read the titles and abstracts of the selected records, identifying 126 potentially relevant studies. The main exclusion criteria applied in this phase included: (a) assessment of family relationships or processes concerned early stages of development (i.e., childhood, adolescence); (b) studies whose participants were facing particular stressors (e.g., chronic disease, death of a relative); and

(c) the primary focus of the study went beyond family relationships or processes within the joint transition phase. This was verified, for instance, within the body of literature focused on emerging adults' intimate relationships.

In the second step of the screening process, the first two authors independently examined the full texts of the selected studies. The main exclusion criteria applied in this phase included: (a) family relationships and/or processes were not the primary focus of the study, and (b) insufficient or not included descriptive focus. According to the former criteria, studies should present descriptive data on family relationships and/or processes during this period of transition, instead of only assessing, for instance, the effects of family relationships/processes on emerging adults' individual outcomes.

The strategy applied in the second screening allowed the calculation of an interrater agreement as recommend by PRISMA – Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (Moher et al., 2015). Cohen's kappa coefficient showed a strong agreement between the two first authors ( $\kappa = .843$ ; McHugh, 2012). In the few cases in which the authors disagreed on, they were able to reach consensus after discussion. Finally, 1 additional study that met the inclusion criteria was added, identified through the examination of the reference lists of the 37 selected records from the electronic search. Figure 1 depicts the decision process of the study, including reasons for exclusion.

## Results

### Research Contexts, Designs, and Participants

The 38 studies retrieved from the electronic and manual searches were carried out in 14 different countries. The majority were conducted in the US ( $n = 22$ ), while 9 were conducted in Europe (1 each in Belgium, Spain, Switzerland, England, and United Kingdom; and 2 each in Italy and Netherlands). The remaining ones were carried out in Australia ( $n = 2$ ), Israel ( $n = 3$ ), South Africa ( $n = 1$ ), and 1 was undertaken in four different places (Germany, US, Hong Kong and Korea; Fingerman et al., 2016). Seven studies were led between 2000 and 2004, 6 between 2005 and 2009, 16 between 2010

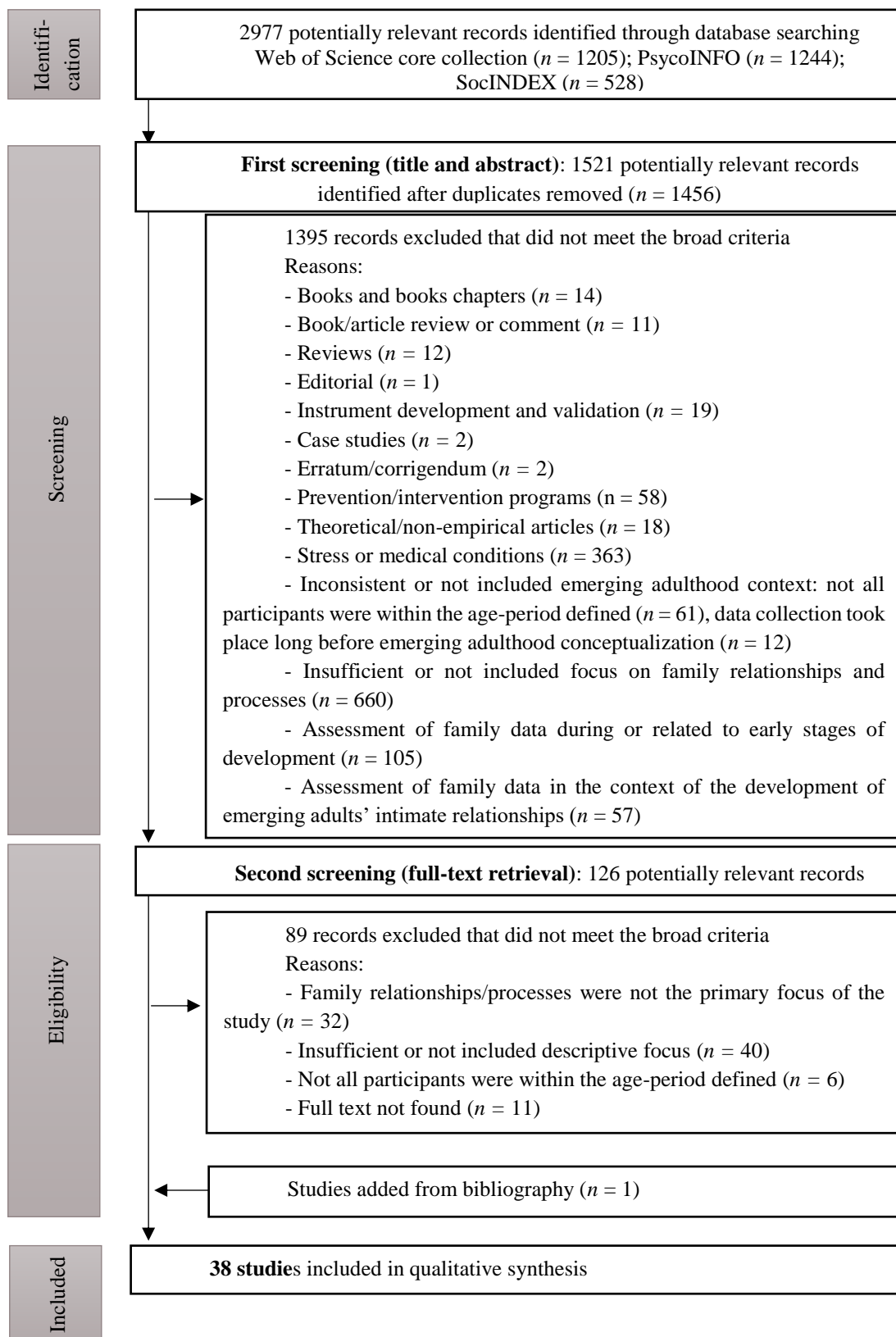


Figure 1. Flowchart of the process of review

and 2014, and 9 between 2015 and 2017. Most of the selected studies were cross-sectional ( $n = 26$ ), with 12 employing a longitudinal design. Quantitative methods were adopted in the majority of the studies ( $n = 21$ ), while 9 studies adopted a qualitative methodology. Eight studies adopted both quantitative and qualitative methods, out of which 5 were categorized as mixed-method studies and 3 as multimethod studies (Anguera, Blanco-Villaseñor, Losada, Sánchez-Algarra, & Onwuegbuzie, 2018). Within all the studies applying qualitative methods ( $n = 17$ ), 9 conducted interviews, 6 included open-ended questions, 1 included both interviews and focus-groups (Crocetti & Meeus, 2014) and another 1 included family observational tasks (Walkner & Rueter, 2014).

In terms of participants, all selected studies included emerging adults in their samples, except for 1 study that only counted with interviews of emerging adults' parents (Kloep & Hendry, 2010). Out of these 37 studies, 12 included other participants in addition to emerging adults: 9 studies included their parents; 3 compared groups of adolescents with emerging adults, one of which had also included participants' mothers and siblings (Scharf, Shulman, & Avigad-Spitz, 2005). Importantly, 7 longitudinal studies assessed emerging adults when they were still adolescents.

Regarding emerging adults' sex, the samples were predominantly composed of female participants in 29 studies and male participants in 5 studies (with 2 studies not providing this data). Within the studies that included emerging adults and/or their parents as participants, 1 study included exclusively mothers (Scharf et al., 2005) and 10 included both fathers and mothers, even though more mothers participated.

Concerning the structure of emerging adults' families, considering the studies that provided this data, two-parent families were the most frequent ( $n = 12$ ), with 3 studies exclusively involving families with this configuration. Five studies included divorced families, 2 of which included exclusively families with this configuration; 4 studies involved adoptive families, with 1 study involving only emerging adults' adoptees as participants (Farr, Grant-Marsney, & Grotevant, 2014). Participants were mainly Caucasian or European American ( $n = 15$ ), excepting in 4 studies (Cheng, Birditt, Zarit, & Fingerman 2015; Fuligni & Pedersen, 2002; Guan & Fuligni, 2016; Levitt, Silver, & Santos, 2007) in which African-American, Asian ( $n = 2$ ) and

Hispanic-American ethnicities were more prevalent, respectively. Nevertheless, 19 studies did not provide this information. In terms of socioeconomic status (SES), within the 11 studies that reported this information, three of their samples were characterized as pertaining to a low SES, one to a low-medium/medium, five to a medium, another one to a predominantly low-medium, and two to a medium/high SES.

Within the studies reporting emerging adults' occupational status ( $n = 22$ ), all of them included college students as participants, out of which 13 exclusively. Concerning emerging adults' living arrangements, within the 17 studies that clearly specified this sample characteristic, 9 reported that most of their participants lived outside the parental house, whereas 6 reported that the majority of their participants co-resided with at least one parent, and 2 exclusively included emerging adults co-residing at the parental house. Finally, 29 studies specified the age-range of emerging adults' participants. Most of them ( $n = 19$ ) included participants older than 25 years-old and 7 even involved subjects with more than 29 years of age. Table 1 displays the main data regarding context, design, and participants of the selected studies.

**Table 1. Summary of the Main Characteristics of the Selected Studies**

Author(s), year	Context	Design	Participants				
			Main characteristics				
			AD	EA	FM	<i>N</i> ; participants' sex  (other family members)	EA' ages
Bertogg and Szydlik (2016)	Switzerland	LGT; QT		✓		2226 EA; UN	most of them were 26 years old
Bucx, van Wel, and Knijn (2012)	Netherlands	CS; QT		✓		2022 EA; 1221 female	18-34 years-old
Cheng et al. (2015)	US	CS; QT		✓	✓	515 EA; 54% female	18-30 years-old

					(364 parents)	( $M = 22.3$ years)
Crocetti and Meeus (2014)	Italy	CS; MM	✓		S1: 39 EA; 51% male;	S1: 19-28 years-old
					S2: 474 EA; 52,7% female	S2: 18-28 years-old ( $M = 23.3$ years)
Darlington (2001)	Australia	CS; QL	✓		18 EA; 10 females	18-26 years-old
Farr Grant-Marsney, and Grotevant (2014)	US	LGT; Mix	✓		W3: 167 EA; 86 males	21-30 years-old (at W3) ( $M = 25.0$ years)
Fingerman et al. (2016)	Germany; Hong Kong; Korea; EUA	CS; QT	✓		1301 EA; more females	18-22 years-old
Fingerman Huo, Kim, and Birditt (2017)	US	LGT; QT	✓		159 EA; 50% female	18-30 years-old; $M(\text{cr}) = 23.2$ years; $M(\text{ncr}) = 25.7$ years
Fuligni and Pedersen (2002)	US	LGT; QT	✓		745 EA; 53% female	(at the follow-up moment)  $M(\text{older group}) = 21.2$ years; $M(\text{younger group}) = 19.3$
Givertz and Segrin (2014)	US	CS; QT	✓	✓	339 EA; 209 females  (339 parents)	$M = 19.9$ years
Guan and Fuligni (2016)	US	LGT; QT	✓		478 Total; UN	$M(\text{EA} - 2$ years after high



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						school) = 20.2 years;	
						<i>M</i> (EA – 4 years after high school) = 22.1 years	
Jensen, Arnett, Feldman, and Cauffman (2004)	US	CS; QT	✓	✓	229 AD; 55% female;  261 EA; 65% female	<i>M</i> (EA) = 20.4 years	
Kins, Soenens, and Beyers (2013)	Belgium	CS; QT		✓	✓	119 EA; 56% male  (119 parental dyads)	24-26 years-old ( <i>M</i> = 25.0 years)
Kloep and Hendry (2010)	United Kingdom	CS; QL			✓	(59 parents)	18-25 years-old
Lambert et al. (2010)	US	CS; Mix		✓		S1: 50 EA; 34 females;  S2: 231 EA; 151 females;  S3: 87 EA; 48 males;  S4: 130 EA; 74 females;  S5: 261 EA; 230 females	S1: 18-27 years-old ( <i>M</i> = 20.0 years);  S2: 18-25 years-old ( <i>M</i> = 18.0 years);  S3: 18-23 years-old ( <i>M</i> = 19.0 years);  S4: 18-27 years-old ( <i>M</i> = 19.0 years);  S5: 17-28 years-old ( <i>M</i> = 20.0 years);

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Lefkowitz (2005)	US	CS; QL	✓		205 EA; 61% female	18-25 years-old ( <i>M</i> = 20.1)
Levitt, Silver, and Santos (2007)	US	LGT; QT	✓		361 participants; 64% female	Moment 1: sophomores and seniors in high school  Moment 2: 2 years after
Lewis, West, Roberts, and Noden (2016)	England	CS; QL	✓	✓	27 EA; 19 females (27 parents)	21-29 years-old
Mansson (2012)	US	CS; QL	✓		184 EA; 93 males	19-35 years-old ( <i>M</i> = 21.0 years)
Milevsky (2004)	US	CS; QT	✓		305 EA; 189 females	19-33 years-old ( <i>M</i> = 22.4 years)
Milevsky and Heerwagen (2013)	US	CS; QL	✓		49 EA; 34 females	18-23 years-old ( <i>M</i> = 19.9 years)
Milevsky, Smoot, Leh, and Ruppe (2005)	US	CS; Mix	✓		305 EA; 189 females	19-33 years-old ( <i>M</i> = 22.4 years)
Napolitano (2015)	US	LGT; QL	✓		39 participants; 21 males	<i>M</i> <sub>w2</sub> = 22.5 years
Nelson, Padilla-Walker, Christensen, Evans, and	US	CS; QT	✓	✓	403 EA; 62% female;	18-26 years-old ( <i>M</i> = 19.9 years)

Carroll (2011)					(317 mothers and 287 fathers)		
Nelson, Bahrassa, Syed, and Lee (2015)	US	LGT; QT	✓		230 EA; 66% female	18-29 years-old [ $M_{W1} = 20.6$ years]	
Padilla-Walker, Nelson, Madsen, and Barry (2008)	US	CS; QT	✓	✓	200 EA; 121 females (400 parents)	18-25 years-old ( $M = 19.6$ years)	
Padilla-Walker, Nelson, and Knapp (2014)	US	CS; QT	✓	✓	438 EA; 320 females (376 mothers and 303 fathers)	18-29 years-old ( $M = 19.7$ years)	
Oliva, and Reina (2015)	Spain	LGT; QT	✓		90 participants; 55 females	10-22 years-old; $M_{T4} = 21.7$ years	
Renk et al. (2007)	US	CS; MM	✓		273 EA; 205 females	18-22 years-old ( $M = 19.8$ years)	
Scharf, Shulman, and Avigad-Spitz (2005)	Israel	CS; MM	✓	✓	✓	56 AD; 60 EA; 64 females (Mothers and target siblings)	21-25 years-old ( $M = 23.8$ );
Sestito and Sica (2014)	Italy	CS; QL	✓		20 EA; 10 females	18-26 years-old ( $M = 21.7$ years)	
Shulman and Ben-Artzi (2003)	Israel	CS; QT	✓	✓	165 participants; 86 females; 59 AD; 52 EA; 54 YA	EA: 21-23 years-old ( $M = 22.1$ years); YA: 26-29 years-old	

						( $M = 27.6$ years);
Smit (2011)	South Africa	CS; QL	✓			40 EA; 32 females 19-25 years-old
Tsai, Telzer, and Fuligni (2013)	US	LGT; QT	✓			821 participants; 54% female; 525~594 EA;  Wave 1-4: AD;  Wave 5, 6: EA  15-27 years-old (when assessed for the 2 <sup>nd</sup> time)
van Wel, Linssen, and Abma (2000)	Netherlands	LGT; QT	✓	✓		1688 participants; 958 females
Walkner and Rueter (2014)	US	LGT; Mix	✓	✓	✓	Self-report: 467~473 EA; UN (470 mothers and 418 fathers); Observational task: 475 child-mother and 345 mother-child observations W1: 14.5-18.5 years-old ( $M = 16.34$ years) W2: 18.5-22.5 years-old ( $M = 19.8$ years)
Wells and Johnson (2001)	Australia	CS; QT		✓		142 EA; 89 females $M_{\text{female}} = 19.5$ years; $M_{\text{male}} = 19.9$ years
Yanir and Guttman (2011)	Israel	CS; Mix	✓	✓		100 EA; 59% female (200 parents; 1 mother and 23-27 years-old ( $M = 25.4$ years);

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1 father per  
family)

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*Note.* AD = adolescents. EA = emerging adults. YA = Young adults. FM = family members. QL = qualitative. QT = quantitative. CS = cross-sectional. LGT = longitudinal. MIX = mixed-method. MM = multimethod. S = study. T = time. W = wave. UN = unspecified. cr = co-resident. ncr = non-co-resident.

### **Thematic Focus: Family Relationships and Features Explored**

The reviewed studies investigated a range of relationship features either considering emerging adults' relations with their whole-family system ( $n = 7$ ) either with specific family members ( $n = 31$ ). Among the former, it was verified that the focus of these studies was the parent-child relationship ( $n = 26$ ), followed by sibling ( $n = 4$ ), and grandparent-grandchild relationships ( $n = 1$ ). Table 2 presents the main features explored according to the family relationship investigated on the selected studies. Whereas the majority of studies examined multiple relationship features simultaneously (e.g., Parra et al., 2015; Milevsky & Heerwagen, 2013), a particular subset of them paid particular attention to support (e.g., Napolitano, 2015). Accordingly, support appeared to be a relationship feature of special relevance during emerging adulthood, being more extensively examined in some of the selected studies, particularly within the ones addressing whole-family and parent-child relationships. The results of the reviewed studies will be next presented according to the family relationship focused.

### **Whole-Family Relationship's Features**

Within the seven studies focused on the relationships between emerging adults and their families as a whole, 1 study included emerging adults and their parents as participants (Kins, Soenes, & Beyers, 2013), whereas 6 studies included exclusively offspring, with two of them assessing participants from adolescence throughout their twenties. Even though we mainly had access to children perspectives in these studies, variables assessed concerned to general properties of the family global system, with the study of Tsai et al. (2013) also focusing on parenting issues. The results of these studies will be next described.

**Table 2. Thematic Focus of the Selected Studies**

Family relationship	Relationship features explored
Whole-family relationships ( <i>n</i> = 7)	Closeness ( <i>n</i> = 1). Cohesion ( <i>n</i> = 1). Communication ( <i>n</i> = 1). Dependence <i>vs</i> Autonomy ( <i>n</i> = 1). Family identity ( <i>n</i> = 2). Mutuality ( <i>n</i> = 1). Relationship satisfaction ( <i>n</i> = 1). Respect ( <i>n</i> = 1). Support ( <i>n</i> = 3). Willingness to provide care for family ( <i>n</i> = 2).
Parent-child relationships ( <i>n</i> = 26)	Affection and/or bond ( <i>n</i> = 4). Closeness ( <i>n</i> = 7). Cohesion ( <i>n</i> = 4). Communication ( <i>n</i> = 5). Conflict ( <i>n</i> = 7). Dependence <i>vs</i> Autonomy ( <i>n</i> = 5). Mutuality ( <i>n</i> = 2). Parental knowledge ( <i>n</i> = 1). Legitimate authority ( <i>n</i> = 1). Post-divorced relationship quality ( <i>n</i> = 2). Relationship quality ( <i>n</i> = 5). Relationship satisfaction ( <i>n</i> = 2). Respect ( <i>n</i> = 1). Support ( <i>n</i> = 9). Warmth ( <i>n</i> = 1). Willingness to provide care for parents ( <i>n</i> = 2).
Siblings relationships ( <i>n</i> = 4)	Affection and/or bond ( <i>n</i> = 2). Closeness ( <i>n</i> = 4). Communication ( <i>n</i> = 3). Conflict ( <i>n</i> = 3). Support ( <i>n</i> = 2). Warmth ( <i>n</i> = 1).
Grandparent-grandchild relationships ( <i>n</i> = 1)	Affection and/or bond ( <i>n</i> = 1).

### **How are relationships within the family system?**

Crocetti and Meeus (2014) started to show that 76.9% of their participating emerging adults reported an overall positive relationship with their family, with almost half of them mentioning significant changes within family relationships. Most emerging adults felt they had a more mutual and equal family relationships, characterized by better communication, especially as reported by the ones that had already left the parental home; and characterized by an increased reciprocity, mainly reported when offspring still lived with parents.

The study conducted by Tsai et al. (2013) suggested that, across the transition to emerging adulthood, there were more discontinuity than continuity on family relationships, namely regarding: perceived maternal cohesion and family respect, which were found to decline during adolescence and to stabilize after this period; and family importance to identity, which was

found to increase across emerging adulthood. In turn, paternal cohesion declined across adolescence and, for participants with non-married parents (e.g., never married, divorced), also during emerging adulthood. Moreover, sex differences were found: females felt closer to mothers and less close to fathers, and presented a more solid sense of family identity during emerging adulthood. Crocetti and Meeus (2014) have also showed that females scored higher on family importance to identity than males, and demonstrated that family was considered more important to their participants' identity than friends were.

While Tsai et al. (2013) and Crocetti and Meeus (2014) addressed the importance of family to identity, the study of Smit (2011) examined family identity conceptualized as a sense of belonging to the family system. According to their results, most emerging adults viewed family rituals (e.g., family celebrations, traditional family holidays) as promoters of a family identity, as well as of a sense of family uniqueness. For some respondents, preserving intergenerational family rituals was an opportunity to link with family history, giving them a sense of who they are as individuals and developing an intergenerational self. Moreover, Lambert et al. (2010) addressed the role of family relationships as sources of perceived meaning in life. Firstly, it was verified that most emerging adults viewed family or a specific family member (e.g., parent, sibling) as the most important contributor to meaning. Then, among a list of 12 potential sources of meaning, family was rated by emerging adults as a significantly more influential source of meaning in life compared to each of the other sources, such as friends, happiness, or religious faith.

Lastly, Kins et al. (2013) investigated separation anxiety at the family level in families of emerging adults during the home-leaving process. Through a social relations model (SRM) analysis, personal differences in the extent to which individuals felt separation anxiety toward other family member (actor effects) were found, contrarily to partner effects. The results also suggested that separation anxiety was a specific feature of the mother-child dyad, but also of the father-mother marital relationship (relationship effects) and of the family climate as a whole (family effect). It was also verified that SRM components contributing to the level of separation anxiety experienced in family relationships did not differ according to emerging adult's residential

status (i.e., living permanently in the parental house vs. living away from the parents).

### **How are exchanges of support within the whole-family system?**

Levels of support and assistance within the family system and its trends over time were investigated in three longitudinal studies. Fuligni and Pedersen (2002) assessed three aspects of family obligation from emerging adults toward their families – current assistance, respect for family, and future support –, which were found to increase across the transition from secondary school to emerging adulthood. In addition, emerging adults with a greater sense of family obligation appeared to be more likely to contribute financially to their families and to live with parents. Differences were also found according to family structure, ethnicity, SES, and sex, such that: (a) offspring from two-parent families appeared more willing to support family in the future; (b) Latin American and Filipino emerging adults reported an expressively stronger sense of familial obligation, compared to offspring from East Asian and European backgrounds; (c) poorer emerging adults had steeper increases in all three measures during emerging adulthood, giving more importance to family respect and future support; and (d) females gave more importance to assisting and supporting the family either currently and in the future. Tsai et al. (2013) found that future obligation to assist the family declined during adolescence and stabilized after this period, while sense of current assistance to the family declined across both adolescence and emerging adulthood. Ethnic differences emerged: changes in values toward future support reduced more for emerging adults from non-European compared to European backgrounds. Guan and Fuligni (2016) revealed that, across the transition from high school, emerging adults from European American backgrounds reported increases in parental support, in contrast to those from Asian and Latin American backgrounds, whose parental support remained stable. Females described higher levels of parental and sibling support at the 12th grade, which remained constant through the succeeding years. Further, children reporting receiving higher levels of support from parents and siblings had higher levels of expectations to assist the family.

### **Parent-child Relationships' Features**

Most studies of this review attempted to characterize the quality of the



relationships between emerging adult's children and their parental subsystem, namely by examining a set of different features (e.g., relationship satisfaction, closeness, conflict). In addition, specific cross-sectional (comparing independent groups of adolescents and emerging adults) and longitudinal (assessing participants as adolescents and later as emerging adults) studies provided information about potential changes within parent-child relationships over time. These results will be next presented. Following these, specific results regarding co-residence will be described, as well as the results derived from studies addressing discrepancies between points of view of parents and emerging adults on different relational features.

### **How are the relationships between emerging adults and their parents?**

Similarly to the results from the whole-family level studies, Lefkowitz (2005) demonstrated that emerging adults relationships with their parents were positive and have become closer and more mutual. This author showed that 78% of the participants who reported changes in the quality of parent-child relationships portrayed them as mainly positive: feeling closer to parents, having more appreciation for them, having more independence, and having a more open communication with them. Consistently, Jensen et al. (2004) found that emerging adults lie less to parents than adolescents, and considered this lying behavior less acceptable than their younger counterparts. Sex differences suggested that males more easily accepted lying to parents than females.

Two longitudinal studies investigated shifts in the parent-child relationships over time. The study of van Wel et al. (2000) focused on the parental bond, which appeared to decrease during adolescence for boys and girls and improved after adolescence through the early twenties for girls. Levitt et al. (2007) found no changes in the paternal relationship satisfaction after the transition from high school, whereas maternal relationship satisfaction was reported to improve, but only by participants who were two-years post-transition. In addition, Shulman and Ben-Artzi (2003) suggested that independence from parents increased throughout the transition to adult years. Emerging adults were found to have greater ability to manage their own affairs compared to adolescents, and males reported less need for assistance from both mothers and fathers in this task. On the other hand, the intensity of

affective relationships with mothers was lower for emerging and young adults, as well as with fathers for young adults, compared to emerging adults and adolescents.

Parra et al. (2015) examined five different parent-child relationships' features between initial adolescence and emerging adulthood: frequency of communication, affection, adaptability and cohesion, and conflict. The findings indicated that communication frequency was higher for girls than boys, decreasing for both particularly from late adolescence to emerging adulthood. Affection and conflict were also found to be lower in this stage, with the latter decreasing either for boys and girls especially between late adolescence and emerging adulthood. Adaptability remained stable and cohesion enhanced from adolescence to emerging adulthood. The study of S. C. Nelson et al. (2015) have also suggested that parent-child conflict was lower during emerging adulthood. Accordingly, 65% of their participants considered their conflict with parents low and stable during their college years, and 25% reported a pattern of decreasing parent-child conflict over time. Asian-Americans, compared to Whites, were more probable to be in the increased rather than in the stable groups. Renk et al. (2007) focused specifically on the main topics of parent-child conflict during emerging adulthood, identifying peer issues as the major topic of conflict between mothers and daughters and material possessions between fathers and daughters. In turn, mother-son dyads disagreed more about independence, whereas father-son dyads about school issues. Participant females perceived their fathers as more tolerant than males. Finally, levels of conflict (self-reported and observed) were found to be higher in adoptive families, comparing to non-adoptive ones in the study of Walkner and Rueter (2014).

Adding to the study of Lefkowitz (2005), closeness within parent-child relationships was addressed in three studies. The findings showed that most emerging adults had a close relationship with at least one of their parents (Bertogg & Szydlik, 2016), and that daughters, compared to sons, reported closer relationships with mothers than with fathers (Bertogg & Szydlik, 2016; Padilla-Walker et al., 2008). Bertogg and Szydlik (2016) found that emerging adults from both sexes from Italian Switzerland reported closer ties to parents than the ones from German and French-speaking Switzerland. Moreover, Walkner and Rueter (2014) found differences in self-reported closeness by

both mothers and children across adoptive and nonadoptive families: adoptive mothers and adoptees reported less closeness than non-adoptive mothers and offspring; adoptive mothers reported a greater decrease of closeness over time when compared to nonadoptive mothers. However, for observed closeness, adoptive mothers were observed to have higher closeness with adoptees compared with nonadoptive mothers, with an increased growth across the transition to adulthood. Another study involving adoptive families (Farr et al., 2014) revealed that emerging adults described their communication with their adoptive parents as positive, being fundamental an open communication about adoption in this families. Darlington (2001) identified three main patterns of current parent-child relationships of emerging adults subjected to a custodial process during childhood or adolescence: emerging adults who kept a positive relationship with parents through life ( $n = 7$ ); those who maintained a negative perception of one of the parents ( $n = 5$ ), which, in these cases, was the one who did not obtained custody; and those who reported a progressive positive acceptance of a previously non-preferred parent ( $n = 6$ ).

Sestito and Sica (2014) explored students' perception of both parenting and relationship with parents, including their influence on identity development, identifying two profiles for second-year students and one for the finalists. Most of the younger students fitted on the suitable and adaptive co-residency' profile, reporting a close, warmth, horizontal and mutual parent-child relationship, which had been in transformation across time. Last-year students, however, seemed to live an internal conflict: despite describing a horizontal parent-child relationship in which parents treated them as adults, they did not feel they had already attained that status. Finally, Kloep and Hendry (2010) found that more than half of their interviewed parents ended up delaying their offspring's independence, and about 32% of the participants were reluctant to let their children go, having difficulties accepting the raising autonomy of their children and feeling they were losing their roles as parents.

***To live or not to live in the parental house.*** Four studies were particularly focused on co-residence between parents and emerging adult children. Fingerma et al. (2017) found that co-residence was positively associated with positive experiences with parents (e.g., laughter, enjoyable interactions), but also with more stressful encounters with them (e.g., irritations, getting on nerves), adding that co-residents were more likely to

have in-person contact than non-co-residents. Sex differences were also found: it was expected that girls who co-resided with parents spent more than half an hour with them, compared to boys. Bertogg and Szydlik (2016) verified that co-residence was associated with closeness. Particularly, in cases of divorce during offspring's childhood, a much looser intergenerational relationship of emerging adults with fathers was verified. Sestito and Sica (2014) showed that most emerging adults living with parents felt parenting as warmth, supportive and having a positive influence on their development and well-being, not feeling obliged to move out as they perceived co-residence as pleasant. On the other hand, feelings of ambivalence related to a co-residence status were reported by parents and offspring in 2 studies (Fingerman et al., 2017; Lewis et al., 2016). In the first study, emerging adults living with parents showed a mixed of both positive and negative daily experiences with them. In the study of Lewis et al. (2016), some parents reported that they were feeling guilty for the unsuccessful launch of their children who have returned to the parental house after graduation. Additionally, some offspring were also stressed with this return, however, enjoying the comfort of home.

*Different roles, different views?* Four studies specifically focused on discrepancies within reports provided by parents and their children or by parental dyads. The findings suggested that parents viewed the relationships with their children closer than they do (Bertogg & Szydlik, 2016), reporting higher levels of family cohesion and communication than offspring (Givertz & Segrin, 2014), as well as of parental knowledge (Padilla-Walker et al., 2008). In addition, parents reported less use of permissive and authoritarian parenting and greater levels of authoritative parenting compared to children (Givertz & Segrin, 2014). With regard to legitimate authority, Padilla-Walker, Nelson, and Knapp (2014) demonstrated that parents rated this variable higher than emerging adults and that, in cases where children did not perceive parents as being in control in any domain (i.e., personal, social-conventional, prudential, or moral), there was much bigger discrepancies in the participants' reports. On the other hand, emerging adults were found to consider their achievement of individual-social tasks to be greater than their parents think it was (Yanir & Guttman, 2011).

With regard to discrepancies among parental dyads, Yanir and Guttman (2011) concluded that mothers' rankings of connectedness and of

their offspring accomplishment of emerging adulthood' tasks were higher than fathers' rankings. According to L. J. Nelson et al. (2011), mothers appeared to have higher levels of child-reported parental knowledge and reported more warmth in their relationship with children than did fathers. Fathers, in turn, reported greater levels of punishment and verbal hostility than did mothers.

### **How parents and children exchange support?**

Five of the reviewed studies were mainly focused on support in parent-child relationships, and 3 of the previously described studies also examined this special feature (Fingerman et al., 2017; Levitt et al., 2007; Kloep & Hendry, 2010). Out of these 8 studies, 3 addressed the types of support more frequently exchanged between both parents and children (Bucx, van Wel, & Knijn, 2012; Cheng et al., 2015; Fingerman et al., 2016), 2 focused exclusively on (willing to provide) support to parents by children (Napolitano, 2015; Wells & Johnson, 2001) and 3 referred to support mainly received from parents (Fingerman et al., 2017; Levitt et al., 2007; Kloep & Hendry, 2010).

Overall, parents and offspring appeared to be significant sources of support for each other (Bucx et al., 2012), even though emerging adults appeared to receive more support than provide (Bucx et al., 2012; Fingerman et al., 2016). Types of support were addressed in 7 studies with 2 of them (Kloep & Hendry, 2010; Napolitano, 2015) generating types of support from participants' interviews. Fingerman et al. (2016) showed that emerging adults reported often receiving six types of support: emotional, practical, companionship, advice, financial assistance, and listening. Participants from Hong Kong and Korea were found to receive more practical support than those from Germany or the United States, but, regardless of the country, emerging adults reported providing little support to parents. However, they offered regular implicit forms of support, namely listening to parents, similar to results from the study of Cheng et al. (2015). Moreover, Bucx et al. (2012) demonstrated that advice was exchanged more often than practical or financial support. In the study of Kloep and Hendry (2010) parents reported some types of support they provided to children, namely practical, emotional and financial, adding, however, some complains about their offspring's incapacity of managing their own economies.

In the study of Fingerman et al. (2016), mothers were found to provide

more support to children than fathers, excepting for financial support; and younger children received more support than the older ones, excepting for emotional support. In terms of sex differences, girls received more support than boys (Fingerman et al, 2016), while boys were found to receive more support from fathers in the study of Levitt et al. (2007). The latter study also found that, in terms of ethnic differences, African-Americans felt less support from fathers and reported less satisfaction with post-transition paternal relations compared to European-American, Asian-American and Hispanic-American. Lastly, Bucx et al. (2012) showed that advice was specially received from and provided to mothers, and that girls were more likely than boys to provide advice and practical support to parents, but not financial.

***Different family structures, differentiated support exchanges?*** Four of these studies included analyses regarding parent-child support considering intact and non-intact families. Wells and Johnson (2001) found that willingness to provide care for parents, for both daughters and sons, depended on the parents' marital status for fathers but not for mothers. This could be explained by a reduced attachment to fathers, as mothers were usually the custodial parent. Accordingly, Cheng et al. (2015) found that emerging adults reported offering more support to parents when parent-child relationships were better. Bucx et al. (2012) found that parents were less likely to provide and receive advice from children if they were divorced, and less likely to receive if they were remarried. The probability of practical support received from or provided to parents by emerging adults diminish when parents were divorced. Regarding financial support, differences between mothers and fathers were found when parents were not living together, with mothers being more likely to provide financial support to children and receive from them. Lastly, the results from Fingerman et al. (2016) and Levitt et al. (2007) were in accordance with the previous studies, establishing that married parents provided more support to children than non-married ones.

***Does co-residence promote exchanges of support?*** Issues of support in relation to living arrangements were addressed in 3 studies. According to Fingerman et al. (2016), offspring co-residing with parents were more prone to experience all types of support from them. An ethnic difference was also found, with emerging adults from Hong Kong presenting higher rates of co-residence, as well as provision of support to and from parents, compared to

emerging adults from the other backgrounds. Fingerman et al. (2017) demonstrated that most co-resident and non-co-resident emerging adults received advice and emotional support during the study week, but co-residents were more likely to experience all types of support (i.e., emotional, practical, and advice). Lastly, Napolitano (2015) found that, among lower SES, emerging adults residing at the parental home claimed providing essentially financial support to parents, even though most of them preferred to live independently. They also reported feeling difficulties in managing household responsibilities with their own individual capital goals (e.g., the desire of living with a partner or getting married).

*Different roles, different views?* Cheng et al. (2015) documented the presence of discrepancies in terms of the support provided by emerging adults to their parents, as children claimed providing more emotional, practical, technological, and financial support, as well as advice, than parents recognized.

### **What About Siblings Relationships?**

Altogether, emerging adults mainly described positive changes in the relationship with their siblings during this period (Milevsky et al., 2005; Milevsky & Heerwagen, 2013; Scharf et al., 2005), referring sisters as promoters of more harmonious relationships (Milevsky et al., 2005; Scharf et al., 2005). Moreover, it was shown that emerging adults reported more emotional exchanges and more positive descriptions of siblings than adolescents, even though they spent less time with siblings in a regular afternoon than adolescents (Scharf et al., 2005). They also reported more enjoyable experiences of moments together and viewed the entrance in college as a moment of more maturity and new experiences and perspectives on the sibling bond (Milevsky & Heerwagen, 2013). Sex disparities found by Scharf et al. (2005) suggested that there were more emotional exchanges and affective intensity within same sex sibships.

Regarding conflict, respondents, target siblings, and mothers from the study of Scharf et al. (2005) considered relationships with siblings less conflictual in emerging adulthood than in adolescence. In addition, older emerging adults were found less likely to report conflict within their sibling relationships (Milevsky et al., 2005). Conflict could be generated by economic

problems (Milevsky et al., 2005) or by the different treatment between siblings: for instance, based on participants' reports, the eldest child was often exposed to stricter family rules than the younger one (Milevsky & Heerwagen, 2013). Scharf et al. (2005) found that parent-child relationships were not associated to siblings' conflict, although higher levels of functional dependence (i.e., dependence on parents for managing offspring's affairs) conducted to less rivalry between children. Nevertheless, parental divorce appeared to cause tension among siblings' relationship (e.g., if they live in different households, different house rules may cause jealousy and conflicts between siblings) (Milevsky & Heerwagen, 2013).

Regarding closeness, this feature was perceived as increasing across emerging adulthood years (Milevsky et al., 2005; Milevsky & Heerwagen, 2013; Sharf et al., 2005), except for divorced families, where siblings' relationship of emerging adults was found as being less close (Milevsky, 2004). The lower involvement of parents in their children's conflicts contributed to a closer bond between siblings (Milevsky & Heerwagen, 2013), which was negatively associated with sibship's length (Milevsky et al., 2005). Two studies addressed communication, which became less frequent with economic problems or larger sibships (Milevsky et al., 2005) and in cases of divorce (Milevsky, 2004). Sibling relationships' warmth was higher than during adolescence (Scharf et al., 2005) and it was predicted by age and sex: older and/or female siblings promoted warmer sibling relationships (Milevsky et al., 2005). Further, age-gaps between siblings were viewed as negative to their relationships according to some emerging adults (Milevsky et al., 2005; Milevsky & Heerwagen, 2013), in the sense that it could lead to parental figure of the older sibling instead of promoting a more equal relationship (Milevsky & Heerwagen, 2013). Lastly, some inconsistent results were found regarding geographic distance between siblings. It was described either as advantage (Milevsky & Heerwagen, 2013), either as having a negative effect on siblings relationships (Milevsky et al., 2005).

### **How siblings exchange support?**

Two studies addressed support within this family subsystem. According to Milevsky et al. (2005), siblings were social support providers for each other during emerging adulthood, generally reporting high levels of support. The most important function of support described by participants was



that they counted on siblings to give them immediate help when they needed it. However, support exchanges were affected by factors such as: working situation, with not employed participants scoring higher in support than the ones who were working; sibship length, with emerging adults from larger sibships scoring lower (Milevsky et al., 2005); and, lastly, family structure, with emerging adults from non-divorced families scoring higher on support than the ones from divorced families (Milevsky, 2004).

### **And What About Grandparent-grandchild Relationships?**

Relationships between emerging adults and grandparents were examined by 1 study (Mansson, 2012), addressing the ways in which grandparents communicate affection to their grandchildren, as perceived by emerging adults. The results showed that nonverbal affection (e.g., hugging, kissing, eye contact, laughter) was the most common behavior grandparents used to demonstrate affection, closely followed by attempts to spend face-to-face time with grandchildren (e.g., having lunch or dinner together, going on vacancies with them). Support/encouragement (e.g., providing financial support by paying for education or bills) was the least reported affectionate behavior grandparents used toward grandchildren.

### **Discussion**

The present review aimed to describe family relationships and processes of families with emerging adult children, attempting to uncover the implications that the new features of the transition to adulthood bring for the family system. A first conclusion of this review stems from the centrality of parent-child relationships in research in these years of development, as previously noted by Aquilino (2006). This could be particularly justified by the extending length of time that parents are engaged in parenting activities (L. J. Nelson et al., 2011), functioning as “safety nets”, while supporting their children's successful transition to adulthood (Swartz, Kim, Uno, Mortimer, & O'Brien, 2011). The findings underscored important changes in the patterns of interaction between parents and children, supporting the view of emerging adulthood as a period of significant shifts in the parent-child relationships (Aquilino, 2006; Tanner 2006). In addition, discrepancies between parents and their offspring regarding their relationships were found, suggestive of

growing separation and differentiation. A second conclusion comprises the major role that family and particularly family support play in families within this period of development. Finally, a third conclusion concerns the role of different intervening factors shaping family relationships in varied ways, namely: family members' sex, emerging adults' age, living arrangements, family structure, SES, ethnicity, and cultural contexts.

With regard to the first conclusion, the results globally showed that parent-child relationships across emerging adulthood years became more mutual, horizontal, and closer (Lefkowitz, 2005; Sestito & Sica, 2014), and less conflictual (S. C. Nelson et al., 2015). In this sense, these relationships appeared to evolve toward a relationship between adults, an important shift that families with children in the transition to adulthood are expected to attain, as previously indicated by Carter and McGoldrick (1988) and later by Aquilino (2006). Moreover, the pattern of warmer, less conflictual, and more enjoyable and supportive relationships in emerging adulthood than in adolescence (e.g., Milevsky & Heerwagen, 2013) was also found for the fraternal subsystem. The findings of this review suggested that families proceed, in fact, to a relational redefinition, including changes in the family hierarchy and power, as well as a renegotiation in family's interdependences (Author citation, 2000), which is at the basis of Tanner's (2006) conceptualization of recentring. Furthermore, this review underlined the particular challenges that families with emerging adults face, namely acknowledging the child' emerging adult' status and managing the interplay between autonomy and dependency needs. This was particularly demonstrated by a subset of studies that captured some of the parents' ambivalence regarding the raising autonomy of their children (Kloep & Hendry, 2010; Lewis et al., 2016), as some parents attempted to delay offspring's home leaving, while others felt guilty for their unsuccessful launch of the children. Moreover, in the Italian investigation of Sestito and Sica (2014), some emerging adults reported that, even though the relationships with their parents moved toward an adult-adult relationship, they continued to feel that they do not reached an adult status. Taken together, these results might be explained by the achievement of adult status by emerging adults in some domains (e.g., which job to take) but not in others (e.g., not being able to move out from the parental house) (Aquilino, 2006), as well as by the

gradual nature of the criteria that today are considered necessary for reaching adulthood (Arnett, 2001; L. J. Nelson & Barry, 2005).

Furthermore, parents appeared to be more optimistic in their perceptions on the relationships with their children (e.g., Bertogg & Szydlik, 2016; Givertz & Segrin, 2014). This is in accordance with previous findings from Aquilino (1999), which found that children tended to focus more on conflict and differences in relation to parents, whereas parents attempted to display a more positive image of their parent-child relationship. Interestingly, these discrepancies are likely to mirror normative intergenerational differences, in the sense that whereas parents are focused on familial and generational continuity, emerging adults strive to create an individualized self, differentiated from the family of origin (Author citation, 2000).

Concerning the second conclusion, the major relevance of the family for emerging adults was especially demonstrated within a subset of studies addressing family's importance to one's identity during these years of development (Crocetti & Meeus, 2014; Tsai et al., 2013), the significance of family rituals for maintaining a sense of family belonging and uniqueness (Smit, 2011), and the view of family members as important sources of meaning in life (Lambert et al., 2010). Underlining the interdependence among family members within this joint transition phase (Scabini et al., 2006), support was a relationship's feature particularly scrutinized, being of major importance in this phase. At one hand, the findings showed that current support was predominantly provided by parents to children, which often includes financial assistance (e.g., Fingerman et al., 2016). In fact, parents generally seem to encourage the exploration process during emerging adulthood (Swartz et al. et al., 2011), supporting their children during today's protracted period of transition to adult status. At another hand, children support to parents was found to increase in emerging adulthood (Napolitano, 2015), as well as a sense of family obligation to support the family (Fuligni & Pederson, 2002). This is likely to reflect the development of filial maturity, one of the main developmental tasks of emerging adulthood (Aquilino, 2006).

Regarding the third conclusion, several sex differences emerged from the studies' results. Male emerging adults seemed more independent from parents (Shulman & Ben-Artzi, 2003), having less frequent communication with them (Parra et al., 2015). In turn, female children appeared to be more

involved in supportive practices toward the family (Fuligni & Pedersen, 2002), to be more likely to receive support from parents (Fingerman et al., 2016), as well as to promote warmer and affective siblings relationships than males (Milevsky et al., 2005). Overall, these findings support the view that females are more connected to family than males (Aquilino, 2006; Crocetti & Meeus, 2014; Fuligni & Pedersen, 2002). Moreover, our results revealed that female emerging adults were found to be closer to mothers than to fathers (Bertogg & Szydlik, 2016; Tsai et al., 2013), and that mothers showed more positive views of their relationship with offspring compared to fathers (L. J. Nelson et al., 2011). Findings of the review also underscored the specificity of separation-anxiety as a typical feature of the mother-child dyad (Kins et al., 2013). These results are in line with other works (Arnett, 2015; McGoldrick, Heiman, & Carter, 1993; Scabini, 2000), which suggested that mothers have a core role in the parent-child relationship and tended to be more involved in their children lives than fathers. The results related to the closeness in the mother-daughter relationship are also in accordance with previous literature (Arnett, 2015; Scabini, 2000; Author citation, 2000; Fingerman, 1996), suggesting more intensive and affective relationships for this dyad. Globally, our results appear to show that women continue to be more recognized in the caregiver role than men (McGoldrick et al., 1993).

Concerning emerging adults' age, younger children were found to receive more parental support than the older ones across most of the domains assessed (Fingerman et al., 2016). This is consistent with Swartz et al. (2011), who found that economic support decreases as respondents age. Notably, this might indicate a progressive successful attainment of an adult status. Moreover, older participants appeared to endorse warmer and less conflictual relationships with their siblings (Milevsky et al., 2005), which seems to illustrate the development of more horizontal relationships across time. Additionally, siblings age-gaps were usually perceived as negative to the relationships, (e.g., Milevsky & Heerwagen, 2013), which suggests that it might be easier for siblings with reduced age gaps to see refinements in their relationships, as they perceive communalities in their tasks or responsibilities during the transition to adulthood.

As some studies of this review demonstrated, living arrangements of emerging adults have been shifting toward the postponement of the moving

out process from the parental house (see Aquilino, 2006). The review findings underscored that co-residence could bring both positive and negative implications for individual and family development. At one hand, it appeared to be linked with positive experiences between parents and offspring (Fingerman et al., 2017), closeness (Bertogg & Szydlik, 2016; Sestito & Sica, 2014) and support (e.g., Fingerman et al., 2017). In fact, previous studies (e.g., Aquilino, 1999) have showed that co-residence was associated to closeness during these years of development. On the other hand, it was also found to promote stressful parent-child encounters (Fingerman et al., 2017), and to be associated with parental feeling of guilt for the unsuccessful launching of their children (Lewis et al., 2016). Additionally, it was also suggested that leaving the parental house could bring positive implications to the parent-child communication (Crocetti & Meeus, 2014). This second body of findings is in accordance with studies that suggested that when individuals move out from the parental house parent-child conflict decreases and closeness increases (Aquilino, 1997; Arnett, 2015). Altogether, we found a complexified picture of results regarding living arrangements in emerging adulthood. This topic warrants further investigation, specially across different geographic and cultural contexts, which could explain some of the variability of the results obtained. Furthermore, it is legitimate to consider that this complexified picture of results reflects the new contours of the transition to adulthood. Nowadays, situations of prolonged co-residence might be more common, involving benefits for both emerging adults and parents, but also potential costs for family relationships and for children's autonomization processes.

Family relationships were also found to vary according to family structure, with a subset of studies showing that parental divorce was bound to influence levels of conflict between parent-child dyads (Darlington, 2001), as well as paternal cohesion (Tsai et al., 2013) and closeness (Bertogg & Szydlik, 2016). A similar pattern was identified within siblings' relationships, with parental divorce being linked with negative relationship outcomes (e.g., Milevsky, 2004). Further, previous studies (Aquilino, 2005; Swartz et al., 2011) sustained that non-married parents provided less support to children than married ones, which was reinforced by this review findings (e.g., Bucx et al., 2012; Fingerman et al., 2016). Moreover, Wells and Johnson (2001) found that children's willingness to provide care for fathers was related to

parental marital status. Importantly, sex differences in these results appeared to derive from the fact that mothers, and not fathers, tended to be the custodial parent (Arnett, 2015; Wells & Johnson, 2001). In addition, this review underscored differences between adoptive and non-adoptive families, regarding conflict and closeness (Walkner & Rueter, 2014).

Evidence that SES played a role in support exchanges was also found in this review. Fuglini and Pederson (2002) suggested that emerging adults from lower income families were more likely to feel obligated to assist their families in the future, whereas Napolitano (2015) suggested that these emerging adults were particularly aware of the family needs, sometimes withdrawing their individual goals to support their families. Previous studies (see Aquilino, 2006) have underscored that emerging adults with lower SES might often feeling obliged to remain at the parental house, as they cannot afford more expenses. Nevertheless, Swartz et al. (2011) indicated that, even though the likelihood of receiving parental support is influenced by SES, parents across diverse income groups usually provide at least some money for offspring's daily costs. This is likely to reflect people's awareness of the current challenges emerging adults today face.

Finally, differences within family relationships related to ethnicity and cultural contexts were found regarding closeness (Bertogg & Szydlik, 2016), conflict (S. C. Nelson et al., 2015), and support (Fingerman et al., 2016; Fuligni & Pedersen, 2002; Guan & Fuligni, 2016; Levitt et al., 2007) features. Within family support, however, the results revealed to be somewhat inconsistent. These findings support the view of Aquilino (2006), stressing the need for racial and ethnic diversity in research about family relationships in emerging adulthood.

### **Research Critique and Future Directions**

The first critique to the reviewed research lies on the selected studies' participants, mainly emerging adult children. Accordingly, a more reduced attention was given to other family members' perspectives on family relationships. When studying family relationships, taking into account only one family member's perceptions could be considered a research inconsistency, as this strategy will not allow to describe the family relationship, but only the particular view of that family member about the

relationship (Scabini et al., 2006). In most of the reviewed studies, the unit of analysis was the individual, being the findings of this review mainly supported in family-related studies (see Scabini et al., 2006). In addition, when family members beyond the emerging adult child were included in the studies, they were mainly mothers, with fathers and/or other family roles appearing less frequently. These research trends have been previously identified specifically in the study of parenting in emerging adulthood (L. J. Nelson et al., 2011). Moreover, the observed discrepancies between parents and their offspring in the reviewed studies and in other works (Aquilino, 1999; Scabini, 2000), as well as the influence of age on siblings' reports (Milevsky et al., 2005) found in this review, reinforce the pertinence of collecting multiple perspectives within the family. Therefore, we strongly encourage future studies on family relationships throughout the transition to adulthood to include multiple family members as participants (e.g., parents, grandparents), and to consider the family as the unit of analysis, attempting to understand relational dynamics.

Secondly, few research attention has been given to family relationships beyond the parent-child dyad, namely siblings and grandparent-grandchild relationships. This is in accordance with the view of Aquilino (2006), who identified the role of extended family relationships as a research gap in this area. Importantly, as people grow up, siblings' relationships become a matter of choice, in contrast to childhood (Aquilino, 2006); further research is needed to understand how these relationships evolve over time and why siblings choose (or not) to stay connected, particularly with the contemporary challenges that emerging adults face. In addition, the findings of this review related to the positive support role of siblings add importance to a deeper exploration of these relationships during today's transition to adulthood. On another hand, grandparents have been documented to be of increasing importance in supporting the family system (Glaser et al., 2013), either in emotional (e.g., advice) or practical/instrumental (e.g., paying college expenses) terms. These could be viewed as a reflection of the growing life expectancy, inextricably linked with the current common family model involving three or even four generations within a family system (Author citation, 2000). In this line, we encourage future studies to adopt a systemic and intergenerational approach, aiming at identifying the specificities of grandparent-grandchildren relationships in emerging adulthood and the role

of grandparental figures in this family joint enterprise (Scabini et al., 2006) that is the transition to adulthood.

Another research critique encompasses the terminology used to designate the developmental period coincident with the third decade of life. In the reviewed studies, both terms of emerging adulthood and young adulthood were used, often in an undifferentiated manner. Importantly, for some authors (e.g., Arnett, 2015; Shulman & Ben-Artzi, 2003), these terms are not synonyms, being emerging adulthood a distinct period that precedes young adulthood. Moreover, studies were not all restricted to the 18-25 years range, which in our view represents a strength of this review. In the words of Arnett (2015), nothing magical happens when individuals reach age 25, being the end of emerging adulthood quite variable. Accordingly, we recommend researchers to carefully select the participants' age ranges in their future studies, paying attention to the topic being addressed as well as specificities of their national contexts (e.g., median ages of entering marriage and parenthood).

Furthermore, Swanson (2016) examined empirical research on the topic of emerging adulthood between 2000 and 2015, providing data about the main topics, methods, authors, publishing outlets, and research trends. One of the author's conclusions attested that research on emerging adulthood was international in scope, including studies carried out in countries other than the US, as well as studies related to a specific ethnicity. Interestingly, the percentage of studies in this review developed outside the US was higher than the one found by Swanson (2016). Nevertheless, there was still a predominance of study samples involving White emerging adults, who were college students pertaining to middle-class families within the US, which might constitute a research skew in the current review. This research trend has already been identified by Aquilino (2006), especially regarding the predominance of college population from middle-class families, in contrast to the so called forgotten half, as well as social and ethnic minorities. Importantly, these sociodemographic features are likely to influence the way in which both emerging adults and their families navigate this time of their lives. For instance, the literature suggested that emerging adults from lower income families are likely to have fewer opportunities of exploration than wealthier people in the same age (Arnett, 2015).



Additionally, our review included studies with participants from families' structures beyond the nuclear intact family, which could be regarded as a literature strength. Considering that family structure emerged in this review as an intervening factor likely to deeply influence family relationships, and the increasing diversity of families forms in today's society, future research would definitely benefit from including participants from multiple family forms (e.g., single, step, extended families). Moreover, this review showed that emerging adults' living arrangements represented another important sociodemographic feature. Further studies are needed to grasp the benefits and drawbacks of the different living arrangements that may occur during emerging adulthood, either to parents, children, and other family members. In sum, it is of utmost relevance that future studies include more heterogeneous samples, providing clear descriptions of participants' academic/professional paths, SES, ethnicity, family structure, and living arrangements – an important procedure at which some of the reviewed studies failed.

Finally, also in line with the findings of Swanson (2016), this review included both qualitative and quantitative research, but most of reviewed studies were cross-sectional. Longitudinal research would be valuable to better analyze the changes and processes that occur during emerging adulthood within the family system.

### **Limitations, Strengths, and Conclusion**

There are limitations of the current review. Firstly, the chosen electronic databases might have biased resulted records, namely regarding scientific journals. This, along with the non-English exclusion criterion, could possibly hamper our access to other relevant publications meeting this review inclusion criteria. Secondly, the diversity of discussed topics and methodologies did not benefit cross-national nor cross-socioeconomic contexts comparisons. Further, 3 out of 4 studies focused on siblings' relationships appeared to be carried out by the same first author, which could represent a research skew in this review due to the potential communalities of these studies' rationales and methodologies.

Nevertheless, this review provided an overall description of family relationships during emerging adulthood, identifying the most scrutinized

features and relationships, and the main gaps in this body of research. More importantly, this review findings underlined the relational nature of the transition to adulthood, in accordance with Elder's (1994) view of the interdependence of human lives and with systemic conceptualizations of the family life cycle (Author citation, 2000; Carter & McGoldrick, 1988). A core recommendation for future research consists in a shift from family-related research to family research, which demands the inclusion of multiple family members as participants, as well as pursuing information about each person's individual perspective and about what family members share (Scabini et al., 2006).

Furthermore, from the findings of a specific set of studies of this review (e.g., Lewis et al., 2016; Kloe & Hendry, 2010), it is legitimate to expect that not only children, but also parents/families are feeling in between during this time of their lives. Inherently, during these years parents are viewed as the "sandwich generation", divided between their offspring and their elderly parents (Author citation, 2000), with the lengthy transition to adulthood of their children hindering the establishment of clear boundaries (McGoldrick et al., 1993). Nowadays, this could be even more pronounced: at one hand, offspring seek for their independence, and on the other, they are still, at least financially, reliant on their parents, often shifting between co- and non-coresidency. Accordingly, families might see themselves floating amongst the previously established challenges of this stage and new ones, not being sure about the best path to follow. According to Aquilino (2006), there is a lack of social norms and cultural expectations for how emerging adults and parents should renegotiate relationship changes, which fosters a great variability among families during this period (Aquilino, 2006). Ultimately, the present review attempted to examine this variability, being, to the best of our knowledge, the first endeavor to systematically address the recent literature on family relationships during emerging adulthood. Lastly, implications from this review draw attention to the "new and old" challenges that families with emerging adults must overcome, providing a renewed vision of this stage of life cycle, that could be particularly useful for clinicians working with these families.

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