Emerging adults' family relationships in the 21st century: A systematic review

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Abstract

The current study aims to describe the relationships between emerging adults and their families and how these evolve over emerging adult years. Through a systematic review of the literature, we extracted data from 38 empirical studies, which met the following inclusion criteria: published since 2000, included emerging adults and/or their relatives as participants, and focused on family relationships. The results showed that most studies examined the parent-child relationship, providing insight into the relational renegotiations occurring during emerging adulthood and into inter-generational discrepancies in the way that parents and children viewed their relationships. Family support was also found to be of substantial relevance during this developmental stage. In addition, sex, age, living arrangements, family structure, socioeconomic status (SES), ethnicity and cultural contexts emerged as key factors influencing family relationships in varied ways. Implications for future research include the need to consider the family as the unit of analysis and to collect data from multiple family members; to conduct longitudinal studies in order to better understand changes in family relationships across emerging adulthood; and to focus on family relationships beyond the parent-child dyads, namely on sibling and grandparent-grandchildren relationships. In conclusion, this review provided a renewed perspective on family relationships during the transition to adulthood, contributing to clinical insights on individual and familial shifts in the fast-paced and complex contemporary context.

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

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The demographic shifts seen in recent decades have made the transition to adulthood longer and more complex. Most young people in industrialized societies currently spend more time in education, achieving traditional markers of adulthood – such as obtaining a stable full-time job, marriage, and parenthood – later in life (Arnett, 2015; Buchmann & Kriesi 2011). 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 longer considered a brief transition but rather a distinct period of one's life course (Arnett, 2015).

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. Family relationships have been identified as a main topic in the literature about emerging adulthood (Swanson, 2016). Nonetheless, as far as we know, little attention has been given to how emerging adults' relationships with their families develop during this period. The purpose of the current study is to characterize family relationships during emerging adulthood and to understand how they evolve over time, by reviewing empirical research on the topic published since 2000.

According to Arnett (2015), emerging adulthood is the age marked by the exploration of one's identity, by possibilities/optimism, and instability, as well as a period of self-focus, during which individuals tend to view themselves as being neither adolescents nor adults. This ambivalence might be explained by the gradual nature of the main criteria that emerging adults perceive as necessary for reaching adulthood (Arnett, 2015; L. J. Nelson et al., 2007): the acceptance of responsibility for one's self, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent. Accordingly, emerging adults' main developmental tasks concern becoming responsible for themselves, instead of sharing responsibility for their actions with parents, and gaining self-sufficiency, including financial independence (Tanner, 2006). Therefore, the transition to adulthood is a process that inevitably occurs in relation to others, namely the family of origin (Tanner, 2006), having been described as a joint enterprise of both children and parents (Scabini et al., 2006).

Previous conceptualizations of the family life cycle (e.g., Author citation, 2000; Carter & McGoldrick, 1988) have acknowledged that the transition to adulthood represents an important moment along the family's developmental path, encompassing parent-child separation and its acceptance as well as the renegotiation of roles within family relationships. For instance, within the pioneering theory of the family life cycle by Duvall (1957), 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.

More recently, Tanner (2006) introduced the concept of recentering, a primary task of emerging adulthood from a developmental systems framework, which corresponds to a relational rearrangement between the emerging adults and their families, encompassing shifts in power, agency, responsibility, and dependency, ultimately leading to the replacement of parent regulation by self-regulation. The challenges that these families face include the acknowledgement of the child's emerging adult status, the development of filial and parental maturity, and the interplay of emerging adults' autonomy and dependency needs (Aquilino, 2006). In fact, emerging adults might reach an adult status in some domains (e.g., making their own decisions) but not in others, if they continue to be economically dependent on their families, for instance. This contradiction is bound to influence family relationships and the transition to adulthood in varied ways. Moreover, the 2008 economic crisis 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, can be particularly challenging for individuals and families. Therefore, a clearer understanding of the interplay between the new features of the third decade of life and family dynamics is warranted.

Stemming from a systemic perspective and a life course framework (Elder, 1994), which acknowledge that individuals both influence and are influenced by significant others and their changing historical contexts, the current study aims to provide a comprehensive and up-to-date picture on family relationships and processes during emerging adulthood. Furthermore, we intend to provide a renewed reflection upon 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 takes on particular relevance due to the new challenges that emerging adults and families currently face, ones 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 search of the literature was conducted employing the Web of Science (core collection), SocIN-DEX, and PsycINFO on material dated between 2000 and 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*"). As Arnett's emerging adulthood theory first appeared in 2000, this became the year at which the range of searches began. In addition to date of publication, the search was limited to documents in English. Together with the electronic searches, the bibliographical references from the final selected records were manually examined to identify other relevant studies for the present review.

Selection of Studies

The results of the electronic searches were merged in Mendeley, where duplicate records were electronically removed. The inclusion criteria for this review were as follows: (a) empirical studies that used quantitative or qualitative methods, or both; (b) studies whose participants were emerging adults and/or the relatives of emerging adults; (c) assessment of family relationships 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. Although Arnett's first publications focused primarily on the age range of 18-25, the current literature regarding emerging adulthood is more inclusive in terms of age. In fact, accepting emerging adulthood until the age of thirty may be more accurate internationally, especially because the median ages for marriage and parenthood in some countries are higher than thirty years old (Arnett, 2015). Thus, for the purposes of this review, we defined emerging adulthood as encompassing the age range of 18 to 35.

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 concerning 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) studies whose primary focus went beyond family relationships within the joint transition phase. This was verified, for instance, in research focusing 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) studies in which family relationships were not the primary focus, and (b) studies of insufficient descriptive focus. According to the former criteria, studies characterizing family relationships, including its predictors, were included, contrary to studies focusing on the effects of family relationships on emerging adults' individual outcomes.

The strategy applied in the second screening allowed for the calculation of an interrater agreement as rec-

ommend 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 ($\varkappa$ = .843; McHugh, 2012). In the few cases in which the authors disagreed, consensus was reached after discussion. Finally, one additional study that met the inclusion criteria was added, having been identified through the manual searches. Figure 1 depicts the flowchart of the study selection process. [insert Figure 1]

Results

Research Contexts, Designs, and Participants

Our electronic and manual searches yielded 38 studies carried out in 14 different countries. The majority were conducted in the US (n = 22), while nine took place in Europe (one each performed in Belgium, Spain, Switzerland, England, and United Kingdom; and two each in Italy and Netherlands). The remaining ones were done in Australia (n = 2), Israel (n = 3), South Africa (n = 1), with one cross-cultural study undertaken in four countries (Fingerman et al., 2016). Most of the selected studies were cross-sectional (n = 26), with 12 employing a longitudinal design. Quantitative methods were adopted in most studies (n = 21), while nine studies adopted a qualitative methodology. Eight studies adopted both quantitative and qualitative methods, out of which five were categorized as mixed-method studies and three as multimethod studies (Anguera, Blanco-Villaseñor, Losada, Sánchez-Algarra, & Onwuegbuzie, 2018). Out of the 17 studies applying qualitative methods, nine conducted interviews, six included open-ended questions, one included both interviews and focus-groups (Crocetti & Meeus, 2014) and another included family observational tasks (Walkner & Rueter, 2014).

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

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

As for the structure of emerging adults' families, considering the 17 studies that provided this data, 13 two-parent families were the most frequent, with three studies exclusively involving families with this structure. Seven studies included divorced families, two of which included families with this structure exclusively; four studies involved adoptive families, with one study involving only emerging adults' adoptees as participants (Farr, Grant-Marsney, & Grotevant, 2014). As for ethnicity, half of the studies provided this information: participants were mainly Caucasian or European-American (n = 15), except in four studies in which African-American, Asian, and Hispanic-American ethnicities prevailed. In terms of SES, within the 11 studies that reported this information, three included samples from a low SES, one from a low-medium/medium, five from a medium, and two from a medium-high/high SES.

Within those studies reporting emerging adults' occupational status (n = 22), all of them included college students as participants, out of which 13 did so exclusively. On the topic of living arrangements, within the 17 studies that clearly specified this sample characteristic, nine reported that most of the participants no longer lived in the family home, whereas six reported that most of their participants co-resided with at least one parent, and two exclusively included emerging adults co-residing at the parental house. Finally, most studies (n = 19) included participants older than 25, and seven included participants over the age of 29, with no emerging adult identified as being older than 35. Table 1 displays the main data regarding the context and design of the studies. [insert Table 1]

Thematic Focus: Family Relationships and Features Explored

The studies investigated a range of relationship features either considering emerging adults' relationships with their whole-family system ($n = 7$) or with specific family members ($n = 31$). Out of these, 26 studies focused on the parent-child relationship, four on siblings, and one on grandparent-grandchild relationships. The main results of the studies will be next presented according to the type of family relationship explored.

Whole-Family Relationships

Most studies addressing whole-family relationships were supported by emerging adults' reports on the general properties of the overall family system. Almost half of the participants from Crocetti and Meeus (2014) mentioned significant changes within family relationships. Most of them felt that they had more mutual family relationships characterized by better communication, especially reported by individuals who had already left the parental home, and by an increased reciprocity, mainly reported by participants who were still living with their parents.

Tsai et al. (2013) verified that family respect declined during adolescence and stabilized after this period, whereas the importance of family to an emerging adult's identity increased across emerging adulthood. In addition, females presented a more solid sense of family importance to identity during emerging adulthood (Crocetti & Meeus, 2014; Tsai et al., 2013).

Moreover, most emerging adults viewed family, or a specific family member, as the most important contributor to meaning in life (Lambert et al., 2010). Smit (2011) found that most emerging adults perceived family rituals as promoters of a sense of belonging to the family system, as well as of their uniqueness. Preserving family rituals was viewed as an opportunity to connect with family history, contributing to the development of an intergenerational self. Lastly, Kins et al. (2013) showed that separation anxiety can be represented as a personal characteristic, as a specific feature of the mother–child and father-mother dyads, as well as of the family climate as a whole.

Support at the family level was investigated in three longitudinal studies. Fuligni and Pedersen (2002) found increases in the sense of obligation to assist, support, and respect the family from the period extending from secondary school into young adulthood. Group differences were verified: (a) offspring from two-parent families appeared more willing to support the family in the future compared with those from single-parent families; (b) Latin American and Filipino participants reported a stronger sense of familial obligation compared with those from East Asian and European backgrounds; (c) poorer participants reported steeper increases in family obligation compared with those from higher income families; and (d) females gave more importance to current and future family support than males. Tsai et al. (2013) verified that the sense of family obligation decreased during adolescence, with family respect and future support stabilizing in the following years. Guan and Fuligni (2016) showed that across the transition to young adulthood, participants from European American backgrounds reported increases in parental support, whereas this feature remained stable for those from Asian and Latin American backgrounds. Females described higher levels of parental and sibling support at the 12th grade, which remained constant two and four years after high-school.

Parent-child Relationships

Most studies focusing on the parent-child relationship provided information about potential changes within this relationship as the offspring aged. For instance, Lefkowitz (2005) demonstrated that most emerging adults reported changes in parent-child relationships once they began college, portraying them as mainly positive (e.g., feeling closer to parents). Consistently, Jensen et al. (2004) found that emerging adults lied less to their parents and, especially females, considered this behavior less acceptable compared with adolescents.

Parra et al. (2015) found that communication frequency, conflict, and affection decreased from late adolescence to emerging adulthood, whereas cohesion increased from adolescence to emerging adulthood. Specifically, female emerging adults reported higher communication and affection and lower conflict compared with males. Findings from S. C. Nelson et al. (2015) also attested to lower parent-child conflict during emerging adulthood. The main topics of conflict appeared to be peer issues (for mother-daughter dyads), material possessions (for father-daughter dyads), independence (for mother-son dyads), and school issues (for father-son

dyads) (Renk et al., 2007).

Changes in the parental bond were examined by van Wel et al. (2000), who found decreases during adolescence for both sexes and increases after adolescence through the early twenties for girls. Shulman and Ben-Artzi (2003) showed that the intensity of affective relationships with fathers and mothers was lower for young adults (26-29 years) when compared with adolescents. Maternal cohesion, following a decrease in adolescence, was found to stabilize in emerging adulthood; however, for participants with non-married parents, paternal cohesion declined not only during adolescence but also during emerging adulthood (Tsai et el., 2013). Maternal relationship satisfaction, unlike paternal relationship satisfaction, was found to improve for two-year post-transition participants (Levitt et al., 2007). Additionally, daughters appeared to have closer relationships with mothers than with fathers (Bertogg & Szydlik, 2016; Padilla-Walker et al., 2008; Tsai et al., 2013).

Furthermore, Sestito and Sica (2014) identified that most second-year college students reported a close, warmth, horizontal, and mutual parent-child relationship, which has been transformed over time. However, last year-students seemed to live an internal conflict: despite describing horizontal parent-child relationships in which parents treated them as adults, they did not feel they had already attained such status. Kloep and Hendry (2010) found that more than half of their interviewed parents ended up delaying their offspring's independence, and about 32% were reluctant to let their children go, as they experienced difficulties in accepting offspring's increasing autonomy and felt that their role as parents was diminishing.

Finally, parents and children appeared to be significant sources of support for each other (Bucx et al., 2012). Fingerman et al. (2016) showed that emerging adults often reported receiving six types of support: emotional, practical, companionship, advice, financial assistance, and listening. Except for emotional support, younger children received more support than the older ones; mothers were found to provide more support to children than fathers, except for financial support; and female emerging adults received more support than males. Assessing both paternal and maternal support, Levitt et al. (2007) found an association between being male and receiving more support from fathers. Bucx et al. (2012) demonstrated that advice was exchanged more often than practical or financial support and it was specially received from and provided to mothers. Regarding the role of ethnicity, practical support was more frequently reported by emerging adults from Hong Kong and Korea in comparison with participants from Germany and the US (Fingerman et al., 2016); and African-Americans felt less support from fathers as compared with their European-American, Asian-American, and Hispanic-American counterparts (Levitt et al., 2007). Furthermore, emerging adults reported providing little support to parents, with implicit forms of support (e.g., listening) being the most regular (Cheng et al., 2015; Fingerman et al., 2016). Girls were found to be more likely than boys to provide advice and practical support to parents (Bucx et al., 2012).

Parent-child relationships and family structure. Specific studies investigated parent-child relationships in adoptive families. Walkner and Rueter (2014) showed that self-reported and observed conflict were higher in these families as compared with non-adoptive ones, and that adoptive mothers were observed to have higher closeness with adoptees compared with nonadoptive ones. Farr et al. (2014) revealed that emerging adults described their communication with their adoptive parents as positive, and open communication about adoption in these families was viewed as fundamental. Darlington (2001) identified three main patterns of current parent-child relationships of emerging adults subjected to a custodial process during childhood or adolescence: positive parent-child relationships through life; continued negative perception of one of the parents; and the progressive positive acceptance of a previously non-preferred parent. In addition, Bertogg and Szydlik (2016) verified that divorce during an offspring's childhood promoted a looser intergenerational relationship of emerging adults with fathers.

Findings from Fingerman et al. (2016) and Levitt et al. (2007) suggested that married parents provided more support to children than non-married ones. Specifically, Bucx et al. (2012) showed that divorced parents were less likely to provide and receive advice and practical support from children. Wells and Johnson (2001) found that willingness to provide care for fathers depended on their marital status, which could be explained by a possibly weaker bond to fathers (usually the non-custodial parent), according to the study authors.

The role of co-residence in parent-child relationships. Living with parents was associated with positive (e.g., laugher) and stressful (e.g., irritations) experiences with them (Fingerman et al., 2017), higher closeness (Bertogg & Szydlik, 2016), as well as higher likelihood of receiving multiple types of parental support (Fingerman et al., 2016; 2017). Moreover, some parents reported guilty feelings linked to the unsuccessful launch of their children who had returned to the parental house after graduation (Lewis et al., 2016). Feelings of ambivalence concerning co-residence were also shown by some children, who reported being stressed by their return even though they enjoyed the comfort of home (Lewis et al., 2016). Co-residence was, in fact, perceived as a pleasant experience, with most emerging adults not feeling obliged to move out (Sestito & Sica, 2014). Specifically, lower SES co-resident emerging adults, providing financial resources to parents, preferred to live independently, and reported having had difficulties in managing household responsibilities with their own individual capital goals (e.g., the desire of getting married) (Napolitano, 2015).

Different views on parent-child relationships . Studies suggested that parents viewed the relationships with their children as being closer than their sons and daughters did (Bertogg & Szydlik, 2016), reporting higher levels of family cohesion and communication (Givertz & Segrin, 2014), as well as higher parental knowledge (Padilla-Walker et al., 2008) and legitimate authority (Padilla-Walker, Nelson, & Knapp, 2014). Cheng et al. (2015) found that children claimed providing more emotional, practical, technological, and financial support, as well as advice, than parents recognized. In addition, mothers had higher levels of child-reported parental knowledge, reporting warmer relationships with their children (L. J. Nelson et al., 2011) and higher connectedness (Yanir & Guttman, 2011) in comparison with fathers.

Siblings Relationships

Studies documented positive changes in sibling relationships in emerging adulthood. Participants described these relationships more positively, reporting more emotional exchanges and less conflict as compared with the adolescent period (Scharf et al., 2005), greater enjoyment of the moments together, and they viewed beginning college as a moment marking more maturity, new experiences, and perspectives on the sibling bond (Milevsky & Heerwagen, 2013). Siblings were also found to be providers of social support for each other in this stage, generally reporting high levels of support (Milevsky et al., 2005). Relying on siblings to provide immediate help when needed was found the most important function of support described by participants (Milevsky et al., 2005)

Findings also suggested that these relationships were influenced by different sociodemographic factors. Same sex sibships were characterized by more emotional exchanges and higher affective intensity relationships (Scharf et al., 2005), and female emerging adults were found to promote warmer sibling relationships (Milevsky et al., 2005). Age-gaps between siblings were viewed as negative for their relationships by some participants (Milevsky et al., 2005; Milevsky & Heerwagen, 2013), and younger emerging adults were more likely to report sibling conflict (Milevsky et al., 2005). Geographic distance between siblings was described either as an advantage (Milevsky & Heerwagen, 2013) or as having a negative effect on their relationships (Milevsky et al., 2005). Furthermore, support exchanges were affected by: one's working situation, with non-employed participants scoring higher in support than employed ones; sibship length, with emerging adults from larger sibships scoring lower (Milevsky et al., 2005); and, family structure, with emerging adults from non-divorced families scoring higher than those from divorced families (Milevsky, 2004). In addition, parental divorce appeared to cause tension among sibling relationships (Milevsky & Heerwagen, 2013), promoting less closeness and less frequent communication (Milevsky, 2004).

Grandparent-grandchild Relationships

Mansson (2012) established that nonverbal affection (e.g., hugging, kissing) was the most common behavior that grandparents used to demonstrate affection toward their emerging adult grandchildren. This was followed by attempts to spend face-to-face time with them (e.g., having lunch together). Support/encouragement (e.g., providing financial support by paying for education or bills) was the least affectionate behavior reported.

Discussion

The present review aimed at describing the family relationships of families with emerging adult children in light of the implications that the new features of the transition to adulthood may present to the family system. A first conclusion of this review concerns the changes in the relationships between children and their families in emerging adulthood, which were found to become more horizontal, closer, and less conflictual when compared with those during adolescence. In other words, 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 (Carter & McGoldrick, 1988). This review suggested that families proceeded, in fact, to a relational redefinition that includes changes in the family hierarchy and power (Author citation, 2000), which is at the basis of Tanner's (2006) conceptualization of recentering. Parents' more optimistic views on their relationships with children found in this review are in line with previous literature, being likely to mirror intergenerational differences (Author citation, 2000): whereas parents are focused on familial and generational continuity, children strive to create an individualized self, differentiated from the family of origin.

This review has also provided some insight into the particular challenges that today's families with emerging adults face, namely acknowledging the child's emerging adult status and managing the interplay between autonomy and dependency needs. On the one hand, parents demonstrated some ambivalence regarding children's growing autonomy (Kloep & Hendry, 2010; Lewis et al., 2016). On the other hand, despite attaining a more adult-adult relationship with their parents, emerging adults continued to feel that they had not reached adult status (Sestito & Sica, 2014).

A second conclusion of this review comprises the major role that family, and particularly family support, played in families navigating emerging adulthood. Underscoring the interdependence among family members in this joint enterprise (Scabini et al., 2006), findings stressed the importance of the family (Crocetti & Meeus, 2014; Smit, 2011; Tsai et al., 2013) to one's identity and sense of belonging, with support being a relationship feature of major importance. Current support was predominantly provided by parents to children, often including financial assistance and co-residence (e.g., Fingerman et al., 2016). In fact, parents generally seemed to encourage the exploration process during emerging adulthood, supporting their children during the protracted period of transition to adult status in the present day. Additionally, results suggesting increases in children's support to parents (Napolitano, 2015) and the familial obligation to support the family (Fuligni & Pederson, 2002) might reflect the development of filial maturity.

A third conclusion of this review 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. Female emerging adults seemed to be more connected to the family than males, as the former, for instance, reported to have more frequent communication with parents (Parra et al., 2015), to promote warmer siblings relationships (Milevsky et al., 2005), and to be more involved in supportive practices toward the family (Fuligni & Pedersen, 2002). Supporting the view that the mother-daughter relationship could be more affective relationship as compared with other parent-child dyads (Author citation, 2000; Scabini, 2000), results of this review showed that female emerging adults were closer to mothers than to fathers (e.g., Bertogg & Szydlik, 2016). In addition, results attesting to the more positive views of mothers on their relationship with offspring compared to fathers (L. J. Nelson et al., 2011) and separation-anxiety as a typical feature of the mother-child dyad (Kins et al., 2013) are in line with previous literature (e.g., Scabini, 2000) suggesting that mothers have a core role in the parent-child relationship, being more involved in their children's lives than fathers. Concerning age, older children were found to receive less parental support than younger ones across most of the domains assessed (Fingerman et al., 2016), which 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), possibly illustrating the development of more horizontal relationships across time.

With regard to living arrangements, co-residence with parents could bring both positive and negative implications for individual and family development. This intricated picture of results might stem from geographic and cultural factors, while simultaneously reflecting the new contours of the transition to adulthood. Ac-

cordingly, prolonged co-residence might be more common nowadays, involving benefits for both emerging adults and parents, but also potential costs for family relationships and for children's autonomy.

Concerning family structure, parental divorce was found to be linked with negative relationship outcomes for both parent-child dyads (e.g., Bertogg & Szydlik, 2016) and siblings (e.g., Milevsky, 2004). Importantly, stemming from the study of Wells and Johnson (2001), differences between divorced and non-divorced families could be related with weaker bonds established between children and non-custodial parents. The findings of this review have also called attention into potential specificities of adoptive families' relationships (e.g., higher conflict, more negative perceptions of the mother-child relationships).

Regarding SES, emerging adults from lower SES might be more aware of the need to assist their families and thus feel more constrained with regard to their individual pursuits (e.g., Fuglini and Pederson, 2002; Napolitano, 2015). This can be accentuated in contexts of economic crisis, which might restrict these emerging adults' opportunities and potentially expose them to situations of social inequality. Finally, differences in family relationships related to ethnicity and cultural contexts were found in some studies (e.g., Fuligni & Pedersen, 2002; Levitt et al., 2007). However, the results revealed to be somewhat inconsistent, highlighting the need to examine racial and ethnic diversity in research dealing with family relationships in emerging adulthood (Aquilino, 2006).

Research Critique and Future Directions

The first critique to the reviewed research lies in the participant profile in the selected studies, which was mainly emerging adult children. Collecting data from only one family member to describe family relationships can be considered a research limitation, as we merely have a single family member's particular view of the relationships (Scabini et al., 2006). Additionally, when other family members were included in the studies, these individuals were mainly mothers; fathers and/or other family roles appeared less frequently. Future studies on family relationships during the transition to adulthood would benefit from including more than one family members as participants and considering the family as the unit of analysis in order to understand relational dynamics. Moreover, the observed discrepancies between parents and their offspring regarding their relationships reinforce the relevance of this recommendation.

Secondly, little research attention has been given to family relationships beyond the parent-child dyad, namely that reflecting sibling and grandparent-grandchild relationships. As people grow up, sibling relationships become a matter of choice, in contrast to childhood (Aquilino, 2006). With life expectancy on the rise, and inextricably linked with the current common model of a family incorporating three or four generations (Author citation, 2000), grandparents are likely to become increasingly important providers of family support. Future studies may adopt a systemic and intergenerational approach, with the aim to identify the specificities of sibling and grandparent-grandchildren relationships in emerging adulthood and the role of these family members in the transition to adulthood.

Another research critique involves the frequent use of the terms 'emerging adulthood' and 'young adulthood' in an undifferentiated manner. For some authors (e.g., Arnett, 2015; Shulman & Ben-Artzi, 2003) it is important to emphasize that emerging adulthood represents a distinct life period, which precedes young adulthood. Moreover, studies were not all restricted to the 18-25 age range, which in our view represents a strength of this review. According to Arnett (2015, p. 7), "nothing magical happens when individuals reach age 25", showing that the cutoff age for the end of emerging adulthood can vary. Researchers ought to carefully select the participants' age ranges in their future studies, paying attention to the topic being addressed and to the specificities of their national contexts (e.g., median ages of marriage/parenthood).

Furthermore, we have reasons to assume that our reviewed research was international in scope, in that we found a higher percentage of studies developed outside the US as compared with the number found in Swanson's (2016) review. Nevertheless, there was still a predominance of study samples involving White emerging adults attending college, which reflects a demographic pertaining to middle-class families in the US and might constitute a research bias in this review. These sociodemographic features are likely to influence the way in which both emerging adults and their families navigate this time of their lives. Future research

attention on the experiences of those who do not attend higher education – the "forgotten half" (Arnett, 2000, p. 476) – as well as of social and ethnic minorities is warranted.

Additionally, our review included studies with participants from different family structures, which could be regarded as a literature strength. Considering the increasing diversity of family structures in today's society and that family structure emerged in this review as an intervening factor likely to influence family relationships, future research would benefit from including participants from single, step, and extended families. Moreover, further studies are needed to grasp the benefits and drawbacks of the variety of living arrangements that may occur during emerging adulthood.

In sum, it is of utmost relevance that novel studies include more heterogeneous samples and provide clear descriptions of participants' sociodemographic characteristics – an important procedure at which some of the reviewed studies failed. Finally, most of reviewed studies were cross-sectional. Longitudinal research would be valuable to map the changes and processes that occur during emerging adulthood within the family system.

Limitations, Strengths, and Conclusion

This review presents limitations. Firstly, the chosen electronic databases along with the non-English exclusion criterion might have introduced publication bias, hampering our access to other relevant publications meeting our inclusion criteria. Secondly, the diversity of discussed topics and methodologies did not allow for cross-national or cross-socioeconomic contexts comparisons. Further, three out of the four studies focusing on sibling relationships were 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, the current review provided an overall description of family relationships during emerging adulthood, identifying the main gaps in this body of research. A core recommendation for future research consists in a shift from family-related research to family research (see Scabini et al., 2006), demanding the inclusion of more than one family members as participants.

More importantly, the present findings underscored 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). Furthermore, it is legitimate to assume 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 a lengthy transition to adulthood of their children. Nowadays, this could be even more pronounced: on the one hand, offspring strive for independence and, on the other hand, they are still, at least financially, reliant upon their parents, often shifting between living together and living apart. 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. 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. Implications from this review draw attention to the "old and new" challenges that families with emerging adults must overcome, providing a renewed vision of this stage of life cycle.

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Table 1

Summary of the Main Characteristics of the Selected Studies

Author(s), year	Context	Design	Partici
			AD
Bertogg and Szydlik (2016)	Switzerland	LGT; QT	
Bucx, van Wel, and Knijn (2012)	Netherlands	CS; QT	
Cheng et al. (2015)	US	CS; QT	
Crocetti and Meeus (2014)	Italy	CS; MM	
Darlington (2001)	Australia	CS; QL	
Farr Grant-Marsney, and Grotevant (2014)	US	LGT; Mix	
Fingerman et al. (2016)	Germany; Hong Kong; Korea; EUA	CS; QT	
Fingerman Huo, Kim, and Birditt (2017)	US	LGT; QT	
Fuligni and Pedersen (2002)	US	LGT; QT	
Givertz and Segrin (2014)	US	CS; QT	
Guan and Fuligni (2016)	US	LGT; QT	
Jensen, Arnett, Feldman, and Cauffman (2004)	US	CS; QT	
Kins, Soenens, and Beyers (2013)	Belgium	CS; QT	
Kloep and Hendry (2010)	United Kingdom	CS; QL	
Lambert et al. (2010)	US	CS; Mix	
Lefkowitz (2005)	US	CS; QL	
Levitt, Silver, and Santos (2007)	US	LGT; QT	
Lewis, West, Roberts, and Noden (2016)	England	CS; QL	
Mansson (2012)	US	CS; QL	
Milevsky (2004)	US	CS; QT	
Milevsky and Heerwagen (2013)	US	CS; QL	
Milevsky, Smoot, Leh, and Ruppe (2005)	US	CS; Mix	
Napolitano (2015)	US	LGT; QL	
Nelson, Padilla-Walker, Christensen, Evans, and Carroll (2011)	US	CS; QT	
Nelson, Bahrassa, Syed, and Lee (2015)	US	LGT; QT	
Padilla-Walker, Nelson, Madsen, and Barry (2008)	US	CS; QT	
Padilla-Walker, Nelson, and Knapp (2014)	US	CS; QT	
Parra, Oliva, and Reina (2015)	Spain	LGT; QT	
Renk et al. (2007)	US	CS; MM	
Scharf, Shulman, and Avigad-Spitz (2005)	Israel	CS; MM	
Sestito and Sica (2014)	Italy	CS; QL	
Shulman and Ben-Artzi (2003)	Israel	CS; QT	
Smit (2011)	South Africa	CS; QL	
Tsai, Telzer, and Fuligni (2013)	US	LGT; QT	
van Wel, Linssen, and Abma (2000)	Netherlands	LGT; QT	
Walkner and Rueter (2014)	US	LGT; Mix	
Wells and Johnson (2001)	Australia	CS; QT	
Yanir and Guttmann (2011)	Israel	CS; Mix	

Note. AD = adolescents. EA = emerging adults. FM = family members. QL = qualitative. QT = quantitative. CS = cross-sectional. LGT = longitudinal. MIX = mixed-method. MM = multimethod.

Figure 1 . Flowchart of the review process