# Emerging Adulthood and Parent-Child Communication: A validation study with Perception Scale of Parenting Communication

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## ABSTRACT

Emerging adulthood has been described in literature as a new phase of individual and family life cycle. This new stage (18-25 years old) is characterized by identity configuration, instability, self-focused and feeling in between of emerging adults. Notwithstanding the theoretical relevance of this topic, there is a research gap about parent-child communication in this stage, perhaps because of the lack of appropriate measures. The purpose of this study was to validate a scale originally developed to assess parent-adolescent communication (Perception Scale of Parenting Communication) to this new stage of life cycle. A cross-sectional and descriptive design was used to explore the perception of 217 emerging adults (68.2% females) about communication with their parents. A new version of Perception Scale of Parenting Communication was designed with 17 items distributed by four factors (parental confidence/sharing, children confidence/sharing, emotional support/affective expression, and negative communication patterns), according to confirmatory factor analysis. Results showed that Perception Scale of Parenting Communication is a valid and consistent measure ($\alpha$= .934 mother version; $\alpha$= .923 father version) to assess parent-emerging adult communication. This study provides important implication for research and practice such as the design of a new tool to assess family communication in emerging adulthood stage.
*Key words*: emerging adulthood, parent-child communication, validity study.

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### Novelty and Significance

*What is already known about the topic?*

• The social/cultural changes (in the last 40 years) encouraged the need to conceptualize a new individual development stage: emerging adulthood.
• Parent-child relationships change over the lifespan cycle.
• Communication process seems to be an important mediator to explain the parent-child relationship quality.

*What this paper adds?*

• Presents an assessment tool to evaluate the communication perceived by emerging adults with their parents.
• This study raises awareness about patterns of communication in a sample of Portuguese emerging adults (these patterns are quite differently from those in USA, country where the emerging adulthood were conceptualized).

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The concept of emerging adulthood was proposed by Jeffrey Arnett in 2000, having been theoretically conceptualized a little later (Arnett, 2005). This concept portrays a new stage of individual and family development, between 18 and 25 years of age, where exploration and instability constitute a norm in the transition from adolescence to adulthood (Arnett, 2005). Considering, therefore, that emerging adulthood is constituted as a stage of development, it can be said that it has its own features, and, like other developmental stages, it also involves questions associated with relational changes

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which clearly entail gains and losses for individuals (Carr, 2006; McGoldrick, 2013). The theory of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2005) becomes particularly relevant when one intends to understand family relationships and communication patterns between parents and young adult children in the Mediterranean context where, contrary to what happens in the northern European countries, the family system is constituted as the main provider of financial and emotional care for the emerging adults (Croucetti & Meeus, 2014; Scabini, Marta, & Lanz, 2006).

Arnett (2005) identifies five normative and transversal features of emerging adulthood: (a) identity exploration, especially in the loving and professional dimensions (the author considers that the autonomy acquired in this phase promotes diverse experiences, with less probability of being experienced during adolescence and adulthood); (b) instability (more leaving and returning home of the family of origin, change of degree, job change); (c) feeling that one is in a transition period (a study carried out in Portugal by Ferreira & Jorge, 2008, showed that emerging adults at this stage of life do not consider themselves adolescents, but they also do not consider themselves adults yet, although they say that they feel going in that  direction); (d) diversity of possibilities, that is, perception that it is possible to plan a future full of professional and marital successes (Arnett, 2000, found that emerging adults from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds present a more optimistic view of their future compared to emerging adults from more favored contexts); and (e) self-focused, in other words, the possibility of reflecting on what is wished for the future without existence of external pressure to decision making. This characteristic seems to be evident particularly in the relation that the emerging adults establish with their parents, as they start to see parents as people, more than mere agents of rules and limits (Arnett, 2005). In fact, during the emerging adulthood important changes occur in the relational dynamics between parents and children. These relationships begin to take a more horizontal and bi-directional character, in the sense that there is a greater flexibility of the parents in the adjustment to the needs of autonomy and dependence of the children and a greater capacity of the children to put themselves in the place of the other, which leads them to see their parents as people with a past, with a history, with perspectives and opinions and not only as fulfillers of the parents role (Aquilino, 2006).

Literature indicates that the changes, derived from instability, that characterize emerging adulthood have implications in the communicational relationship established with the parents (Arnett, 2007; Crocetti & Meeus, 2014; Parra, Oliva, & Reina, 2015; Kloep, Stuart-Hamilton, Taylor, & Hendry, 2016; Zambianchi & Bitti, 2014). Communication is understood as the "process by which information is transmitted from one element to another" (Bronckart, 2001, p. 156), whether in a biological, technological or social dimensions. In the particular context of the family, and according to Vangelisti (2004), communication is an essential agent in the first experiences of socialization, since it is through observation and interaction with family members that the human being learns to communicate and to think about communication (Bruner, 1990). Thus, communication reflects the interpersonal connections between the elements of the family, allowing us to anticipate the quality of the family relationship and the family's ability to adapt to structural changes, whether natural (e.g., birth of a child) or accidental (e.g., occurrence of a divorce) (Vangelisti, 2004). Hence, family relationships tend to change over the life cycle of the family in order to respond to the challenges of each stage, and the communication processes follow these transformations (McGoldrick, 2013; Segrin & Flora, 2005).

According to Arnett (2007), an important transition moment is when the young adult children move out from their parental home, an event that promotes the autonomy of emerging adults and, on the other hand, a lesser influence of parents on their children's routines, decisions and behaviours (Arnett, 2007). This change is considered in the literature as the driver of a more positive and less conflictive relationship between parents and children (Aquilino, 2006). Crocetti and Meeus (2014) conducted a qualitative study with the aim of identifying the perspectives of Italian emerging adults on the relationships they establish with family and friends. The authors found that 76.9% of the participants reported having a positive relationship with their family, and 43.6% considered that this relationship improved with the transition from adolescence to emerging adulthood. The authors also found that emerging adults living with parents perceived improvements in terms of reciprocity, that is, the relationship takes on a more horizontal than vertical nature, while emerging adults who have started to live alone perceived improvements, especially in terms of communication. In addition, the positive perception of parent-child communication seems even to have impact on the well-being of the emerging adults. Zambianchi and Bitti (2014), in a study of 232 emerging adults, verified that the social well-being of these emerging adults is positively correlated with the open communication that they establish with their parents, which is also a variable predictor of social well-being. The authors, therefore, considered that establishing a clear and open communication with parents during this stage of life tends to promote discussion and reflection on life projects and on the roles assumed by emerging adults. However, empirical studies on parental-filial communication in emergent adulthood do not seem to gather a consensus. For example, a longitudinal study carried out by Parra *et alii* (2015), with 90 emerging adults from Mediterranean context found that, although family cohesion tends to increase, emerging adults tend to perceive lower levels of parent-child communication in emerging adulthood (compared to the previous stages). Furthermore, and contrary to the literature descriptions (e.g., Sneed *et alii*, 2006), Parra *et alii* (2015) did not find significant differences in how boys and girls perceive communication with their parents.

Despite the recent commitment by the scientific community to the study of emerging adulthood, there are still insufficient empirical studies on this subject, particularly in the European context, since the first and main studies were carried out in North America (Parra *et alii*, 2015). Furthermore, there are few, and sometimes inconsistent, researches that focus on the relationship between parent-child communication and emerging adulthood. This difficulty may be due to the inadequacy of the available evaluation tools. For instance, the study carried out by Zambianchi and Bitti (2014) applied the Parent-Adolescent Communication Scale (PACS; Barnes & Olsen, 1985), an instrument whose items were developed specifically for the adolescent population. In Portugal, the Mediterranean context in which it is proposed to carry out the present study, there are rating scales of parent-child communication for children and adolescents, but none is validated for the stage of emerging adulthood. Therefore, the present study aims to analyse the relationship between parent-child communication and emerging adulthood through two research questions: (1) How can a scale developed to evaluate parent-child communication in the adolescent children perspective (Perception Scale of Parenting Communication; Portugal & Alberto, 2013, 2015) be adjusted to the evaluation of communication between parents and children in the stage of emerging adulthood? and (2) In what way can the communication perceived by the emerging adults be influenced by variables such as: gender, geographical area, sociocultural and economic status, financial autonomy and cohabitation with parents?

## METHOD

### *Participants*

The study was conducted in Madeira Island, Portugal. A total of 217 Portuguese emerging adults (68.2% females) participated in this study. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 25 years old (*Median*= 21 years; *SD*= 1.84). All participants had Portuguese nationality and most of them (85%) were living with their parents and/ or with other relatives, while 7% of participants' reported living on their own (we did not have data from 8% of the participants), mainly in urban areas (77.4%). Most of the participants do not seem to have financial autonomy since 63.1% are degree students and 5.1% are master's students (several fields of study: 24% of Psychology, 14.7% of Medicine, 4.6% of Computer Science and 54.9% study other social and exact science courses). Regarding marital status, 54% of the sample said they were not in a relationship compared to the remaining 44% who assumed they had a loving commitment. Finally, regarding the sociocultural and economic level of the participants, we found a homogeneous distribution for the four categories analysed, that is 18% of emerging adults from lower level, 23% from lower middle level, 12% from upper middle level and 23% from upper sociocultural and economic level. However, it was not possible to analyse this information in 27% of the sample, due to the missing's registered in some central variables for this calculation.

### *Instruments*

*Sociodemographic Data Sheet*. Included questions related to: gender, age, place of residence, educational qualifications of the young adult and his/her parents, profession of the young adult and their parents and cohabitation. To calculate the sociocultural and economic level, considering that most of the participants still cohabit with their parents, it was applied the formula proposed by Morais, Peneda, Neves, and Cardoso (1993), through which information about the profession and the educational level of the parents of each young adult are crossed.

*Perception Scale of Parenting Communication* (COMPA; Portugal & Alberto, 2013, 2015). The COMPA is a self-report instrument that evaluates communication patterns between parents and children through a five-level Likert scale (1= Never, 5= Always), having in its basis the Pragmatics of Human Communication Model (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1993) as theoretical support. It is a scale with three versions: a version to be answered by parents (COMPA-P, measuring five dimensions: emotional support/ affective expression, parental availability to communication, metacommunication, parental confidence/sharing, children confidence/sharing); a version to be answered by children from 7 to 11 years old (COMPA-C, measuring two dimensions: parental availability to communication, emotional support/affective expression); and a version to be answered by adolescents from 12 to 16 years old (COMPA-A, measuring five dimensions: parental availability to communication, children confidence/sharing, emotional support/ affective expression, metacommunication, negative communication patterns). There are two versions regarding the COMPA-C and COMPA-A, which include the same items, one to be answered regarding the mother and another one to be answered regarding the father. Considering the literature review on emerging adulthood as a qualitatively different but prolonged stage of adolescence (Arnett, 2005; Erikson, 1968), the research team intended to evaluate the adequacy of the COMPA-A version to a sample of emerging adults. For this purpose, research team followed procedures recommended in the literature in order to evaluate content analysis (e.g., Messick, 1995; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), namely, consulting members of the target population (two groups composed by emerging adults), by using an approach involving moderator-facilitated items discussion. Considering this, some changes have been made on the instrument:

(a) reformulated the grammatical and syntactic forms of some items, (b) two items were eliminated ("I lie to my parents" and "My parents explain me why they say 'no' to the things I ask", and (c) six new items were introduced, in order to include more indicators showing progressive autonomy experienced in this life cycle phase. Thus, the final version of COMPA scale was composed by 43 items (one version to be answered regarding the mother and another one to be answered regarding the father).

*Procedure*

At first, the research team sought to analyse the content validity of the COMPA-A scale for a population of emerging university students. Thus, in the classroom context, it was requested the voluntary collaboration of about 16 students to discuss relevance and suitability of the instrument items. In order to ascertain their suitability, these participants were distributed in two focus groups (Coutinho, 2018).

Based on the data collected in the previous phase, a version of the COMPA scale for emerging young people (COMPA-EA, 18-25 years old) was drawn up, and a non-probabilistic sample was collected with the purpose of validating the new version of the instrument (Coutinho, 2018). The sample was collected from a convenience sampling process using the snowball method, that is, the first participants to whom the protocol was administered suggested others that could be available to participate (sample of young emerging university students and non-university students) (Maroco, 2007). After the presentation of the project and obtaining informed consent (in accordance with the American Psychological Association and Department of Health & Human Services), the protocol was applied individually in a quiet location. The sample collection period took place over two months.

*Data Analysis*

Using IBM SPSS Statistics 22 descriptive statistics on age, gender, co-habitation, geographical area where participants live, financial autonomy and sociocultural and economic status, were examined to characterize the sample. Confirmatory factor analysis of the scale and subscales was used to evaluate the construct validity of the COMPA-EA. The confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) was performed using the AMOS (v.21.0). The model fit was assessed by Chi-square ($\chi^2$), Goodness of Fit Index (*GFI*), Comparative Fit Index (*CFI*), and Root-Mean Square Error Approximation (*RMSEA*). The reference values considered were: $\chi^2/df \leq 5$; *CFI* $\geq.90$; *GFI* $\geq.90$; and *RMSEA* $<.10$ (Maroco, 2010). According to the theoretical sense of the scale, it was determined the internal reliability of the scale and subscales. Listwise deletion was used to account for missing data. Based on reliability analysis, scale items were removed to increase scale and subscale reliability in order to improve the measure. Average inter-item correlations of at least .30 and Cronbach's alpha of >.70 were considered acceptable for the full scale and subscales (Pallant, 2010). To assess construct validity, *t*-student and ANOVA analysis were performed in order to explore the relationship between COMPA-EA scale and sociodemographic variables.

## Results

The results will be presented according to the exploratory questions set out at the introduction section, which formed a basis to the present study. The item's discussion carried out with a group of emerging adults on the COMPA version for adolescents,

described earlier in the methodology section, intended to evaluate the content validity of the questionnaire. In addition to the suggestion of change and removal of items from the scale, the participants proposed the introduction of six new items, namely, "the expectations of my parents influence what I tell them", "I need to listen to my parents about the important decisions of my life", "my parents' expectations influence my decisions", "I feel that my parents support my autonomy to make decisions", "my parents support me in my life projects" and "I feel that my parents respect my decisions". Consequently, the version of the scale adjusted to the stage of development emerging adults was composed of 43 items (37 of the original scale and six suggested by the young emerging adults).

Considering the original model subjacent to the COMPA-A, one intended to analyse whether the version of COMPA directed to emerging adults, reproduced the original factorial structure of the instrument. Thus, the original correlated five-factor model (Model 1) was tested in CFA, revealing a poor fit to the data, both for fathers ($\chi^2/df$= 2.172, *CFI*= .878, GFI= .747, RMSEA= .074) and mothers ($\chi^2/df$= 2.190, *CFI*= .866, GFI= .749, RMSEA= .075).

Subsequently, the 5-factor model was tested, with the new items resulted from the focus group (Model 2). This model also showed a poor fit to the data, for both fathers ($\chi^2/df$= 2.421, *CFI*= .828, *GFI*= .688, RMSEA= .081) and mothers ($\chi^2/df$= 2.586, *CFI*= .795, *GFI*= .677, RMSEA= .086).

To improve this model, the items were studied taking into account the (a) factor loads in the factor, (b) the correlation between items, and (c) the theoretical scale sense. Based on these criteria, some items were erased and/or reorganized. Throughout this process, the emergent models were tested with AFC, until obtaining the proposed model, a four-factor model, composed of 17 items distributed by four factors (Model 3, Figure 1 and 2). Model 3 has a good fit to the data, both for fathers ($\chi^2/df$= 1.688, *CFI*= .964, *GFI*= .902, RMSEA= .057) (see Figure 1) and mothers ($\chi^2/df$= 1.745, *CFI*= .959, *GFI*= .903, RMSEA= .059) (see Figure 2).

Thus, the final instrument was composed of four dimensions: (1) Subscale 1 -parental confidence/sharing (items: 5, 6, 7 and 9). This five-item subscale referring to sharing personal problems and intimacy issues in parental perspective about work, personal relationships, friendships, family issues. Sharing issues should be balanced with an individual's own privacy (e.g., "My father/mother tries to understand what I'm saying"); (2) Subscale 2 - children confidence/sharing (items: 1, 2, 4, 14 and 16). This five-item subscale referring also to sharing personal problems and intimacy issues in child's perspective about personal relationships, friendships, family issues (e.g., "I talk to my father/mother when I feel bored"); (3) Subscale 3 -emotional support/affect expression (items: 8, 11, 13 and 15). This four-item subscale refers to the availability of a family member with whom one can discuss problems, concerns, and feelings. Affect expression refers to how affection is expressed by nonverbal, verbal, and supportive modes of communication (e.g., "My father/mother cares about what I'm feeling"); and (4) Subscale 4 -negative communicational patterns (inverted items: 3, 12 and 17). This three-item subscale focuses on the negative aspects of communication, such as: hesitancy to share, negative styles of interaction and selectivity and caution in what is shared (e.g., "When I have some problem I prefer not to tell to my father/mother").

Cronbach's alpha was used to assess internal consistency for the COMPA-EA' mothers and fathers' versions and also for the four dimensions of the scale. Results indicated acceptable internal consistency for the 17 items comprising the full scale
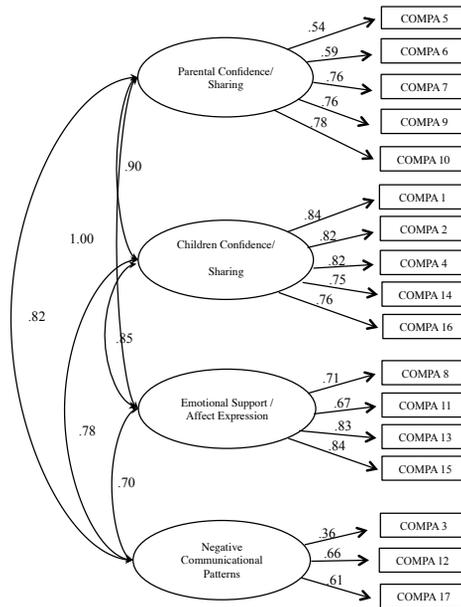
*Figure 1*. Standardized parameter estimates of CFA model for COMPA-EA' father version. COMPA 1 to COMPA 17= 17 items of Perception Scale of Parenting Communication.
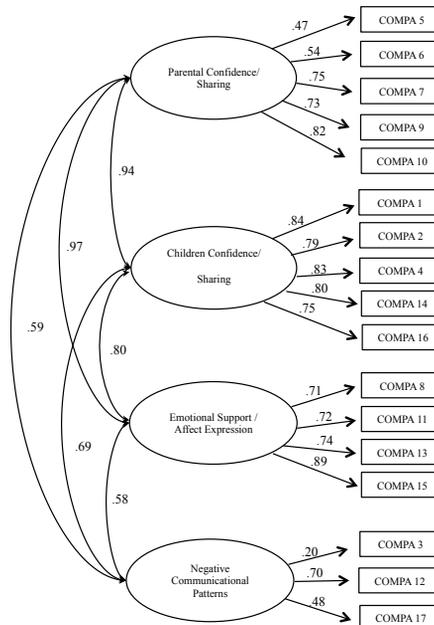


*Figure 2*. Standardized parameter estimates of CFA model for COMPA-EA' mother version. COMPA 1 to COMPA 17= 17 items of Perception Scale of Parenting Communication.

COMPA-EA mothers' version ($\alpha$= .923) and fathers' version ($\alpha$= .934). Each dimension also had acceptable Cronbah's alphas values (see Table 1), except for the dimension negative communication patterns (mothers' version: $\alpha$= .551; fathers' version: $\alpha$= .442), in which the value was lower than recommended (Pallant, 2010). According to Colossi (2005, cited in Bishop, 2015), although negatively-worded items are often used to correct for acquiescence, they can confuse respondents and ultimately introduce error. Regardless, the analysis does not reveal any improvement if any item on this subscale is removed.

From an exploratory point of view, one intended to analyse the relationship between the parent-child communication and some demographic variables described by the literature as being relevant. Considering that the assumption of normality distribution was confirmed, parametric comparison test between groups were selected, namely comparison of means Student's *t*-test for paired samples and the ANOVA one-way.

*Table 1*. COMPA –EA Values of Internal Consistency (Cronbach's alpha).

| Subscales | | Fathers | Mothers |
|---|---|---|---|
| Parental confidence/sharing | | .832 | .806 |
| Children confidence/sharing | | .900 | .898 |
| Emotional support/affective expression | | .867 | .830 |
| Negative communication patterns | | .551 | .442 |
| COMPA - TOTAL | Present study (COMPA-Emerging Adults) | .934 | .923 |
| | Original Study (COMPA-A) | .940 | |

Regarding the variable "gender", there was a statistically significant difference between girls and boys,  in the sense that young women tend to perceive greater confidence/communication sharing  from their mothers [($M$= 21.08, $SD$= 3.37), $t(208)$= -2.646, $p$= .009] and greater confidence/communication sharing to their mothers [($M$= 19.69, $SD$= 4.22), $t(201)$= -3.245, $p$= .001] compared to young adult males ($M$= 19.66, $SD$= 4.07 and $M$= 17.51, $SD$= 4.96 respectively).

With regard to the variable "live alone or in cohabitation", there was a statistically significant difference between the sampled young people living with their parents ($M$= 19.13, $SD$= 4.41) and the young people living alone ($M$= 15.92, $SD$= 4.89) in the sense that the former perceive greater confidence/communicative sharing with their mothers than the second ($t(192)$= -2.185, $p$= .013).

Finally, there were no significant differences between the groups regarding the variables "financial autonomy", "geographical area" and "sociocultural and economic status".

## Discussion

Being the family an integrated system in a macro system, it is understood that the transformations registered in the last decades in social and cultural terms directly affect the organization of the family and its elements (Arnett, 2000; Torres, 2010). Thus, it is essential to contemplate a new phase of individual and family life cycle referred to as emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000, 2005).

Given the relevance that the communication assumes in the family context, since, according to some authors (Barnes & Olson, 1985; Segrin & Flora, 2006), communication in the family functions as regulator of their adaptation to demanding or challenging circumstances and promotes the cohesion of the elements among themselves,

it is essential to analyse how this family dimension works in the emerging adulthood stage. Studies in this area are, indeed scarce, considering that the lack of appropriate instruments for this purpose may condition the scientific deepening of this theme. Thus, this research had as main objectives: (a) to adapt a scale developed to evaluate parent-child communication in adolescence stage to the emerging adulthood stage, and (b) to explore differences among groups at the level of some sociodemographic variables indicated by the literature as relevant.

From the presented results, it was possible to adapt the COMPA-A measure to the emerging adulthood stage, although with some adjustments. This adaptation resulted in the scale COMPA-Emerging Adults (COMPA-EA) composed of 17 items spread over four dimensions of family communication, namely: confidence/communication sharing from parents to children (5 items), confidence/communication sharing from children to parents (5 items), expression of affection and emotional support (4 items) and negative communication pattern (3 items). This new version of the instrument, apart from being smaller than the original (17 items, in contrast to the 44 of the COMPA-A version), and therefore also faster to administer, revealed good psychometric characteristics, both at the level of content validity, analysed through the item's discussion in focus group format, as at the level of the construct validity, verified through confirmatory factorial analysis. Although the original model of the scale has not been confirmed, it was possible to adjust a new model considering the weighting of several factors. Indeed, this outcome was somewhat predictable because, although the emerging adulthood is often considered as an extension of adolescence (Erikson, 1968), the truth is that this is a stage of the life cycle which, like others, has characteristics, specific functions and tasks, although they can coexist with tasks from the predecessor stage (adolescence phase) and successor stage (phase of adulthood) (Arnett, 2000, 2005, 2007). Thus, the items that compose the scale reflect the evaluation of crucial dimensions in parent-child communication, even though only one of the six items proposed by focus group participants has remained on the scale ("I need to hear my father about the important decisions of my life").

Also regarding the study of adapting the COMPA scale to emerging adults, there were good levels of internal consistency of the items, of the sub-dimensions and of the total of the scale. This result reinforces the relevance of the instrument, not only as being useful for evaluating parent-child communication, but also as being a tool that guarantees accuracy in the measurements it makes. These results are compatible with those obtained in the original scale (Portugal & Alberto, 2013, 2015), even though the dimensions evaluated in this version of the scale are not exactly the same. Although the internal consistency values are globally good, the negative communicational patterns dimension revealed low values both in the responses of the young people to the father ($\alpha$= .551) and in the responses related to the mother ($\alpha$= .442). This result was, somehow, expected, as far as, in the original version (COMPA-A) this dimension also showed lower values compared to the others. One possible justification for this internal consistency value relates to the fact that the items of the scale are written in the negative way ("My father/mother and I are upset with each other"; "When I have some problem, I prefer not to tell my father/mother"; and "I have trouble believing in what my father/mother tells me") and represent a small number in the scale (only three items). Two reasons were considered for maintaining this subscale in the new version of COMPA: (a) the elimination of any of the items of the negative communication patterns subscale did not significantly improve the global Cronbach's alpha of the scale and, (b) since it is a first study of adapting the scale, the disclosed value may be kept for research

purposes (Wasserman & Bracken, 2012). However, it is essential to carry out further validity and reliability studies in order to ensure the maintenance of this dimension and thus facilitate the use of scale in different contexts other than those related to research.

With regard to the exploratory analysis of the sociodemographic variables, we found that there were differences regarding the gender of the participants, namely, the young females tend to perceive communication with their mothers more supported in mutual confidence and sharing than the young males. Although the study by Parra *et alii* (2015) did not show differences in the communication of emerging adults with their parents in terms of gender, studies conducted with the COMPA-A scale (Portugal & Alberto, 2015) and with other instruments (Barnes & Olson, 1985; Matos, Simões, Camacho, & Reis, 2015; Parra & Oliva, 2002) revealed the existence of similar differences that were identified in the present study. This result reinforces the sensitivity of the COMPA-EA version to distinguish groups in the sense of the clues indicated by the literature. The differences observed at the level of gender may come from social attributions to parental roles given that, in Western societies, prevails a clear differentiation in terms of the roles and functions of father and mother (Fitzpatrick & Vangelisti, 1995; Stewart, Stewart, Cooper, & Friedley, 1996). For example, women are more encouraged to share their emotions and feelings than men (McNaughton, 2000). Socially, women are expected to be more attentive and responsive to their children's basic needs (e.g., health care, hygiene), while men/fathers tend to manage the dimensions that involve power (e.g., establishment of rules and limits, monitoring of academic achievements) (McNaughton, 2000). These attributions and social representations around gender roles influence the exercise of parenting and the way fathers/mothers and children relate in a given culture. In the present study, the fact that young women perceive reciprocal communication patterns at the level of confidence/communication sharing, may also be due to a progressive differentiation that occurs between parents and children and consequent autonomy resulting from this movement (Aquilino, 2006). Emerging adults are perceived by their parents as adults and no longer as adolescents. This attitude change promotes greater flexibility in the parent-child relationship leading to a more robust sharing and communication confidence (Aquilino, 2006; Crocetti & Meeus, 2014).

Apart from differences in gender, there was a statistically significant difference between emerging adults living alone and those living with their parents in the sense that the latter tend to perceive greater confidence/sharing with their mothers. This result can be understood if one considers the greater communication openness that arises from this stage of the life cycle, since the communication between parents and children becomes more horizontal and, therefore, perceived as being more reciprocal (Aquilino, 2006; Crocetti & Meeus, 2014). In addition, living under the same roof with the parents may facilitate the communication frequency and the perception that there is a greater confidence/sharing with them. Actually, the COMPA-EA scale evaluates above all the frequency of communication between parents and children, since the response scale varies from 1= Never to 5= Always.

Despite the contributions of the present research, this is not exempt from limitations which may even appear in the results. For instance, in the present study there were no statistically significant differences between emerging adults who have financial autonomy and those who do not. This result can be justified given two limitations inherent in the research design: (a) an insufficient record of sociodemographic data collection (the operationalization of the financial autonomy variable was deduced from the professional situation of the emerging adult and not as a result of a direct question) and (b) the reduced

size of the sample in the analysed conditions (more than half of the participants (63.1%) reported not having a job that provides them some financial autonomy). The reduced sample size, not only in this variable, but also in the distribution of the participants by the categories of other variables (e.g., living alone or in cohabitation with the parents) may be constituted as another limitation of the study. The majority of the participants (85% of the sample) still live under the same roof with their parents and the literature suggests that this variable is very relevant when analysing the relationship between parents and children (Arnett, 2007). Thus, the high representativeness of young adults who live with their parents may have had a significant influence on the results presented previously. Furthermore, apart from the communication variable, the present study could be more enriched if it had been analysed the relationship of this variable with other (e.g., attachment to parental figures, family functioning), as well as, if it had been collected the perspective of the parents of the emerging adults who participated in this study.

Given the identified limitations, it becomes essential in the future, to carry out further validation studies with the COMPA-EA scale, which would imply a more comprehensive sample collection. Furthermore, it would be important to apply the COMPA-EA to adolescents (since most of the items are the same of the COMPA-A version) and to compare the patterns of child-parent communication of young adolescents and young adults. Adapting the COMPA-P version to parents of emerging adults is also a goal, once it will allow the collection of information from the perspective of the parents and thus cross the information of parents and children. Finally, the elaboration of cross-cultural studies, involving samples from others countries of Europe would also be interesting in order to compare patterns of communication between parents and their emerging adult children in terms of cultural specificities. Assuming that the expression of the parent-child relationship is different in these two contexts (Crocetti & Meeus, 2014; Parra *et alii*, 2015), it would be relevant to deepen how these differences are expressed with regard to the parent-child communication.

In conclusion, the present study contributes to the enrichment of the instruments of psychological evaluation, presenting an evaluation measure of the parent-child communication validated for one phase of the life cycle recently conceptualized (Arnett, 2000, 2005): emerging adulthood. COMPA-EA is a self-report measure, short and easy to fill, which revealed good validity and reliability. Moreover, it was also possible to perform an exploratory study of a sample from the south of Europe, in order to obtain some descriptive indicators that have not yet existed on parent-child communication with emerging adults. Thus, and in the future, COMPA-EA can become a useful tool in research with this specific population, as well as a relevant measure in the clinical context.

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