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# Autonomy Development: Gender and Age Differences from Adolescence to Emerging Adulthood

## *Desarrollo de la Autonomía: Diferencias por Sexo y Edad desde la Adolescencia hasta la Adulthood Emergente*

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### Abstract

The development of autonomy during the transition to adulthood may present itself in different forms, depending on age, gender and cultural variations. Grounded in developmental psychology, this study examined gender and age differences in autonomy in Brazilian youth. Participants were 154 Brazilian adolescents and emerging adults (14-33 years old,  $M = 20.87$ ,  $SD = 3.74$ , 50% female) from the state capital of Rio de Janeiro. Our findings indicate a positive association between age and autonomy scores in the Kağıtçıbaşı's Autonomous, Related and Related-autonomous Self scales. Correlation results showed gender specific results in such associations, such as that for men, age was positively associated with autonomy, whereas for women, it was associated with related-autonomy. These results suggest that, in Brazil, traditional views continue to reinforce gender roles towards men's agentic behavior and women's communal behavior. These findings highlight the importance of elucidating gender differences in the development of autonomy in different sociocultural contexts.

**Keywords:** Emerging Adults; Adolescents; Autonomy

### Resumen

El desarrollo de la autonomía durante la transición a la edad adulta puede presentarse en diferentes formas, según la edad, el género y las variaciones culturales. Basado en la psicología del desarrollo, este estudio examinó las diferencias de género y edad en la autonomía de los jóvenes brasileños. Los participantes fueron 154 adolescentes brasileños y adultos emergentes (14-33 años,  $M = 20.87$ ,  $SD = 3.74$ , 50% mujeres) de la capital del estado de Río de Janeiro. Nuestros hallazgos indican una asociación positiva entre las puntuaciones de edad y autonomía en las escalas de Self Autónomo, Relacionado y Autónomo-relacionado de Kağıtçıbaşı. Los resultados de la correlación mostraron resultados específicos de género en tales asociaciones, como la de los hombres, la edad se

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asoció positivamente con la autonomía, mientras que para las mujeres se asoció con la autonomía relacionada. Estos resultados sugieren que, en Brasil, las opiniones tradicionales continúan reforzando los roles de género hacia la conducta de los hombres y la conducta comunitaria de las mujeres. Estos hallazgos resaltan la importancia de dilucidar las diferencias de género en el desarrollo de la autonomía en diferentes contextos socioculturales.

**Palabras Clave:** Adultos Emergentes; Adolescentes; Autonomía

## Adulthood

The aim of the present study is to investigate gender and age differences in autonomy development in adolescence and emerging adulthood based on Kağıtçıbaşı's (2007) perspective on Self Development, and Arnett's theory. The rationale for doing this is that Arnett's theory of emerging adulthood has autonomy acquisition as an important marker, and a general contemporary characteristic of young people. We believe that Kağıtçıbaşı's propositions about different developmental trajectories taking into account culture are important to understand emerging adulthood as a phenomenon in context.

No longer associated to performing traditional adult roles, such as marrying, having children, and having a job (Arnett, 2000, 2011), emerging adults are considered as acquiring autonomy in terms of separation and independence from their families (Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986). By the age of 18-29 years old, adulthood involves assuming responsibility for oneself, and making independent decisions. Arnett (2011) identified four beliefs associated with emerging adults, focusing on becoming a self-sufficient person: (1) Independence and autonomy, which configure the primary challenges of this life stage, viewed as a prerequisite to long-term commitments to others. This is reinforced by the minimal social and institutional control experienced by emerging adults, because they are not bound to follow the rules set by others (Arnett, 2005); (2) Search for a love partner who could match their expectations. For them, romantic love is the base for marriage; (3) Search for a job opportunity connected with their personal interests and life. They strive towards the ideal of finding a job that is interesting and satisfying; (4) Enjoyment and self-leisure appear before assuming adult roles and long-term commitments.

This set of beliefs gives priority to individual autonomy. It can be questioned if this is an universal developmental goal (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2007). For some cultures it is certainly not. Seidl-de-Moura and colleagues have shown this in a set of Brazilian studies (Seidl-de-Moura, Vieira & Carvalho, 2013). Studies on familism and family allocentrism (Carlo, Koller, Raffaelli, & De Guzman, 2007; Manago, 2012; Seidl-de-Moura, Ziviani; Fioravanti-Bastos, Carvalho, 2012) have provided evidence on different tendencies in Latin American cultures, specifically in Brazil. In Brazil, family allocentrism relates to living in rural areas and sociocultural experiences during development. Familism scores are higher in low socioeconomic contexts, and emerging adults from those contexts considered "being capable of taking care of parents" as a more important marker of adulthood than high socioeconomic status emerging adults (Dutra-Thomé & Koller, 2014). Thus, it seems important to reevaluate the proposal of emerging adulthood as necessarily involving one view of autonomy and to take into account cultural particularities in each context and their effects during individuals' transition to adulthood.

Autonomy refers to a multidimensional construct conceived as the ability to make decisions and control important areas of one's life, self-determination by one's own means, and the right to make decisions freely, acting on one's moral and intellectual independence (Goossens, 2008). Although autonomy develops throughout a person's complete life cycle, it has been more studied until adolescence. Adolescents seem to experience autonomy differently than emerging adults, because their autonomy is usually related to exploring and experimenting new cognitive abilities and capacities; testing boundaries; and renegotiating with the parents his/her place in the family (Goossens,

2008; Ponciano & Seidl-de-Moura, 2011). For emerging adults, autonomy is associated with an exercise of becoming more responsible for their choices as well as experimentation. Individual's exploration provides a glimpse of what adult life may lay ahead, concerning, for instance, life partners and job opportunities (Arnett, 2011).

Kağıtçıbaşı (2013) considered autonomy as a basic human need that must be satisfied in some manner by healthy psychosocial development (Marques, 2014; Marques & Seidl-de-Moura, 2016; Noom, Dekovic, & Meeus, 2001; Reichert & Wagner, 2007) and it is not associated with distance from others. This author considered that two dimensions have to be taken into account: agency and distance from others. One of the poles of the agency axis is autonomy and the other is heteronomy.

She proposed a General Theory of Family Change and of Self Development, which encompasses three models of family interaction patterns that promote different models of development of the self (*Autonomous, Related, and Related-autonomous selves*; Kağıtçıbaşı, 1996, 2007): (1) *Independence model* reflects the importance attributed to agency and to more personal distance, and refers to the *Autonomous self*. It is most observed in middle class families of Western urban industrial societies. Separation, financial, personal autonomy, and feeling of singularity are valued within an individualistic ideology. Children are emotionally valued and parents' socialization goals focus on the development of self-value and the quality of being unique; (2) *Interdependency model* is the result of a tendency to value heteronomy and low personal distance from others, and refers to the *Related self*. This model is present in both rural and urban societies with low income, in which intergenerational interdependency has been necessary for family survival. Within this context, family members may interpret autonomy as a threat. They value both emotional and utilitarian ties that represent a guarantee for the safety of aging parents; (3) *The model of related autonomy* or psychological (emotional) interdependency is found in urban areas of countries that keep relational values of family such as closeness, even with socioeconomic growth, and refers to

the *Related-autonomous self*. They value autonomy mainly as a path to professional success, and loyalty to family and emotional interdependency remains. This represents the poles of autonomy and low personal distance. Based on these models, Kağıtçıbaşı (1996, 2007) developed three scales to measure the Autonomous, Related and Related-autonomous Selves (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2011). Considering these models, we may think that emerging adults in some contexts may show higher agency, but not necessarily become separated from others, specially their family nucleus.

In Brazil, a country with high familism e socioeconomic inequality, it is quite common that individuals count on their communities for mutual support. On one hand, this support is part of a population that values family as important, as a heritage of practices and beliefs influenced by Christian background (Carlo, Koller, Raffaelli, & De Guzman, 2007; Cerqueira-Santos & Koller, 2009). On the other hand, poorer settings lack of governmental investment (e.g. not decent access to health and education) and the context of insecurity faced by these families leads them to find strategies to support each other, count on their broad family and neighbors as reference, and build a solidarity network (Bem & Wagner, 2006; Llanos, Orozco, & Garcia, 1999; Schmidt, 2010). Not only that, but the general characteristics of Brazilian people formation, with its three main influences (indigenous people, slaves from African origin, and Portuguese colonizers may have fostered a tendency for a predominance of a developmental trajectory of Related-autonomous selves in Brazil, although it shows variations depending on sociodemographic variables (Seidl-de-Moura, Carvalho, & Vieira, 2013; Seidl-de-Moura, Mendes, Pessôa, & Carvalho, 2012). Brazilian families, especially mothers, in their conception of their children, their socialization goals, and their practices, value both autonomy and relatedness. Brazilian adolescent girls also indicated Related-autonomous selves, showing family cohesion and influence of parents when deciding about their future and professional plans (Ponciano & Seidl-de-Moura, 2011).

In other countries, autonomy during emerging adulthood studies showed independence and autonomy as important values, what might be related to

an Autonomous development of the self. A study with 332 American university students from different ethnic groups (average age of 21.7 years) showed that across different ethnic groups, higher levels of agency were positively related to exploration and flexible commitment; unrelated to conformity; and negatively related to avoidance. Findings suggested that one of the primary tasks of emerging adulthood may be to develop an orientation consonant with developmental individualization, since the degree of agency was directly related to the coherence of the emerging adult's identity (Schwartz, Côté, & Arnett, 2005).

Another study developed in U.S. examined 204 college students and their parents' ( $n=226$ ) expectations about autonomy during the transition to college. Although the encouragement of autonomy was present, emerging adults might need more family support during the transition than expected, probably because the period is characterized by instability and multiple transitions (Kenyon & Koerner, 2009). In the opposite direction, parents hold higher expectations for their emerging-adult children's future autonomy behaviors. This apparent contradiction in the American studies in emerging adulthood may be related to what has been observed in the adolescent studies. Adolescents and their parents disagree in terms of which spheres of the adolescent's life are entitled to adolescents to make a decision. Therefore adolescents may strive for autonomy in areas of their lives that their parents do not encourage (Smetana, Crean, & Campione-Barr, 2005), what may be a reality in further stages in life.

In the same direction as the one observed in Brazilian studies, a mixed-methods study interviewed 14 first-generation Mayan university students from Chiapas (Mexico), who were experiencing a transition from rural to urban settings. Quantitative analyses indicated a trend toward perceptions of more individual autonomy and gender egalitarian values. Qualitative analyses of interviews revealed that participants were thriving to harmonize new values of independence, self-fulfillment, and gender equality with the traditional values of respect for elders and family obligation (Manago, 2012).

Based on this literature, we intend to explore further the kind of autonomy presented by Brazilian

emerging adults. Most of the studies done by Seidl-de-Moura and colleagues had only women (mothers) as participants. There is no data on gender differences and their relation to individuals' autonomy. Traditionally, for the most part in Western urban cultures, society expects men to be strong in traits of agency, with an inclination to manifest independence and assertiveness, while women are expected to be strong on communal qualities such as warmth, friendliness, and nurturance (Bason & Rubin, 1999). Rogoff (2003) pointed out that socialization of men and women is different throughout childhood and adolescence, and that those gender differences, such as forcefulness and nurturance, indicate a clear connection with the roles they are supposed to play in their cultural communities. Research in some cultures has indicated that men and women differ concerning how they develop autonomy during adolescence and emerging adulthood. Women tend to keep closer relationships with their parents than do men, to decrease family contact more slowly, and they tend to be more strongly affected by their relationships with their parents than men are (Geuzaine, Debry, & Liesens, 2000; Sneed et al., 2006). Women also present higher levels of emotional and altruistic pro-social tendencies, internalization of values, and higher levels of religiosity than men (Padilla-Walker, Barry, Carroll, Madsen, & Nelson, 2008). A study in the U.S. assessing work preferences, life values, and personal views of highly talented and gifted math/science graduate students at 25 and 35 years found that men assumed a more agentic and career-focused attitude in life, whereas women favored their connection with the community, family, and friendships (Ferriman, Lubinski, & Benbow, 2009). Another study in U.S. with emerging adults found different trends, with values of autonomy and community balanced for both genders, with no expressive differences. This result was in some extend surprising, in a general way, because emerging adults were expected to privilege individualistic over communal values while concentrating on their personal interests in a self-focused period (Arnett, Ramos, & Jensen, 2001). All these studies were done in cultural contexts in which, theoretically, Kağıtçıbaşı's model in which agency and separation are fostered and



valued. Research in Brazil indicated this may not be universal, but there is not sufficient data. Women and adolescent girls in various contexts (Marques, 2014; Seidl-de-Moura, Carvalho & Vieira, 2013) presented characteristics of an autonomous related self, indicating the presence of both Autonomy and Relatedness (proximity of others).

Besides gender comparison studies, we observe a lack of longitudinal studies on emerging adulthood. Due to the extension of transition to adult life observed in the phenomenon of emerging adulthood, there are questions not yet answered regarding the development of autonomy in this period. Emerging adulthood shares some characteristics with adolescence (e.g. living with parents) and adulthood at the same time (e.g. having financial independence). Thus, autonomy development in transition to adulthood may present different forms, depending on the age.

This study is based on the three set of aspects discussed: the need to consider the cultural context in studies of emerging adulthood, the lack of gender comparisons and the absence of investigations taking age into account. Based on the literature that found the tendency of Related-autonomous self in Brazilian studies, and trying to bring evidence about emerging adults characteristics, the present study aims at

analyzing the orientation towards Autonomy, Relatedness, and Related-autonomy, taking into account age and gender differences. We hypothesize that (a) a general tendency for Related-autonomy is present in this group; (b) there are significant differences between male and female participants in the three scales, with the males presenting higher scores in autonomy than females; (c) an association of the participants' age with the Autonomy scores; and finally (d) significant age group differences in Self-development scores.

## Method

### Participants

The participants were 158 Brazilians, aged between 14 and 33 years old ( $M = 20.87$ ,  $SD = 3.74$ ; 50% female). Among them, there were adolescents (14 to 18 years old,  $N = 42$ ); early emerging adults (19 to 23 years old,  $N = 89$ ); and late emerging adults (24 to 33 years old,  $N = 27$ ) living and urban and suburban settings in Rio de Janeiro (Table 1).

### Instruments

*Autonomous, Related and Related-autonomous Self-Scales.* The Self-development Scale (Seidl-de-Moura, Ziviani, Fioravanti-Bastos, & Carvalho, 2013) based on the agency and interpersonal distance, measures three tendencies of trajectories of selves: Autonomous, Related, and Related-autonomous. The scale development began with a pool of 40 items (Kağitçibaşı, 2011, personal communication during visit to Brazil) administered to a sample of 117 university students of Istanbul, Turkey. Concurrent and construct validity tests in a sample of 677 Turkish participants indicated that the scale is valid for the three models of self (Kağitçibaşı, 2007). The Turkish structure of 27 items divided in three sub-scales with nine Likert-type items each was confirmed in Brazil (Seidl-de-Moura, Ziviani, Fioravanti-Bastos, & Carvalho, 2013). Examples of items included: "People close to me have little influence on my decisions" (Autonomous self;  $\alpha = .69$ ); "I need the support of persons to whom I feel very close" (Related self;  $\alpha = .67$ ); "It is important to have both close relationships and also to be autonomous" (Related-autonomous self;  $\alpha = .73$ ).

**Table 1**  
Socio-demographic characteristics of the total sample ( $N = 158$ )

Characteristics	n (%)	
Age	14-18	43 (27,2)
	19-24	89 (56,5)
	25-33	27 (16,3)
Sex	Male	79 (50)
	Female	79 (50)
Marital Status	Single	148 (93,7)
	Married/Living together	10 (6,3)
Education	Incomplete Middle School	5 (3,2)
	Middle School	2 (1,3)
	Incomplete High School	18 (11,4)
	High School	21 (13,3)
	Incomplete College Education	58 (36,7)
	College Education	42 (26,6)
	Graduate School	12 (7,6)

**Procedures**

*Data collection.* Data was gathered using a study approved by the Brazilian IRB (protocol = 017/2010). Participants were recruited in: 1) undergraduate psychology classes; 2) the research group members' social network; 3) the participants' social networks (snowball). All participants were interviewed in their classrooms, homes or other suitable places. After signing the informed consent form, they completed the instruments. Participants under 18, had the informed consent form signed by their parents.

*Data Analysis.* In order to identify the predominant model of self in our sample, the Autonomous, Related and Related-autonomous Self Scales scores were compared via one-sample *t*-tests. Secondly, independent samples *t*-tests were performed to analyze sex differences. Thirdly, the association of age with the Autonomous, Related and Related-autonomous scores was analyzed with pairwise Pearson correlations for the whole sample, and separately for males and females. Finally, a One-way ANOVA compared the scores in the Autonomous, Related and Related-autonomous self-scales of three age groups, namely Adolescents (14 to 18 years old); Early and Emerging Adults (19 to 23 years old); and Late Emerging Adults (24 to 33 years old).

**Results**

The Brazilian adolescents and emerging adults scored significantly higher in Related-autonomy than in Autonomy and Relatedness  $t(157) = 105,56; p < .05$ , indicating a predominance of the Related-autonomous model of self, confirming our first hypothesis. Autonomy was the lowest of the three scores.

There were no significant sex differences in Autonomy  $t(156) = 0,71; p > .05$  and Related-autonomy  $t(156) = -1,10; p > .05$ . Females had statistically significant  $t(156) = -2,26; p < .05$  higher scores in Relatedness ( $M = 29,84; SD = 4,65$ ) than males ( $M = 28,24; SD = 4,20$ ). This result did not confirm our second hypothesis.

Age was positively correlated with Autonomy ( $r = .23; p < .05$ ), but not with Relatedness ( $r = -.05; p > .05$ ) and Related-autonomy ( $r = .09; p > .05$ ), confirming our third hypothesis. These associations were only noticeable when analyzing males and females separately. Autonomy was associated with the participants' age for males ( $r = .25; p < .05$ ) and Related-autonomy was associated with age for female participants only ( $r = .25; p < .05$ ).

Levene's test indicated equal group variances for all dependent variables. There was a significant difference between the three age groups (adolescents,

**Table 2**  
Results ANOVAs between the Age groups and self scales and age (N=157)

Variables	Groups' Means (SD)			F	p	Testes Post hoc Bonferroni		Cohen's d
	Adol	Early	Late			Comparison	p	
Autonomy	24.80 (4.24)	25.18 (4.18)	26.96 (3.47)	3.063	=.05	Adol vs. Early	1.000	.009
						Adol vs. Late	.068	.552
						Early vs. Late	.100	.45
Relatedness	28.24 (4.16)	30.13 (4.22)	27.52 (4.95)	5.233	<.01	Adol vs. Early	.075	.159
						Adol vs. Late	1.000	.587
						Early vs. Late	<.01	.523
Relational Autonomy	34.10 (4.93)	35.68 (4.07)	36.10 (3.31)	2.675	>.05	Adol vs. Early	.145	.361
						Adol vs. Late	.120	.467
						Early vs. Late	1.000	.109
Age	16.47 (1.48)	21.01 (1.37)	26.09 (2.37)	317.2	<.0001			

early emerging adults and late emerging adults) on Relatedness at the  $p < .05$  [ $F(2, 154) = 5.233, p < .01$ ; see Table 2], confirming our fourth hypothesis. Post hoc comparisons using Bonferroni's test indicated that the mean score of Relatedness was significantly lower for late emerging adults (24 to 33 years old) than to early emerging adults (19 to 23 years old).

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate Autonomy in emerging adulthood, analyzing the orientation towards Autonomy, Relatedness, and Related-autonomy in Brazilians from both genders and different age periods. Brazil belongs to a Latin culture that gives high importance to family (familism; Carlo, Koller, Raffaelli, & De Guzman, 2007; Manago, 2012), which cultural specificities in terms of development of autonomy. Investigations in Brazil indicated trends toward Related-autonomy of adolescents (Ponciano & Seidl-de-Moura, 2011; Marques, 2014), as well as adult women (mothers) valued both Autonomy and Relatedness in their socialization goals (Seidl-de-Moura, Vieira, & Carvalho, 2013). Our results corroborate this trend because both participants in different age periods and developmental stages (adolescence and emerging adulthood) presented higher scores in Related Autonomy than in Autonomy and Relatedness.

Gender differences are also expressed in our results. Our hypothesis that men would present higher levels of Autonomy was not confirmed. However, in despite of having similar levels of Autonomy manifestation, women present higher levels of Relatedness in their self-development than males, which may indicate that Brazilian females prioritize family, children, and community aspects. Ordinarily, women in various cultures since their infancy and adolescence are socialized toward more communal aspects of life (Netherlands Noom, Dekovic, & Meeus, 2001) and more likely to show behaviors and characteristics of relatedness to others (Belgium; Geuzaine, Debry, & Liesens, 2000). Previous studies on emerging adulthood indicated a trend of women to present behaviors associated with Relatedness, such as having

higher levels of prosocial behaviors (Padilla-Walker et al., 2008), favoring connections with the community, family, and friendship, in despite of their similar professional achievements than men (Ferriman et al., 2009), higher tendencies to intimate friendships and relational-orientation than men (Way, 2011), as well as engagement in educational and social services occupations (Evans & Diekman, 2009).

We also found a correlation between age and Autonomy. Older participants scored higher in Autonomy, being consistent with the assumption that autonomy acquisition is a process one experiences throughout life. In adolescence, the experience of autonomy is usually related to experimenting and testing boundaries, with no long-term plans. During emerging adulthood, autonomy is more an exercise of becoming more responsible for one self's choices and experimentation as a preparation for adulthood and long-term decisions (Arnett, 2011; Goossens, 2008; Ponciano & Seidl-de Moura, 2011).

Male participants showed a positive correlation between autonomy and age; whereas for women, this correlation was found for related autonomy only. A possible influence for men's higher Autonomy levels with age is their tendency to present behavior associated with autonomy, such as observed in studies in the U.S., where men presented a more agentic and career-focused behavior (Ferriman et al., 2009), whereas women were not exclusive career focused and favor their connections with the community and family (Ferriman et al., 2009). It is also related to men's tendency to decrease family contact faster than women during emerging adulthood (Sneed et al., 2006). In addition, in industrialized and post-industrialized countries, men are constantly trying to respond to social expectations concerning their role as household and family providers (Santos & Kasouf, 2007). Women's higher levels of Related-autonomous self with age may indicate that their Autonomy comes together with behaviors of Relatedness. As stated before, women in various cultures since their infancy and adolescence are socialized toward more communal aspects of life (Netherlands; Noom, Dekovic, & Meeus, 2001) and more likely to show behaviors and characteristics of relatedness to others

(Belgium; Geuzaine, Debry, & Liesens, 2000). Thus, their Self-development integrates behaviors associated both with Autonomy (e.g. having a career, financial independence, making independent decisions) and Relatedness (e.g. raising kids, being attractive, communal and prosocial behaviors), favoring connections with the community, family, and friendship, in despite of their similar professional achievements than men (Ferriman et al., 2009; Padilla-Walker et al., 2008; Way, 2011).

These results reflect Brazilian contextual specificities. Brazil is predominantly Catholic (Cerqueira-Santos & Koller, 2009), and conservative perspectives remain reinforcing gender roles towards men's autonomy and agentic behavior, and women's norm compliance and other-focused behavior throughout the life cycle. Men have freedom to explore different experiences, and parents' monitoring towards them seems to be weaker compared to women in Brazil. Men's sexual activity inside parents' home might be encouraged in any situation before marriage. In the contrary, for women, when sex before marriage is allowed, it should happen with a steady boyfriend, and preferably outside of the family household (Romanelli, 1998). In addition, gender roles within the family dynamics still prioritize the roles of women as the main responsible for domestic activities and children raising, exposing women to a double shift daily life, conveying their jobs and domestic activities (Araújo, 2009).

In order to explore Self-development (Autonomy, Relatedness and Related-autonomy) in different ages, we explored mean scores among adolescents, early emerging adults and late emerging adults. There were statistically significant differences in lower levels of relatedness of late emerging adults in relation to early emerging adults. These results highlight that emerging adults become less dependent of other people in their late twenties. It might reflect participants' process of reaching autonomy through relevant events, such as leaving parental home and reaching their financial autonomy. In Brazil, it is quite common that individuals leave their parental home in their late twenties, considering Brazil is family oriented country, for both cultural and religious reasons

(Cerqueira-Santos & Koller, 2009), a longer period at the parental home is a usual situation (Camarano et al., 2004; Féres-Carneiro et al., 2004). In their late twenties, it is also common for young individuals to reach complete or partial financial autonomy, after a period of investment in higher education and/or better professional skills to face the job market. The latter situation mainly expresses the reality of medium socioeconomic status Brazilians, the majority of the sample (Dutra-Thomé & Koller, 2014).

Concerning the three groups of comparison, there were statistically significant differences in levels of Relatedness for early emerging adults and emerging adults. The decreasing level of Relatedness means may indicate that, in addition to higher Autonomy, late emerging adults also experience lower levels of dependence, what may be related to the fact that in their late twenties, they usually leave their parental house and reach at least some financial independence.

## Conclusion

Autonomy acquisition has been consistently addressed in developmental psychology as the ultimate goal for a healthy development, mainly in studies with adolescents. Nevertheless, a growing body of research acknowledges that Autonomy and Relatedness coexist and are both core universal psychological needs for an optimum development. Even though emerging adulthood is a recognizable period of the life cycle in industrialized societies that shares some similarities with adolescence, it has some distinctions of its own (e.g., making independent decisions and taking responsibility for one's actions), characteristics that stress the importance of individual autonomy.

The aim of our study was to investigate autonomy and its characteristics (age, gender) in this particular developmental phase in the Brazilian context. The findings added to our understanding that the development of autonomy continues to grow through life, even though its gains may not be remarkably substantial when comparing adolescents to emerging adults. It is worthy of note that the results in this study confirmed a tendency towards Related-autonomy that



has been observed not only in Brazil, but also in other majority world's research studies.

One of the aspects that may explain that is the fact that Brazil presents socioeconomic growth with socioeconomic inequality. Autonomy is valued and reinforced because the ability to make individual decisions is important for the job market, although due to its high familism and the need for network support parental socialization goals continue to reinforce family loyalty. The limitations of the present study are related to the fact that the participants are from the city of Rio de Janeiro and Brazil is a vast country with a wide diversity, what may restrict our ability to generalize our results. We consider that autonomy in emerging adulthood based on Kağıtçıbaşı (2007) perspective on Self Development in context, and Arnett's view about this life stage and autonomy acquisition may be added to contribute to the understanding of young adults lives.

Finally, it would be of great contribution to the field of emerging adulthood that other studies investigate Self-development in emerging adults within Kağıtçıbaşı's perspective (2005) in contexts with higher familism like Brazil (ex.: Latin America, Asia, Latin-European countries, Latino-Americans within U.S.) and lower familism (Caucasian-Americans, East and North-Europe), taking into account the General Theory of Family Change and of Self Development. This set of different context might clarify the diverse forms of autonomy development during emerging adulthood.

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