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Articles

Parenthood as an Opportunity to Mature: A Questionnaire to Detect Changes in Self-image and Relationships

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Abstract

*Introduction:* Parenthood is a composite experience in which personal, couple, relational, environmental, historical and cultural variables interact. In recent years, western societies have experienced a steady downward trend in the birth rate. On the other hand, scientific contributions, in which a qualitative methodology prevails, highlight the tendency of this experience to be positive. There is therefore an interest in exploring this topic in greater depth, also with quantitative studies, but above all in highlighting what changes, or maturing, happens in adults, sometimes after the birth of their children.

*Objectives:* Our study aims to investigate parenthood through the administration of an ad hoc questionnaire. In particular, we investigate the psycho-relational changes that the experience of parenthood (after at least 3 years) may have promoted in women and men, specifically with respect to self-perception and relationships, both with their own parents, within the couple, and in object relations in general, and we compare the evaluations of mothers and fathers.

*Method:* With prior permission and written informed consent, the self-report was distributed in various kindergartens. The sample consisted of 326 subjects, of whom 187 mothers and 139 fathers, residing in northern Italy.

*Results:* Three main components emerged from the factor analysis of the questionnaire: Openness Factor, Castling or Closure Factor, and Depth Factor. The reliability statistic indicates a Cronbach's alpha of 0.74. According to our sample parenthood promotes positive changes; among these, the most widespread are an increase in tenderness (92,7%), sense of responsibility (89,1%), perception of feeling older and more capable (88,4%), gratitude towards their partner (81,5%), and perception of a strengthening of the couple bond (86,5%). Increased tenderness and gratitude are particularly significant indicators of mental functioning. Other changes present more articulated distributions, and it is interesting to note that the direction of change fostered by parenthood is not unique and does not follow a fixed rule.

*Conclusions:* Parenthood can open a time window in which greater plasticity and readiness to change are possible. Parenthood is therefore a precious opportunity (but not a certainty) to promote a growth in maturity for adults.

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## 1. Introduction

There are many variables - individual, couple, environmental, socio-cultural (Borisenko, 2007; Molina, 2006) that modulate the experience of parenthood and interact in synergistic or contrasting ways. Parenthood marks an important existential transition, and in this paper, we highlight how it is integrated in a social context that nowadays is in a phase of transition and uncertainty. On the philosophical side, we recall the reflections about the themes of consciousness and subjectivity (Dennett, 1997) and those of postmodernity, the pragmatics of scientific knowledge (Lyotard, 1979) and the liquid connotation of our society (Baumann, 2000, 2007, 2017).

It is therefore not surprising that in most of Europe there is a declining birth rate, especially in Italy where there has been a continuous decline over the last twelve years, with a 3.8% reduction in 2020 compared to the previous year and a 30% reduction compared to 2008 with the birth rate of 6.8 per 1000 inhabitants. In 2020, the average age of mothers at childbirth was 32.2 and the average number of children per woman was 1.24. (ISTAT, 2020).

Despite the decline in birth rate, there is an increased interest in parenthood within the scientific field, both in terms of quantity and with respect to the variety of themes and approaches.

Salcuni and Simonelli identified 4 areas of interest and innovation in the field of parenthood: “(a) parents’ representation of themselves, both in relation to children and to their care-giving role; (b) the quality of a couple’s relationship, both in terms of conjugal and co-parental bounds, and its influence on the quality of early mother-father-child interactions; (c) the early models of caregiver-baby interaction; (d) the recent approach to the "maternal brain" that represents the contribution coming from neurosciences, linked to adult's activation and cerebral functioning processes, in association with the parental role” (p.1, 2018). Beyond the different articulations, the primary perspective is connected to the parental role in function of children's growth, and hence assessments, clinical and psychotherapeutic interventions, promotion of parenting skills, analysis of relational styles and attachment patterns, etc. This is based on the observation that primary interactional experiences constitute the first foundation of the nascent mind and its direct subsequent development, in health vs psychopathology.

Another interesting perspective is the evaluation of parenthood as a significant experience that impacts on adult functionality. Experiences continue in fact to be the modulators of our mind even as adults, as Bion (1962) taught, and neuroscience proved (Kandel et al., 1999; Panksepp & Bivert, 2012; Siegel, 1999, 2012) In the complex parent-child relational experience, the adult can also learn and develop competences and functions that remain as (mental) heritage beyond the specific learning context.

Parenthood can therefore be for fathers and mothers an experience of genuine crisis that can precipitate unstable balances, both in personal and dual terms, or it can foster further processes of maturation and development. This is a streak of study that began decades ago and is now being rediscovered, particularly with current research on the transition to parenting, paternity, and parental resilience (Young et al., 2019). Historical contributions include Erikson's notion of generativity (1950) - the ability to care for the next generation - while, in motherhood, it is worth mentioning the idea of parenthood as a "stage of development" (Benedek, 1959), Bibring's concept of 'development crisis' (1959, 1961) and Pines' concept of the third separation-individuation process (1982). "Parenting appears to be a 'prime candidate' for stimulating adults' openness to new learning and coping strategies" (Newman and Newman, 1988, p. 313). Recent contributions, interpreted in different ways, show the theoretical relationship between parenting and adult development. Palkowitz et al. (2001) summarized the different approaches as follows: parenting as a stimulus for developmental changes, as a catalyst for learning and for the development of new coping strategies, as an opportunity to mature, as a qualitative evolutionary change to increase differentiation and integration. It should be emphasized that parenting offers an opportunity for maturation (Snarey et al., 1987), however little is known about what happens, especially in male psychology, when the crisis has a negative outcome.

As for fatherhood, it can be accomplished through a "jolt" or a "settling down" depending on the levels of maturity before parenthood, levels are generally related to the age at which a man becomes a father. In any case, paternity can be a "powerful generator of adult development" (Daniels & Weingarten 1986, p. 36); it "can lead men to become less self-centered, more giving, and achieve a greater sense of direction, responsibility, and maturity. It can also lead men to take fewer risks and temper their lifestyles." (Settersten & Cancel-Tirado, 2010, p. 87). Fatherhood presents a number of opportunities for men to experience "increased integration and differentiation, a qualitative developmental change ... [indicating] maturity" (Cowan, 1988, p. 14), a greater maturity, both in social and personality aspects (Borisenko, 2007). The study of Morishita (2006) highlighted several components of fatherhood, such as "affection for the family", "responsibility and calm", "expansion of perspectives", "perspective on the past and the future" and loss of freedom, attention to upbringing of children, to family and marital relationships and father-child relationships.

There is a rich literature that investigates the maternal side and has conceived maternity as a re-enactment or reparation for women's relationship with their mothers (Steinberg, 2005), or as a possibility for developing the ability to interact with others in a more interchangeable and permeable way (Baraitser, 2006), a self-expansion (Lanely et al., 2014). In a study conducted with semi-structured interviews Laney et al. (2015) underlined how becoming a mother is an

identity-transforming process that requires a challenging transitional period, and that the experience of motherhood largely depends on the balance between freedom and fusion with child.

The experience of parenthood does not only depend on internal resources, but it is also linked to the concreteness and specificity of family, social and cultural contexts. It is possible to detect wider differences between men and women and between mothers and fathers. In our time, different family models coexist simultaneously with different balances, more or less suffered or satisfactory, of integration/reconciliation between parental roles and individual aspirations. The changes for women have occurred gradually (Molina, 2006), while those for men have been more abrupt. On the other hand, much more pressing and articulated demands fall on women rather than on men, and the tasks of separation and identification between men and women are different (Josselson, 1987). According to Josselson, women constantly balance their autonomy with their relationships with others: "In women (and perhaps also in men) identity is deeply relational. It evolves to be" who they are in the world with others especially, but not exclusively, with a particular other"" (Josselson, 2017, p. 266). Josselson pointed out that work, love and care are all intertwined in a woman's sense of identity (*ibidem*). The contribution of Gilligan is syntonic as he wrote "seeing oneself woman is seeing oneself in a relationship of connection" (1982, p. 171). What has been said above about the centrality of the relational dimension in the definition of female identity more than in the definition of male identity, seems to us to be understood as a cultural fact. This does not invalidate the established fact that the very construction of mind and identity without distinction of sex is relational. This is confirmed at different levels and according to different theoretical frameworks, from Winnicott with his memorable words "there is no such thing as an infant" (1964, 1984), to the concept of the Markov blanket shared by the caregiver and the infant in Solms (2021) or Kaës's third topical (2000, 2006).

After the birth of the first child, divisions of roles are accentuated in the traditional sense (Baxter et al., 2015). Although fathers are currently more involved in relationships with their children, a gender disparity in housework and childcare is still evident. In addition, fathers are more frequently involved in play and leisure with children rather than in education, emotional support, and day-to-day care (Craig 2006; Milkie et al., 2012; Parker & Wang, 2013). This supports the idea that the costs and benefits of becoming a parent are moderated by gender and marital status, although the involvement of the father can be negotiated within the couple (Olsavsky et al., 2020).

Although the data are not unidirectional, it seems that for women having children leads to an increase in daily tensions, housework, disagreements with their partner, and worse social relationships, but protects them against depression (Kluwer, 2010; Maas et al., 2018; Twenge et al., 2003). On the other hand, married men who become fathers show little change in terms of costs and benefits (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003). Therefore, parenthood is associated with more positive well-being outcomes for fathers than for mothers (Nelson-Coffey et al., 2019). In any case, it is worth noting that the conditions under which parenting is experienced are different: according to Nelson et al. (2014), “parents are unhappy to the extent that they encounter relatively greater negative emotions, magnified financial problems, more sleep disturbance, and troubled marriages. By contrast, when parents experience greater meaning in life, satisfaction of their basic needs, greater positive emotions, and enhanced social roles, they are met with happiness and joy” (p. 846).

However, if we return to the question of how much parenthood contributes to personal growth, the research cited does not allow a clear-cut answer, since the costs may not necessarily be losses. It is probably easier to emphasize the costs, major commitments, worries, and tensions, as compared to the relational and individual gains, but above all the weight and meaning attached to costs and gains may differ: perhaps there are costs that some people willingly pay and others not.

Our interest, while not neglecting every day and concrete aspects, such as the impact at work and possible differences between men and women, focuses on the importance of changes in self-representation and relationships. These changes are somewhat more profound and therefore require an elaboration of lived experience and time. For this reason, our study considers parents with children aged at least three years.

There is much research concerning adults becoming parents, but what is proposed in this paper is somewhat different. Predominantly studies focus on the transition to parenthood (Don & Mickelson, 2014; Doss et al., 2009; Fox, 2009; Huss & Pollmann-Schult, 2020; Keizer & Schenk 2012; Kluwer, 2010) while our interest is to focus on certain acquisitions or changes that tended to be 'stable', or at least less related to the events taking place during the first months of life of children. In addition, there is frequently a focus on parenting, measured through appropriate instruments. Hurley et al. (2014) identified more than 150 different psychometric inventories which assess various aspects of parenting skills or attitudes. Among the most widespread and robust are the Parent-Child Relationship Inventory (PCRI) (Gerard, 1994), the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire (APQ) (Frick, 1991), the Parenting Alliance Measures (PAM) (Abidin & Konold, 1999), the Parenting Scale (PS) (Arnold et al., 1993), and Parenting and Family

Adjustment Scales (PAFAS) (Sanders & Morawska, 2010). Our intention is instead to consider parenthood, with the aim not so much to assess various areas of life per se but to capture the changes that the subjects themselves detect in relation to parenting. For this reason, no standardized tests were used, although the literature offers a wealth of instruments. Examples of these instruments are: sexual satisfaction scales (e.g. Index of Sexual Satisfaction (ISS) (Hudson et al., 1981), Global Measure of Sexual Satisfaction (GMSEX) (Lawrance & Byers 1992, 1995), and the New Sexual Satisfaction Scale-Short Form (NSSS-S) (Stulhofer et al., 2010, 2011); relationship satisfaction measures (e.g. General Measure of Relationship Satisfaction (GMREL) (Byers et al., 1998); DAS (Spanier 1976); Marriage satisfaction scale (MSS) (Çelik & İnanç, 2009); instruments to investigate close relationships and attachment patterns (Brennan et al., 1998; Lafontaine & Lussier, 2003; Lafontaine et al., 2016), and also instruments to assess relationship mindfulness (Baer et al., 2006; Daks et al., 2021; Kimmes et al., 2017) and Relationship Awareness (Snell, 2002).

In addition, in this study, we are looking for a general overview and therefore a tool is needed that investigated several areas, but without digging too deep: a protocol consisting of several tests would entail a time commitment for recompilation that is not always sustainable. Our point of view holds the idea of fathering and mothering as similar constructs to be investigated (Fagan et al., 2014), but we need to verify whether there are differences between men and women concerning personal acquisitions deriving from the experience of parenthood.

### Aims

The main objectives of this study were the following

1. investigating the changes that subjects believe to be promoted by parenthood Attention is focused on the changes, highlighted after a few years from the birth of children, not immediately, relating to self-perception and relationships, both with parents and within the couple, and in the object relations in general;
2. highlighting the comparison between maternal and paternal evaluations;
3. creating an *ad hoc* questionnaire for the above-mentioned objectives (a and b).

## 2. Materials and methods

### 2.1 Instruments

An *ad hoc* questionnaire was implemented to detect some aspects of parenthood and the changes it may promote, according to the evaluation of parents themselves.

The issues investigated were analyzed thanks to the study of the literature and through individual and group meetings with parents, in particular in pre- and post-partum courses. In addition, the

parents' comments and observations on the pilot version of the questionnaire made it possible to select some areas. In particular, in the current version, some questions have been eliminated (e.g., reaction of families of origin to the communication of pregnancy, different clothing choices, etc.); furthermore, the evaluation concerning the pre-parenthood experience has been simplified, providing only the options of “less”, “greater” and “equal”.

A characteristic of the instrument is the focus on subjective evaluation, not only because it is a self-report, but also because no questions were introduced to objectify or support the experience with data and behavior, i.e., we chose not to ask how much time the subjects spent with their partner or parents, how often they had dinner with friends, how often they quarreled. This does not mean that the concrete expression of the parent's experience, the specific context, the family and socio-environmental resources and ties are not relevant, on the contrary, the subject's resources, values, history, environment, children's characteristics, the time, and quality of the time the parent spends with them, etc. count in the experience, but the interest was to capture the representation, value and outcome of the experience for the subject, with specific attention to grasping what has changed. Therefore, some sections ask to indicate the evaluation in progress, but together to indicate if there have been variations (increases, decreases, or stationary conditions); other sections only ask to indicate if there have been any changes, such as for example whether parenting has sharpened disagreements with their parents, or had increased the sense of tenderness, regardless of the values these aspects had in the past.

After some personal data concerning health (including significant events during pregnancy and in the years following the child's birth) and work, the questionnaire asks for an evaluation of the subject as a parent and proposes a series of adjectives to define it. The relationship with others is investigated in general terms by asking for a numerical evaluation and then with more detailed questions that include a comparison between the current situation and the period before the birth of the children. The same method of comparison is proposed for the next two topics. In the first one, using the expression "Celebrating his birthday...", a section is introduced aiming at investigating the relationship with time and, in summary, a personal opinion about life balance and existence in general. The next section investigates how the parent feels when he/she is faced with difficulties. The couple's relationship is investigated through both a general and numerical evaluation as well as through questions concerning possible changes in the couple due to parenthood. With regard to the relationship with the subject's parents, a general evaluation is requested, as well as an assessment of whether parenthood has favored vs. compromised this relationship. Other changes are explored in the next section. The questionnaire closes by asking if the subject feels that something is missing, and if so, what is missing, with an open question

about any other changes. For the numerical evaluations, the 7-point or 3-point Likert scale was used.

The reliability statistic, performed on all 57 items, indicates a Cronbach's alpha of 0.74.

**Table 1.** Test KMO and Bartlett

<b>Test KMO and Bartlett</b>		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin		0,756
Test of sphericity of Bartlett	Chi-squared	5996,823
	Df	1485
	Sign.	0,000

**Table 2.** Component matrix

	Component		
	1	2	3
currently cheerful	<b>0,716</b>		
currently happy	<b>0,702</b>		
currently serene	<b>0,692</b>		
wholeness now	<b>0,616</b>		
currently satisfied	<b>0,591</b>		
happy	<b>0,582</b>		
stronger couple bond	<b>0,550</b>		
lost complicity and intimacy as a couple	<b>-0,520</b>		
currently ... towards others with confidence	<b>0,513</b>		
currently empty	<b>-0,491</b>		
currently old	<b>-0,469</b>		
currently sad	<b>-0,467</b>		
balanced	<b>0,456</b>		
increased conflict	<b>-0,445</b>		
alone	<b>-0,432</b>		
satisfied	<b>0,426</b>		
currently mistrustful and suspicious		<b>0,563</b>	
currently at risk		<b>0,536</b>	
currently vulnerable		<b>0,491</b>	



currently fragile		<b>0,469</b>	
authoritative		<b>0,440</b>	
to be competent		<b>0,416</b>	
more gratitude for own parent			<b>0,619</b>
favoured relationships with my mother			<b>0,573</b>
I feel bigger and more capable			<b>0,555</b>
favoured relationships with my mother			<b>0,544</b>
I get more attention			<b>0,525</b>
I give more attention to the partner			<b>0,499</b>
greater sense of responsibility			<b>0,471</b>
increased sense of tenderness			<b>0,433</b>

From the factor analysis, three main factors emerged.

The first factor consisted of 16 items and was characterized by a positive dimension of fullness, openness and satisfaction for themselves and relationship with others. We can call it the "Openness factor".

The second factor consisted of 6 items and was characterized by a more defensive tone. As in a sort of castling, positive aspects of parental competence and a feeling of fragility towards the outside world were combined. We can call it the "Castling or Closure factor".

The third factor consisted of 8 items and referred to aspects of greater depth, to changes in significant relationships, couple and parental relationships. We can call it the "Depth factor".

## 2.2 Procedure

After receiving authorization from the competent bodies (School board and specific school directorates), meetings were organized in every nursery school in Brescia and Verona taking part to the project. In the group meetings, the research was presented, and space was given to answer all questions; a presentation sheet of the project was handed over, and the questionnaire was delivered to those who were interested. The questionnaires were put into a sealed envelope and then returned independently by placing them in a box, similar to a letterbox, within the next two weeks. The questionnaire did not request any identifying personal data, and the data were therefore treated to ensure anonymity. The inclusion criterion for the sample was having children aged between 3 and 6 years. Exclusion criteria were difficulties in understanding the written language or serious illnesses of the subject and/or of the children. Nursery school age

range was considered optimal for assessing personal changes triggered by the experience of parenthood. In fact, with younger children, a lot of time and energy is devoted to daily care and to the creation of new balances, so the perception of changes might be less vivid for the subjects; moreover, profound changes are likely to require a certain amount of time to be elaborated and consolidated and therefore the situation may not be stable and mature yet. With older children, it is more likely that other significant life experiences will occur, and on the other hand, it is more difficult to be aware of changes that have consolidated over time.

### Sample

The sample consisted of 326 parents residing in northern Italy, i.e., 187 mothers and 139 fathers. The average age of the parents was 37 years. The mode value of mothers was 34 years, while that of fathers was 39. The age of the first child did not exceed 6 years for 72.8% of the sample and almost all (92%) of the first children were no older than 11 years.

The majority of the subjects were married (82%) or cohabiting (12.5%).

All men were working, while a quarter of the women were employed outside home. Women worked mainly as clerks, teachers, and shop assistants; men as manual workers, clerks, and freelancers. With regard to work, after the birth of the child, 25.1% of women kept the same job with the same tasks and time commitment, compared to 78.3% of men. Among women, 35.8% worked part-time (against 2.4% of men), and 16.6% decided to stop working.

### Statistics Analysis

The database was formatted through the Microsoft-Excel® software and later imported from the IBM-SPSS® software ver. 26.0.1 (IBM SPSS Inc. Chicago, Illinois).

Normality of the distributions was assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.

Categorical variables were presented as frequencies or percentages and compared with the use of the Chi-Square test or the Fisher's exact test, as appropriate; associations of the crosstabs were verified using standardized adjusted residuals.

Continuous variables were presented as means  $\pm$ SD (in case of a normal distribution), or medians and min/max (in case of a skewed distribution) and compared with the use of Student's T-test, Anova, or the Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis test; correlations among variables was performed by means of the Pearson's or Spearman's rank correlation test.

A two-sided  $\alpha$  level of 0.05 was used for all tests.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Descriptive analysis

In the evaluation of oneself as a mother or father, positive data prevailed, with a greater positivity linked to the emotional aspects and a greater variability related to the characteristics of competence: for example, 98.7% felt happy as a parent (scores greater than or equal to 4), while 79.1% considered themselves authoritative, 93.1% capable. The relationship with others was evaluated positively by 95%, and almost half of the sample (42.6%) expressed a very high score (6), even if in the specific questions that investigated object relations there was a greater dispersion of answers and a medium evaluation prevailed cumulatively.

Perception of changes

With regard to couple relationship, the clearest finding in quantitative terms was the perception of a strengthening of the bond, as shown in the table 3 below.

**Table 3.** Item “Stronger couple relationship”: Frequency, percentage, valid percentage, cumulative percentage

Stronger couple relationship	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
1	14	4,3	4,4	4,4
2	17	5,2	5,3	9,7
3	15	4,6	4,7	14,4
Valid 4	61	18,5	19,1	33,5
5	70	21,3	21,9	55,5
6	54	16,4	16,9	72,4
7	88	26,7	27,6	100,0
Total	319	97,0	100,0	
Missing	7	3,0		
Total	326	100,0		

The majority of the sample (79.2% with values 1,2, 3 on a scale of 7) did not consider their relationship to have the connotation of brotherhood and 56.2% did not consider that they had lost complicity and intimacy with their partner and did not record an increase in conflict (62.5%).

The distribution related to sexual satisfaction (Tab. V) and to giving and receiving attention within the couple (Tab. IV, VI) was much more articulated.

**Table 4.** Item “I have more attention for my partner”: Frequency, percentage, valid percentage, cumulative percentage”

I have more attention for my partner	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
1	24	7,3	7,5	7,5
2	26	7,9	8,2	15,7
3	36	10,9	11,3	27,0
4	89	27,1	27,9	54,9
5	62	18,8	19,4	74,3
6	57	17,3	17,9	92,2
7	25	7,6	7,8	100,0
Total	319	97,0	100,0	
Missing	7	3,0		
Total	326	100,0		

**Table 5.** Item “Increasedsexual satisfaction”: Frequency, percentage, valid percentage, cumulative percentage

increased sexual satisfaction	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
1	36	10,9	11,4	11,4
2	35	10,6	11,1	22,5
3	42	12,8	13,3	35,8
4	74	22,5	23,4	59,2
5	52	15,8	16,5	75,6
6	46	14,0	14,6	90,2
7	31	9,1	9,5	99,7
Total	316	96,0	100,0	
Missing	10	4,0		
Total	326	100,0		

**Table 6.** Item “I get more attention”: Frequency, percentage, valid percentage, cumulative percentage

I get more attention	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
1	31	9,4	9,7	9,7
2	45	13,7	14,1	23,8
3	46	14,0	14,4	38,2
4	86	26,1	27,0	65,2
5	55	16,7	17,2	82,4
6	31	9,4	9,7	92,2
7	25	7,6	7,8	100,0
Total	319	97,0	100,0	
Missing	7	3,0		
Total	326	100,0		

Among the changes related to the experience of parenthood, the most consistent were the following: increase in tenderness (Tab. VII), increase in the sense of responsibility (89,1% for values from 4 to 7) and perception of feeling older and more capable (88,4%). Another significant increase was in gratitude towards the partner, shared by 81.5%.

**Table 7.** Item “increased sense of tenderness”: Frequency, percentage, valid percentage, cumulative percentage

increased sense of tenderness	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
1	6	1,8	1,9	1,9
2	7	2,1	2,2	4,1
3	10	3,0	3,1	7,2
4	43	13,1	13,4	20,6
5	66	20,1	20,6	41,3
6	98	29,8	30,6	71,9
7	90	27,4	28,1	100,0
Total	320	97,3	100,0	
Missing	6	2,7		
Total	326	100,0		

Relationship with own mother seems to be favored by parenthood, except in 29.1% of cases; while relationship with father has improved in 70.4% of cases. Conflicts with parents increased for 24.5% of the sample.

#### *Mothers and fathers*

The Mann-Whitney test indicates some differences in the ratings expressed by women and men. In their perception of themselves as parents, mothers and fathers did not have different evaluations except for two characteristics: mothers felt somewhat more competent than fathers; they also felt more rigid than fathers.

With respect to object relationships, women felt at a greater extent that they wanted deep and demanding relationships, whereas men felt that their relationships took place mainly in the workplace. With respect to the passing of time, the perception of feeling older was greater in women than in men. In difficult situations, men felt stronger, more playful, more detached and less fragile than women. About couple relationship, men felt that they cared more about their partner than women, and they also felt a greater sense of gratitude towards their partner. In women, more than in men, an improvement about the relationship with their mother has been underlined. Women had a greater perception that parenthood multiplied their commitments and that they risked to be split among many activities. In addition, women also felt that something was missing, to a greater extent than men ( $p=.000$ ).

#### *Age of the parents*

The possibility that the different ages of the parents could have an influence on differences in the experience of parenthood was examined. The only statistically significant, and yet small, differences were the perception of receiving more attention, which decreased with age ( $p= .004$ ), and the loss of partnership ( $p= .001$ ), which was directly associated with age.

#### *Age of the first child*

If we look at how long-ago mothers and fathers became parents (i.e., the age of the first child) rather than considering their age, other differences emerge. Again, the significance was high, but the magnitude was small. With regard to the perception of the subjects as parents, the perception of themselves as authoritative ( $p= .004$ ), strict ( $p= .000$ ) and capable ( $p= .01$ ) parents increased. In the relational approach, the sense of trust and serenity increased ( $p= .008$ ); in the difficulties, the perception of feeling increased ( $p= .000$ ).

On the other hand, relationships with their parents worsened, both with mother ( $p= .000$ ) and with father ( $p= .001$ ), and conflicts increased ( $p= .001$ ).

*Current situation vs. situation before becoming a parent*

**Table 8.** shows significant associations to the test of Chi-squared where the adjusted residuals are greater than 1.96.

**Taking an interest in others – before / currently**

		Currently - interest			Total	
		1	2	3		
Before- interest	1	Count	3	20	16	39
		% within Before- interest	7,7%	51,3%	41,0%	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	0,4	-0,1	-0,1	
	2	Count	8	104	101	213
		% within Before- interest	3,8%	48,8%	47,4%	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	-2,8	-1,5	2,9	
	3	Count	9	38	14	61
		% within Before- interest	14,8%	62,3%	23,0%	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	3,0	1,8	-3,3	
Total	Count	20	162	131	313	
	% within Before- interest	6,4%	51,8%	41,9%	100,0%	

**Distrustful and suspicious – before / currently**

		Currently - suspicious			Total	
		1	2	3		
Before - suspicious	1	Count	14	27	17	58
		% within Before - suspicious	24,1%	46,6%	29,3%	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	-2,8	0,7	2,7	
	2	Count	101	77	22	200
		% within Before - suspicious	50,5%	38,5%	11,0%	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	4,8	-1,8	-3,8	
	3	Count	11	27	14	52
		% within Before - suspicious	21,2%	51,9%	26,9%	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	-3,1	1,5	2,1	
Total	Count	126	131	53	310	

% within Before - suspicious	40,6%	42,3%	17,1%	100,0%
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**Wanting meaningful relationships but struggling to find them – before / currently**

		Currently - wanting relationships			
		1	2	3	Total
Before - wanting relationships	1 Count	4	28	17	49
	% within Before - wanting relationships	8,2%	57,1%	34,7%	100,0%
	Adjusted Residual	-4,9	2,5	3,0	
	2 Count	103	78	32	213
	% within Before - wanting relationships	48,4%	36,6%	15,0%	100,0%
	Adjusted Residual	4,8	-2,5	-2,9	
	3 Count	14	20	10	44
	% within Before - wanting relationships	31,8%	45,5%	22,7%	100,0%
	Adjusted Residual	-1,1	0,6	0,6	
Total	Count	121	126	59	306
	% within Before - wanting relationships	39,5%	41,2%	19,3%	100,0%

**Meeting people but not getting emotionally involved – before / currently**

		Currently – meeting people			
		1	2	3	Total
Before – meeting people	1 Count	6	32	6	44
	% within Before – meeting people	13,6%	72,7%	13,6%	100,0%
	Adjusted Residual	-3,4	3,0	0,5	
	2 Count	97	115	26	238
	% within Before – meeting people	40,8%	48,3%	10,9%	100,0%
	Adjusted Residual	2,7	-2,2	-0,6	
	3 Count	11	14	4	29



	% within Before – meeting people	37,9 %	48,3 %	13,8 %	100,0 %
	Adjusted Residual	0,1	-0,4	0,4	
Total	Count	114	161	36	311
	% within Before – meeting people	36,7 %	51,8 %	11,6 %	100,0 %

**No longer have time for people outside their family- – before / currently**

		Currently - no time outside their family			Total
		1	2	3	
Before no time outside their family	1 Count	21	48	40	109
	% within Before no time outside their family	19,3%	44,0%	36,7%	100,0%
	Adjusted Residual	-2,3	-1,0	3,5	
	2 Count	55	61	12	128
	% within Before no time outside their family	43,0%	47,7%	9,4%	100,0%
	Adjusted Residual	5,3	-0,1	-5,3	
3	Count	8	40	26	74
	% within Before no time outside their family	10,8%	54,1%	35,1%	100,0%
	Adjusted Residual	-3,6	1,2	2,3	
Total	Count	84	149	78	311
	% within Before no time outside their family	27,0%	47,9%	25,1%	100,0%

**Having deeper and more enriching interpersonal relationships - before / currently**

		Currently - deeper relationships			Total
		1	2	3	
Before - deeper relationships	1 Count	8	32	31	71
	% within Before - deeper relationships	11,3%	45,1%	43,7%	100,0%
	Adjusted Residual	-2,0	-2,3	4,5	
2	Count	42	108	36	186

	% within Before - deeper relationships	22,6%	58,1%	19,4%	100,0%
	Adjusted Residual	1,8	0,4	-2,1	
3	Count	10	37	6	53
	% within Before - deeper relationships	18,9%	69,8%	11,3%	100,0%
	Adjusted Residual	-0,1	2,1	-2,3	
Total	Count	60	177	73	310
	% within Before - deeper relationships	19,4%	57,1%	23,5%	100,0%

### Being selective and demanding - before / currently

		Currently - selective				
		1	2	3	Total	
Before – selective	1	Count	2	40	68	110
		% within Before - selective	1,8%	36,4%	61,8%	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	-4,0	-1,6	4,2	
	2	Count	31	76	47	154
		% within Before - selective	20,1%	49,4%	30,5%	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	4,7	2,4	-5,4	
	3	Count	3	16	27	46
		% within Before - selective	6,5%	34,8%	58,7%	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	-1,2	-1,2	1,9	
Total	Count	36	132	142	310	
	% within Before - selective	11,6%	42,6%	45,8%	100,0%	

**Sad - before / currently**

			Currently - sad			Total
			1	2	3	
Before - sad	1	Count	26	25	6	57
		% within Before - sad	45,6%	43,9%	10,5%	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	-5,5	5,2	1,4	
	2	Count	192	26	13	231
		% within Before - sad	83,1%	11,3%	5,6%	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	6,1	-6,1	-1,0	
	3	Count	13	9	1	23
		% within Before - sad	56,5%	39,1%	4,3%	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	-2,0	2,5	-0,4	
Total	Count	231	60	20	311	
	% within Before - sad	74,3%	19,3%	6,4%	100,0%	

**Old - before / currently**

			Currently - old			Total
			1	2	3	
Before - old	1	Count	38	38	8	84
		% within Before - old	45,2%	45,2%	9,5%	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	-5,1	4,9	1,0	
	2	Count	164	28	12	204
		% within Before - old	80,4%	13,7%	5,9%	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	6,7	-6,5	-1,1	
	3	Count	8	13	2	23
		% within Before - old	34,8%	56,5%	8,7%	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	-3,5	3,6	0,3	
Total	Count	210	79	22	311	
	% within Before - old	67,5%	25,4%	7,1%	100,0%	

**Happy - before / currently**

			Currently old			
			1	2	3	Total
Before - happy	1	Count	3	13	49	65
		% within Before - happy	4,6%	20,0%	75,4%	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	0,9	-3,5	3,2	
	2	Count	4	89	105	198
		% within Before - happy	2,0%	44,9%	53,0%	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	-1,2	2,9	-2,5	
	3	Count	2	18	26	46
		% within Before - happy	4,3%	39,1%	56,5%	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	0,6	0,0	-0,3	
Total	Count	9	120	180	309	
	% within Before - happy	2,9%	38,8%	58,3%	100,0%	

**Empty - before / currently**

			Currently - empty			
			1	2	3	Total
Before - empty	1	Count	49	10	1	60
		% within Before - empty	81,7%	16,7%	1,7%	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	-2,1	2,1	0,3	
	2	Count	207	12	2	221
		% within Before - empty	93,7%	5,4%	0,9%	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	4,0	-3,9	-1,0	
	3	Count	18	7	1	26
		% within Before - empty	69,2%	26,9%	3,8%	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	-3,4	3,2	1,2	
Total	Count	274	29	4	307	
	% within Before - empty	89,3%	9,4%	1,3%	100,0%	

**Full - before / currently**

			Currently full			Total
			1	2	3	
Before - full	1	Count	3	22	32	57
		% within Before - full	5,3%	38,6%	56,1%	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	-1,2	-1,3	2,0	
	2	Count	24	105	77	206
		% within Before - full	11,7%	51,0%	37,4%	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	1,8	2,4	-3,5	
	3	Count	2	13	25	40
		% within Before - full	5,0%	32,5%	62,5%	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	-1,1	-1,9	2,5	
Total	Count	29	140	134	303	
	% within Before - full	9,6%	46,2%	44,2%	100,0%	

**Worried about time passing - before / currently**

			Currently - worried			Total
			1	2	3	
Before - worried	1	Count	25	48	20	93
		% within Before - worried	26,9%	51,6%	21,5%	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	-4,4	3,2	1,7	
	2	Count	110	53	17	180
		% within Before - worried	61,1%	29,4%	9,4%	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	6,3	-3,6	-3,7	
	3	Count	8	17	13	38
		% within Before - worried	21,1%	44,7%	34,2%	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	-3,3	0,9	3,2	
Total	Count	143	118	50	311	
	% within Before - worried	46,0%	37,9%	16,1%	100,0%	

**At risk - before / currently**

			17 Currently - at risk			
			1	2	3	Total
17 before – at risk	1	Count	20	45	10	75
		% within 17prima_arischio	26,7%	60,0%	13,3%	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	-4,1	3,2	1,7	
	2	Count	119	77	11	207
		% within 17prima_arischio	57,5%	37,2%	5,3%	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	5,2	-3,6	-2,9	
	3	Count	5	13	5	23
		% within 17prima_arischio	21,7%	56,5%	21,7%	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	-2,5	1,2	2,4	
Total	Count	144	135	26	305	
	% within 17prima_arischio	47,2%	44,3%	8,5%	100,0%	

**Fragile - before / currently**

			Currently - fragile			
			1	2	3	Total
Before - fragile	1	Count	17	27	7	51
		% within Before - fragile	33,3%	52,9%	13,7%	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	-3,4	2,7	1,5	
	2	Count	127	55	12	194
		% within Before - fragile	65,5%	28,4%	6,2%	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	4,9	-3,9	-1,9	
	3	Count	24	30	7	61
		% within Before - fragile	39,3%	49,2%	11,5%	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	-2,7	2,3	0,9	

Total	Count	168	112	26	306
	% within Before - fragile	54,9%	36,6%	8,5%	100,0%

### Vulnerable - before / currently

		currently vulnerable			Total	
		1	2	3		
Before vulnerable	1	Count	15	37	22	74
		% within Before vulnerable	20,3 %	50,0 %	29,7 %	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	-3,4	0,8	3,3	
	2	Count	95	91	24	210
		% within Before vulnerable	45,2 %	43,3 %	11,4 %	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	4,4	-1,3	-3,9	
	3	Count	4	13	7	24
		% within Before vulnerable	16,7 %	54,2 %	29,2 %	100,0%
		Adjusted Residual	-2,1	0,9	1,6	
Total	Count	114	141	53	308	
	% within Before vulnerable	37,0 %	45,8 %	17,2 %	100,0%	

In the open question asking if the subjects had noticed any other changes, 66% replied in the negative, while others expressed some observations, the most frequent of which are: feeling more responsible in their life choices (6.2%), making sacrifices (2.8%), more attention and sensitivity towards children (2.4%), more anxiety (2.4%), enjoying life more (2.1%), worry about the future of children (1.8%), feeling better in general (1.8%), more patience (1.5%), giving priority to children and a grow in faith (1.2%).

## 4. Discussion

According to women and men's opinion, parenthood promotes positive changes, increasing gratitude, tenderness, a sense of responsibility, a feeling of being older and more capable; it also helps to strengthen the couple's bond and improve relationships with their parents. These changes are not linked to the age of adulthood and seem to be promoted by the experience of parenthood in itself.

Increased tenderness and gratitude are particularly significant indicators of mental functioning. According to the conceptualization of affective neuroscience (Panksepp & Biven, 2012) tenderness is linked to the activation of the basic affective system: Care. This system, which is present in both sexes (it is not only maternal instinct) supports caring for others, especially for own children. It is therefore a good indicator of parental function.

With regard to gratitude, it is worth mentioning the work of M. Klein (1957), who considered gratitude as the basis of the capacity to love, the ability to love, which is indispensable for recognizing positive (good) aspects in oneself and others and for achieving healthy development. It is therefore a very positive fact that parenting makes adults feel more capable of mutual gratitude.

The picture concerning the couple's functioning is quite composite: the bond seems to be strengthened, but a large percentage of participants declares that most of the couple's complicity and intimacy has been lost. Few come to perceive the relationship as brotherhood, and the distribution regarding sexual satisfaction is varied, with signs of it either increasing or diminishing. Various studies show relational decline (Doss et al., 2009; Laerence et al., 2007; Kluwer & Johnson 2007; Twenge et al., 2003) and sexual dissatisfaction (Ahlborg et al., 2008; *Bäckström* et al., 2018; Schütze et al., 2022), but this in the first few years of the child's life. On the other hand, relational satisfaction appears to be associated with sexual satisfaction in men, but not in mothers (Gurreri et al. 2022). The decrease in relationship satisfaction seems to be greater in women than in men (Kluwer, 2010; Twenge et al., 2003) and is associated with increased conflict (Huss & Pollmahn-Schult, 2020). Parenting stress, in women is instead a unique predictor of sexual satisfaction (Maas et al., 2018). In our sample, which includes couples with children of at least three years, a varied picture emerges, but the differences are not attributable to gender: probably every couple has its own balance and functioning, and the same external events can have very different impacts. This is in line with more current perspectives which, by not focusing on average values, show precisely a variety of outcomes (Don & Michelson, 2014), whereby, as Kluwer (2010) wrote “negative changes in the relationship are likely but far from inevitable” (p. 116).

Even with respect to object relations, the data do not allow us to indicate a common evolution for all the subjects in the sample. Although we seem to identify some elements indicative of greater depth and maturity, there are also different trends or situations that have remained stable. We highlight how, regardless of the current assessment (low, medium, high) there is a perception among parents that they desire meaningful relationships, but struggle to find them. With respect to the depth of relationships, those who express a high value mainly believe that the situation is



confirmed, and significant are the associations that indicate that in the past there was less depth, but to a lesser extent, though still statistically significant, the opposite association also occurs. In addition, there is a change in both the increase and decrease in the depth of relationships among the current average values. The selectivity of relationships remains predominantly stable over all three present values, with greater significance for low present values, but the increase in selectivity is also significant for those who record high present values.

With respect to the relationship with the family of origin, the improvement in the relationship with parents seems, at a greater distance from the birth of the first child, to be no longer perceptible. This could simply indicate the intervention of other factors in the vicissitudes of life, or perhaps it could suggest that the greater closeness felt in assuming the same parental role requires further work on the relationship to maintain a more positive connotation. However, it remains positive that early years of parenthood are characterized by such an improvement in parental relationships, as an adequate identification with own parents favours the processing of (normal) parental distress (Manzano et al., 1999; Manzano & Palacio Espasa, 2012).

A varied situation also emerges with respect to the emotions connected with subjects' birthday. Considering the average present values, there is a tendency to feel sadder and older than in the past. Concern about the passing of time remains stable, on all current levels, but in those who are averagely concerned, there is also a significant association with greater concern than in the past, while higher levels of current concern are associated with less concern than in the past. With respect to happiness, mean and high current values are significant, with respect to which there is confirmation compared to the past, but ratings for who is happier now than in the past are also statistically significant. Possibly, having children gives a more immediate and constant measure of the passing of time and the cycle of life, but the emotional impact or processing of this evidence possibly depends on a variety of factors.

It seems important to us to emphasize that the direction of change promoted by parenthood is not unique and does not follow a fixed rule. Parents experienced increases or decreases in a trait considered depending on the levels at which this trait was evaluated in the present. For example, with regard to relationships within couples and with parents, the more the subjects evaluated these same relationships positively, the more they felt they had improved after becoming parents. However, there are also statistically significant associations which, considering the same current level of evaluation, (e.g., feelings of emptiness or fragility) show that all options for change are possible: stability, increase or decrease. A large longitudinal study also highlighted the heterogeneity and the existence of different response trajectories between parents (Galatzer et al., 2011). It can therefore be hypothesized that the changes promoted by parenting are

influenced not only by previous levels of competence and functioning but perhaps also by the existence of a zone of proximal development, in which environmental factors play a very significant role.

In the comparison between mothers and fathers, some small differences emerge. Contrary to a common and dated image, mothers perceive themselves as more competent and more rigid than fathers. This confirms the evolution of the family, where, at least as regards the Italian territory, the father is no longer the authority that dictates the rules, with mothers increasingly assuming a managerial function within the family, replacing the absence with a virtual presence, with the organization and control of time and activities, in particular of children, mediated by digital tools (Lancini, 2019). In line with a more traditional female image, culturally influenced, women evaluate themselves in the face of difficulties as more fragile, less strong, less lucid, and less detached than men. However, it should be emphasized that these differences, while statistically significant, are small. We can therefore assume that differences related to gender are, at least in self-representations, reducing. As far as gender differences are concerned, these are not expressed so much in the internal effects or in the representations, but the greatest difference is found in the concrete aspects, particularly in the work environment, where only a quarter of the female sample maintained the same employment contract work compared to  $\frac{3}{4}$  of men. Since parenting led to changes in employment relationships predominantly in women in our sample, we confirm (Baxter et al., 2008) the existence of gender inequalities. The prevalently female feeling of being dispersed in various activities can be interpreted as the effect of an excessive load, increased as a result of parenthood, which does not weigh equally on men and women (Gurreri et al., 2022). As was also found in the research by Maas et al. (2018) “Overall, stress experienced inside and outside the couple was demonstrated more in mothers, with less satisfaction with coparenting quality and more feelings of role overload (..). Although there has been a shift toward fathers becoming more involved in housework and child care, there continue to be more demands placed on mothers to balance multiple roles after the transition to parenthood” (p. 121). The predominantly female perception that something is missing seems interpretable, in our opinion, as being at least partly due to an unequal distribution of workloads between mothers and fathers. None of the participants indicated what is missing, suggesting that it is not something concrete, something material that is needed; it seems to us that it can be interpreted as a lack of a sense of centrality, of being in the present moment, of time for the self, or perhaps an excessive prevalence of *negotium* over *otium*. In partial support of this is the result of Maas et al. (2018), who noted that longer working hours were predictive of lower sexual satisfaction, but in women, lower sexual satisfaction was also predicted by reduced or no

working hours. The topic would require in-depth studies, but if working outside home contributes to personal fulfillment and identity, these results are not so unexpected.

Our study has some limitations, *in primis* the comparison between the situation before parenthood and the subsequent one is not based on a longitudinal study, but on retrospective evaluations and it is known that memories change depending on the emotional state of the moment in which the issue is asked. However, our aim was not to approximate an objective assessment but to capture the subjective assessment, including distortions of memories and also the effects of cognitive dissonance. In evaluating the self, its own characteristics, affections, and well-being, (also) personal representations are relevant.

Furthermore, a limitation of the work is given by the characteristics of the sample itself: we took into consideration adults residing in Northern Italy, belonging to a medium-high socio-economic class, therefore the results are limited in their generalizability. Another limitation can be represented by a kind of social desirability, in fact although the questionnaires were anonymous, the prevailing positive social connotation of parenthood (and even more of motherhood) may have led to an increase in positive responses. An element of interest in this questionnaire is the variety of themes proposed. Several subjects freely stressed that filling in the questionnaire guided them towards individual or couple reflection. We, therefore, believe that the questionnaire, in addition to being used for research purposes, could be usefully used in parent training and support groups.

This research has highlighted problems that could be the object of future research; in particular, emphasis is placed on the evaluation of gender inequalities, especially related to work, outside and inside the home, and their personal and relational repercussions; another area of interest is represented by the monitoring of changes in relations with families of origin, especially considering how, in the Italian reality, childcare is often supported by grandparents. Another rather complex field is represented by the identification of those factors which, in the medium-to-long term, promote or hinder parenthood and the positive acquisitions deriving from this experience. There are studies that have focused on the conditions that can facilitate the transition to parenthood (Nelson et al., 2014) but little has been studied in the subsequent period, when children are three or more years old.

## 5. Conclusions

In conclusion, there is no doubt that parenthood is a 'costly' choice beyond the transition phase (Perales, 2019). However, if what is at stake is the promotion of maturity, is this enough to consider parenting a bad/risky investment? The topic is certainly complex and there is no simple answer or an answer that applies to everyone. Although our sample includes subjects who

reported more discomfort or difficulties than those they experienced before becoming parents, our study confirms that, in the majority of cases, parenthood promotes positive changes and personal growth in both women and men, without significant gender differences. Almost all the parents in our sample record increasing gratitude, tenderness, a sense of responsibility, and a feeling of being older and more capable; parenting also helps to strengthen the couple's bond and improve the relationship with their own parents. We must, however, note that in various areas the changes noted showed different directions, with some parents increasing, for others decreasing, without a rule being discernible, at least with the data in our possession. In short, we believe that parenting can open a time window in which greater plasticity and willingness to change are possible and it is therefore a precious opportunity to promote health, even if this might not be the most suitable experience for personal growth in all cases.

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### **Authors' contribution**

C.T. did the statistical analysis, wrote the paragraph "Statistics Analysis", and prepared the tables.

P.M. designed the questionnaire and wrote all the other paragraphs.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any potential conflict of interest.

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**Appendix A**PROTOCOLLO:   

Luogo: .....

Data: .....

**COME CI CAMBIA LA GENITORIALITA'**

Quando gli adulti divengono genitori, sovente avvengono vari cambiamenti, sia nell'organizzazione della vita quotidiana, sia dentro di loro. Attraverso questo questionario si vuole indagare alcuni di questi possibili cambiamenti. Non ci sono risposte giuste o sbagliate: è importante che ognuno possa indicare come ha vissuto fino ad oggi il proprio essere madre o padre.

Il questionario è anonimo.

Può essere impegnativo soffermarsi e considerare alcuni temi proposti dal questionario non è inoltre molto facile accorgersi immediatamente dei cambiamenti: anche per questo impegno vi ringrazio per la collaborazione.

Cordiali saluti

Autore

1. Lei è:             madre             padre
  
2. Di quanti figli? .....
  
3. Che età hanno?    1..... 2..... 3..... 4.....
  
4. Qual è la sua età? .....
  
5. Qual è l'età dell'altro/i genitore/i dei suoi figli?  
.....
  
6. E': (Indicare il proprio stato civile. Se ci sono stati cambiamenti dalla nascita dei figli a ora si possono segnare più risposte, numerandole nei quadratini e segnalando con il numero più alto la situazione attuale):  

<input type="checkbox"/> nubile/celibe	<input type="checkbox"/> sposata/o	<input type="checkbox"/> risposata/o
<input type="checkbox"/> convivente	<input type="checkbox"/> separata/o	<input type="checkbox"/> vedova/o
  
7. Con chi vive? (Indicare le persone che sono stabilmente presenti in casa con lei, ad es. figli di eventuali precedenti relazioni, figli in affidato, genitori, suoceri, ecc.)  
.....  
.....  
.....
  
8. Durante la gravidanza e i primi anni di vita di suo/a figlio/a si sono verificati eventi a suo parere particolarmente significativi (ad esempio malattie, ricoveri, separazioni, lutti, matrimoni, ecc.)?  
 si                             no  
  
 Se sì, quali? (indicare anche i tempi e le persone coinvolte)  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....
  
9. Suo/suoi figlio/i ha/hanno attualmente problemi di salute?  
 sì                             no  
  
 Se sì, specifichi per ogni figlio quali sono i problemi.  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....
  
10. Lei o altre persone della famiglia soffrite attualmente di problemi di salute?  
 sì                             no

Se sì, specifichi chi ne soffre e per quali problemi.

.....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

11. Attualmente lavora?

<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Sì</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>No</b>
- Che lavoro svolge? ..... - A: <input type="checkbox"/> tempo pieno <input type="checkbox"/> part time  - Ci sono stati significativi cambiamenti nella sua attività lavorativa, da quando è diventato/a genitore? <input type="checkbox"/> non ci sono stati cambiamenti significativi <input type="checkbox"/> ho richiesto una riduzione dell'orario di lavoro <input type="checkbox"/> lavoro per più tempo <input type="checkbox"/> c'è stata una modifica nelle mie mansioni <input type="checkbox"/> altro .....	- Se non lavora ha scelto lei di sospendere l'attività?  <input type="checkbox"/> Sì <input type="checkbox"/> No  - Pensa di riprendere il lavoro?  <input type="checkbox"/> Sì <input type="checkbox"/> No  Se sì, quando? ..... ..... .....

12. Il/la suo/a partner attualmente lavora?

<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Sì</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>No</b>
- Che lavoro svolge?..... - A: <input type="checkbox"/> tempo pieno <input type="checkbox"/> part time  - Ci sono stati cambiamenti significativi nella sua attività lavorativa, da quando è diventato/a genitore? <input type="checkbox"/> non ci sono stati cambiamenti significativi <input type="checkbox"/> ho richiesto una riduzione dell'orario di lavoro <input type="checkbox"/> lavoro per più tempo <input type="checkbox"/> c'è stata una modifica nelle mie mansioni <input type="checkbox"/> altro .....	- Se non lavora ha scelto lei di sospendere l'attività?  <input type="checkbox"/> Sì <input type="checkbox"/> No  - Pensa di riprendere il lavoro?  <input type="checkbox"/> Sì..... <input type="checkbox"/> No  Se sì, quando? ..... ..... .....

13. Come madre/padre si ritiene tendenzialmente (indicare su una scala da 1 a 7, dove 1 è il valore più basso e 7 il valore più alto, il suo grado di accordo):

- appagata/o  
 1    2    3    4    5    6    7
- insoddisfatta/o  
 1    2    3    4    5    6    7
- equilibrata/o  
 1    2    3    4    5    6    7
- capace  
 1    2    3    4    5    6    7
- incompetente  
 1    2    3    4    5    6    7
- fortunata/o  
 1    2    3    4    5    6    7
- rigida/o  
 1    2    3    4    5    6    7
- senza polso  
 1    2    3    4    5    6    7
- preoccupata/o  
 1    2    3    4    5    6    7
- felice  
 1    2    3    4    5    6    7
- amica/o  
 1    2    3    4    5    6    7
- autorevole  
 1    2    3    4    5    6    7
- sola/o  
 1    2    3    4    5    6    7

14. Come valuta complessivamente il suo rapporto con gli altri?  
 (indicare su una scala da 1 a 7, dove 1 è il valore più basso e 7 il valore più alto, il suo valore)

- 1    2    3    4    5    6    7

## 15. Pensando il suo rapporto con gli altri le pare di:

	<b>attualmente</b> (indicare su una scala da 1 a 3, dove 1 è il valore più basso e 3 il valore più alto, il suo grado di accordo)	<b>prima di diventare genitore</b> (indicare se in misura maggiore >, uguale =, minore <)
- avere interesse nei confronti delle altre persone	① ② ③	> = <
- avvicinarsi agli altri con fiducia e serenità	① ② ③	> = <
- essere diffidente e sospettosa/o	① ② ③	> = <
- desiderare rapporti significativi ma faticare a trovarne	① ② ③	> = <
- incontrare persone ma non farsi coinvolgere affettivamente	① ② ③	> = <
- coltivare relazioni ma superficiali	① ② ③	> = <
- non avere più tempo per pensare a persone esterne alla propria famiglia	① ② ③	> = <
- frequentare persone per lavoro	① ② ③	> = <
- avere rapporti interpersonali più profondi ed arricchenti	① ② ③	> = <
- essere selettiva/o ed esigente	① ② ③	> = <

## 16. Festeeggiando il suo compleanno si sente/si sentiva:

	<b>attualmente si sente</b> (indicare su una scala da 1 a 3, dove 1 è il valore più basso e 3 il valore più alto, il suo grado di accordo)	<b>prima di diventare genitore si sentiva</b> (indicare se in misura maggiore >, uguale =, minore <)
- triste	① ② ③	> = <
- vecchia/o	① ② ③	> = <
- soddisfatta/o	① ② ③	> = <
- serena/o	① ② ③	> = <
- felice	① ② ③	> = <
- vuota/o	① ② ③	> = <
- piena/o	① ② ③	> = <
- preoccupata/o del tempo che passa	① ② ③	> = <
- allegra/o	① ② ③	> = <

## 17. Di fronte alle difficoltà si sente/si sentiva:

	<b>attualmente si sente</b> (indicare su una scala da 1 a 3, dove 1 è il valore più basso e 3 il valore più alto, il suo grado di accordo)	<b>prima di diventare genitore si sentiva</b> (indicare se in misura maggiore >, uguale =, minore <)
- battagliera/o	① ② ③	> = <
- a rischio	① ② ③	> = <
- tenace	① ② ③	> = <
- fragile	① ② ③	> = <
- distaccata/o	① ② ③	> = <
- esposta/o	① ② ③	> = <
- forte	① ② ③	> = <
- lucida/o	① ② ③	> = <



## 18. Come valuta complessivamente il proprio rapporto di coppia?

(indicare su una scala da 1 a 7, dove 1 è il valore più basso e 7 il valore più alto, il suo valore)

①      ②      ③      ④      ⑤      ⑥      ⑦

## 19. Dal momento in cui è diventata/o genitore, le pare si siano verificati alcuni cambiamenti nel suo rapporto di coppia? (indicare su una scala da 1 a 7, dove 1 è il valore più basso e 7 il valore più alto, il suo grado di accordo)

- sento di avere più attenzione nei confronti del partner	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
- sento di ricevere più attenzioni	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
- sento che siamo diventati quasi come fratello e sorella	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
- sento un maggior appagamento nell'intesa sessuale	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
- sento che si è persa gran parte della nostra complicità ed intimità di coppia	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
- sento che è aumentata la conflittualità	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
- sento che il legame di coppia è più forte	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦

## 20. La maternità/paternità (indicare su una scala da 1 a 7, dove 1 è il valore più basso e 7 il valore più alto, il suo grado di accordo):

- ha accresciuto il mio senso di tenerezza	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
- ha favorito i rapporti con mia madre	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
- ha favorito i rapporti con mio padre	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
- ha contribuito ad acuire i contrasti con i miei genitori	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
- mi ha fatto sentire più grande e capace	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
- ha suscitato nei confronti della/del madre/padre dei miei figli un maggior senso di gratitudine	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
- ha moltiplicato i miei impegni facendomi sentire "dispersa/o" in troppe attività	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
- mi ha fatto sentire un senso di responsabilità rispetto alla mia vita e a quella dei componenti della mia famiglia, che prima non conoscevo	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦

21. Come valuta il rapporto con sua madre (indicare su una scala da 1 a 7, dove 1 è il valore più basso e 7 il valore più alto, il suo valore)?

①      ②      ③      ④      ⑤      ⑥      ⑦

22. Come valuta il rapporto con suo padre (indicare su una scala da 1 a 7, dove 1 è il valore più basso e 7 il valore più alto, il suo valore)?

①      ②      ③      ④      ⑤      ⑥      ⑦

23. Ci sono attività, occupazioni, interessi che ha trascurato con l'arrivo dei figli?

sì                                       no

Se sì, quali? (è possibile indicare più risposte, numerandole nei quadratini in ordine di importanza dove 1 è più importante, e inserire altre voci)

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> cure estetiche   | <input type="checkbox"/> viaggi             | <input type="checkbox"/> pulizie domestiche     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> amici            | <input type="checkbox"/> mostre, conferenze | <input type="checkbox"/> corsi di aggiornamento |
| <input type="checkbox"/> teatro, concerti | <input type="checkbox"/> letture            | <input type="checkbox"/> TV/cinema              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> sport            | <input type="checkbox"/> amicizie           | <input type="checkbox"/> abbigliamento          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> cucina           | <input type="checkbox"/> .....              | <input type="checkbox"/> .....                  |

24. Ci sono attività, occupazioni, interessi che ha iniziato o incrementato con l'arrivo dei figli?

sì                                       no

Se sì, quali? (è possibile indicare più risposte, numerandole nei quadratini in ordine di importanza dove 1 è più importante, e inserire altre voci)

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> cure estetiche   | <input type="checkbox"/> viaggi             | <input type="checkbox"/> pulizie domestiche     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> amici            | <input type="checkbox"/> mostre, conferenze | <input type="checkbox"/> corsi di aggiornamento |
| <input type="checkbox"/> teatro, concerti | <input type="checkbox"/> letture            | <input type="checkbox"/> TV/cinema              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> sport            | <input type="checkbox"/> amicizie           | <input type="checkbox"/> abbigliamento          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> cucina           | <input type="checkbox"/> .....              | <input type="checkbox"/> .....                  |

25. Ha mai l'impressione che le manchi qualcosa?

sì                                       no

Se sì, saprebbe indicare di cosa si tratta o descrivere meglio la sua sensazione?

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26. Ha riscontrato altri cambiamenti che le appaiono in relazione all'essere diventato genitore?

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***Grazie per la collaborazione.***