

Family Relationships From Adolescence to Emerging Adulthood: A Longitudinal Study

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Abstract

This longitudinal follow-up studies a group of 90 girls and boys from initial adolescence into emerging adulthood. The relationships between these young people and their parents are analyzed over a 10-year period, while considering possible gender differences. The results indicate that the levels of communication and affection perceived by these young people diminish during emerging adulthood; however, their perceived adaptability remains and cohesion increases as the frequency of conflicts decreases. In terms of gender differences, boys and girls show similar developmental pathways. On the other hand, the results indicated a high relative stability for the scores of the subjects. This work underlines the importance of further studies about family relationships during emerging adulthood, especially from a longitudinal perspective.

Keywords

family relationships, emerging adulthood, adolescence, longitudinal study

Introduction

For most young people from industrialized societies, the third decade of life differs from adolescence as well as adulthood. This fact has allowed the

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various researchers to conclude that a new stage in the life cycle has appeared (Cohen, Kasen, Chen, Hartmark, & Gordon, 2003; Eccles, Templeton, Barber, & Stone, 2003; Nelson, Badger, & Wu, 2004). It is a differentiated phase of life with its own defining characteristics (Arnett, 2007). Currently, the most accepted term when referring to this intermediate stage of the life cycle is *emerging adulthood*, a concept coined by Jeffrey Arnett that appeared for the first time in 2000, when describing the period between the end of adolescence and the intermediate or final years of the third decade of life (between 18 and 25 years of age).

The emergence of this relatively new developmental stage justifies the limited knowledge of the topic to date. In this sense, one of the least known aspects is how family relationships change during these years.

Family is a system composed of interacting elements which, as individuals, is subjected to macrosystemic influences. Throughout its lifetime, the family faces a variety of transitions that demand adaptive efforts by its members. As Granic (2000) indicates, the transition coinciding with the onset of their children's adolescence will be one of the most important. Although the family could have acquired a pretty stable organizational pattern during childhood, during adolescence, because of physical, cognitive, and emotional changes experienced by adolescents, the family system becomes unbalanced. This makes it especially sensitive and unstable, facilitating or forcing as would be the case, the appearance of new functional systems (Granic, Dishion, & Hollenstein, 2003). Recognizing this fact has motivated the interest of researchers, who have dedicated significant effort to exploring the relationships between mothers, fathers, sons, and daughters for decades.

Currently, it can be said that *some things are known* (Steinberg, 2001), probably, *quite a lot*, about family dynamics during adolescence; but very little is known about what happens when children reach the age of 20 which, only recently, has attracted a more systematic interest of developmental scholars (Galambos & Leadbeater, 2000).

The limited research analyzing family relationships during emerging adulthood highlights the existence of continuity between these and previous years. Thus, among the factors that predict the quality of the relationships at this time, prior interaction patterns are most outstanding (Thornton, Orbach, & Axinn, 1995; Tubman & Lerner, 1994), and young people who stated that they lived in more cohesive homes during adolescence, with affection and emotional proximity, later feel closer to their parents (Rossi & Rossi, 1990). Nonetheless, it is also important to indicate that this continuity tends to weaken with the passing of time (Belsky, Jaffee, Hsieh, & Silva, 2001). In other words, the evidence of continuity appears to be greater when

comparing the emerging adult–parent relationships with those of adolescent–parent relationships, than when going back to the years prior to childhood.

Research indicates that the relationships usually improve during these years, with a lesser conflict rate (Noack & Buhl, 2005), especially in those families where the young people no longer live with their parents (Aquilino, 1997; Belsky et al., 2001). In fact, according to certain studies, the *coresidence* factor appears to be important when predicting the level of parent–offspring conflict during these years, with 21-year-olds who continued to live with their parents showing higher levels of depression and poorer relationships with their parents than those who lived independently (Dubas & Petersen, 1996). Nevertheless, other works fail to coincide with these results; for Latin American and young people of Asian origin in the United States, living in the family home bears no significant relation, neither in terms of their personal well-being, nor in the quality of family relationships (Fulgini & Pedersen, 2002).

One result that seems to generate greater consensus is that the well-being of young people during emerging adulthood is highly related to the quality of their family relationships (Roberts & Bengtson, 1993). Thus, family is a fundamental support during this period (Holdsworth & Morgan, 2005), and the quality of the relationships continues to be essential for adjustment during this developmental stage (Powers, Hauser, & Kilner, 1989; Umberson, 1992).

With regard to gender differences, some studies showed that during emerging adulthood women maintain significantly more contact with family members and tend to view their parents as a more important source of emotional support than do men (Kenny & Donaldson, 1991; Sneed et al., 2006). Furthermore, daughters perceive higher levels of cohesion than sons (Scabini & Galimberti, 1995). Women also tend to maintain closer relationships with their parents during the transition into adulthood than do men, and they tend to be more strongly affected by their relationships with their parents than men (Hoffman & Weiss, 1987; Lopez, Campbell, & Watkins, 1986; Sneed et al., 2006).

Most studies mentioned above were performed in the United States. Although there are similarities between that context and the European reality (Arnett, 2006), there is a lack of empirical evidence that allows the American results to be generally applicable to Europe (Buhl & Lanz, 2007; Douglass, 2005).

In addition, Europe is not a standard scenario and, within a single European context, a variety of transition to adulthood models can be identified depending on the country (Scabini, 2000). The reality of Spain would be defined as the *Mediterranean model* (Scabini, Marta, & Lanz, 2006), which is a model

characterized by living in the family home until well over the age of 20 years and leaving that home, generally, to live with a partner.

At least in the case of Spain, it is not clear whether young people remain in the parental home because they are comfortable there (Douglass, 2005), or because their economic situation hinders emancipation (Martín, 2002). It is true that family is one of the main sources of support, both economically and emotionally, during these years (Baizán, 2001; Jurado, 2001). Even though some features of the parent–offspring relationships during emerging adulthood in the Spanish context are known (Fierro & Moreno, 2007), the picture of what happens in Spanish households during these years is still unclear. Today's profound economic crisis, which has created the highest youth unemployment rate in Europe—with 52% of Spaniards younger than 25 years without a job (Eurostat, 2012)—makes the study of family relationships during these years even more necessary, to learn to what degree the forced economic dependence on parents could be affecting the quality of the family relationships. As indicated in the 2008 Report about Youth in Spain, which compared previous decades, young people now depend economically on their parents for a longer period of time, as they also continue to live under the same roof. Undoubtedly, this demands readjustments within the family system to adapt to a new reality where sons and daughters are no longer children but rather, are building their own adult roles. Thus, the general objective of this work is to learn about family relationships that coincide with the emerging adulthood of sons and daughters, bearing in mind the previous family development. Variables referring to the specific relationships—family communication, family conflict and family affection—are analyzed in the study, as well as variables that are more closely related to the family as a system—cohesion and adaptability—in a sample of young people who have been under study since the initial years of adolescence until emerging adulthood. Special attention is paid to gender differences, with differentiating analyses being carried out between girls and boys.

First of all, as hypothesis, a degree of continuity is expected in the relationships established during emerging adulthood and those in previous years. On the other hand, it is believed that conflicts diminish during this stage and that family relationships in general are warmer. Finally, and regarding gender differences, although, once again, research considering this aspect is scarce, it is expected that there will be differences between young women and men, and, that the females, following the trend of the previous years will, in general, show less conflict, more affectionate family relationships and better levels of communication.

Method

Participants

This work is a longitudinal follow-up of a specific group of children throughout adolescence. It all begins with previous research in which the changes that took place in family dynamics coinciding with the adolescence of these children were analyzed using a cross-sectional design. In the cross-sectional research, the sample was made up of 513 adolescents between 12 and 19 years old, and from 10 different schools in the city of Seville (southern Spain) and its province. The choice of primary and secondary schools from where the adolescents were recruited took into account criteria such as whether they were rural or urban, public or charter school, and the socioeconomic level of the families. For further information about the sampling procedure, see Oliva and Parra (2001) and Parra and Oliva (2002).

The second phase of the research consisted of the follow-up of those same children, who were initiating adolescence, between 12 and 14 years of age. Follow-up continued for almost 10 years, until they reached the ages of 21 or 22. Consequently, these young people completed the evaluation instruments during early, mid- and late adolescence, called Time 1 (T1), Time 2 (T2), and Time 3 (T3), respectively, as well as in emerging adulthood (T4). The final sample included 90 adolescents: 35 boys and 55 girls. The average ages in early (T1), mid- (T2), late (T3) adolescence and emerging adulthood (T4) were T1 ($M = 13.11$ years; $SD = 0.44$); T2 ($M = 15.38$ years; $SD = 0.56$); T3 ($M = 17.85$ years; $SD = 0.52$); T4 ($M = 21.73$ years; $SD = 0.61$).

Most of the young people lived with their parents (77% of the boys and 96.4% of the girls). Half of the boys were employed, exclusively 43.3% or in conjunction with their education (16.7%). The percentage of girls who were studying was greater, 50% were dedicated exclusively to their university or vocational education and almost 21% were also employed. Only one of the boys in the sample had his own children. None of the girls had been a mother at the time when the data were collected.

To know whether the subjects who continued participating in the research until emerging adulthood showed differential demographic characteristics when compared with those who decided not to participate, an *analysis of lost cases* was carried out. To do so, in the matrix with the subjects until T3, a new variable was generated in which the subject was coded as 1 if they had participated in the data collections up to T4 and 2 if they did not participate in the last data collection process. The results indicated that those adolescents who continued participating in the T4 research and those who decided not to do so were similar with regard to gender ($\chi^2 = 0.55, p = .46$) and their rural or

urban habitat ($\chi^2 = 0.80, p = .37$). However, among those who continued, there were somewhat more young people who had attended charter schools compared with those who had attended public schools ($\chi^2 = 3.93, p = .047$). Adolescents who participated in data collections up to T4 and those who did not participate were similar in family relationship variables.

Instruments

1. Conflicts with parents: A scale of 14 items, created ad hoc for this research (Parra & Oliva, 2002) evaluated the frequency of arguments between parents and adolescents on a variety of subjects (curfew, friendships, drugs, politics, or religion, etc.) The subjects had to respond on a Likert-type scale from 1 to 4, where 1 implied not having any arguments and 4 having frequent arguments. Cronbach's alphas: T1/T2/T3/T4 = .81/.62/.71/.72. The score range is T1, 1 to 3; T2, 1 to 2.5; T3, 1 to 2.86; T4, 1 to 2.5.
2. Family communication (Parra & Oliva, 2002): A scale elaborated for this research included 22 items, 11 referring to the father and 11 referring to the mother, which evaluates the frequency of family communication on a variety of subjects (friendships, free time, sexuality, drugs, future plans, etc.). A Likert-type scale was used from 1 to 4 where 1 meant that they never spoke about the topic, 2 that they rarely spoke, 3 that they sometimes spoke, and 4 that they frequently spoke about that topic. To obtain an indicator for the level of family communication, a new variable was generated using the average scores for each item in the communication with each parent. Cronbach's alphas: T1/T2/T3/T4 = .79/.80/.83/.88. The score range is T1, 1.68 to 3.45; T2, 1.68 to 3.77; T3, 1.68 to 4; T4, 1.05 to 3.55.
3. Affection: The affection scale of the Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, and Dornbusch (1991) instrument was used, specifically, a translation carried out by the members of the research team using a back translation method. The scale was composed of 15 items. Two of the items were adapted to refer to school qualifications, because in T3 and T4 not all the young people continued their education. Specifically, the items were "When you get a low grade at school or college, how frequently do your parents or caretakers encourage you to do better?" and "When you get a good grade, how frequently do your parents congratulate you." These items were substituted, respectively, by "When something works out badly, how frequently do your parents or caretakers encourage you to do it better?" and "When something works out well academically or professionally, how frequently do

your parents congratulate you?" Cronbach's alphas: T1/T2/T3/T4 = .69/.68/.76/.74. The score range is T1, 22 to 36; T2, 20 to 36; T3, 17 to 37; T4, 16 to 25.

4. **FACES II: Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scale** (Olson, Portner, & Lavee, 1985). A translation by members of the research team was used, following a back-translation method. This scale was developed to evaluate the family relational structure. It was made up of 30 Likert-type items from 1 to 5, to facilitate the evaluation of cohesion, Cronbach's alphas T1/T2/T3/T4 = .69/.84/.87/.89, and adaptability, Cronbach's alphas T1/T2/T3/T4 = .71/.74/.81/.85, in the family relationships. The cohesion score range is T1, 38 to 68; T2, 24 to 77; T3, 29 to 79; T4, 27 to 79. The adaptability score range is T1, 29 to 63; T2, 23 to 65; T3, 26 to 65; T4, 24 to 66.

Procedure

As is usual in longitudinal research, the data collection procedure was long and costly, extending over 10 years. The first data collection (T1) took place during the 1998-1999 academic year. The second (T2) took place in 2000-2001, the third (T3) in 2002-2003, and the fourth (T4) between the end of 2007 and the beginning of 2008.

The first step in T1 was to select the schools and contact their Board of Directors to explain the research and request collaboration. Once they agreed to participate, the classrooms where the data would be collected were selected. Once the parental permission was obtained, members of the research team applied the questionnaires anonymously and collectively. To facilitate the subsequent follow-up, each participant was given a numeric identifier, which was equivalent to their first and last names, and that only the researchers knew.

For T2, the collection of data was similar, since most of the girls and boys continued to be enrolled at the same school as in the first phase of the research. In the third and fourth data collection (T3 and T4), once contact had been made with the adolescents, and their having agreed to continue collaborating in the research project, an appointment was made to complete the questionnaire in the University of Seville Department of Developmental Psychology or in their own homes.

Results

To respond to the objectives proposed, the *absolute stability* of the variables was analyzed first. In other words, reliability over time was analyzed and

how the averages behave at the different point of observation. The statistical analysis used for this objective was the analysis of variance with repeated measures. This model allows the effect of one or more factors to be studied when at least one of them is an intrasubject factor, which is very useful in the analyses of longitudinal designs where the effect of the time factor is analyzed on the variables of a same group of subjects. In addition to including the intrasubject factor time (early, mid- and late adolescence, and emerging adulthood: T1, T2, T3, T4) an *intersubject* factor was included in these analyses: gender of the adolescent, since certain variables could follow different pathways in boys than in girls.

All the above is useful to comprehend the *absolute stability* of the variables being studied. However, analyzing the general trends of the variables over time does not report changes in the individual subjects (Alder & Scher, 1994; Collins & Laursen, 2004; Loeber et al., 2000).

That is why the *relative stability* of the variables was also analyzed in this work. The *relative stability* allows us to know to what extent the subjects of a sample maintain their relative position when compared with the average at a different point of the observation, or whether there are major fluctuations (Alder & Scher, 1994). Being able to analyze the relative stability of the variables is one of the main advantages of longitudinal studies. Only this type of design allows us to discover whether the subjects, over time, continue in the same position when compared with their reference group, in the variables that are the object of study, or if there are changes. The most frequent procedure to measure the relative stability of variables is based on the *correlation coefficients* between the different measurement times (Alder & Scher, 1994; Holsen, Kraft, & Vitterso, 2000; Loeber et al., 2000).

Absolute Stability

Family Conflicts. Between early adolescence and emerging adulthood, there is a decrease in the conflicts taking place at home—*Pillai multivariate analysis*, $F(3, 89) = 17.00$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .38$ —in the case of both boys and girls. This is especially significant between late adolescence and emerging adulthood. However, in the case of the girls, there is an increase in the frequency of arguments between early and mid-adolescence; this increase fails to reach statistically significant levels (Figure 1). On the other hand, and continuing with gender trends, girls show less conflicts than their male counterparts at all four times studied, although this difference does not reach statistically significant levels—univariate contrast $F(1, 89) = 2.83$, $p = .096$, $\eta^2 = .032$.

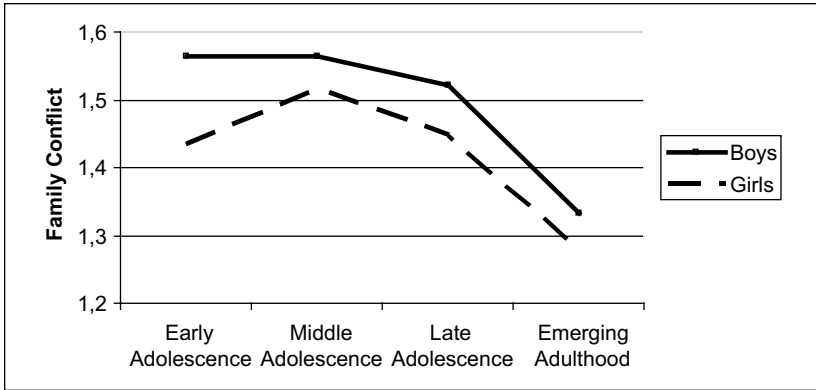


Figure 1. Development of conflicts.

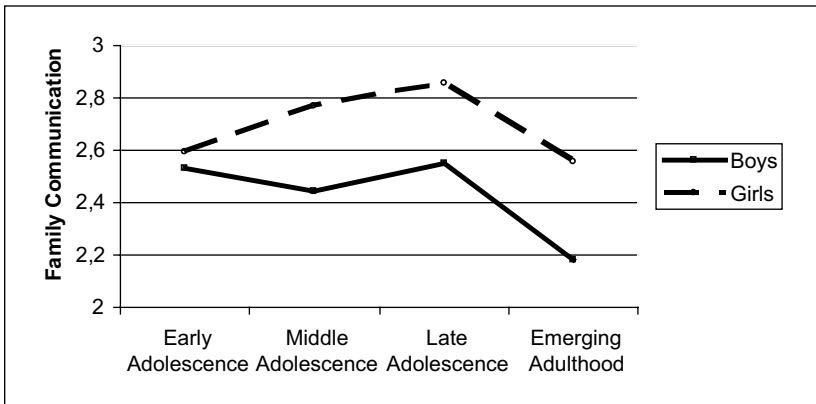


Figure 2. Development of family communication.

Nonetheless, it is important to indicate that at no time, either during adolescence or emerging adulthood, were the conflicts very frequent. In fact, on a scale of 1 to 4, it was rare for the girls or the boys to indicate a score of 2.

Family Communication. As seen in Figure 2, girls are more talkative at home than boys. *Univariate contrast* $F(1, 89) = 10.11, p = .002, \eta^2 = .103$. This is a particularly significant trend during the mid and later years of adolescence and in emerging adulthood because of the fact that in early adolescence the

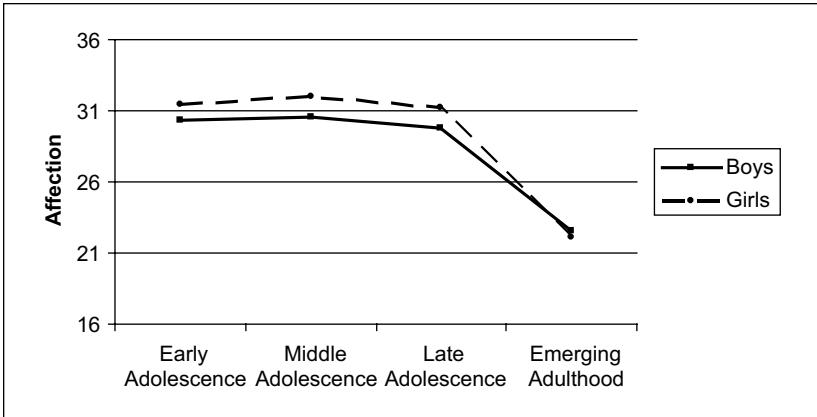


Figure 3. Development of affection.

differences between boys and girls fail to reach statistically significant levels.

With regard to pathways, some undergo significant changes in their communication with their parents over the years. In the case of boys, *Pillai multivariate analysis*, $F(3, 89) = 10.27, p = .000, \eta^2 = .26$; in the case of the girls, *Pillai multivariate analysis*, $F(3, 89) = 9.82, p = .000, \eta^2 = .25$. Based on the perception of the adolescents in the sample, the lowest levels of communication appear in emerging adulthood.

In the case of the girls, a significant increase in the frequency of communication was found between early and late adolescence, $F(1, 89) = 12.72, p = .005$, and a subsequent reduction between late adolescence and emerging adulthood, $F(1, 89) = 37.61, p = .000$. In the case of the boys, family communication did not change significantly throughout adolescence, but there was a notable decrease between late adolescence and emerging adulthood, $F(1, 89) = 18.35, p = .001$.

Family Affection. Although stability was the prevailing feature in the affection perceived by girls and boys between early and late adolescence, between these years and emerging adulthood there was a very significant decrease, *Pillai multivariate analysis*, $F(3, 89) = 236.48, p = .000, \eta^2 = .89$, for both girls and boys (Figure 3).

Regarding gender differences, girls perceived somewhat more affection from their parents than did boys, especially during mid-adolescence, *univariate contrast*, $F(1, 89) = 5.44, p = .022, \eta^2 = .058$, although as a general trend,

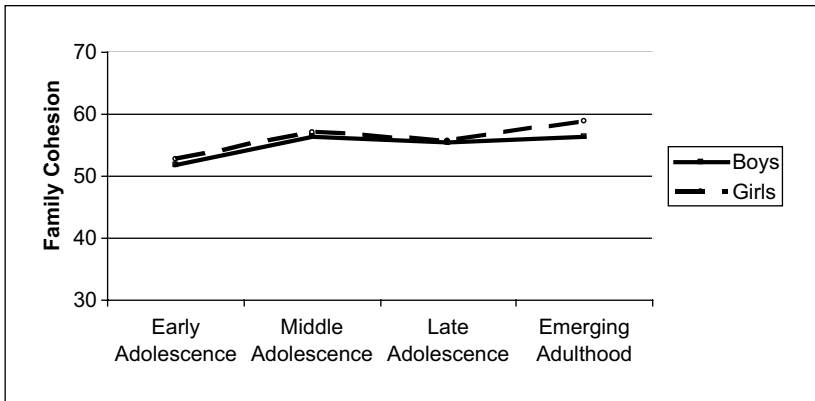


Figure 4. Development of family cohesion.

this does not reach statistically significant levels—univariate contrast, $F(1, 89) = 3.17, p = .078, \eta^2 = .035$.

Family Cohesion. According to these results, family cohesion perceived by children increases throughout adolescence and emerging adulthood, *Pillai multivariate analysis*, $F(3, 89) = 9.29, p = .000, \eta^2 = .22$, especially when comparing early adolescence, when least cohesion was perceived in comparison with mid-adolescence and emerging adulthood (Figure 4). Regarding gender, no significant differences between girls and boys appeared either at the general level, *univariate contrast*, $F(1, 89) = 0.46, p = .50, \eta^2 = .005$, or at the different measurement points.

Family Adaptability. With regard to the perceived adaptability of the family system, there were no changes over the years (Figure 5), *Pillai multivariate analysis*, $F(3, 89) = 2.09, p = .11, \eta^2 = .07$. Between girls and boys there were no statistically significant differences, *univariate contrast*, $F(1, 89) = 0.03, p = .87, \eta^2 = .000$.

Relative Stability

Table 1 shows the correlations between the levels of conflict, affection, cohesion, adaptability, and communication described by girls and boys between early and mid-adolescence, between mid- and late adolescence, between late adolescence and emerging adulthood and, last, between early adolescence and emerging adulthood. A medium high average of continuity can be seen

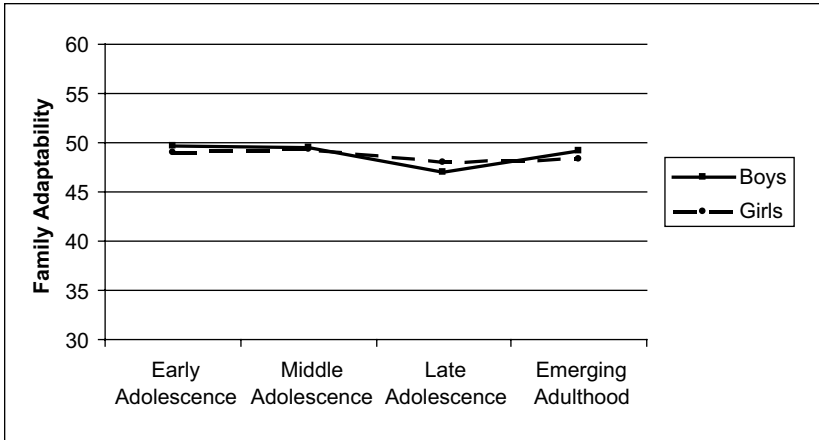


Figure 5. Development of family adaptability.

Table 1. Relative Stability of Variables.

	T1–T2	T2–T3	T3–T4	T1–T4
Conflicts	.26*	.56**	.33**	.04
Communication	.48**	.67**	.70**	.33*
Affection	.68**	.72**	.32**	.25*
Cohesion	.23*	.62**	.66**	.16
Adaptability	.33**	.43**	.64**	.16

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

between most of the comparisons, especially when bearing in mind that this method to analyze the relative stability tends to minimize the value of the coefficients due to the fact that by basing the estimate on scales whose reliability is less than 1, correlations are attenuated, always being smaller than what would be the real relative stability.

Obviously, the lowest levels of stability were found on comparing the longest period of time; that is, from early adolescence to emerging adulthood, as there was a 10-year span between both measurements. Nevertheless, it is interesting that for the levels of communication and affection, stability reaches statistically significant levels; this indicates that those who tended to occupy the highest levels in communication or affection in the early years, compared with their peers, were those who also tended to occupy the highest levels during emerging adulthood.

Discussion

The results of this study have demonstrated continuity and change in certain aspects relative to both family and parent–child relationships over a period stretching from early adolescence to emerging adulthood. Continuity was more clearly observed in those variables referring to the family as a system, as is the case of cohesion and adaptability, since only in the former was there a slight, although significant, increase. In the case of the variables evaluating the perception a young person has of the relationship with his or her parents, the data indicated that with the onset of adulthood, the decrease in conflict and affection that began in mid-adolescence became even more evident. On the other hand, the slightly upward trend in parent–child communication that had taken place toward the end of adolescence decreased.

This decrease in the number of conflicts coincides with the existing empirical evidence about this stage of adulthood, and could be partly due to the fact that parents feel less justified when it comes to intervening in certain matters they now consider to be none of their business, which would make confrontations and disputes less frequent (Aquilino, 1997; van Wel, ter Bogt, & Raaijmakers, 2002). However, the same could not be said with regard to the decrease in affection and communication, since some studies have found the opposite trend with the arrival of adulthood (Lefkowitz, 2005; Morgan, Thorne, & Zurbruggen, 2010). It is possible that these discrepancies are partly due to the fact that while most of the subjects of this sample continued living with their parents, other studies were carried out with subjects who lived at university dorms. This fact is something that empirical evidence indicates usually bears better perception of the parent–child relationship, especially regarding communication (Aquilino, 1997; Dubas & Petersen, 1996; Lefkowitz, 2005). In other words, there are important cultural and socio-economic differences that contribute to the fact that, in Spain, ties with the family of origin are forced to remain, as a consequence of youth unemployment having reached levels much higher than those found in other, neighboring countries (International Labour Office, 2012). This mandatory coexistence could generate a certain degree of anxiety that influences family relationships, and although it fails to generate major conflicts, it at least makes both communication and the expression of affection more difficult.

The decrease in affection and communication could be less indicative of a worsening in the relationships that these young adults have with their parents, but rather due to a certain distancing, with the consequent decrease in time shared and in sustained interactions, both positive and negative. That is to say, entrance into the third decade of life would indicate a transition from a hierarchal to a more symmetrical relationship sustained between two adults

(Aquilino, 2006). Therefore, these changes could be interpreted as indicators of the individuation process, which starts in adolescence and continues to be a high-priority task during the initial years of adulthood. This process includes the renegotiation of the relationship with parents, which, in the early years of adolescence is marked by conflicts that progressively disappear throughout adolescence, to give way to a greater independence and certain emotional distancing (Buhl, 2008; Mattanah, Hancock, & Brand, 2004). The fact that in this study these changes with the entrance into emerging adulthood were more evident in the variables referring to the parent–child relationship than in those referring to the family as a system appears to support this idea. Thus, a young adult would perceive more changes in his or her exclusive relationship with parents, needing a certain degree of distancing, than in the cohesion or adaptability of the family group, which remains more stable and less affected by the process of the young person's individuation.

In connection with the decrease observed in the parent–child communication, it must be specified that this need not necessarily be seen as a negative fact, since it is possible that, although during adolescence this communication reached higher levels in quantitative terms, it is also probable that it had more negative shades, including frequent lectures, criticisms, and prohibitions, by which parents sought to control and influence the behavior of their children. On the other hand, and as Morgan, Thorne, and Zurbriggen (2010) found, entrance into the adulthood brings more equitable, frank, and open communication, which, although less frequent, generates greater satisfaction for both parties. In this sense, the idea that the lower levels of communication and affection do not necessarily imply more negative family relationships is supported by two results in this study: a decrease in the frequency of conflicts and a slight increase in family cohesion.

Another noteworthy fact is the similarity between boys and girls in the pathways of the variables observed, especially with regard to the change between late adolescence and early adulthood. Although there were significant sexual differences, both in adolescence and in adulthood, in the absolute values of certain variables studied (more communication and less conflicts between the women), the pathways were practically parallel in both groups. As indicated by Marinho and Mena (2012), although girls tended to show closer bonds with their parents, most studies found very small effect sizes, despite the fact that usually more emphasis is placed on the differences than on the similarities.

If the analysis of the absolute stability of family relationships throughout an entire decade has indicated significant changes when the relative stability was considered; these data pointed more toward stability than change. In this study, the relative scores of the subjects with regard to the group tend to remain constant at the different points studied. Thus, independently of the general pathway

followed by the group averages, the boys and girls who perceived more conflicts in adolescence were also those who occupied the highest positions in emerging adulthood. The same holds true for all other dimensions analyzed. As some authors have pointed out (Granic et al., 2003; Lewis, 1997), the functions that continue to arise within the family cycle depend partly on preexisting functions; therefore, the family system tends toward coherence and stability.

To conclude, mention must be made of the limitations of this study. Such limitations include the exclusive use of questionnaires as the information collection method and the fact that information was obtained from a single source. Having the opinion of parents would have allowed us to compare data between parents and children. On the other hand, although 90 subjects is a large number given the longitudinal nature of the research, it is not an excessively large sample; this aspect partly conditioned the statistical analyses performed. Likewise, the authors are aware of the difficulty of generalizing results.

Despite these limitations, the authors would like to emphasize that it is one of the few longitudinal studies carried out in Spain to include adolescence and early adulthood over a decade. This longitudinal perspective has allowed the authors to obtain greater detail about the development of family relationships over the whole period studied. Undoubtedly, studies of this type, which provide information about the developmental changes taking place during the years known as emerging adulthood, are necessary, especially within non-Anglo-Saxon contexts (Aquilino, 2006).

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