

Chapter 2

Personal Well-being and Interpersonal Communication of 12–16 Year-Old Girls and Their Own Mothers: Gender and Intergenerational Issues

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2.1 Introduction

In recent years, an increasing number of studies have focused on adolescents' well-being (see, for instance, Ben-Zur 2003; Casas et al. 2007b; Huebner 2004) and adolescents' interpersonal communication (Casas et al. 2007c, 2007d; Malo et al. 2006; Valois et al. 2002, 2004). This research connects those two aspects of adolescent life and reflects a long term interest of the researchers (see, for instance, Casas et al. 2004).

Adolescence is a rapidly-evolving period of time so adolescents' specific age is a key variable to be taken into account in any study of the above topics. Both well-being and family interpersonal communication vary as the adolescents grow up. The tendency is for both well-being and interpersonal communication to decrease with age as adolescents express being less satisfied with life as a whole and with specific life domains (González 2006), and, the older they become up to the age of 16 years, prefer talking to friends rather than with their parents on almost any topic (Casas et al. 2001).

In most of the studies covering well-being and interpersonal communication, gender disaggregation of data for the indicators used to measure both reveals few differences between girls and boys. For some topics, important differences are found while for some others, responses do not differ much between them. In what follows, some examples are provided.

In reference to interpersonal communication, Gilligan and other authors have defended the existence of differences between boys and girls in the sense that they seem to experience and understand social and interpersonal dimensions of relationships with other people in a different way (Colarossi and Eccles 2000), including conflictive relationships with the parents (Unger et al. 2000). We have also seen in other research that girls' perceived social support from friends tends to be higher

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compared to boys (González 2006). Moreover, social support from family seems to lose ground throughout adolescence to social support coming from friends, especially among girls, who are considered to develop more intimate and social support based peer-relationships compared to boys (Bru et al. 2001).

With reference to well-being studies, Meadows et al. (2005) highlight the existence of controversial findings worth mentioning. The feminist position (represented by Gilligan 1982) defending the argument that girls' well-being has been consistently impeded by the patriarchal society is countered by the argument that boys, rather than girls, are the ones who are disadvantaged, especially within the education system (represented by Sommers 1994). González (2006) and Meadows et al. (2005) do not find empirical support for disadvantage for either sex. In relation to the latter, North-American boys' and girls' answers to the questions used for the analysis do not differ substantially in their personal well-being in general. However, there are significant gender-related differences in specific life domains.

Values have become a topic of increasing concern within well-being studies, as an important connection seems to exist with those variables traditionally considered to be the core of well-being (satisfaction with life as whole and satisfaction with specific life domains). Some interesting differences, which refer at least to some extend to "gender cultures", appear when focusing on gender, as boys tend to show higher scores in material values, and capacities and knowledge values while girls give higher importance to interpersonal relationships values (Casas et al. 2007a).

The research papers devoted to contrasting adolescents' and parents' well-being and to analysing patterns of family communication have increased significantly over the past decade (for example, Barber et al. 2003; Casas et al. 2001, 2007c; Unger et al. 2000). Most of these research projects report that parents' responses are often at odds with those of their sons and daughters. The key objective of this study was to identify similarities and differences in the patterns of communication between daughters and mothers and to analyse different perceptions and evaluations of their own and the other's well-being. As noted above, in previous research it was found that adolescents' perceptions of communication and adolescents' well-being do not necessarily coincide with that of their own parents'. These results may reflect the existence of different "generational cultures" whereby people of different ages perceive and evaluate psychological and psychosocial phenomena in quite a different manner.

Many other examples can be found around interpersonal communication and well-being in which boys' responses are systematically compared to that of girls' and, at the same time, parents' responses are analysed differently depending on whether they have an adolescent son or daughter. In general terms, this line of research has contributed to the development of *gender-sensitive* quality of life indicators (Eckermann 2000). However, we agree with Eckermann that further research towards the development of *gender-specific* (Eckermann 2000) measures on well-being and interpersonal communication need to be explored. These would be sensitive to the differential effects of gender socialization for girls and boys.

In this chapter, the study of well-being, interactions and interpersonal communication in adolescence is addressed through the study of girls' well-being and

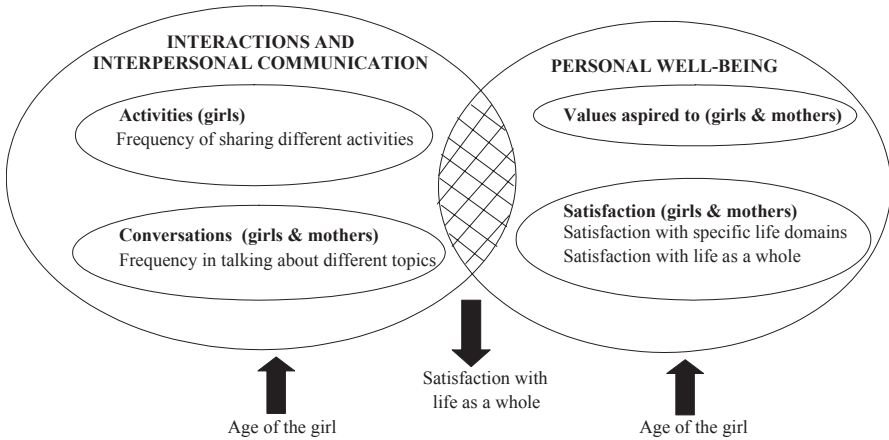


Fig. 2.1 Relationships explored in this study

perceptions compared with that of their own mothers, specifically and independently of boys' and fathers' well-being and interpersonal communication. Therefore, emphasis is moved from the comparison between gender to the analysis of common and different views in the perceptions and evaluations of people of the same sex, who are regularly interacting and who differ substantially in their age. Some potential gender and generational cultures aspects can be more easily detected.

The objectives of this study are the following:

1. To comparatively explore interactions and interpersonal communication of 12 to 16 year-old girls and their own mothers in terms of activities (frequency of sharing different activities) and conversations (frequency in talking about different topics).
2. To comparatively explore both girls' and mothers' personal well-being in terms of satisfaction with specific life domains and satisfaction with life as a whole and other related variables such as values aspired to for the girls' future.
3. To analyse potential differences in both interpersonal communication and personal well-being related variables according to the age of the girl.
4. To explore which variables (between satisfaction with specific life domains, values aspired to and reported frequency of some activities) better explain girls' and mothers' satisfaction with life as a whole, respectively, including perceptions and evaluations of each other.

The relationships among variables explored in this chapter are graphically displayed in Fig. 2.1.

2.2 Method Procedure and Sample

Data were obtained from secondary school centres belonging to the four provinces of the Catalan Autonomous Region (northeast of Spain). Schools and number of classes were randomly selected to fulfil a quota for each age group and all the steps were taken according to ethical guidelines for questionnaire administration to children.

Directors, parents associations and teachers were asked for cooperation, and after their approval, children were informed about the confidentiality of the data and that they were free to refuse although they were asked to cooperate. Questionnaires were administered in their regular classroom to the whole group, where one of their usual teachers and at least one researcher were present during the administration in order to clarify any issues that arose.

Once the questionnaire was completed for the children, each child received an explanation letter and another questionnaire in a sealed envelope for their parents which they were asked to return within a week. Each parent's questionnaire was coded to be paired with their child's.

2,715 boys and girls responded to the questionnaire jointly with 1,372 of their parents. In 21.4% of the cases the father answered alone, in 32% the two parents answered together and in 46.4% the mother answered alone. A sub-sample composed of 358 paired girls and their own mothers (13.18% of the total sample of adolescents and 26.09% of the total sample of parents, respectively) has been adopted as the sample of this research. Distribution by the age of the sub-sample of girls was: 17.3% of 12 year-olds, 26.3% of 13, 28.2% of 14, 19% of 15 and 9.2% of 16 year-olds.

2.2.1 Description of the Variables

The variables included in the questionnaire, which are analysed in this study, were:

Frequency of Sharing Different Activities with the Mother Each girl was asked to inform the researchers about the frequency with which she shares 13 different activities with her mother: going to the school, going to out-of-school activities, going to the doctor, providing care and support, playing videogames, playing generally, listening to music, reading, watching TV or videos, going to the cinema or theatre, going for a walk, going on excursions, and going to religious events. This frequency was measured by a five-point scale: *never*, *not much*, *seldom*, *often* and *almost always*.

Frequency in Talking with the Mother/Daughter About Different Topics Both girls and mothers were asked about their conversations about the same 20 different topics: journals, music, feelings, what happens in the world, the future, school and learning, computers, daily life, free time and leisure, religion and spiritual issues, family, sports, responsibility and moral values, television, clothes, videogames, cities or towns, food, other people and relationships and cleanliness and tidiness. Girls

answered about the frequency with which they maintained conversation with their own mother, and mothers answered about the frequency of their conversations with their own daughter. The measure was obtained through a five-point scale: *never, rarely, from time to time, often and very often*.

Satisfaction with Life Domains and with Life as a Whole Both girls and mothers were asked about their satisfaction with 15 life domains, eight of which constitute the Personal Well-Being Index (Cummins et al. 2003) (satisfaction with health, with standard of living, with achievements in life, with the feeling of security, with groups of people belonging to -which is the Spanish adaptation of the original item on satisfaction with the community, see Casas et al. 2008, with security for the future, with the relationships with others and with spirituality or religious beliefs) and seven additional more concrete ones (satisfaction with friends, with enjoying time, with the family, with herself, with the use of time, with the sports practiced and with the body).

Four life domains were included only in the girls' questionnaire: satisfaction with preparation for the future, with learning, with the school and with school outcomes. Each mother was asked about her satisfaction with ten aspects of her daughter's life (her daughter's friends, health, responsibility, technical abilities, the sports she practices, knowledge of computers, preparation for life, school learning, acquired knowledge, use of time and her abilities with people). Mothers were also requested to respond to questions about satisfaction with their own job and their acquired knowledge.

All these variables plus a one-item scale on satisfaction with life as a whole were measured through an eleven-point scale, from 0 (*Completely unsatisfied*) to 10 (*Completely satisfied*).

Values Aspired to for the Girl's Future A closed set of 23 items referred to values the girl herself would like and their own mother would like her daughter to be appreciated by other people when the girl becomes 21 years old: intelligence, technical abilities, abilities with people, knowledge about computers, profession, family, sensitivity, 'niceness' (friendliness, sympathy), money, power, knowledge of the world, image, responsibility, solidarity, tolerance, good manners, joie de vivre (love of life), creativity, capacity for working, faith or spirituality, constancy, personality, kindness. The importance of each value was measured by a scale from 0 (*Not at all*) to 10 (*A lot*).

2.3 Results

2.3.1 Activities

Girls' perception of mothers caring about them achieved the highest percentage to the *almost ever* response, followed by going to the doctor together (Table 2.1). It is worth commenting that the rest of percentages to the *almost ever* response do not reach 30%.

Table 2.1 Frequency of sharing different activities with the mother (in descendant order)

Girls	Almost ever (%)	Never (%)
Caring about you	85.1	0.8
Going to the doctor	66.1	1.7
Watching TV or video	26.3	3.1
Going on excursions	23	17.8
Reading	16.4	34.8
Listening to music	12.9	20.2
Going to religious events	12.1	58.9
Going for a walk	11.9	22.6
Going to out-of-school activities	9.9	67.1
Going to the school	9.1	67.1
Going to the cinema or theatre	7.8	27
Playing to other things	2.3	47.8
Playing videogames	1.4	84.7

Table 2.2 Frequency of sharing different activities with the mother, by the age of the girl (in descendant order, only significant correlations are displayed)

Girls	Correlations (τ_c)	
	Value	Significance
Going on excursions	-0.177	$p < 0.001$
Going to religious events	-0.161	$p < 0.001$
Playing	-0.160	$p < 0.001$
Going for a walk	-0.132	$p = 0.002$
Reading	-0.118	$p = 0.007$
Going to the doctor	-0.101	$p = 0.027$

Significant correlations were found between 6 of the 13 activities included in the girls' questionnaire and their age. In all cases, correlations were both low and negative and so, the older the girl, the less she shares those activities with her mother (Table 2.2). Correlations ranged from 0.101 (for going to the doctor) to 0.177 (for going on excursions).

2.3.2 Conversations

School and learning, and clothes were the two topics that both girls and mothers agreed that they talk about *very often*. Most girls and also mothers expressed that two topics they *never* talk about are videogames and religion or spiritual issues (Table 2.3).

Interestingly, there were some topics which reached exactly the same percentage on behalf girls and mothers. That is the case for cleanliness and tidiness and

Table 2.3 Frequency in talking with the mother/daughter about different topics (non-shadowed column, in descendant order for girls' percentages) and differences of percentage between girls' and mothers' responses (shadowed columns)

	<i>Very often</i> (%)			<i>Never</i> (%)		
	Girls	Mothers		Girls	Mothers	
School and learning	34.4	45.5	-11.1	1.4	2	-0.6
Clothes	33	33.4	-0.4	2.8	2.6	+0.2
Cleanness and tidiness	27.1	27.1	0	4.3	7	-2.7
Family	23.3	22.6	+0.7	5.7	13.6	-7.9
The future	21.8	19.3	+2.5	12.7	5.2	+7.5
Feelings	19.4	16.5	+2.9	22.8	9.3	+13.5
Food	18.9	29.6	-10.7	8.6	1.4	+7.2
Responsibility and moral values	17.6	19.7	-2.1	8.5	7.2	+1.3
Daily life	16.8	22.5	-5.7	15.9	2.9	+13
Music	16.5	20.1	-3.6	12.5	6.9	+5.6
Free time and leisure	16.5	27.2	-10.7	14.2	3.5	+10.7
What happens in the world	14.6	19.6	-5	13.8	5.3	+8.5
Other people and relationships	14.2	21.8	-7.6	12.5	2.3	+10.2
Television	13.3	17.1	-3.8	7.4	4.1	+3.3
Journals	11.1	11.7	0	40	17.3	+22.7
City or town	11.2	18.5	-7.3	21.8	4.6	+17.2
Sports	10.3	10.8	-0.5	22.2	13.7	+8.5
Computers	5.4	21	-15.6	31.9	10.1	+21.8
Videogames	3.1	5.6	-2.5	63.7	39.2	+24.5
Religion or spiritual issues	2.6	10.2	-7.6	55	14.8	+40.2

journals. In other cases, percentages were very similar: clothes, family and sports. In contrast, for some other topics the difference between percentages was noticeable: school and learning, food, free time and leisure, and computers, for example. This difference was even higher when the *never* response is considered, especially on the topics of journals, computers, videogames and religion or spiritual issues (shadowed column on the right).

When only girls' responses are taken into account, we observe significant, although low, correlations between some topics and the age of the girl, only one of them being positive: the future ($\tau_c = 0.094$; $p = 0.030$), and the other two negative: videogames ($\tau_c = -0.110$; $p = 0.015$), and music ($\tau_c = -0.115$; $p = 0.009$).

2.3.3 Satisfaction

In reference to satisfaction with life as whole, girls obtained a mean of 7.71 in a 0–10 scale (with a standard deviation of 2.345), whereas mothers' mean was 7.50 (with a standard deviation of 1.898).

Means and standard deviations have been calculated for girls' and mothers' own responses to those life satisfaction domains included in the questionnaires. The results are shown in Table 2.4. Means ranged in the case of girls from 5.50 (satisfaction with spirituality or religious beliefs) to 8.74 (satisfaction with friends), and in the case of mothers from 5.78 (satisfaction with the sports practised) to 7.84 (satisfaction with herself). The most satisfactory satisfaction domains for girls were, in this order: (1) Satisfaction with friends, (2) Satisfaction with groups of people belonging to and (3) Satisfaction with standard of living.

In the case of mothers the three most satisfactory satisfaction domains were quite different. They were the following: (1) Satisfaction with herself, (2) Satisfaction with the family, and (3) Satisfaction with health. The least appreciated satisfaction domains of girls were: (1) Satisfaction with spirituality or religious beliefs, (2) Satisfaction with the body, and (3) Satisfaction with the school outcomes. And for mothers: (1) Satisfaction with the sports practiced, (2) Satisfaction with the body and (3) Satisfaction with security for the future.

Remarkably, girls' means were higher compared to their own mothers' with the exception of satisfaction with herself, with the use of time, with the body and with spirituality or religious beliefs. The differences between girls and mothers were significant for all the satisfaction life domains considered except for satisfaction with health, with achievements in life and with the feeling of security.

The two life domains only considered for mothers, ranged from satisfaction with acquired knowledge (6.90) to satisfaction with work (7.44), while in relation to the life domains only considered for girls (satisfaction with learning, with preparation for the future, with the school and with the school outcomes), indicated that the highest mean corresponds to satisfaction with learning; all four means being between 6.84 and 7.48 (Table 2.4)

Significant and negative correlations were observed in 12 satisfaction life domains, ranging from 0.104 to 0.224, when the age of the girls was considered (Table 2.5). This means that as the age of the girl increases, the less importance she gives to these life domains.

In relation to the satisfaction of mothers with some of their daughter's aspects of life, the highest means corresponded to satisfaction with the daughter's friends and satisfaction with the daughter's responsibility (Table 2.6).

2.3.4 Values Aspired to for the Girls' Future

As Table 2.7 reveals, means ranged in the case of girls from 4.14 (power) to 8.88 (personality), and in the case of mothers, from 5.28 (power) to 9.07 (personality). The most appreciated values for girls were, in this order: (1) Personality, (2) Niceness and (3) Kindness. In the case of mothers the three most appreciated values were almost the same: (1) Personality, (2) Joie de vivre, and (3) Kindness. The

Table 2.4 Girls' and mothers' own satisfaction with different life domains (in descendant order for girls' means) and differences between girls' and mothers' means (shadowed column)

Girls and mothers	Means and standard deviations (0–10 scale)		
	Girls	Mothers	Mean differences
Satisfaction with friends	8.74 (1.704)	7.49 (2.269)	$t_{325}=8.312$ ($p<0.001$)
Satisfaction with groups of people belonging to	8.29 (2.094)	7.74 (1.642)	$t_{338}=4.096$ ($p<0.001$)
Satisfaction with the standard of living	8.30 (1.974)	7.43 (1.987)	$t_{325}=5.865$ ($p<0.001$)
Satisfaction with enjoying time	8.20 (1.949)	6.93 (2.202)	$t_{325}=8.221$ ($p<0.001$)
Satisfaction with the family	8.20 (2.086)	7.77 (2.550)	$t_{336}=2.665$ ($p=0.008$)
Satisfaction with the relationships with others	7.99 (2.133)	7.53 (1.970)	$t_{337}=2.923$ ($p=0.004$)
Satisfaction with health	7.97 (2.444)	7.76 (2.048)	–
Satisfaction with achievements in life	7.85 (2.093)	7.74 (1.801)	–
Satisfaction with learning	7.48 (2.024)	–	–
Satisfaction with work	–	7.44 (2.164)	–
Satisfaction with security for the future	7.41 (2.163)	6.82 (2.254)	$t_{325}=-3.544$ ($p<0.001$)
Satisfaction with herself	7.36 (2.650)	7.84 (1.857)	$t_{335}=-2.763$ ($p=0.006$)
Satisfaction with preparation for the future	7.31 (2.150)	–	–
Satisfaction with the feeling of security	7.12 (2.471)	7.21 (2.061)	–
Satisfaction with the school	7.01 (2.521)	–	–
Satisfaction with the use of time	7.00 (2.199)	7.53 (1.914)	$t_{337}=-3.525$ ($p<0.001$)
Satisfaction with the sports practiced	6.92 (2.890)	5.78 (3.072)	$t_{331}=5.196$ ($p<0.001$)
Satisfaction with school outcomes	6.84 (2.588)	–	–
Satisfaction with the acquired knowledge	–	6.90 (1.842)	–
Satisfaction with the body	6.19 (2.753)	6.70 (2.219)	$t_{330}=-2.814$ ($p=0.005$)
Satisfaction with spirituality or religious beliefs	5.50 (3.388)	7.09 (2.309)	$t_{316}=-7.398$ ($p<0.001$)

least appreciated values by girls and also mothers were: (1) Power, (2) Money, and (3) Faith or spirituality. Mothers' means were always higher, compared to girls', with the only exception being 'niceness', profession and sensitivity. Except for the values of personality, profession, family and technical abilities, the differences between girls' and mothers' means were significant. When the age of the girls was considered, any significant correlation appeared in girls' answers.

Table 2.5 Girls' satisfaction with different life domains, by the age of the girl (in descendant order, only significant correlations are displayed)

Girls	Correlations	
	Value	Significance
Satisfaction with the school	-0.224	p<0.001
Satisfaction with health	-0.214	p<0.001
Satisfaction with the body	-0.195	p<0.001
Satisfaction with learning	-0.181	p<0.001
Satisfaction with security for the future	-0.158	p<0.001
Satisfaction with herself	-0.157	p<0.001
Satisfaction with the family	-0.157	p<0.001
Satisfaction with the standard of living	-0.144	p=0.001
Satisfaction with school outcomes	-0.140	p=0.001
Satisfaction with the feeling of security	-0.123	p=0.004
Satisfaction with the relationships with others	-0.118	p=0.006
Satisfaction with achievements in life	-0.104	p=0.015

Table 2.6 Mothers' own satisfaction with some aspects of their daughter's life (in descendant order)

Mothers	Means and standard deviations (0–10 scale)
Satisfaction with the daughter's friends	8.21 (1.791)
Satisfaction with the daughter's responsibility	7.64 (1.976)
Satisfaction with the daughter's health	7.58 (2.389)
Satisfaction with the daughter's technical abilities	7.41 (1.749)
Satisfaction with the daughter's preparation for life	7.33 (1.918)
Satisfaction with the daughter's school learning	7.22 (2.004)
Satisfaction with the daughter's knowledge of computers	7.01 (2.151)
Satisfaction with the daughter's use of time	6.99 (1.968)
Satisfaction with the sports the daughter practices	6.98 (2.578)
Satisfaction with the daughter's abilities with people	6.90 (2.648)

2.3.5 *Explained Model of Girls' and Mothers' Satisfaction with Life as a Whole*

A model including girls' and mothers' satisfaction with life domains, values aspired to for the girls' future and reported frequency of talking to each other about some activities was made to explain girls' satisfaction with life as whole. The equivalent model was made for mothers, adding the items on the mother's satisfaction with different aspects of her daughter's life. The results obtained are the following:

'Satisfaction with herself' was the best variable in predicting satisfaction with life as a whole both for girls and their own mothers being at the same time the only one included in both models. In the case of the girls in the study, three other satisfac-

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