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Personal Identity in Italy

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Abstract

This chapter discusses specifics of identity formation in Italian adolescents and emerging adults. We review consistent evidence illustrating that, in Italy, a progressive deferral of transition to adulthood strongly impacts youth identity development by stimulating identity exploration and postponement of identity commitments. We also consider the influence of ecological contexts and specific Italian groups (i.e., immigrant adolescents and those who drop out of school, youth living in disadvantaged areas in the south of Italy, and emerging adults who are unemployed or hold precarious jobs) for which the identity formation process is particularly challenging.

In recent decades, a progressive deferral of transition to adulthood has occurred around the world, especially in Western countries. In Italy, such a delay is particularly evident, and it differentiates Italy from other Western contexts. In this chapter we discuss how this delay might strongly impact adolescent and emerging adult identity development by stimulating identity exploration and postponement of identity commitments.

Characteristics of the Italian Context: The Delay Syndrome

The demographer Livi Bacci (2008), in describing unique features of the Italian national context, described a "delay syndrome," which is characterized by five symptoms: (a) prolongation of education; (b) deferral of entry into the job market and high rates of unemployment; (3) tendency remain in the parental home until the late 20s or 30s; (4) postponing entry into a committed partnership; and (5) delayed transition to parenthood.

In particular, in Italy, the mean age at which young people leave home to live independently is 29.5 for females and 31 for males (European Communities, 2009). Further data provided by the Italian Institute of Statistics (ISTAT, 2010) indicate that in 2009, 92.4% of males and 85.68% of females age 20 to 24 years lived with their nuclear families. Further, among 25- to 29-year-olds, 7 out of 10 males and 5 out of 10 females still lived at home. These percentages are much higher than those found not only in northern Europe but also in other Mediterranean countries.

Thus, in Italy, the transition to adulthood occurs within the family context (Scabini, Marta, & Lanz, 2006). This phenomenon has been made possible by changes in family relationships: Nowadays young people living with their parents have reduced responsibilities and considerable freedom to do as they choose. Moreover, not only do parents not expect their children to contribute to household expenses, but the parents continue to further support their children financially—providing the main source of economic security for Italian emerging adults. Most young people leave their family's home only when they get married. In fact, in Italy, differently from other European countries, adult relational stability is most commonly represented by marriage and by the purchase of a house. Cohabitation is less common than in other European countries (Livi Bacci, 2008).

This typical Italian situation for young people is due in part to the limits of the welfare system in which, compared to other European countries, social policies (such as public expenditure for families and children) toward younger generations are reduced. However, a careful analysis reveals that economic difficulties explain only part of the delay syndrome. Indeed, there is a significant group of emerging adults who, although they have the financial security necessary to live independently and create a new family, still postpone the transition to adulthood and continue to live with their parents. For instance, results of Italian national surveys (Buzzi, Cavalli, & de Lillo, 2007) indicate that only 27.4% of young workers believe that their salaries are not sufficient for them to leave home. On the contrary, 38.7% of young workers report that they could afford to live independently, and 23.7% of young people claim they could afford to leave home by sharing living costs with a partner or a friend.

Effects of the Delay Syndrome on Identity Development. What are the effects of this delay syndrome on the hfe of Itahan youth? We suggest that delaying adult commitments might increase identity instability in adolescence. In particular, young people could experience adolescence as a long period of moratorium, given that the time when they are expected to enact enduring commitment in multiple hfe domains is still far away (Crocetti & Palmonari, 2011).

Evidence from studies comparing identity processes in Itahan versus northern European adolescents (Crocetti, Schwartz, Fermani, Klimstra, & Meeus, 2012; Crocetti, Schwartz, Fermani, & Meeus, 2010) has provided support for the delay syndrome. In these studies, identity was operationalized as a three-factor model (Crocetti, Rubini, & Meeus, 2008) that represents an extension of Marcia's (1966) identity status paradigm (see Chapter 2 for a detailed presentation of the three-factor model). This three-factor identity model represents the interplay among *commitment* (making firm choices with regard to various developmental domains and the self-confidence one derives from these choices); *in-depth exploration* (the extent to which individuals reflect on their current commitments, search for new information about these commitments, and talk with other people about these commitments); and *reconsideration of commitment* (comparing present commitments with possible alternative commitments when one's existing commitments are no longer satisfactory). Although commitment appears to serve as an indicator of identity consolidation and of successful identity development, in-depth exploration appears to be a double-edged sword, associated with curiosity but also with confusion and distress. Reconsideration of commitment appeared to be closely related to disequilibrium and distress (Crocetti, Rubini, & Meeus, 2008). From the combination of commitment, in-depth exploration, and reconsideration of commitment, is possible to obtain five identity statuses (Crocetti, Rubini, Luyckx, & Meeus, 2008; see also Chapter 2 of this volume): achievement (high commitment and in-depth exploration but low reconsideration of commitment), early closure (moderate commitment, low exploration, and low reconsideration), moratorium (low commitment, low exploration, and high reconsideration), searching moratorium (high commitment, exploration, and reconsideration), and diffusion (low commitment, exploration, and reconsideration).

An empirical comparison of identity formation in large samples of Itahan and Dutch adolescents attending junior and high schools (Crocetti et al., 2010) yielded a number of interesting findings. In particular, Itahan adolescents reported lower commitment, higher in-depth exploration, and much higher reconsideration than their Dutch counterparts. Moreover, in both the early- to middle- (age 11–14 years) and middle- to late- (age 15–19 years) adolescent cohorts, half of the Italian adolescents were classified into the moratorium and searching moratorium statuses compared to about one-fourth of the Dutch adolescents. Dutch adolescents were

more often classified as early closed (foreclosed) in both age groups (Crocetti et al., 2012). Furthermore, in the middle to late cohort of Italian adolescents, diffusion and early closure were more prominent than in the early to middle cohort, whereas identity theory and prior cross-sectional as well as longitudinal research (for a meta-analytic review, see Kroger, Martinussen, & Marcia, 2010) would suggest that the frequencies of these statuses should decrease with age.

Further, in the Dutch sample, high levels of reconsideration of commitment were associated with problematic family relationships, while it was not the case in the Italian sample (Crocetti, Schwartz et al., 2010). Similarly, the searching moratorium status appeared to be more adaptive in the Italian group (i.e., Italian youth in this status reported levels of conscientiousness, openness to experience, and paternal trust compared to their peers in the achievement status) than in the Dutch sample, in which searching moratorium was more similar to the classical moratorium status (Crocetti et al., 2012).

These cross-national differences can be interpreted taking into account the different pattern of transition to adulthood typical of the Italian and Dutch societies. In Italy, this transition occurs later than in northern European and North American countries. So, whereas Dutch adolescents may be more pressed to achieve a stable identity because they will soon take on adult roles, Italian adolescents can remain "on hold" for a longer period of time. As a consequence, Italian adolescents may view the teenage years as a time of considering and reconsidering identity alternatives rather than as a period of consolidating a sense of identity. This delayed transition to adulthood creates a context in which Italian adolescents can spend more time experimenting with different roles and identity alternatives before making enduring choices. (This explains their predominance in the moratorium statuses.) Furthermore, they can also return to a "less mature" status (i.e., diffusion) in middle adolescence, because they still have a long time until they must assume adult commitments. Moreover, in a less structured context such as Italy, the searching moratorium status, typified by the attempt to revise current commitments, can be more adaptive and socially accepted.

These considerations provide some further elements to better understand why such large percentages of Italian youth remain at home until their late twenties or early thirties. Emerging adulthood represents a time of consistent identity work, in which young people need to undertake important decisions in multiple life domains. Italian families constitute a context that supports an extended moratorium phase (Livi Bacci, 2008). In fact, Italian parents support their children economically, providing them with the opportunity to attend college and to try out various job alternatives in times of economic crisis. Thus, Italian families provide a suitable context for identity exploration in the educational and vocational domains. Furthermore, Italian parents are not only the main source

of economic support for their children, but they also grant their children a great deal of freedom (Scabini et al., 2006). This means that young people living at home are free to invite their friends and their partner over to their home, to stay out late at night, etc. In this way, they can count on a context that facilitates identity exploration in the relational domain. Thus, many Italian emerging adults, even though they might economically be able to afford to live independently, tend to postpone home leaving to take advantages of identity exploration opportunities offered by the family context. This solution seems to be convenient for both emerging adults and their parents, as indicated by high levels of family relationship satisfaction reported by both (Scabini et al., 2006). In other terms, in Italy most youth navigate toward adulthood by developing their identity and achieving independence not from the family, but within the family

"Postponed Identity": Shedding Light on Identity Formation in Italy Through a Mixed Approach. The evidence described so far suggests ways in which identity formation in the Italian context linked to the "delay syndrome." One of the most important aspects of this delay focuses on postponing the consolidation of a stable identity. The developmental tasks associated with the acquisition of adult roles are similarly postponed. To shed further light on this phenomenon, a number of studies have examined identity among Italian youth using in-depth narrative approaches. These approaches have focused on personal experiences, emotions, and individual life stories as a way of exploring autobiographical self-construction. The idea that stories and self are intimately linked has inspired numerous investigations based on the narrative self-conceptualization (Bruner, 1986; McAdams, 2011; Pasupathi, Mansour, & Brubaker, 2007), suggesting that identity should be investigated also through the meaning-making process of autobiographical events and important experiences.

In the Italian context, many studies have used the narrative approach to explore autobiographical transitions in adolescence (e.g., Smorti, 1997) and to explore identity formation processes during adolescence and emerging adulthood (e.g., Aleni Sestito & Sica, 2010). Through this approach—often combined with quantitative methods of data detection—studies have shed light on the Italian context for identity development.

In this respect, narrative studies have highlighted what we could call "postponed identity": an Italian identity configuration characterized by moratorium and/or diffusion identity statuses (Aleni Sestito & Sica, 2010; Aleni Sestito, Sica, & Ragozini, 2011), postponed entry into adult roles, lack of future orientation (Aleni Sestito, Sica, & Nasti, 2009), low occupational locus of control (Aleni Sestito, Nasti, Parrello, & Sica, 2009), and use of virtual identity in social media and social networks (Sica, Di Palma, & Aleni Sestito, 2011). The core of this picture of identity could be identified in the tendency to procrastinate commitments, avoiding the choices

related to future planning, and the more general tendency to postpone consolidating a sense of self and identity.

Furthermore, this postponed identity phenomenon is evident for both adolescents and emerging adults (Aleni Sestito & Sica, 2010; Aleni Sestito, Sica, et al., 2009, 2011). More specifically, Aleni Sestito and Sica (2010) explored identity redefinition processes during the transition from high school to university, focusing on identity profiles related to the interplay of identity processes (Crocetti, Rubini, & Meeus, 2008) and the personal orientations in exploring identity alternatives or in engaging stable commitments (identity styles; Berzonsky, 1989) in three steps of the school to university transition (last year of high school, first year of university, and second year of university). Findings have indicated that, for adolescents, two identity clusters emerged, labeled "Explorers" and "Overwhelmed by the Crisis"; for university students, two identity clusters emerged, labeled "Active Consolidators" and "Elusive." Specifically regarding the university student clusters, the first cluster indexes the identity achievement and a process of actively seeking of information for the purpose of redefining identity commitments. The second cluster refers primarily to a state of diffused identity: These are individuals characterized by avoidant diffusion, disengagement, and indifference to identity issues.

All these results have been interpreted in light of the current education, economic, and social situation in Italy (high rates of unemployment, job insecurity, and longer transition to adulthood). Itahan adolescents and emerging adults are sensitive to the current situation and, probably on the basis of this awareness, are driven more than others to recognize that the final outcome of their own plans for the future no longer depends exclusively on personal ability and commitment (Sica & Aleni Sestito, 2010).

Empirical evidence (Aleni Sestito & Sica, 2010; Aleni Sestito, Sica, et al., 2009) suggests that two developmental moments are particularly critical for Itahan young people: the end of high school, when most seem not to be ready to make choices regarding their professional future; and the period after starting university, when young people appear disoriented, not convinced about the choices made, and far from ready to adopt stable adult roles.

In this context, high use of virtual identities and social networks among Itahan adolescents and emerging adults can represent a strategy to deal with identity uncertainty. A study (Sica, Di Palma, et al., 2011) conducted with Itahan youth found that one group of emerging adults uses social networks "to meet" other people and to convey and compare their own ideas with those of others, whereas another large group of emerging adults seems to express and build their identities using Facebook and Twitter profiles, blogs, and so on. The latter group belonged to a lexical cluster labeled "the Potential Self." This cluster describes a form of Internet addiction and the definition of specific identity characterized by (a) disengagement from real self; (b) identification with an avatar or

virtual self; (c) lack of perception of discrepancy between virtual and real life; and (d) addiction or "refuge" in the virtual world offered by social networks.

Identity Formation in an Ecological Perspective

As Bosma and Kunnen (2001) have argued, *identity* does not refer to a fixed set of characteristics but rather is defined by the continuous interplay of situation-specific person–context interactions. Accordingly to this theoretical framework, contextual and personal factors are intertwined in a series of short-term iterative processes that contribute to the formation of one's identity. Individual differences in person and context factors determine intra-individual variation and interindividual differences in identity developmental trajectories. This perspective is similar to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory of human development. Bronfenbrenner's theory provides a framework for examining the interaction between individuals and the various environmental levels in which they are embedded. In light of Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological perspectives, we now turn to a consideration of how different family and peer contexts can promote or hamper identity formation in Italian young people.

Identity and Family Relationships. The development and redefinition of identity is a crucial developmental task for adolescents. Nevertheless, in the last 20 to 30 years, this redefinition of identity has become extended into emerging adulthood—and this extension is more pronounced in Italy than in many other countries. Worldwide, and especially in Western countries, growing numbers of young people encounter difficulties in developing a steady and coherent identity in a context that is currently defined as socially postmodern (Bonino, Cattelino, & Ciairano, 2006).

Studies in Italy (Begotti, Borca, Rabaglietti, & Ciairano, 2011; Rabaglietti, Roggero, Begotti, Borca, & Ciairano, 2012) and in other countries (e.g., Grotevant & Cooper, 1985; Schwartz, Pantin, Prado, Sullivan, & Szapocznik, 2005) have found that family functioning (e.g., family cohesion, positive communication, and parental involvement with young people) plays a prominent role in the process of identity development. Family functioning (namely parental support and parental control) is positively associated to integration of moral and civic identity among late adolescents (Schwartz, 1992). More specifically, parental support is particularly effective in promoting and transmitting structured values to youth. Usually parental control tends to decrease when children enter emerging adulthood. However, for Italian late adolescents, some kind of external help, such as parental control, still appears to positively influence the development of structured values, which may be considered as indicators of civic and moral identity. It seems reasonable to interpret this finding in light of the current delayed Italian transition to adulthood (Arnett, 2011)

and to the characteristics of Itahan family context (Scabini et al., 2006). Both Itahan parents and their late-adolescent children appear to be adversely affected by the delayed transition to adulthood. That is, parents seem to consider their children very far from acquiring independence because they still control their children's behavior. And the children themselves appear to still behave like younger children, as evidenced by very high prevalence of lying and disobedience in Itahan emerging adults (Bonino, Cattelino, & Ciairano, 2005).

Identity and Peer Relationships. During adolescence, relationships with peers are redefined and assume new meaning. More specifically, adolescent relationships with their peers acquire a central position, becoming as important as relationships with parents, and they are characterized by greater levels of intimacy compared to childhood peer relationships (Rubin, Bukowski, & Laursen, 2009). Adolescent peer groups fulfill several positive functions for the development of identity. For example, they offer the opportunity to experiment with new social roles and behaviors (both healthy and risky ones) and to share feelings and problems.

Studies among Itahan adolescents (for a review, see Palmonari, 2011; also cf. Roggero, Rabaglietti, & Ciairano, 2006) have indicated that peer groups and friendships represent a crucial developmental context, a normative and comparative reference for adolescents, and a resource for reorganizing the self and constructing one's own identity. Among Itahan adolescents, for instance, supportive friendships, compared to friendships characterized primarily by conflict, are strongly related to the fulfillment of crucial adolescent developmental tasks (personal, social-institutional, and relational) linked to identity (Rabaglietti & Ciairano, 2008) and to higher levels of psychosocial well-being and lower levels of aggression toward peers (Ciairano, Rabaglietti, Roggero, Bonino, & Beyers, 2007). Moreover, high level of friendship quality and popularity represent both an important resource for the development of crucial self-related characteristics (e.g., social and emotional self-efficacy, positive self-perception) and a protective factor that can buffer the effect of risk factors leading to problematic behaviors (such as alcohol abuse and risky driving) (Rabaglietti, Vacirca, & Ciairano, 2011). In addition, as soon as adolescent boys and girls acquire enough competence and confidence in peer relationships, particularly in those with the opposite gender, they can experiment with different kinds of dating and of romantic relationships, which also lead them to explore their sexuality and redefine their gender roles (Vacirca, Ortega, Rabaglietti, & Ciairano, 2011).

Identity Challenges in Specific Italian Groups

The continuous interplay of individual resources and characteristics of the social context helps to determine different identity trajectories and can increase challenges for some groups within the Italian context. In particular,

these challenges refer to youth from immigrant famihes, adolescents who have dropped out of school, young people living in disadvantaged areas in the south of Italy, and emerging adults coping with precarious and unstable jobs.

Immigrant Adolescents Living in Italy. After being a country of mass emigration for decades (until the late 1960s), Italy has recently become a country of increasing immigration. The Italian National Statistical Institute (ISTAT, 2011) reported that, in 2010, children and adolescents (ages 0–17 years) from immigrant famihes represented 9.7% of the general Itahan population.

Findings from a study comparing identity formation in adolescents from Itahan, mixed (one Itahan parent and one immigrant parent), and immigrant families (Crocetti, Fermani, Pojaghi, & Meeus, 2011) indicated that adolescents from immigrant families reconsidered their choices to a greater extent compared to their counterparts from either Itahan or mixed famihes and were overrepresented in the searching moratorium status. Furthermore, an in-depth analysis within the group of adolescents from immigrant famihes indicated that they were not a homogeneous group. Findings were most pronounced in Asian individuals, underlining the importance of studying specific immigrant groups. In fact, even among immigrant famihes who immigrated for similar reasons, their methods of integrating (or not) into the society of settlement may vary widely (Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010). For adolescents from immigrant famihes, the challenge of forming a firm personal educational and relational identity is strongly intertwined with the development of social identity (e.g., Schwartz, Montgomery, & Briones, 2006; Schwartz, Zamboanga, & Weisskirch, 2008). These adolescents need to find their place within the social system and within the groups to which they belong. Doing so may be difficult due to the challenges inherent in reconciling sometimes-conflicting expectations of one's heritage cultural group and the larger receiving society (Rudmin, 2003). Discrimination from receiving-society members may also limit the personal identity choices that individuals from immigrant famihes can make (Yoder, 2000). Some cultural groups may also place limits on the options available to young people, especially young women. Thus, for immigrant adolescents, the possibility of exploring different identity alternatives is tempered by group memberships and intergroup relations that may limit the range of opportunities that are available.

Adolescents Following Nontraditional Academic Trajectories. School engagement plays an important role in the construction of an adaptive vocational self-understanding, and school adjustment serves as a precursor of positive career development in terms of employment and job satisfaction, as well as self-realization (Sappa & Bonica, 2011). Conversely, school failure constitutes a risk for identity development. In Italy, in 2007, 19.3% of adolescents (22.6% males and 15.9% females) had left school

prematurely (European Communities, 2009). This percentage is among the highest recorded in Europe (only in Malta, Spain, and Portugal have greater levels of dropout). Therefore, dropout prevention and recovery constitute challenging goals that imply for young people not only improved competence but also a process of construction (or reconstruction) of epistemological premises for perceiving oneself as capable and motivated to learn and to become competent.

A series of studies carried out by Bonica and Sappa (2006, 2010; Sappa & Bonica, 2011) with Italian adolescents who dropped out of high school and decided to enroll in vocational training courses to obtain a certificate highlight the role of flexible commitment in the process of developing a sense of identity during the transition to adulthood. Among these vocational school students, such flexible commitment entails developing representations of themselves based on a sense of competence and self-efficacy, on a motivational orientation rooted in the exercise of control and mastery, exploratory strategies that make use of adaptive coping strategies and active decision making, and personal meaningfulness of their course work. It is possible that vocational education trajectories based on the development of competencies, rather than on the receipt of specific certificates or degrees, facilitate the development of identity because they encourage young people to explore themselves and experience adult roles. Young people are able co-construct a flexible commitment of self as worker —especially in a work context that prioritizes competence before qualification and that may promote motivation to develop mastery and competence.

Non-Normative Contexts: A Focus on South Italy. As we noted earlier, in Italy (and elsewhere), contextual factors linked to both economic and sociocultural dimensions directly affect the processes of identity formation. The south of Italy, which is the least prosperous region of the country, presents socioeconomic challenges and challenges related to organized crime.

In particular, studies conducted in youth living in the south of Italy have attended to effects of normative and non-normative contexts (Sica, 2009) and deviant engagement (Sica & Aleni Sestito, 2010) on risk behaviors and delinquency, More specifically, here we operationalize non-normative contexts as those characterized by low socioeconomic conditions, multiproblematic families (e.g., divorced parents and/or unemployed, alcoholic father, low economic conditions), frequent absences from school, conduct problems, and drug abuse. These adolescents are labeled by local authorities as in need of help and assistance. Their families cannot provide them with much economic support, and, as a consequence, these adolescents can easily become involved in delinquent behavior at both individual and group levels. In some cases, their families already form a delinquent or deviant context for their ensuing development and socialization. In all cases, their school contexts are officially

labeled as at-risk schools. The presence of organized crime in southern Italy makes for ready access to delinquency, thereby increasing the precariousness faced by at-risk youth and their families.

Sica (2009) described ways in which adolescents belonging to different Itahan contexts (normative and at risk) conceive their future. This study was conducted in the Naples area and was focused on the role of context identity exploration, possible selves, and self-perceptions of youth from various socioeconomic backgrounds. The results suggested that context influences possible selves and the ways in which young people explore their identities. The impact of context is more evident in the dimension of feared selves (the possible selves that people most fear or worry about being in the future). Adolescents from normative contexts were most able to consider desirable future possible selves. In contrast, at-risk adolescents were more likely to focus on feared selves—that is, what they were afraid of becoming. This is likely because feared selves (e.g., criminal) are consistent with their current lifestyles. These results are in line with Oyserman and Markus's (1990) study, which demonstrated that balance between positive and negative possible selves within a given content domain is associated with low risk for delinquency. A study (Sica & Aleni Sestito, 2010) with deviant adolescents in south Italy was designed to explore the extent to which belonging to deviant contexts can interfere with identity formation. Specifically, autobiographical interviews and pictures were gathered from adolescents in a juvenile detention center in Naples. Results indicated that, in these adolescents, identity formation did not evolve and it is characterized by a focus on one's present circumstances and self (and especially on physical appearance), without further exploration of future possibilities.

Youth Dealing with Unstable Jobs. Among the various characteristics of social uncertainty, we are particularly interested in exploring the effects of precarious employment situations on the satisfaction and life projects of Itahan youth. Using a mixed-methods approach and studying Itahan emerging adults who were unemployed or working in unstable jobs, Aleni Sestito et al. (2011) documented strong impacts of high levels of unemployment and work instability on identity consolidation and on acquisition of adult roles. In particular, only a small proportion of these youth are oriented toward intrinsic motivation, self-monitoring, an internal locus of control, and high levels of agency. On the contrary, most participants appeared to make decisions on the basis of external factors (steady job, income, career) and not to assume personal responsibility for the consequences of their choices. Most Itahan youth who were unemployed or underemployed blamed outside individuals or circumstances for their dissatisfactions and failures (degrees that do not offer job opportunities, socially backward national context, no meritocracy). The majority of these young people offered stories of poor well-being: Failure to achieve professional and relational goals is perceived as a source of discomfort and

distress as well as a source of uncertainty with respect to identity achievement and future orientation.

Furthermore, Itahan emerging adults in precarious occupations have been found to report less stable job identities compared to their peers with steady job contracts (Crocetti, Palmonari, & Pojaghi, 2010). In particular, individuals with unstable contracts are more heavily represented in the identity moratorium status, which indicates that they have not yet found what work fits their standards and aspirations and that they are still struggling to find the "right" occupation for themselves.

A temporary job may also negatively influence the satisfaction derived from, and willingness to pursue, long-term life projects and goals (Ciairano, Rabaglietti, Roggero, & Callari, 2010). However, this negative effect may be counterbalanced by some personal dispositions of the youth themselves, such as sense of coherence (Antonovsky, 1987). Specifically, people with higher sense of coherence were more satisfied, perhaps because perceiving some control over one's hfe can help in coping with unstable work situations.

In sum, even when general social conditions are unfavorable, there is still room to intervene and promote the types of competence needed to face precarious and uncertain hfe conditions. The real question to which we still do not know the answer is the extent to which negative personal and social conditions can persist before individual discomfort becomes too high and results in identity problems and other problematic outcomes.

Conclusions

The final take-home message that we wish to convey is that, because Italian youth are progressively postponing transition to adulthood, adolescence and emerging adulthood are increasingly devoted to identity work. Identity formation cannot be understood without attending to the interplay of individual characteristics and relational (especially family and peer) contexts. For some specific Itahan groups (immigrants, high school dropouts, youth living in the south of Italy, and emerging adults who are unemployed or hold precarious jobs), the identity formation is even more challenging.

In order to further improve our understanding of personal identity in Itahan youth, future longitudinal studies are needed. In fact, longitudinal studies are necessary for ascertaining which individual, relational, and social factors predict identity progressions toward greater maturity. More specifically, longitudinal studies should assess identity from adolescence, throughout emerging adulthood, until transition to adulthood, in specific groups of individuals (e.g., authoctonuous and immigrant adolescents, from different family backgrounds, etc.). In this way, it could be possible to understand which factors can foster identity formation in each group. It is of utmost importance to achieve this goal, in order to plan future

evidence-based interventions aimed at promoting identity development and tailored to the specifics of various youth Italian groups.

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