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Using Focus Group in the Development of UNIPA Emotional Autonomy Inventory

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Abstract

Focus groups were used in order to develop a new measure of adolescents' emotional autonomy from parents. The procedure started from an in depth analysis of the literature concerning the construct and a definition of the dimensions which characterize it. Following our idea of the construct, we developed a list of 60 items, getting some of them from existing instruments. Twenty-four adolescents participated in the focus group discussions about the adequacy of the items to measure emotional autonomy. Following their feedbacks a second version of the list with 59 items was presented in a focus group with experts in the field of developmental and clinical psychology, who were called to judge the ability of each item to evaluate the construct. Resulting from the indications emerged in this discussion, a final version of the scale with 66 items was developed and called UNIPA Adolescent Emotional Autonomy Inventory.

Keywords

Focus Group, Emotional Autonomy, Adolescence, Parent-Adolescent Relationship, Scale Development

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Focus groups were used in order to develop a new measure of adolescents' emotional autonomy from parents. The procedure started from an in depth analysis of the literature concerning the construct and a definition of the dimensions which characterize it. Following our idea of the construct, we developed a list of 60 items, getting some of them from existing instruments. Twenty-four adolescents participated in the focus group discussions about the adequacy of the items to measure emotional autonomy. Following their feedbacks a second version of the list with 59 items was presented in a focus group with experts in the field of developmental and clinical psychology, who were called to judge the ability of each item to evaluate the construct. Resulting from the indications emerged in this discussion, a final version of the scale with 66 items was developed and called UNIPA Adolescent Emotional Autonomy Inventory. Keywords: Focus Group, Emotional Autonomy, Adolescence, Parent-Adolescent Relationship, Scale Development

Adolescents' Emotional Autonomy from Parents

A relevant tenet in developmental psychology is that adolescents are expected to achieve an autonomous functioning, independent from parents, to become reliant on their internal resources and responsible for their actions and decisions. Within this framework, emotional autonomy reflects the affective side of the largest process by which a young person acquires a more mature identity. It emerges when adolescents are capable to abandon dependence on parents and to individuate from them. Moreover, emotional autonomy implies a shift towards a less idealized conception of parental figures, the development of a more complex consideration of them as people, and the establishment of affective bonds more symmetrical than those characterizing the parental relationship in childhood (Beyers, Gossens, Vansant, & Moors, 2003; Parra, Oliva, & Sánchez-Queija, 2015; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986; Zimmer-Gembeck & Collins, 2003).

The construct of emotional autonomy has gained interest among researchers because of its importance as a key component of adolescent development, and two main theoretical orientations have informed its study. Some authors with a psychoanalytic background have suggested that a positive process of emotional autonomy occurs when adolescents are able to move away from familial influences and to distance themselves from parents, including the extreme form of disengagement, achieving an emotional separation from them (Blos, 1979; Freud, 1958). Consistently with this perspective, research has shown that an increased independent behaviour and the relinquishing of dependence on parents are positively related to indices of well-being during adolescence, such as better school grades and performances (Chen & Dornbusch, 1998), better adjustment to university environments (Beyers & Goossens, 2003) and higher self-esteem (Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986).

Some other authors have questioned the adaptive meaning of separating from parents (Beyers & Goossens, 1999; Garber & Little, 2001). According to their point of view, a healthy autonomous development can only occur if accompanied by a warm and intimate relationship with nurturing figures, providing love, support and empathic responsiveness to their children while encouraging and promoting an appropriate sense of autonomy, independence and self-regulation (Goossens & Waeben, 1996; Goossens & Van der Heijden, 1998; Grotevant & Cooper, 1986; Hill & Holmbeck, 1986; Ingoglia, Lo Coco, Liga, & Lo Cricchio, 2011; Lo Cricchio, Liga, Ingoglia, & Lo Coco, 2012; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Research carried out from this perspective have found that highly emotionally autonomous adolescents who also perceive their parents as being supportive are more likely to show positive patterns of adjustment and competence than those with higher levels of autonomy but low levels of connectedness to parents (Fuhrman & Holmbeck, 1995; Ingoglia, Lo Coco, Pace, Zappulla, Liga, & Inguglia, 2004; Lamborn & Steinberg, 1993). However, even in this perspective, results are puzzling and there are studies that have found a different pattern of outcomes identifying teenagers who score high on measures of psychosocial adjustment even if they show low levels of attachment to parents and high levels of emotional autonomy (McClanahan & Holmbeck, 1992).

Much of the above mentioned controversial findings seem to originate from measurement issues (Beyers, et al., 2003; Parra, Oliva, & Sanchez-Queija, 2015). Firstly, the Emotional Autonomy Scale (EAS; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986) has been one of the most widely used measure of this construct. However, it has been argued (Beyers et al., 2003; Ingoglia, Lo Coco, Liga, & Lo Cricchio, 2011; Ryan & Lynch, 1989; Schmitz & Baer, 2001; Turner, Irwin, Tschann, & Millstein, 1993) that this instrument seems to measure a detachment from parents, rather than a genuine autonomy. Detachment can be viewed as a more radical form of distancing from parents, associated with experiencing a lack of support and acceptance and feelings of disengagement from parents (Lamborn & Steinberg, 1993). This could be the reason why high scores of emotional autonomy as measured by the EAS are related with negative psychosocial outcomes, such as higher probability to be engaged in delinquent activities (Lamborn & Steinberg, 1993), and higher feelings of insecurity (Matos, Barbosa, Almedia, & Costa, 1999).

Secondly, emotional autonomy has been used as a synonym of several constructs – such as decision-making capacity (Greenberger, 1984), self-reliance (Steinberg, 2002), resistance to peer pressure (Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986), and self-other responsibility (Frank, Avery, & Laman, 1988). This has given rise to a great amount of confusion about the meaning of emotional autonomy and the correct way of measuring it.

Lastly, the inconsistent findings of literature may also be a consequence of the multifaceted nature of the construct. Even if emotional autonomy has been considered as a multidimensional concept (Chen & Dornbusch, 1998), its components have not been clearly individuated and captured by existing measures. Steinberg and Silverberg (1986), for example, have distinguished among several dimensions such as the de-idealization of parents and the sense of individuation from them, and they have developed the EAS in order to measure these aspects. Notwithstanding, subsequent analyses have revealed that this instrument measures other aspects rather than those originally conceived by the authors (Beyers, Goossens, Van Calster, & Duriez, 2005; Schmitz & Baer, 2001).

All of these considerations underline the necessity of an in-depth analysis of the theoretical structure of emotional autonomy, prior to examine any relation with other theoretically important variables. In fact, a clear picture of the association of emotional autonomy with psychological adjustment can only occur when its conceptualization and measurement are sufficiently specific and unambiguous.

Several attempts have been made in order to address the measurement problems associated to emotional autonomy, such as revisiting the nature and structure of the EAS (Beyers, Goossens, Van Calster, & Duriez, 2005; Schmitz & Baer, 2001) and developing other scales to evaluate this construct (Noom, Dekovic, & Meeus, 1999). Notwithstanding, a more meticulous investigation and operationalization of this construct is necessary. One helpful approach to this aim can derive from using qualitative methods, and in particular, focus groups. Focus groups can enable not only to better understand what the construct is, but also to develop a new measure, which may be able to evaluate in-depth this aspect of adolescent-parent relationships by exploring the meaning of the concept and the best way to approach to its measurement.

Using Focus Group in Developing Questionnaires

Focus groups refer to the "explicit use of group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group" (Morgan, 1988, p. 12). They may be used to clarify information previously known about a topic or may be aimed at producing new awareness and instruments about an issue by investigating it from a new perspective. Several important steps in developing questionnaires have been accomplished through the use of focus groups (Fuller, Edwards, Vorakitphokatorn, & Sermsri, 1993; Hughes & DuMont, 1993; Nassar-McMillan & Borders, 2002; O'Brien, 1993). Focus groups have been considered as an useful starting point in questionnaire designs because they give the possibility to explore the way in which potential respondents think about an issue, for developing initial items, and determining the best approach of response or scale alternative (Stewart & Prem, 2015).

Even if the standard methodology is to use focus groups in the first stage of questionnaire development, their use is not limited to this preliminary phase. Nassar-McMillan and Borders (2002) proposed, for example, using focus group to generate questionnaires, refining items of existing ones. They suggested conducting focused discussion on the adequacy of items of questionnaires already existing about an issue in order to improve them and then to use them in a new, more adequate and suitable version. Focus groups enable to improve existing questionnaires by three levels: (a) correcting the language, and in particular, the choice of words or expressions of items to better fit what is usual for possible respondents; (b) taking into account the context, and the differences due to age and educational background between the target population and the researchers who have generated the questionnaires; (c) improving the content, in particular, the appropriateness of content in questions relating to individuals' experiences and background. Focus groups can give a strong contribution to the solution of measurement problems such as those described in the present study.

Aims of the Study

The current research was aimed at using focused group discussions as proposed by Nassar-McMillan and Borders (2002) in order to develop a new measure for the evaluation of adolescent emotional autonomy from parents, and to address the above-mentioned difficulties and the multifaceted nature of the construct. In reaching this scope, we decided to use the methodology of focus group, viewing it as an elective way to generate items by selecting, improving and refining those of already existing instruments.

Procedure

The development of the scale required five steps, which started from an analysis of the literature concerning emotional autonomy and a preliminary identification of the main dimensions that have to be assessed in order to catch the multidimensional nature of the construct. Following Nassar-McMillan and Borders (2002), the procedure continued with the selection of items from existing instruments assessing autonomy and the development of others in order to evaluate specific aspects neglected in questionnaires. Focus groups with adolescents and then with experts were conducted with this aim along with that of generating additional items and eliminating those considered not salient for the aim of measuring emotional autonomy.

Step 1 – First Conceptualization of Emotional Autonomy Dimensions

In the aim of developing a questionnaire, the most important aspect is to have a basic idea of what is necessary to measure, and which aspects and variables have to be considered as components of the construct you want to assess. Starting from this consideration, the first step of the research was to develop a frame of what emotional autonomy is, trying to match the most important theoretical perspectives on the construct. The result of this in-depth analysis was a conception of adolescent emotional autonomy that implies an articulation of this construct in three dimensions: (a) one related to the recognition of one's self; (b) one linked to the recognition of the relationship with parents as a "secure haven"; and (c) one linked to the availability to dialogue and debate with parents.

One of the distinctive dimensions of emotional autonomy refers to the distancing of self from parents. Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) suggest that highly autonomous adolescents endorse the actions in which they are involved, and they are self-determining because they base their actions on consciousness of personal interests, values and goals, possessing a sense of volition and choice (Soenens, et al., 2007; Ryan, 1993; Ryan, LaGuardia, Solky-Butzel, Chirkov, & Kim, 2005; Vansteenkiste, Zhou, Lens, & Soenens, 2005). Following this theory, we contemplate the development of clear boundaries between self and parents, of the ability to take own personal decisions and to face everyday events independently from parents as fundamental aspects, which have to be evaluated in the aim of catching adolescent's emotional autonomy. We called the first dimension "Self-Recognition" and it specifically reflects (a) the differentiation, or the ability to express the difference between themselves and their parents, developing and expressing their own personal points of view; (b) the individuation, which is a sense of stable and consistent self, with precise borders with the external world, characterized by a certain stability of self-esteem and mood due to reduced dependence on external sources of support; in this area is included the ability to make decisions for their own lives without experiencing feelings of guilt towards their parents; (c) the susceptibility to parental influence, or the tendency to express ideas and behaviours, which are strongly influenced by the views expressed by parents; and (d) the volitional functioning, or the ability to make choices, set goals in life, face the daily challenges regardless for the stress of parents.

The development of an increasingly differentiated, integrated and mature sense of self – which is reflected in the first dimension - is contingent on establishing satisfying interpersonal experiences with parents, and vice versa (Blatt & Blass, 1996; Guisinger & Blatt, 1994; Kağitçibaşı, 1996; Ryan, Deci, & Grolnick, 1995). In typical development, these processes evolve in a reciprocally balanced and mutually facilitating fashion from birth through senescence (Inguglia, Ingoglia, Liga, Lo Coco, & Lo Cricchio, 2015). Consequently, becoming emotionally autonomous from parents does not result in the interruption of relationship with

them. The second dimension has to do with connection with parents and the adolescents' ability to maintain an intimate relationship with them. We called it "Recognition of the relationship with parents" and it reflects, on the one hand, the capacity to consider them as secure bases, reference points, models, and important examples on which being inspired, especially in the most important moments of lives, and on the other hand, the capacity to view them as leading figures that can give useful advices in facing important problems.

The last dimension refers to adolescent's availability to debate with parents. We called it "Willingness to dialogue," and it reflects the ability to manage the disagreements with parents during adolescence. The increasing necessity of emotional autonomy, and adolescent's search for emotional independence inevitably generates disagreements and conflicts in their relationships with parents. Adolescents become less inclined to accept parental authority (Fulgini, 1998), and the conflicts with parents increase in affective intensity (Laursen, Coy, & Collins, 1998). Being emotionally autonomous entails the adolescent's disposition to negotiate disagreements, the ability to state clearly one's own reasons and to express complete information in order to explain one's own position and points of view. It includes the readiness to change ideas and to find a compromise where necessary.

In the aim of evaluating adolescents' emotional autonomy from parents, it is necessary to control other two dimensions that may confuse the meaning of those already highlighted. As previously said, becoming emotionally autonomous from parents requires the adolescents' disposition to negotiate divergences and to search for a compromise. Unfortunately, this does not always happen. The first dimension to control reflects the adolescents' tendency to take an adversarial attitude towards parents instead of a positive and cooperative one - which instead characterizes the willingness to dialogue. We called it "Opposition." Moreover, emotionally autonomous adolescents are able to consider parents as normal people, characterized by weak and strength aspects, and to de-idealize them. Contrary to this, the second dimension to control denotes the tendency to consider parents as perfect people, who do not make mistakes or errors, instead of simply seeing them as important guides and models, and we called it "Idealization."

Step 2 - Item List Selection

Having in mind the idea of what are the overall dimensions that characterize emotional autonomy, we selected and developed a total of 60 items in the first list to be used in focused discussions. In this line, we considered the most important questionnaires that have been used in literature to measure adolescent autonomy. In particular, we selected 43 items of the following scales.

- *Emotional Autonomy Scale* (EAS; Steinberg & Silveberg, 1986). It is a 20-item self-report measure which tries to tap 4 supposedly central components of emotional autonomy: deidealizing the parents, taking responsibility for one's own behavior, understanding that parents have roles outside of their parental status, and establishing a sense of oneself as a separate individual ensuing this direction. All items of the scale were selected.
- *Adolescent Autonomy Questionnaire* (AAQ; Noom et al., 2001). It is a 15-item self-report measure that evaluates 3 different aspect of autonomy: attitudinal, functional and emotional autonomy. Only the items of the emotional autonomy subscale were selected for this study.
- *Psychological Well-Being Scale* (PWS; Ryff, 1989). It is a 84-item self-report inventory reflecting 6 areas of psychological well-being: autonomy

(independence and self-determination), environmental mastery (the ability to manage one's life), personal growth (being open to new experiences), positive relations with others (having satisfying, high quality relationships), purpose in life (believing that one's life is meaningful), and self-acceptance (a positive attitude towards oneself and one's past life). For the goal of the study, only 10 items of the subscale of autonomy were selected.

- *Psychological Basic Needs Satisfaction and Frustration* (Chen et al., 2015). It is a 24-item self-report inventory reflecting the satisfaction and frustration of 3 psychological needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness. For the goal of the study, only 8 items of the scale autonomy were selected.

All items of the scales were reformulated in order to refer to the adolescent relationship with parents. Together with these items, 17 other items were developed in order to catch other aspects of emotional autonomy, which were not evaluated by existing measures.

Step 3 – Conduction of Focus Groups with Adolescents

Due to the practical necessity of conducting the groups locally, focus group participants did not constitute a random sample. Nonetheless, they were representative of the population of our interest (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Participants of the focus groups were 24 adolescents (12 males) of a high school of Palermo (Italy), which serves a middle class community. Four groups were conducted with early adolescents (13-14 years) and late adolescents (17-18 years), each composed by 6 participants; they were homogeneous for sex.

Focus groups were directed at school, during class hours, in a room specifically devoted to the study. The moderator initiated the groups by discussing the aim of the research and obtaining informed consent from participants for their involvement in the study as well as for audiotaping. Participants were encouraged to freely share their own thoughts. The moderator started the conduction of the groups expressing a definition of emotional autonomy and giving to each participant 60 cards, one for each item selected for the study. They were asked to read them, and to decide (individually) whether or not they were useful in order to measure adolescent emotional autonomy from parents. They had to put the cards in 3 separate baskets: one for "yes" items (if they could be maintained); one for "no" items (if they could be eliminated), and a last for "yes, with revisions" items (if they could be maintained but only modifying them with different terminology).

When all the cards of each participant were placed in the baskets, the researcher and the moderator ensured the counting of them in order to identify those on which focus the discussion. The items that received at least 4 "no" were deleted and not discussed as well as the items that received at least 4 "yes." Moderator encouraged the groups to discuss how they would have proposed to modify or combine items that received different assessments (e.g., 3 "no" and 3 "yes") and those that were judged as characterized by the need for revision. The idea was to go beyond simple "yes" and "no" responses to better understand the thoughts and perceptions of the adolescents, and to achieve a balance between qualitative and quantitative data (Krueger, 1994). The focus group sessions were audiotaped, and served as a confirmation of the observer's notes, as well as to provide an opportunity to consider qualitative results.

Step 4. Development of the First Scale Version

Once done all the focus groups, we selected items from the original list using feedback, according to the following procedure:

- The items that received the answers "no" in more than 2 focus groups were deleted from the list, based on the idea that if the most of the groups agreed on its salience, the behavior was not representative;
- The items with 4 or 3 answers "yes" were maintained;
- The items with 2 answers "yes" and 2 "no" were analyzed closely going to examine and understand the logic of the decisions for the "yes" and "no" taken by the groups.

Using these criteria, 6 items of the first list were eliminated because in more than 2 groups adolescents suggested that they were not adequate in order to measure autonomy. Five items were added and 10 were maintained as they were in the original list. All the other items were changed following the recommendations emerged during the discussions. The second version of the scale was composed by 59 items.

Step 5. Conduction of a Focus Group with Experts

Participants of the focus group were 4 professionals in the field of developmental and clinical psychology who work with adolescents, selected for their expertise. The focus group was conducted at university, in a room specifically devoted to the study. The moderator initiated the group by discussing the aim of the research and expressing a definition of emotional autonomy and giving to each participant the version of the scale developed by using the feedbacks of focused group discussions with adolescents. They were asked to read them, and to discuss whether or not they were useful in order to measure adolescent emotional autonomy from parents.

The moderator encouraged the participants to discuss how they would propose to modify or combine items of the scale. Participants were asked to respond by considering whether or not items performed the aim of measuring emotional autonomy and to provide suggestions or comments about any of the items. Moreover, they were asked to reflect about the meaning of emotional autonomy and to eventually suggest other dimensions and items that were necessary to be added in order to improve the final scale. Following the feedbacks of the participants, 7 items were added to the list in order to better evaluate emotional autonomy and 15 items were changed in their formulation. The study resulted in 66 items presented in Table 1, which constitutes the final instrument called UNIPA Emotional Autonomy Inventory (UNIPA-EAI).

Table 1. UNIPA Emotional Autonomy Inventory (UNIPA-EAI)

Self-Recognition
<i>Differentiation</i>
My parents and I have different ways of doing.
My parents and I have different interests
My parents and I have different ideas (with regards to, for example, politics or religion)
My parents and I have different tastes (with regards to, for example, clothes, hair or music)
My parents and I have different ideas on what friends to go out with/to hang out with
My parents and I have different projects for my future (for example, education or working)
<i>Individuation</i>
When my parents complain about what I do, I'm not comfortable with myself (r)
When my parents complain about my interests, I'm not comfortable with myself (r)
When my parents complain about my ideas (with regards to, for example, religion or politics), I'm not comfortable with myself (r)
When my parents complain about my taste (with regards to, for example, clothes, hair or music),

I'm not comfortable with myself (r)
When my parents complain about my friends, I'm not comfortable with myself (r)
When my parents complain about my plans for the future (for example, working or education), I'm not comfortable with myself (r)
When my parents criticize me, I'm not comfortable with myself (r)
I feel vulnerable to criticism from my parents (r)
I feel uncomfortable if my parents disagree with some of my action (r)
I worry about how my parents value the choices I make (r)

Susceptibility to parental influence

My parents' wishes influence mine
My parents' opinions influence my life
My parents influence my behaviour
My parents' ideas (with regards to, for example, religion or politics) influence mine
My parent's tastes (with regards to, for example, clothes, hair or music) influence mine
My parents' plans about my future (with regards to, for example, education or working) influence mine
My parents' ideas on who to go out with/hang out with influence my choices with regards to friends

Volitional functioning

I feel can decide by myself whom to go out with
I feel I'm free to decide by myself how to live my life
I feel I'm doing what really interests me
I feel that my choices express who I really am
I feel that my choices reflect what I really want
I feel I am free to choose what I want to commit to

Recognition of the relationship with parents

Parents as models

When I'll be a mother/father I'll use my parents as a role model
When I'll be a mother/father, there will be certain things that I will do like my parents
My parents are a reference point for my behaviour
My parents are an important reference point in my life
My parents are an important model to inspire from
I find easy to think about my parent's as an educational model

Parents as guides

When I have to solve a particularly complicated problem, I ask for help to my parents
When I do something wrong, I go to my parents
When I have to take important decisions for my life, I ask my parents for advice
When I need to understand an important question, I ask for my parent' support
If I'm in trouble at school or with my friends, I ask for my parent's help
When I have to solve a very delicate problem, my parents help me to understand how to solve it

Willingness to dialogue

Disposition to negotiate

I am willing to agree with my parents' opinions if they convince me
After listening to my parents about an issue on which we disagree, I can change my mind if their reasons convince me
When my parents and I disagree on a decision that I am about to take, I am willing to change my mind if their reasons convince me
When my parents and I disagree on an issue, we try to find a compromise
When my parents and I disagree on an issue, we try to meet together halfway
When my parents and I argue about something we have different opinions in, we try to find a solution that pleases both parts

Stating own reasons

When I disagree with my parents, I openly express my disagreement
I can express clearly my opinions to my parents, even if they are in opposition to theirs

When I argue with my parents about something we disagree, I manage to clearly express my reasons

When we have different opinions on an issue, I clearly say to my parents what I think

In the discussions with my parents I can say openly what I think

Even when I know that my parents will disagree with me, I find it easy to talk to them about my ideas

I can express clearly my opinions to my parents even on debatable issues

Control dimensions

Opposition

Even if my parents dislike my ideas (with regards to, for example, religion or politics) I do not change them

Even if my parents dislike my interests, I do not change them

Even if my parents dislike my tastes (with regards to, for example, clothes, hair or music), I do not change them

Even if my parents dislike my friends, I keep on seeing/going out with them

Even if my parents dislike my projects for the future I do not modify them

Even if my parents dislike what I do, I keep on going my way

Idealization

My parents are perfect

My parents do not make mistakes

My parents do not lie

My parents do not raise their voice

My parents do not lose their temper

My parents never fail

Discussion

The literature research about adolescents' emotional autonomy from parents has underlined the existence of several measurement issues about this construct. Partly, they have arisen from the confusion concerning the real number of dimensions of the construct and the best way to measure and analyze them. The general aim of the present study was to develop a new measure of adolescent's emotional autonomy from parents capable to evaluate its components in a wider-ranging way. For reaching this aim, we followed the procedure proposed by Nasser-McMillan and Borders (2002), which uses focus group as the elective method in order to generate new questionnaires improving items derived from existing measures.

The dynamics of the focus groups raised the identification of controversial items which otherwise might not have come about. In most cases, the terminology of the items simply was judged as not appropriate to describe and measure emotional autonomy. The groups who revised or modified the items to make them more appropriate to the aim addressed this issue. The final focus group with experts gave us a concluding indication about which items needed to be selected or not, which dimensions needed to be added and improved.

Only few items of the original list were maintained as they were. All others were modified in their terminology, and improved from the discussions and the suggestions during the study. Thus, even if it can be argued that the gaining of objective awareness is impossible (Seale, 1999), we believe that the use of this procedure in developing a questionnaire to measure adolescent's emotional autonomy from parents added a quality control measure and, in that way, minimized the partiality of other procedures of specific items selection (Nasser-McMillan & Borders, 2002). The result of the method is a 66 item-questionnaire, which is in most part composed by very different items from the original ones.

An important limitation of the study is that, even if the situation was designed to induce participants to be relaxed and to feel free to express their real opinions, it is possible that some of them may have been uncomfortable in front of the mediator and the researcher and felt compelled to act in ways that did not necessarily reflect how they would have behaved and thought in a more ordinary setting. Despite these limitations we agree with Seale (1999) and Nassar-McMillan and Borders (2002), who suggested that no research (qualitative as well as quantitative) is exempt of this kind of limit, and we think that a qualitative method which is based on following indications deriving directly from those people who usually undergo the administration of questionnaires is an elective way to build knowledge in research and to develop new instruments. Future step of the research will be the administration of the questionnaire to a large population in order to evaluate its construct validity and reliability.

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