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## SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# “What is more important than love?” Parental attachment and romantic relationship in Italian emerging adulthood

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**Abstract:** Previous researches suggest that individuals with different attachment styles practice different styles of love, but these do not consider the role of trust, communication, and closeness to the father and mother separately. The main aim of this study was to evaluate the relationship and the impact of parental attachment, through the analysis of the participants' self-reported account and romantic styles in Italians emerging adulthood by using a multidimensional approach (trust, communication, closeness to father and mother). The 296 participants (19–29 years; 50.7% males) rated items of information on a questionnaire, regarding their perspective of their attachment to their mother/father and attitude toward love. Using a variable-centred approach and a person-centred approach, the results suggest that the respondents differed in levels of parental attachment or love styles and that the present parental attachment has a positive impact on their romantic relationship. It is possible to estimate romantic relationships and prevent manic relationships based on the individual's current perceptions of their attachment to the father or mother. The role of parents and paternal attachment, are still fundamental in Italian young adults. The role of communication with the mother, in particular, is controversial and should be further investigated.



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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The authors have been working on this research at the University of Macerata (Italy). They in 2018 started a collaboration in the PhD. course in “Psychology, communication, and social sciences”, where Alessandra Fermani (Ph.D., associate professor of Social psychology) is the Director of the Teaching Council. The group's work includes topics related to identity formation in adolescence, and emerging adulthood, parent attachment, school violence, child-to-parent violence and study of verbal communication. Ramona Bongelli Ph.D. is an assistant professor in Psychology of Communication. Angelo Carrieri, Ph.D., teaches Social psychology of tourism. Gonzalo del Moral Arroyo PhD, is assistant professor of Social Psychology. Morena Muzi Ph.D. is an assistant professor in developmental and Educational Psychology. Claudette Portelli PhD is a therapist, trainer and coach specialised in Brief Strategic Approach.

### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

The interest in studying parental attachment has grown over the years and with it the interest in its impact on emerging adults' styles of love. It is important to understand the feelings of emerging adults concerning attachment figures because these relations will have an impact on the welfare of their relationships and their possible parenthood in the future. Thus, understanding the origins and the variables that have an impact on “manic” romantic relationships becomes of primary importance especially in countries where the statistics show alarming data. The literature suggests that individuals with different attachment styles develop different styles of love, but these do not consider the role of trust, communication, and closeness to father and mother separately.

We have looked for some data to confirm this connection and understand how to develop a romantic relationship. The results seem to be encouraging.

**Subjects: Social Psychology; Attachment; Romantic Relationship; Positive Psychology**

**Keywords: Attachment styles; romantic relationships; emerging adulthood; gender parents; father; mother; Italian culture**

## 1. Introduction

Research in social psychology has shown that adult attachment styles are important concurrent predictors of the quality of romantic relationships (Pascuzzo, Cyr, & Moss, 2013).

The Attachment theory provides a framework for understanding the development of interpersonal patterns throughout the life span (Bowlby, 1969; Fonagy, 2018).

Bowlby predicted that an individual securely attached in childhood is more likely to form secure romantic attachments in adulthood. The Attachment theory contains predictions about both continuity and discontinuity of individual differences across development. Bowlby (1973, 1980) was also clear in claiming that individual adaptation is always a product of developmental history and current circumstances and that change is always possible.

In effect, also the current attachment representations become the filter through which individuals view their significant relationships. For example, an individual who shows secure attachments today, report greater satisfaction in relationships, whereas those individuals with insecure attachments feel unloved and undervalued by the significant people in their lives (Attili, 2017).

Evidence that parents function as attachment figures in adolescence is provided by Zeifman and Hazan (2008). In their study, parents were found to be the primary source of separation distress and the preferred bases of security for adolescents. Other evidence, obtained through the administration of self-report scales as per the *Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment* (IPPA) (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987), suggested the same important roles of parents in emerging adulthood (Fermani, Muzi, Crocetti, & Meeus, 2016). These results demonstrate how the hierarchy of attachment figures gradually shifts between childhood and adulthood. This highlights the need to further our understanding of the impact of parental attachment relationships in emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000, 2001, 2006) on the development of adult romantic styles.

Psychologists have brought together theories, scale, and proofs to measure love (e.g. Attili, 2004, 2012, 2017; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986; Iannone, 2019; Kelley, 1983; Margherita, Gargiulo, Troisi, Tessitore, & Kapusta, 2018; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; Raby, Roisman, Fraley, & Simpson, 2015; Rubin, 1974; Zavattini & Santona, 2008). In our study, we considered the discussion on love varieties, focusing on the theory of love styles developed by Hendrick and Hendrick (1986) on the basis of the systematisation previously proposed by Lee (1973). The literature review will be further elaborated in the next paragraph.

Even though there is an abundance of literature focusing on the association between adult attachment orientations and romantic relationships, there are few studies that considered the impact of father and mother attachment, separately, especially in emerging adults, in the age of identity explorations (Arnett, 2000). Our study examined this issue in an Italian context, where young people live with the family of origin for a long time (Battisti, 2019; Dhariwal, Connolly, Paciello, & Caprara, 2009; Garelli, 2000; Milani, 2011). The role of attachment to both parents are predictors of romantic attachment styles in emerging adulthood. It is important to understand the feelings and expectations of emerging adults regarding attachment figures, considered separately, especially if these determine love styles. These relations will have an impact on the well-being of the romantic couple and the possible parenthood of emerging adults in the future. For example, findings (Linder, Crick, & Collins, 2002) suggest that relationships with mother or father may play a role in the expression of relational aggression in romantic relationships. In contrast, romantic

relational victimisation was not associated with either mother or father relationship qualities. The psychosocial literature itself recommends a further study of these aspects in different contexts (Dhariwal et al., 2009; Pascuzzo et al., 2013).

So, understanding the attachment and romantic style is important to identify possible antecedents of aggression and victimisation in romantic relationships. (Gerino, Caldarera, Curti, Brustia, & Rollè, 2018; Godbout, Daspe, Runtz, Cyr, & Briere, 2019; Rollè et al., 2018a). Thus, understanding the origins and the variables that have an impact on “manic” romantic relationships becomes of primary importance especially in a country such as Italy where the statistics show alarming data. In Italy, in the last 5 years, the number of women who have suffered at least one form of physical or sexual violence amounts to 4 million 353 thousand, i.e., 11.3% of women aged from 16 to 70 (Battisti, 2019).

## 2. The Italian context

The Italian context provides the framework for understanding the emerging adult romantic styles in the current paper. Within the last 20 years, the age of first marriages in the majority of European nations has dramatically moved up, changing from 26 years in 1990 to 31 in 2012 (Boffo & Mannarini, 2015). Furthermore, divorce rates and the option of cohabitation as a stable alternative to marriage has increased and inflated the number of children born outside of marriage. This demographic data evidence how the strict, conservative concept of the traditional family has been progressively changing. Commitment to the development of a new family slowly shifted toward the end of the third decade of life. Italy is perfectly included in this analysis (35 years for men and 32 for women). In Italy, marriages are in sharp decline while divorces and civil unions are on the rise (Italian National Institute of Statistics—ISTAT, 2019).

Countries differ markedly in how and when adult transitions occur, and research has paid less attention to how romantic development unfolds in southern Europe. According to Dhariwal et al. (2009), Italy provides an important opportunity to understand emerging adulthood who live at home for a protracted period. Since non-marital cohabitation is less frequent in Italy than in other countries and young people move out of their family homes predominantly for marriage and parenthood, the incidence of romantic activities may signal a range of outcomes. For some, it may indicate readiness for a serious relationship and independence; for others, it may hint at the simple desire to engage socially with cross-sex peers without commitment (Lanz & Tagliabue, 2007).

It seems that patterns of relational instability are more common today than in the past. This consistent change in the timing and process of marital union puts forth the question about how emerging adulthood live their early romantic relationships and what the variables implicated in the choice of romantic styles are. Major changes in young adults’ emerging romantic relationships bring about the reflection on what makes a relationship long-lasting, and which factors contribute most to avoiding aggressive behaviour and break up in a couple.

The emotional life of Italian emerging adults has been little explored even though this can be a strategic research area to understand how cultural changes can affect the sphere of intimacy in the new generations. For example, research is beginning to address ways how success in the peer group is linked to romantic experiences in emerging adulthood (Dhariwal et al., 2009) and in this age group, developing competence in the romantic domain becomes a central challenge (Arnett, 2000).

Furthermore, love continues to be a priority in the universe of values of emerging adulthood but only through an analysis of love styles can such relevance be contextualised (Milani, 2011; Palmonari, 2011). Regarding perceived emotional support within parent-child relationships, Lanz and Tagliabue’s results (2007) confirm Italian and international findings, highlighting that those relationships are characterised by a high level of support perceived by emerging adults. Separation and individuation from the family of origin, present in dating emerging adults, does not seem to imply a lower amount of perceived emotional support from parents.

As anticipated in the introduction, Italians enter into married life late in their adulthood (ISTAT, 2019). In this prolonged time of non-cohabitation, having one's own space is a necessity. Emerging adults have a strong desire to affirm themselves and their interests. None of the partners seeks this individualistic affirmation in the couple (Milani, 2011). In any case, especially after the legal age, there is a certain stability in relationships.

The emerging adults involved in the investigations of the Iard Institute (Buzzi, Cavalli, & Lillo, 2007) declared that the reciprocity of the loving feeling, the trust in the partner, the monogamy, the investment in the communicative aspects and the perception of a complete confidence, are the basis of their union (Palmonari, 2011).

While research has shown the tendency to consider sentimental relationships in terms of commitment, the reality highlighted that fidelity and patience are absent in the representations of love styles which are projected in the present. Love is experienced as a conquest or as a way for the acquisition of material goods (Garelli, 2000).

Since the age of the first relationship is decreasing (sometimes under 12) there is a lack of desire. However, Milani (2011) shows a persistence of behavioural models related to juvenile sentimental and sexual experiences on the basis of gender: girls are more prone to be involved in emotional ties and hold a more cautious approach to sexuality, while males tend to remain freer from social conditioning in their experimentation and tend to give more importance to physical attraction (especially the younger ones). In an Italian research (Raffagnino, Penzo, & Bertocci, 2012) with adults, females reported a greater ability, compare to males, to express their feelings and emotions and they were able to succeed in couple communication and problem solving. Females have more expressive abilities. Yet, women were characterised by their fear of being abandoned and rejected by their partner.

However, the gender distinction is not free from exceptions. For example, the recent strategies implemented by *camgirls* are interesting. These *camgirls* offer online sexual services in exchange of gifts, alcohol, and drugs. Recent research has shown significant evidence that represents a tendency for girls to treat their bodies as sexual objects (Fermani, Mattucci, & Carrieri, 2018; Fermani & Pojaghi, 2016) and to consider the pragmatism of the relationship (for example the choice of the partner is on economic bases that can guarantee well-being in terms of lifestyle or that can represent a shortcut to enter the world of television). Moreover, Italian women stop working when they have children and they may have more interest and time for enjoyable activities during the time between ending school and starting family life. Thus, in the Italian context, young women might engage in more exploratory and ludic behaviours while young men might engage in more durable behaviours than expected (Dhariwal et al., 2009).

Today in the Italian context, virility, male domination and the idea of reputation "to defend" are tacit rules which young people respect (Fermani et al., 2018). However, in couple relationships, both boys and girls appear to be engaged in building equal opportunities (Milani, 2011). The reflective and expressive abilities regarding feelings in young Italian women make them main protagonists in the consolidating couple dynamics. The initial phases of the first approach, however, remain a male prerogative. This reflective capacity is also present in males; however, it remains hidden because they are still very much conditioned by the male stereotype that they should control their feelings and express less (Garelli, 2000).

Contemporary emerging adults have more differentiated experiences compared to the older generation when the transition from first love to marriage was faster. Emerging adults, having more freedom, more time and more meeting opportunities, are more experienced in couple dynamics than in the past.

Finally, in emerging adulthood, as far as the victims of manic styles are concerned, the main statistical framework in Italy is offered by the National Institute of Statistics (Italian National Institute of Statistics—ISTAT, 2019), when it analyses violence against women (males are still a poorly explored group). The Italian Institute has calculated the rates of physical or sexual violence suffered by women over the past 5 years. Younger women (up to 34 years) are subjected to violence. Unmarried, separated/divorced and female students are most at risk.

Girls and women with higher educational qualifications suffered more violence from non-partners. Separated/divorced women are more at risk of suffering all kinds of violence, both physical violence from ex-husbands and sexual from other men. Psychological violence is more widespread among younger women (35% for 16–24-year olds compared to an average of 26.5%) and among women with medium-high qualifications (29.9% for graduates and 27.1% for graduates or those with a post-graduate degree).

### 3. Attachment and romantic love

Hazan and Shaver (1987) define the attachment bond as a fundamental and constitutive component of the love relationship that favours and supports, especially in the initial phase of the relationship, the formation of the attachment bond itself. It is the most predictive index of the quality and the duration of the relationship.

Self-reported adult attachment quality is measured on two dimensions: attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety.

Highly avoidant individuals are unable to rely on others and isolate themselves from relationships [...] Highly anxious individuals are overly focused on their relationships and are concerned with abandonment [...] Those with low attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety are thought to be securely attached—secure adults are comfortable with closeness and intimacy. (Safyer, Volling, Schultheiss, & Tolman, 2018, p. 2)

As anticipated in the introduction, the impact of the adult representation of attachment to respective parents is significant to understand the acquisition of identity in general and romantic styles in the couple. Attachment is the result of developmental history and current circumstances. Armsden and Greenberg's contribution (1987) is particularly interesting in measuring adolescent and youth attachment. These authors developed the parental attachment scale (IPPA) to assess attachment to mother and attachment to father, separately, in the framework of Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory. Armsden and Greenberg (1987) decided to isolate the various qualities within the affective dimension in a three-dimensional model: *trust*, *communication*, and *closeness*. IPPA appears particularly suitable in adolescence and in emerging adults because it captures the representations, expectations and evaluations of the individual that guides his choices and his behavior. At the same time, this tool preserves the private space of the participant and limits the intrusive element in the evaluation phase of attachment to parents as it could happen during an interview, like the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI—see Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985) or in the Crittenden Dynamic Maturative Model (1999, 2006) (Fermani et al., 2016; San Martini, Zavattini, & Ronconi, 2009). Recent studies support the validity of Armsden and Greenberg's construct (1987) of young's attachment to parent (Fermani et al., 2016; Vignoli & Mallet, 2004).

The complexity of emerging adults' conceptual thinking, and interpersonal experiences with significant others requires a multidimensional assessment of their perception of attachment relationships to parents. This instrument has to assess the same multidimensional construct in the relationships with mother and father, in order to compare these relationships in terms of strength of their components and their effects on adjustment and development.

In the Italian context, instruments assessing love relationships have been developed from various theoretical perspectives: the attachment, the developmental and the psychosocial perspective (Margherita et al., 2018).

For the present study, an important question is: “To what extent do attachments to parents influence love styles and the quality of relationships with a partner?”. As mentioned previously, Hazan and Shaver (1987), in order to answer this question, focused their study on the theory of love styles developed by Hendrick and Hendrick (1986) and on the typology proposed by Lee (1973). According to Attili (2017), Byrne, Berg, and Jools (2018), these studies are fundamental.

Lee (1973) proposed an interesting typology of love styles and identified three primary types: eros (romantic, passionate love), ludus (game-playing love), storge (friendship love). The secondary styles were conceived as compounds of pairs of primary styles: mania (possessive, dependent love), pragma (logical, “shopping list” love), and agape (all-giving, selfless love). Mania is a compound of eros and ludus, but it is qualitatively very different from either of these primary types. Agape is an association of eros and storge; pragma combines storge and ludus, but they have very different properties. Thus, the six love styles are logically interrelated, each style has qualitative properties independent of all of the other styles. In sum, there is no one type of love, but rather many different types.

According to Hendrick and Hendrick (1986), Lee’s typology is an exceedingly, coherent and rich theory, since it is multidimensional and encompasses less extensive love theories, which have been previously proposed (e.g. Dion & Dion, 1973; Berscheid & Walster, 1978; Kelley, 1983). The intent of their studies was to devise an instrument “that would measure the six love styles/attitudes clearly, thereby providing evidence that the six different conceptions of love truly exist” (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986, p. 393). For this goal, the authors developed a 42-item questionnaire designed to measure attitudes toward love and they controlled the psychometric properties. The questionnaire combines attitudes toward one’s current/recent/hypothetical partner regarding attitudes about love in general. At the end of their article, Hendrick and Hendrick evaluated their scale adequate in its present form as a research instrument to obtain a clear measure the six styles and to correlate with other scales.

Hendrick and Hendrick, in agreement with Lee (1973), believed that it is possible, for example, to be simultaneously erotic in a relationship with a partner and ludic with another partner. This possibility implies that the cause of the love style lies in the nature of the relationship with another person and so specific socialisation practices affect the development of the conceptual love matrix. Possibly, some dimensions are more changeable by experience than other dimensions and the six styles may vary over time. The studies found fascinating gender differences on several of the love subscales. Males were clearly more ludic than females, but females were more pragmatic, storgic (young women are more likely to endorse friendship as an important component in romance) and manic in love attitudes than males (Attili, 2017; Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986). In the Hendrick and Hendrick’s results, one item asked students, “How many times have you been in love?” The results were none (15.1%), one (36.8%), two (26.1%), three to five (17.7%), more than five (4.2%). Males and females differed on this item, with the difference showed greater extremes for males. Males had either never been in love or had been in love three or more times.

Males and females also differed on the question, “Are you in love now?” For males, 54.5% said no and 45.5% said yes. Males were more permissive and instrumental in their sexual attitudes, a result consistent with males being more ludic in their love styles. For these authors, traditionally, females have been more conservative in sexual attitudes as a precious commodity that must be guarded. In psychosocial literature, it was explained that women have historically been educated to marry both a love partner and a potential provider. For this state of dependence on males, females were more pragmatic than males.



Following the same reasoning, the authors may account for females being more storgic than males. The same socialised dependency may also account for more manic attitudes by females, although this effect might be due to an artefact, namely that females report more anxiety and depression symptoms in general than males.

Karandashev (2015) considers individualistic cultures, such as the Italian and European culture, to be love-based where marriage is perceived as an ideal. But a person's motivation to be independent can get in conflict with the need for a romantic partner. People who are more individualistic exhibit less likelihood of having ever been in love. Such people also are more likely to endorse a ludic love style, which involves a less intimate perspective on love. Greater individualism is associated with a perception of their relationships as less rewarding and less deep (Dion & Dion, 2006).

More in general, Attili (2017) recently reaffirmed the relationship between the Attachment theory and Lee's love styles. Those who had a secure attachment would have romantic relationships characterised by a combination of eros and agape. The love of secure people is passionate and altruistic, based on the willingness to take care of others. Those that have secure attachment are not anxious and accept the inevitable transformations of the couple. When the relationship comes to an end, these individuals face pain of loss, grief of abandonment and separation. Sadness and despair are managed and, in about a year, the individual is ready for new experiences.

In the insecure attachment, the individuals regard themselves as persons unworthy of love and who can only trust themselves. These people are indifferent to social reinforcement and do not feel the need to relate to others. The continuous research for a new partner is ludus, pragma and storge.

They live in fear of being left, ignored or disappointed, so they avoid a deep involvement. The commitment with the partner has no value. Emotional and physical intimacy is avoided and when the relationship is interrupted, these people show little anxiety and extreme self-sufficiency. This is what is manifested yet there is fear of suffering. As suggested by Lenzi et al. (2013), emotional distancing is a coping strategy to defend oneself from pain.

A person who is insecure with parents, lives with the constant fear of abandonment, often have trouble socially or struggle in using others to co-regulate their emotions. It may be difficult for them to seek out help or to open up to others. They often have difficulty in trusting people, as they were unable to trust those they relied on during growing up. These individuals have difficulty in managing stress and they may even demonstrate hostile or aggressive behaviours. This problematic type of attachment can cause manic love relationships: obsessive jealousy, parental idealisation, and extreme dependence.

The question about gender differences in romantic styles is complex. For example, in literature, it is unclear whether gender differences exist in the use of romantic relational aggression or well-being. Past research indicates that females are more likely than males to use relational aggression during childhood, but gender differences are less clear in adolescence and emerging adulthood (for a review, see Crick et al., 2001). Linder et al. (2002) hypothesised that romantic relational aggression and victimisation would be negatively associated with positive relationship qualities such as trust, and positively associated with negative relationship qualities such as jealousy.

Research on the antecedents of physical aggression in dating relationships has emphasised the importance of parenting in its development: low involvement by parents and a lack of warmth and trust in the parent-child relationship (in particular less responsiveness by fathers, more coercion by mothers, and less family cohesion, in absence of warmth) are associated with subsequent physical aggression in romantic relationships.

In synthesis, the research on antecedents of romantic relationships suggests that the quality of relationships with parents may play an important role, for example, in the development of romantic relational aggression and victimisation.

#### 4. The study

##### 4.1. Aims

Arnett has argued that the expression “young adults” may be improper because it conveys the idea that adulthood has been achieved. Contrary to the question “do you think you have reached adult life?”, most people aged 20–29 respond “in some respects yes, for others not”, showing that they are in a transition phase, where the transition to adulthood is close but not yet reached. In contrast, individuals over the age of 30 begin to perceive themselves more and more frequently as adults (Arnett, 2001). On the basis of these considerations Arnett (2000) proposes to distinguish three phases: adolescence (10–18 years), emerging adulthood (19–29 years), and adult age (after 30 years). For this reason, the participants in this study were called emerging adults and we selected an age from 18 to 29 years. Emerging adults are a privileged band because they are not in their first romantic experiences and are in the transition phase that leads to the formation of a new family.

Indeed, the first objective of this study was to evaluate the impact of attachment with parents, father and mother, on the romantic styles in emerging adulthood. We wanted to verify if these two different roles will have an impact on the wellness or unhealthy relationship/developments (or) of the couple, in particular in choosing a romantic style.

No one has explored the possibility that the three specific characteristics of parental attachment (trust, communication, and closeness), describing by Armsden and Greenberg (1987), are the predictors of romantic attachment styles in emerging adulthood. Where an attachment construct is multidimensional, the relationship of particular factors to romantic style is of interest. The attachment changes throughout life and the new representation of parental attachment in adulthood can be more influential on behaviour in romantic relationships. For this reason, we have measured the attachment to parents (trust, communication, and closeness) separately, in father and mother, at the time of the test.

##### 4.2. Hypotheses

Using a variable-centered approach, we investigated the mean differences and we predict that the respondents differed in levels of parental attachment or different approaches to love on the basis of their gender and in relation to their present romantic situation. In particular, we expected to find in males’ sexual attitudes more permissive representations and higher scores in ludic style. On the other hand, we thought that females presented themselves as more conservative and with higher scores on eros and on pragma love styles. Moreover, we believed the participants who were in a relationship at the time of testing were more erotic and agapic and less ludic and pragmatic than subjects without a partner.

The second hypothesis aimed to show the associations between the factors of parental attachment and love styles. We hypothesised that the attachment variables of both parents predicted love styles. In particular, good levels of trust, communication and closeness predict positive love styles as eros and negative styles as ludus or mania. We were not able to hypothesise which parent (father or mother) and which attachment factor was more decisive.

By adopting a person-centred approach, we tested the third hypothesis. On the basis of the literature (Fermani et al., 2016), we verified the possibility of identifying 4 attachment clusters: secure or insecure attachment with both parents; insecure father attachment and secure mother attachment or insecure mother attachment and secure father attachment. We thought that the distribution from the gender groups along four attachment clusters was significantly different.



Specifically, we imagined that female participants and participants with a partner would show more secure attachments.

### 4.3. Method

#### 4.3.1. Participants

The Italian sample consisted of 296 emerging adults (50.7% males). Participants ranged in age from 19 to 29 years ( $M = 24.4$ ;  $SD = 2.3$ ). Two age groups were represented in the sample: a first group of 169 participants aged 19–24 years (23.6% boys; 33.4% girls) and a second group of 127 aged 25–29 years (27% males; 15.9% females). The age range and the split were made in accordance with the Italian and international literature and Institute of research that deals with studying the youth condition (Buzzi, Cavalli, & De Lillo, 2002, 2007; IARD Institute, 2019; NDP Group, 2019). 57.7% are students, 34% are workers and 8.2% never worked. Most respondents were single and had never been married (139 males and 130 females). However, 3% stated they were now, or had in the past, co-habited with someone and 14 have children. A final background question attempted to measure the current romantic relationship: 65.9% answered considering their current partner; 25.9% considering their most recent partner; 8.2% have never been in love. Males and females did not differ on this item ( $\chi^2(2) = 0.23$ , *ns*).

#### 4.3.2. Procedure

Target population represents a specific segment within a wider population that is positioned to serve as a primary data source for the research and the study used for the selection a convenience sampling and a Snowball sampling/chain-referral sampling (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012).

Participants completed the self-report measure, the IPPA and the LAS, and demographic information. The total time required to complete the questionnaires was approximately 35 minutes.

Participants were given the option of completing the questionnaires during a lesson of Social psychology, in the Department of Education under the supervision of research assistants, or on their own time, whichever was more convenient for them. Approximately 95% of the participants completed the questionnaires during the lesson, whereas the remainder of the participants completed the questionnaires at their convenience and returned them by mail. All participants were informed that their participation was anonymous.

Prior to initiating the study, we obtained permission from University and participants were provided written information about the research and asked for their consent for their participation. Approximately 99% of the approached participants chose to participate. The study was conducted in accordance to the AIP and APA Ethics Code. For all the data analysis, we used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version 22, running on Windows—SPSS, Chicago, IL, 2002).

#### 4.3.3. Measures

*Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment* (IPPA) (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Italian validation by San Martini et al., 2009) applied in its reduced version (Nada Raja, McGee, & Stanton, 1992) is a self-report tool aimed at measuring the quality of the relationship between adolescents and their fathers (12 items) and mothers (12 items). The IPPA was developed in order to assess adolescents' perceptions of the positive and negative affective/cognitive dimension of relationships with their parents, particularly how well these figures serve as sources of psychological security. The theoretical framework is attachment theory, originally formulated by Bowlby and recently expanded by others. Three broad dimensions are assessed: degree of mutual trust; quality of communication; and extent of anger and alienation. The development samples were 16 to 20 years of age; nonetheless, the IPPA has been used successfully in several studies with adolescents or with emerging adulthood (Fermani et al., 2016). A six-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*completely untrue*) to 6 (*completely true*) was used. The factors singled out three dimensions in the relationship between adolescents and their parents: trust, communication and alienation recoded as

closeness. Sample items include: “My father/mother respects my feelings” (trust); “I talk to my father/mother about my problems and worries” (communication); “My father/mother does not care much about me (Reverse)” (closeness). The reliability of the factors is very satisfactory: trust father alpha = .80; trust mother alpha = .74; communication father alpha = .82; communication mother alpha = .75; closeness father alpha = .74; closeness with the mother alpha = .68.

We employed the *Love attitude scale* (LAS, Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986), a 42-item questionnaire, designed to measure attitudes toward love. The questionnaire combines attitudes toward one’s current/recent/hypothetical partner with attitudes about love in general. Participants are instructed to answer questions with their current partner in mind. However, the instructions state that if the respondent does not currently have a partner, he or she should answer keeping their most recent partner in mind. If, however, the respondents have never been in love, the instructions state that they should provide whatever answer they believe would be true. Participants respond to each item using a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*). The scale is split into 6 subscales (7 items each), each of one represents a different love style: eros (passionate love; sample items “Our lovemaking is very intense and satisfying”); ludus (game-playing love; e.g. “I try to keep my lover a little uncertain about my commitment to him/her”); storge (friendship love; e.g. “The best kind of love grows out of a long friendship”); pragma (practical love; e.g. “I try to plan my life carefully before choosing a lover”); mania (possessive, dependent love; e.g. “I cannot relax if I suspect that my lover is with someone else”); agape (altruistic love; e.g. “I am usually willing to sacrifice my own wishes to let my lover achieve his/hers”).

Hendrick and Hendrick (1986) describe the six factors extracted:

1. Eros: Strong physical preferences, early attraction, and intensity of emotion are attributes of erotic love, along with strong commitment to the lover. [...].
2. Ludus: Love as an interaction game to be played out with diverse partners appears to be the main attribute of Ludus types. Deception of the lover is acceptable within proper role limits. There is not great depth of feeling; indeed, the ludic lover is wary of emotional intensity from others. Ludic love has a manipulative quality to it. This aspect results in apparent lower social desirability. It is important to note, however, that there are ludic aspects to many, if not most, love relationships [...].
3. Storge: This style reflects an inclination to merge love and friendship. There is no fire in storgic love; it is solid, down-to-earth, and presumably enduring [...].
4. Pragma: Rational calculation with a focus on desired attributes of the lover is central to pragmatic love. In fact, “love planning” might be an apt description [...].
5. Mania: Reading the items suggests that Mania is “symptom love”, based on uncertainty of self and the lover. It may be most characteristic of adolescents, but examples of older manic lovers frequently occur [...].
6. Agape: Lee did not find this style manifested fully in actual human beings. However, the factor results suggest that it is a viable style. (pp.400–401)

The measure was translated from English to Italian by a bilingual psychologist.

Before rotation, the percentage of total variance accounted for by each of the factors and the level of Cronbach’s alpha were as follows respectively: eros 22.7, .78; ludus 22.6, .70; storge 29.2, .72; pragma 31.1, .77; mania 24.1, .70; agape 24.3, .73.

## 4.4. Results

### 4.4.1. A variable-centred approach: processes

The first aim of this study was to examine whether the respondents differed in levels of parental attachment or different approaches to love.

In order to achieve this aim, we performed a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) on trust, communication, and closeness (father and mother) and on the six love styles with the attitudes toward one's current/recent/hypothetical partner as independent variables. Gender and age (19–24 and 25–32) were also included as independent variables to control whether differences between participants from the groups could be moderated by gender, age.

The results indicated that, according to Wilks' Lambda criterion, the combined dependent variables were significantly affected by gender ( $F(6, 296) = 4.58, p < .001, \eta^2 = .03$ ), but not by interactions between love status and gender ( $F(6, 296) = 0.19, ns, \eta^2 = .00$ ) or age ( $F(6, 296) = 1.08, ns, \eta^2 = .00$ ).

The results of the follow-up MANOVA analyses (see Table 1) highlighted that females scored significantly higher on communication with the mother and perceived better attachment with both parents. In general, the mother attachment was better than the father one.

Furthermore, females scored significantly higher on eros while, on the contrary, males showed significantly higher level on ludus.

As mentioned above, to further explore levels of attachment and love processes in the current status of love, we applied a post hoc test, namely Tukey post comparisons, which pointed out that there was no significant evidence of parental attachment.

On the other hand, the analysis showed significant results about the style of love among those who have a partner, who never had a partner or who answered keeping in mind their most recent partner (see Table 2).

**Table 1. Mean scores (and standard deviations in parentheses) of males/females and IPPA and LAS**

	<b>Males M (SD)</b>	<b>Females M (SD)</b>	<b>F (1, 296)</b>	<b><math>\eta^2</math></b>
IPPA				
Trust father	4.5 (1.25)	4.9 (1.16)	2.96	.01
Communication father	3.7 (1.41)	3.8 (1.35)	.93	.01
Closeness father	4.6 (1.13)	4.9 (1.19)	.56	.01
Trust mother	4.8 (1.17)	5.0 (1.09)	3.07	.01
Communication mother	<b>4.3 (1.15)</b>	<b>4.9 (1.09)</b>	<b>8.92**</b>	<b>.03</b>
Closeness mother	4.6 (1.07)	5.0 (.81)	1.98	.01
LAS				
Eros	<b>3.8 (.70)</b>	<b>4.1 (.64)</b>	<b>9.28**</b>	<b>.03</b>
Ludus	<b>2.6 (.71)</b>	<b>2.2 (.60)</b>	<b>9.80**</b>	<b>.04</b>
Storge	2.8 (.78)	2.9 (.75)	.75	.01
Pragma	2.7 (.76)	2.6 (.80)	.66	.01
Mania	2.8 (.69)	2.9 (.71)	1.58	.01
Agape	3.5 (.72)	3.4 (.68)	3.63	.01

\*\*\* $p < .001$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \* $p < .05$  Significant differences are noted in **bold**.

**Table 2. Mean scores (and standard deviations in parentheses) of status of love and LAS**

	Partner M (SD)	Recent partner M (SD)	Hypothetical partner M (SD)	F (2, 296)	$\eta^2$
LAS					
Eros	<b>4.2<sup>a</sup> (.54)</b>	<b>3.5<sup>b</sup> (.68)</b>	<b>3.6<sup>ab</sup> (.65)</b>	<b>46.67***</b>	<b>.24</b>
Ludus	<b>2.3<sup>a</sup> (.64)</b>	<b>2.7<sup>ab</sup> (.73)</b>	<b>2.5<sup>b</sup> (.63)</b>	<b>11.78***</b>	<b>.08</b>
Storge	2.8 (.74)	2.9 (.81)	3.1 (.82)	183	.01
Pragma	<b>2.5<sup>a</sup> (.78)</b>	<b>2.7<sup>ab</sup> (.83)</b>	<b>2.9<sup>b</sup> (.77)</b>	<b>3.93*</b>	<b>.03</b>
Mania	2.8 (.65)	2.9 (.82)	2.9 (.61)	.40	.01
Agape	<b>3.6<sup>b</sup> (.68)</b>	<b>3.2<sup>a</sup> (.70)</b>	<b>3.2<sup>a</sup> (.65)</b>	<b>9.78***</b>	<b>.06</b>

\*\*\* $p < .001$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \* $p < .05$  Tukey a, b, c Significant differences are noted in **bold**.

In particular, Tukey pointed out post comparison that those who had a partner at the time of testing were more erotic and agapic and less ludic and pragmatic than those who never had a partner or those who had regarded their most recent partner.

#### 4.4.2. Regressions

A second aim of the present study was to examine the impact of attachment to mother or father on each love style (see Table 3).

Linear regression findings reported in Table 2 indicated that in females, paternal trust was negatively linked with storge and pragma. A good communication with father was positively associated to pragma. Paternal closeness in males predicted eros positively and in females pragma and mania styles negatively.

Maternal trust in females was negatively associated to storge. Maternal communication in males was positively linked to mania. Finally, in males, maternal closeness was negatively related to ludus and mania.

#### 4.4.3. A person-centred approach: attachment styles

A further aim of this study was to examine whether participants were differently represented within the various styles, based on gender and romantic status.

In order to reach this aim, we performed a cluster analysis to empirically obtain attachment styles from the combination of six IPPA factors (i.e., trust father/mother; communication

**Table 3. Standardized betas and proportion explained variance for the regression analyses of LAS on IPPA as predictors in males and females**

	Eros		Ludus		Storge		Pragma		Mania		Agape	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Trust father	.08	.18	-.17	.10	.05	<b>-.29*</b>	-.01	<b>-.30**</b>	-.03	.11	.16	.11
Communication f.	-.01	.13	-.08	.13	-.02	.15	.17	<b>.35***</b>	.02	.13	.06	.03
Closeness f.	<b>.29*</b>	-.06	-.05	-.16	.04	-.16	.02	<b>-.23*</b>	-.04	<b>-.33**</b>	-.01	-.10
Trust mother	.01	-.16	-.04	.04	.01	<b>-.34**</b>	-.01	-.16	-.05	-.11	-.08	-.07
Communication m.	.07	.07	.18	-.06	.04	-.21	-.09	.09	<b>.30**</b>	-.09	-.07	.07
Closeness m.	-.01	-.08	<b>-.28**</b>	-.10	-.14	.06	-.22	.03	<b>-.23*</b>	-.08	.15	.00
R <sup>2</sup>	<b>.14**</b>	.07	<b>.18***</b>	.04	.01	<b>.11**</b>	.06	<b>.21***</b>	<b>.09*</b>	<b>.13**</b>	.05	.01

\*\*\* $p < .001$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \* $p < .05$  Significant differences are noted in **bold**.

father/mother; closeness father/mother). Based on the existing literature, we looked for a four-cluster solution (Fermani et al., 2016). We followed the two-step clustering procedure suggested by Gore (2000) and ran the analyses in the total sample. In the first step, a hierarchical cluster analysis was conducted using Ward's method on squared Euclidian distances. In the second step, the initial cluster centres obtained from the hierarchical cluster analysis were used as non-random starting points in an iterative kmeans clustering procedure. The final 4-cluster solution we obtained clearly replicated the solution found in other studies on Italian sample of adolescents (Fermani et al., 2016). This solution reported a good explanatory power, as it explained more than 50% of the variance. When the cluster analysis was repeated only in the sub-group, gender and romantic status, the same 4-cluster solution emerged. Taken all-together, these findings indicate the robustness of the 4-cluster solution and its replicability in different groups.

The Z-scores for parental attachment are shown in Figure 1.

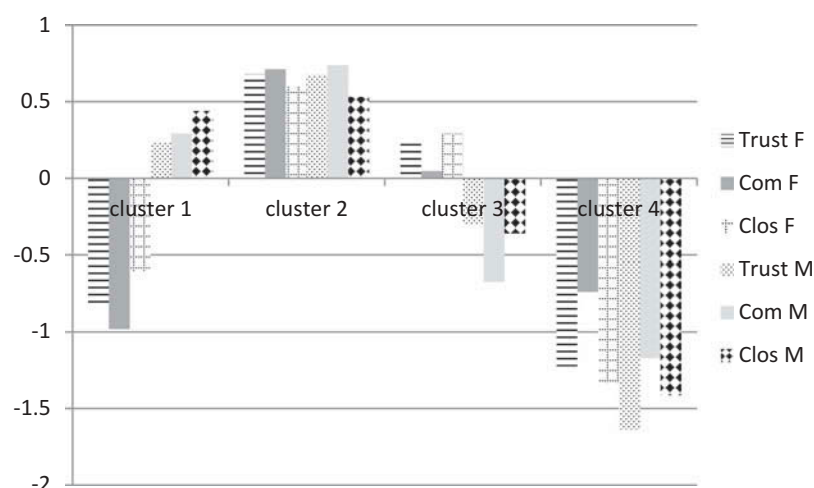
The first cluster “insecure attachment with the father and secure with the mother” consisted of respondents scoring high on closeness with mother and individuals with moderately high scores on trust and communication with mother were associated with low scores on trust communication and closeness with father.

The second cluster “secure attachment with both parents” was comprised respondents with high levels in all dimensions of the relationship with parents.

The third cluster “insecure attachment with the mother and secure with the father” consisted of moderately high scores of trust, communication and closeness with father (especially communication) associated with low scores on trust, communication and closeness with mother.

The last cluster “insecure attachment with both parents” represented the participants with lower scores on trust communication and closeness with father and mother. By means of the Chi Square Test, we found significant differences on the distribution of participants from different groups about the gender ( $\chi^2(3) = 11.21, p < .05$ ), along the four cluster (see Table 4). In particular, females showed more secure parental attachment and males more insecure attachment than their respective counterpart. Fisher's Exact Test (using Monte Carlo approximation to deal with issues related to small sub-samples) revealed that respondents having a partner differed significantly in their distribution across the clusters ( $p = .05$ ). In particular, they were over represented in the secure attachment.

**Figure 1. Z-scores for parental attachment for the four clusters.**



**Table 4. Distribution in the attachment cluster based on gender and romantic status (frequencies and percentages in parenthesis)**

	- father + mother	Secure	+ father - mother	Insecure	Total
Males	30 (10.6%)	<b>46 (16.3%)</b>	39 (13.8%)	<b>29 (10.2%)</b>	144 (50.9%)
Females	25 (8.8%)	<b>68 (24.0%)</b>	33 (11.7%)	<b>13 (4.6%)</b>	139 (49.1%)
Total	55(19.4%)	114 (40.3%)	72 (25.4%)	42 (14.8%)	283 (100%)
Partner	32 (11.4%)	<b>80 (28.6%)<sup>a</sup></b>	50 (17.9%)	22 (7.9%)	32 (11.4%)
Recent	13 (4.6%)	24 (8.6%) <sup>b</sup>	19 (6.8%)	16 (5.7%)	13 (4.6%)
Hypothetical partner	9 (3.2%)	8 (2.9%) <sup>b</sup>	3 (1.1%)	4 (1.4%)	9 (3.2%)
Total	54 (19.3%)	112 (40.0%)	72 (25.7%)	42 (15.0%)	54 (19.3%)

Significant differences are noted in **bold**.

After we had dichotomised the factors of love scale, we repeated the same analysis using filter and gender and romantic position as independent variables. We found significant differences in the distribution of participants from different groups on gender ( $\chi^2(1) = 7.79, p < .01$ ), only about eros (54% of females vs 46% of males) and ludus (90% of males vs 10% females). Finally, we had significant results on eros and ludus ( $p = .01$ ) about romantic position. In eros, 79% have a partner vs 16% thought of the most recent partner and 5% thought of a hypothetical partner. In ludus, 45% have a partner and 45% thought of their most recent partner vs 10% thought of a hypothetical partner.

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

The present research explored the possibility that the three specific characteristics of parent relationships, i.e. trust, communication and closeness, could be probable predictors on emerging adults' romantic attachment styles. At present, very few studies combine the adult representations of the three factors of attachment (trust, communication and closeness), described by Armsden and Greenberg (1987), with love styles in emerging adulthood, which is an important period where enduring choices are made to set the foundations for adult life (Arnett, 2000). Despite the recommendations of the literature, the emerging adult group and the role of parents in the choice of various love styles in the Italian context is poorly studied (Dhariwal et al., 2009).

From a developmental-systems perspective, the evolution of competence is considered to be embedded in the mutually influential relationships between the self and the multiple systems, including parental attachment. Therefore, as anticipated, it is important to understand the feelings and expectations of emerging adults regarding attachment figures, considered separately, because these will have an impact on the well-being of the couple and these emerging adults will become parents in the future (Battisti, 2019; Garelli, 2000; Milani, 2011; Pascuzzo et al., 2013).

The present paper mainly focuses on parental attachment and love style, aimed to provide a contribution to the research panorama on protective factor in the parental attachment for the romantic styles.

Using a variable-centred approach, in relation to the first hypothesis, we investigated mean differences in levels of parental attachment and love styles on the basis of their gender and in relation to their present romantic situation. Consistently with our hypothesis, females scored significantly higher on mother communication and perceived better attachment with both parents, compare to males. In general, mother attachment was more prevalent than father attachment. Zaman and Fivush (2013) found that adolescents who classified as secure, generally favor their mothers over their fathers as their fundamental attachment figure and rate their mothers higher on attachment support than their fathers. Females showed higher affection toward their



mothers, rely more on them for emotional support than their fathers, and open up and share more with them (Fermani et al., 2016). Some Italian studies (Cicognani & Zani, 2003; San Martini et al., 2009) showed that mothers were more open and available for listening to problems and in clarifying the feelings of daughters while fathers were represented as more distant and judging. The daughters considered their father to be too uncritical and unwilling to express their emotions who treats them like little girls, without taking into account the changes that had taken place with them growing up. Instead, the sons were more likely to establish with their fathers, communicative relationships that are emotionally detached and limited to practical activities. Probably, in our studies, girls can consider the communication with the mother qualitatively better, freer and closer and this seems more appropriate for their psychological adjustment. This may also explain some evidence in studies carried out in the Italian context (Garelli, 2000; Milani, 2011). Mothers have priority in the greater reflective ability of emerging adult girls in the language of feelings.

The paternal relationship, especially trust issue, showed a good level of attachment, indicating that the relationship with one's father was admitted to give support to participants in the process of identity development.

Females scored significantly higher on eros, while the males showed significantly higher level on ludus. Previous studies showed different results, but in general, males were more ludic and females more erotic, storgic, pragmatic and manic than their counterpart (Hendrick, Hendrick, & Dicke, 1998; Milani, 2011). Our results are partially consistent with those obtained a few decades ago by the above quoted studies. Probably, the Italian culture remains anchored to the traditional division of roles. Italian society accepts and, in some cases, encourages permissive attitudes for males while women choose more conservative attitudes (Milani, 2011). For the Italian males, the fear of emotional involvement was an important issue in generating unhappiness while the ability to satisfy sexual needs creates satisfaction (Raffagnino et al., 2012).

Attili (2017), on the basis of the evolutionary model, states that women have historically perceived a partner as a potential provider and this state of dependence on males produces the search for lasting love over time.

Evolutionary psychologists have used sexual conflict theory to discover an array of sex-differentiated mating adaptations: one category focused on deception (Buss, 2009). In this perspective, women and men deceive each other in distinct ways.

Men, for example, deceive women about the depths of their feelings, commitment, and love in order to secure sexual access to women. [...] Women, in turn, have evolved defences against these forms of deception, such as prolonging courtship before consenting to sex to provide a wider window for assessing a man's mating intention. The emotions of anger and upset, triggered by experiencing these forms of deception, function to encode these forms of strategic interference for storage in memory and ultimately motivate women to avoid future deception by men (Buss, 2009: 145–146).

Although we hypothesised that the girls were oriented towards a pragmatic love style, our data did not reveal any significant gender differences.

Instead, the analysis showed significant results about the style of love and status: those who had a partner at the time of testing were more erotic and agapic and less ludic and pragmatic than those who never had a love or who referred to their most recent partner. The Study I by Hendrick and Hendrick (1986) suggested that eros may evolve to storge, pragma or agape during the middle and later years. Those who reported that they had never been in love, were least endorsing of eros and agape. Our participants confirmed the literature. Our respondents are all young and we had no "old" couple; for this reason, and that is why we think that the preferred

style was eros. However, what usually starts as passionate love sooner or later settles down to companionate and altruistic love. Moreover, the continuation of the cohabitation with the parents could determine more ludic choices, in those who do not have a partner (Dhariwal et al., 2009).

In the second hypothesis, we tested if the attachment variables of both parents predicted love styles. Females' paternal trust was negatively linked with storge and pragma. Paternal closeness predicted in males positive eros and in females negative pragma and mania styles. Maternal trust in females was negatively associated to storge. Finally, maternal closeness was negatively related to ludus and mania in males.

If we consider mania and ludus as the extreme "pathological" conditions of love and eros as the paradigmatic style of romantic love, the associations recognise that, for both males and females, trust and closeness can be revealed to be security variables. Furthermore, the same interpretation can be valid for storgic and pragma because there is not fire in storgic and in planning love, so in the participants, probably, this corresponds to two negative styles once again predicted by trust and closeness.

Recent literature (Baldoni, 2005) reports that contemporary fathers want to always be more emotionally bonded with their sons. These studies also examined the association between father involvement and father-children attachment security and supported the notion that fathers who are more involved in their children's lives have children who demonstrate more advanced cognitive, social, and emotional development (Brown, Mangelsdorf, Shigeto, & Wong, 2018). Parental trust and closeness are important factors for future identity achievement (Fermani et al., 2016).

According to the literature (Allen & Baucom, 2004; Attili, 2017; Crittenden, Fava & Vizziello, 1999; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1992), secure subjects are trusting in their relationships and show high self-confidence, unlike the avoidant style that eludes intimacy and shows tendency for high scores on ludus, and low scores on the romantic love. Those in the insecure group are characterised by dependence. Secure subjects may be more "successful" than the other styles in their romantic relationship. Our results confirmed these trends and brought us to consider "trust" and "closeness" towards both parents, as two critical protective factors for the well-being of relationships of love.

On the other hand, it is interesting to investigate why paternal communication was positively associated to pragma in females, while maternal communication was positively linked to mania in males. Raffagnino et al. (2012) affirmed that the ability to disclose themselves positively influenced satisfaction but also influenced negatively the desire to be away from the partner. Previous studies (Fermani et al., 2016) in international contexts have already reported the anomalies of the communication factor in association with the achievement of identity or self-concept clarity. Individuals, indeed, organise the knowledge of the self and define the identity through the activation of processes of comparison with other significant ones, such as parents. The negative association between communication with the mother and clarity of the concept of self is explained in the literature because mothers tend to intensify communication when they find a strong uncertainty in their children. Therefore, it could be hypothesised, also in the results of our study, that the excess of communication could become a further reason for anxiety and uncertainty. The consequences of love on relationships could be complex and this topic needs much elaboration.

Finally, our results confirmed the third hypothesis. By adopting a person-centred approach, we identified 3 attachment clusters: secure or insecure attachment with both parents; insecure father attachment and secure mother attachment or insecure mother attachment and secure father attachment. Females participants with a partner were more present in the secure attachment. Females with a partner are more present in eros, while the greater proportion male participants without a partner are in ludus. The same results were showed by Hendrick and Hendrick (1986) and Hazan and Shaver (1987). In light of the previous discussion, and in line with the Italian literature (Milani, 2011), it is not surprising that girls who have shown a better relationship with their parents

and those who have a stable relationship are more present in romantic love. The cluster of secure parental attachment is a protective factor in the couple and predicts eros, in those who had a partner at the time of research. According to Lanz and Tagliabue (2007), the exact opposite happens in the ludus, a style of love considered paradigmatic of promiscuity. The cluster of insecure parental attachment is a risk factor in the couple and predicts ludus, in those who did not have a partner at the time of research. It is interesting to note that the family of origin is influential in emerging adults. Probably in Italy, for those living at home the support of parents is even more significant and, during adolescence and till emerging adulthood, supportive interpersonal experiences are important for romantic relationships. For example, central romantic motives for adolescent girls include affection and support (Dhariwal et al., 2009).

According to Levesque and Lafontaine (2017), men with a detached attachment style report greater permissiveness; females with a secure attachment style report less permissiveness.

Gender differences in love styles is an important topic worthy of more research effort (Gerino et al., 2018; Papp, Liss, Erchull, Godfrey, & WaalandKreutzer, 2017; Rollè, Giardina, Caldara, Gerino, & Brustia, 2018b; Rollè et al., 2018a).

Descriptive work on the love styles held by society would be of great value. It might be hypothesised that, in Western society, people go through a kind of modal developmental sequence of love styles: e.g. in emerging adulthood, the preferred style may evolve toward eros, which in turn may develop into storge and pragma during the middle and later years. Such a developmental sequence, noted by Hendrick and Hendrick (1986), usually starts as passionate love (eros) but sooner or later settles down to companionate love (storge). If such a “love history occurs for substantial numbers of people, then knowledge of the sequence could enable people to intervene to change (or come to terms with) their histories” (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986: 402).

In summary, we consider that from the actual results of our research: (1) it is also possible to estimate romantic relationships and prevent manic relationships in the couple on the basis of current perceptions of attachment to the father or mother; (2) the role of parents, and paternal closeness in particular, is still fundamental for Italian emerging adults. The role of communication with the mother is controversial and should be further investigated.

## 6. Limitations, and future directions

The present findings should be considered in light of at least two important limitations. First, the cross-sectional design used does not permit us to estimate the longitudinal stability of the styles of love process. Second, cross-sectional data does not allow for the investigation of cause-effect relations between attachment processes and love styles. For example, we cannot ascertain whether there are moderation or mediation variables (e. g. gender or status of love) between these constructs.

As a result, future research should extend our understanding of these processes by using longitudinal approaches that permit examination of love trajectories and of antecedents and consequences of the attachment styles. Even today we feel the need to increase the number of researches and to focus on the impact of parental attachment on romantic relationships, since the literature on this subject is still poor. The results are often conflicting, probably due to the variety of tools used. The need for experimentation also plays a fundamental role in the topic of psychotherapy. In fact, by knowing and deepening the interrelation between motivational systems, psychotherapies could receive an important benefit. It would be interesting, for example, to analyse the impact of attachment on love styles in other contexts such as adoptions or domestic violence against women. Finally, it would be interesting to see if a parent's style of love can be a predictor of the son's or daughter's love style.

Future studies are needed to investigate this further. At the moment, we are investigating whether there are significant correlations with internal disorders (anxiety and depression) and

are focusing on psychometric investigations to test gender invariance in the measurement model and to identify possible moderation and mediation variables.

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