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PARENTAL BOND AND LIFE COURSE TRANSITIONS FROM ADOLESCENCE TO YOUNG ADULTHOOD

Freek Bucx and Frits van Wel

ABSTRACT

In this study the effects of life course transitions in adolescence and young adulthood (leaving the parental home, living together with a partner, entering parenthood, and becoming financially independent) on the parent-child bond are investigated. Data are presented from a three-wave study of 1,064 adolescents and young adults (aged 12–24 years at Wave 1) over a six-year period. As the youth in this study proceeded through the life course, they tended to report a closer parental bond. However, this age-related effect was counterbalanced by a tendency toward a weakened bond with parents following departure from the parental home. Results are in line with individuation theory, which contends that parent-child relationships become less close as a result of transitions leading to more autonomy.

Whereas the parent-child bond has been studied extensively in children and adolescents, its nature and course in late adolescence and young adulthood have received less empirical attention (Arnett, 2000; Hagestad, 1987; Van Wel, Ter Bogt, & Raaijmakers, 2002). Particularly scarce are longitudinal studies tracking continuity and changes in the parental bond from adolescence to young adulthood (Berger & Fend, 2005). Based on the small number of studies to date, it can be roughly concluded that adolescents and young adults maintain reasonably good relationships with their parents over time, and that their well-being remains affected by the quality of their relationship with parents (Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Thornton, Orbach, & Axinn, 1995; Van Wel et al., 2002).

This general conclusion may require some refinement, however, as several studies point to fluctuations or changes in the parent-child relationship during late adolescence and young adulthood. Several authors (Aquilino, 1997, 1999; Buhl 2000; Smollar & Youniss, 1989) have identified *life course transitions* as giving rise to such fluctuations or

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changes. Late adolescence and especially young adulthood are characterized by important transitions involving increased social integration within two important life domains: romantic relationships and family formation, and the domain of occupation (Cooksey & Rindfuss, 2001).

The present study investigates how adolescents' and young adults' life course stage affects this relationship with their parents. The results of a three-wave longitudinal study of the parental bond and life course transitions of Dutch adolescents and young adults (aged 12–24 years at Wave 1) over a six-year period are presented.

Theory and Hypotheses

Hypotheses concerning effects of adolescents' and young adults' life course transitions on the parental bond can be derived from three prominent theoretical perspectives with psychological and sociological origins: individuation theory, role identity theory, and theories concerning stressors on the parent-child relationship.

According to individuation theory (Blos, 1979; Grotevant & Cooper, 1986; Youniss & Smollar, 1985), a key developmental task in adolescence is the attainment of autonomy (social, emotional, and cognitive) in various life domains, and in this process, the formation of one's own identity. Biological and cognitive maturational processes in early adolescence, together with having more close contacts with peers, are assumed to give rise to processes of individuation and transformation of the parent-child relationship (Steinberg, 1996).

Individuation theory states that individuation and transformation of the parental bond is an important task not only in adolescence, but also in young adulthood (Buhl, 2000; Smollar & Youniss, 1989; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Transitions such as leaving the parental home, getting married, becoming a parent, entering the labor market, and establishing financial independence can be seen as "motors" (Buhl, 2000) in a more general process whereby young people take up adult responsibilities and become increasingly less dependent on their parents' resources. These theoretical notions of individuation suggest that the relationship between parents and their children becomes less close and less important during this life course phase, as the young adult's dependence on parents decreases and his or her concerns shift to career advancement, to romantic relationships, and to family formation. However, it seems unlikely that such processes lead to radical disengagement, as earlier individuation theorists (Blos, 1979) have hypothesized.

On the other hand, role identity theory (Stryker, 1968) suggests that emotional closeness between children and their parents is positively

influenced by life course transitions. As adolescents and young adults move into the same adult roles as their parents, their experiences become similar to those of their parents. As a consequence, young people will be more likely to understand their parents and to identify with them, which should in turn have favorable effects on the closeness of their relationship with their parents. Bengtson and Black (1973) were the first to put forward this "intergenerational similarity hypothesis."

Other theories have focused on stress and uncertainties invoked by life course transitions, as these changes in the lives of young people require significant adjustment (Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998; Knoester, 2003). From this perspective, the changes produced by life course transitions can be expected to produce a temporary disequilibrium and worsening of the parent-child relationship. Old patterns of interaction are no longer satisfactory (for one or both parties), are perceived by parents and/or children as inappropriate for the new life phase, or are obstructed by practical barriers (e.g., increased geographic distance). New patterns of interaction suited to the needs of both young people and their parents must be developed. It is plausible that this phase will lead in the short term to mutual tensions and to communication about how both parties should adjust their behavior to the new circumstances. In most cases the relationship between parents and children will again improve over time, once adjustments to the new situation have been made.

In summary, these three theoretical perspectives lead to different hypotheses about the effects of life course transitions. On the one hand, individuation theory suggests that life course transitions should have a negative influence on the bond between parents and children because these transitions increase young people's independence from the parents. On the other hand, role identity theory implies a positive influence because life course transitions lead to a situation in which parents and children have more similar roles and experiences. When life course transitions are viewed as potential stressors, temporary pressures can be expected to arise in the parent-child relationship, which are usually subsequently resolved.

Results from previous studies do not provide clear evidence for one specific hypothesis. In accordance with individuation theory, it has been observed that the parent-child bond is negatively influenced by departure from the parental home (Aquilino, 1997, 1999) and the transition to parenthood (Aquilino, 1997, 1999; Berger & Fend, 2005). Marriage has been found to have negative effects (Berger & Fend, 2005) as well as positive effects (Aquilino, 1997, 1999; Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998). In line with role identity theory, the parent-child bond

appears to be positively influenced by the transition to employment (Aquilino, 1997; Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998) and financial independence (Berger & Fend, 2005).

Our literature review reveals that the parental bond of adolescents and young adults has scarcely been studied longitudinally in the context of one or more life course transitions. Moreover, the theoretical implications of certain inconsistent findings require further clarification. Finally, it is unclear whether certain effects observed to date represent temporary fluctuations or more meaningful long-term changes, as most prior longitudinal studies have investigated changes over a relatively short time span. Because in the present longitudinal study we have information from three waves over a six-year period, we are able to distinguish between short-term and long-term effects of life course transitions on the parental bond.

In addition to our main research question, we investigate to what extent the parental bond affects children's well-being during adolescence and young adulthood. Previous research, mostly of a cross-sectional nature, revealed that in adolescence and young adulthood parents remain important for children's well-being (Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Thornton et al., 1995; Van Wel et al., 2002), but also that the benefits of the parental bond diminish as new social roles begin to take priority in young adulthood (Roberts & Bengtson, 1993).

Background Variables

In our analyses, we controlled for age as it has been found that it affects the parental bond, especially at the beginning and end of the adolescence phase (Van Wel et al., 2002). Also, respondent's gender was included, as some studies found gender differences in the parental bond during adolescence (Van Wel et al., 2002). Finally, we included parental divorce: research has shown that parental divorce negatively affects the parental bond (Amato & Booth, 1996) and children's well-being (Amato, 2000). Also, parental divorce has been found to influence the timing of children's life course transitions such as leaving the parental home (Juang, Silbereisen, & Wiesner, 1999), cohabitation, and marriage (Amato, 1996).

METHOD

Sample

The data used in this study were collected in three questionnaires from the Utrecht Study of Adolescent Development, a longitudinal

project (Meeus & 't Hart, 1993). Participants were randomly selected from two representative national panels. A total of 3,394 youngsters (aged 12 to 24 years) participated in the first measurement wave in 1991 (26% of those invited did not participate) At the second measurement wave in 1994, 1,966 respondents again participated, yielding a 42% rate of attrition from Wave 1 to Wave 2. When these respondents were contacted again in 1997, 1,301 (now aged 18 to 30 years) responded, representing an attrition rate of 62% from Wave 1 to Wave 3. The respondents lost to attrition did not differ from those who completed all three questionnaires on the two dependent variables (parental bond and general well-being). At both re-measurement points, male respondents and older respondents dropped out at a higher rate than female respondents and younger respondents, respectively.

A total of 1,133 adolescents and young adults provided responses to questions about their relationship with living parents at all three measurement waves. Of these respondents, 1,078 had no missing scores on any of the variables in the conceptual model under investigation. Moreover, a small group of 14 respondents with an atypical life course stage (mostly single mothers) were excluded from our analyses. The resulting sample of 1,064 respondents (455 male, 609 female) had an average age of 17.5 years at Wave 1, and represented four age groups as follows: 286 in early adolescence (12–14 years), 301 in middle adolescence (15–17 years), 202 in late adolescence (18–21 years), and 275 in early adulthood (21–24 years).

Measures

A *parental bond* scale developed by Van Wel (1994) was used to examine youth-parent relations. This 8-item scale measures the degree to which young people (a) identify with their parents in matters of opinion and taste ("I often have the same opinions as my parents"; "My taste and preferences are usually the same as those of my parents"); (b) view their parents as good role models in their lifestyle and approach to child rearing ("In the future, I want to adopt my parents' way of living"; "someday I will raise my own children just as my parents have raised me") (c) accept their parents as educators from whom they can accept criticism and learn ("When my parents criticize my behavior, I take it to heart"; "I can still learn a lot from my parents"); and (d) value their parents as friends and as persons with whom they can communicate ("I count my parents among my best friends"; "I can communicate extremely well with my parents"). Responses range from 1 = *entirely disagree* to 5 = *entirely agree*. In psychoanalytic terms, the scale indicates the extent to which parents serve as their child's

identification object or ego-ideal, as well as the degree to which parental authority is viewed as an instrument of learning. The currently more egalitarian quality of relations between the generations is captured in scale items concerning the degree of friendship and communication between youth and parents. Cronbach's α for the parental bond was .87, .86, and .87 at Waves 1, 2, and 3, respectively. (The means at Waves 1, 2, and 3 were 3.2, 3.2, and 3.3 respectively.)

The *well-being* of the respondents was examined using the Cantril ladder (Cantril, 1965). Adolescents and young adults evaluated their general well-being on a scale from 0 = *very bad* to 10 = *very good*. (Mean scores at Waves 1, 2, and 3 were 8.0, 7.7, and 7.7 respectively.)

Concerning their *living situation*, adolescents' and young adults' *life course stage* was measured by asking respondents whether they lived with their parents, lived alone, lived with a romantic partner, and whether they had children of their own. On the basis of this information, four life course stages were distinguished: (a) living with parents; (b) living alone without a partner and without children; (c) living together with a partner (married and unmarried) without children; (d) living together with a partner and having children. In our models, effects of the latter three stages were examined in relation to a reference group of respondents still living with their parents, who had not yet made any of the transitions under investigation.

Concerning their *financial situation*, adolescents' and young adults' *life course stage* was measured by asking respondents whether they had a source of income independent of their parents (from employment or from welfare). Two groups were constructed: (a) those with a main source of income independent of their parents; and (b) those without such an income independent of their parents.

Background variables. Gender (0 = *male*, 1 = *female*) as well as age of the respondents were included (at Wave 1, there were four age groups, ranging from 1 = *early adolescence* [12–14 years], 2 = *middle adolescence* [15–17 years], 3 = *late adolescence* [18–21 years], to 4 = *early adulthood* [21–24 years]). *Parental divorce* indicated whether parents had divorced and/or were separated. At Wave 1, 10% of the respondents had divorced parents or parents who were separated.

Research Model

The conceptual model developed for our three-wave longitudinal analysis of the relationship between background variables, life course stage, the parental bond, and well-being of adolescents and young adults is presented in Figure 1. For Wave 1, the cross-sectional relationships were specified between the background variables and the

life course stages. Next, cross-sectional relationships between these background variables and life course stages and the parental bond were estimated. Finally, effects of all these variables on well-being were specified. Note that cross-sectional relationships among the life course stages were NOT examined.

The same cross-sectional relationships were investigated for Wave 2 (three years later) and for Wave 3 (another three years later). Furthermore, longitudinal relationships were investigated between the Wave 1 and Wave 2 variables, between the Wave 1 and Wave 3 variables, and between the Wave 2 and Wave 3 variables. In this way, effects of life course transitions could be investigated over the course of time.

RESULTS

Descriptive Results

Descriptive results are presented in Table 1. The majority of the 1,064 respondents (80%) were living with their parents at Wave 1; six years later only 43% were doing so. On average, those who had left the parental home had done so at approximately 20 years of age. The group of adolescents and young adults living alone (i.e., not living with parents nor with a partner) grew from 6% (Wave 1) to 19% (Wave 3), while those who were living together with a partner (without children) rose from 11% to 26% in the same period. Finally, the group with children expanded from 3% to 12%.

In all, nearly half the respondents (47%) experienced a change in life course stage involving their living situation over the six-year period, 18% during the first three years and 34% during the last three years. (Some respondents experienced a change in living situation during both periods.) Nearly all of these changes (93%) concerned one of the following four transitions: (a) from living in the parental home to living alone; (b) from living in the parental home to living together with a partner; (c) from living alone to living together with a partner; and (d) from living together with a partner to being a parent. With regard to their financial situation, the group of respondents with a source of income independent of their parents grew from 27% (Wave 1) to 76% (Wave 3).

Results from Path Analysis

The relationships between the 21 variables included in the conceptual model (see Figure 1) were examined using LISREL 8 (Jöreskog &

Table 1
 Percentages of Adolescents and Young Adults in each Life Course Stage and Life Course Transition, for Three Measurement Waves ($N = 1,064$)

	Wave 1 Age 12-24	Wave 2 Age 15-27	Wave 3 Age 18-30
<i>A. Life course stages</i>			
Living situation:			
- Living at parental home	80	67	43
- Living alone	6	10	19
- Living together/married	11	17	26
- Parenthood	3	6	12
Work:			
- Financially independent	27	54	76
	Wave 1 → Wave 2	Wave 2 → Wave 3	
<i>B. Life course transitions</i>			
Living situation:			
- Living at parental home → living alone	6	12	
- Living at parental home → living together/married	6	12	
- Living alone → living together/married	2	3	
- Living together/married → parenthood	2	5	
Work:			
- Financially dependent → financially independent	30	49	

Sörbom, 1993). First, a suitable model was obtained for the associations within and between Waves 1, 2, and 3 ($\chi^2=89.57$, $df=93$, $p=0.58$; root mean square error of approximation = 0.0; standardized root mean square residual = 0.015; adjusted goodness of fit index = 0.98; critical $N = 1515.79$). This model is based on a matrix of product-moment (Pearson) correlations of optimal scores. The results are presented in Table 2. Our discussion of the results begins with the background variables (child's age and gender, parental divorce) and then proceeds to influences on and effects of life course variables, the parental bond, and well-being. The longitudinal connections of the life course stage variables to one another are not highlighted, as these are fairly evident.

Background Variables

At Wave 1, male respondents were more often living alone than were female respondents; this was not the case at Waves 2 and 3. At all

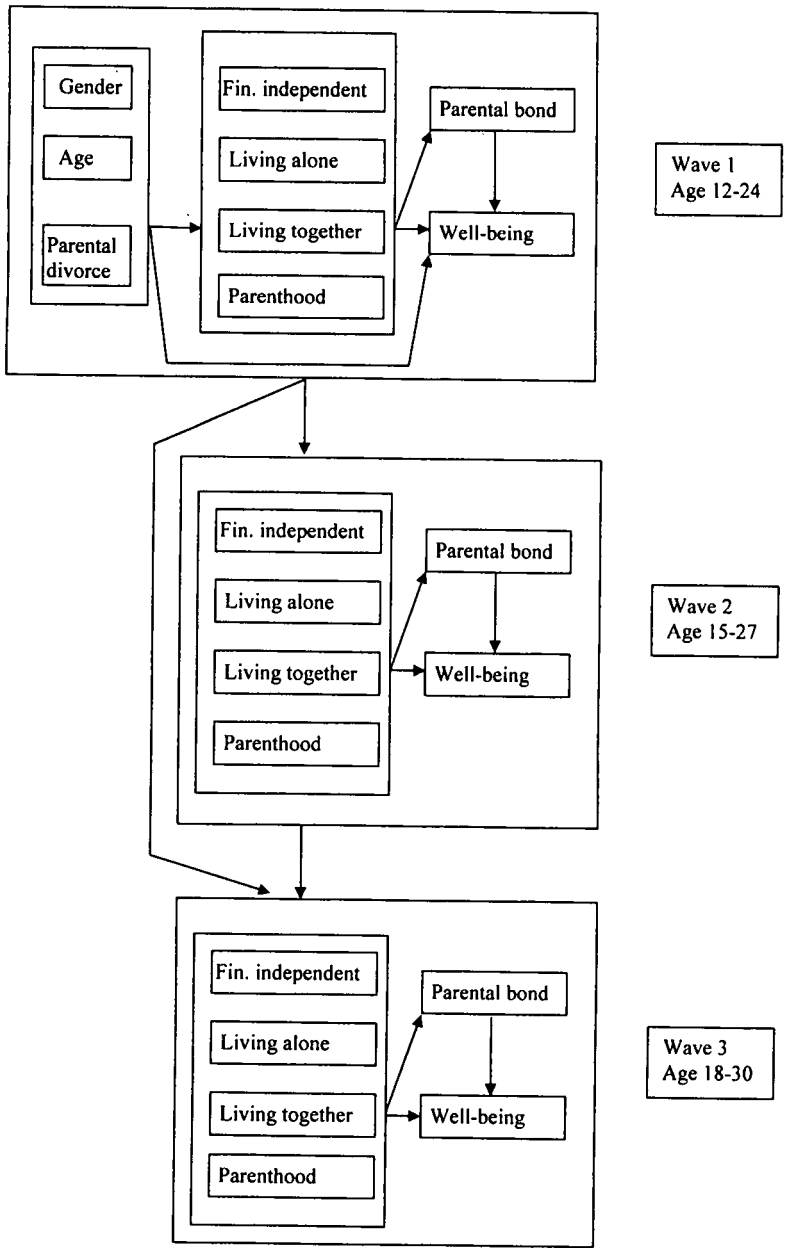


Figure 1
 Conceptual Model: Life Course Stages, Parental Bond and Well-being
 of Adolescents and Young Adults

Table 2a

Path Analysis for Life Course Stages, Parental Bond and Well-being of Adolescents and Young Adults ($N = 1,064$)

Influences	Wave 1							
	Financially independent	Living alone	Living together	Parent-hood	Parental Bond		Well-being	
	D	D	D	D	D	T	D	T
Gender ^a	n.s.	-.09	.11	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	-.14	-.13
Age	.71	.33	.50	.32	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	-.20
<i>Wave 1</i>								
Divorce parents	n.s.	n.s.	.07	n.s.	-.19	-.19	-.23	-.27
Financially independent	—	—	—	—	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Living alone	—	—	—	—	n.s.	n.s.	-.32	-.32
Living together	—	—	—	—	n.s.	n.s.	-.18	-.18
Parenthood	—	—	—	—	-.07	-.07	n.s.	n.s.
Parental bond	—	—	—	—	—	—	.18	.18
Well-being	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
R^2	.51	.12	.28	.10	.04		.26	

Notes. Standardized β coefficients. D = direct effect; T = total effect; n.s.: not significant (significant effect: t -value $> |1.96|$, $p < .05$, resp. $\beta \geq |0.05|$). Symbol '—': influences excluded from the path model.

^aGender: 0 = male, 1 = female.

three waves, female respondents were more often living with a partner than were male respondents. No relationship was found between gender and parenthood. At Wave 2, male respondents were more often financially independent than were female respondents.

At Waves 1 and 2, no difference was observed between male and female respondents in terms of their relationship with parents. At Wave 3, female respondents reported a slightly more positive parental bond than did male respondents. At all three waves, female respondents reported lower well-being than did male respondents.

At any measurement wave, there were positive relationships between age and the life course variables, with two exceptions. At Wave 3, age was negatively related to living alone; at the same wave, no direct age effect on parenthood was found. At waves 2 and 3, a positive effect of age on the parental bond was observed. At Wave 2, age had a negative effect on well-being, with higher levels of well-being reported by younger respondents.

Young people whose parents had divorced were more often living with a partner at Wave 1, and were also more often having children

Table 2b

Path Analysis for Life Course Stages, Parental Bond and Well-being of Adolescents and Young Adults ($N = 1,064$)

<i>Influences</i>	<i>Wave 2 (3 years after Wave 1)</i>											
	Financially independent		Living alone		Living together		Parent-hood		Parental Bond		Well-being	
	D	T	D	T	D	T	D	T	D	T	D	T
Gender ^a	-.08	-.08	n.s.	n.s.	.08	.11	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	-.06	-.07
Age	.44	.44	.32	.21	.33	.51	.06	.38	.20	n.s.	-.23	n.s.
<i>Wave 1</i>												
Divorce parents	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.05	n.s.	n.s.	-.11	n.s.	-.08
Financially independent	.25	.25	-.11	-.11	.13	.13	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Living alone	-.14	-.14	.28	.32	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	-.14	-.14	.07	n.s.
Living together	-.13	-.13	-.19	-.17	.33	.32	.22	.21	-.14	-.14	n.s.	.06
Parenthood	-.23	-.23	-.14	-.13	-.20	-.20	.73	.73	-.16	-.20	n.s.	.13
Parental bond	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.52	.52	n.s.	.12
Well-being	n.s.	n.s.	-.11	-.11	.07	.07	.10	.09	n.s.	n.s.	.28	.32
<i>Wave 2</i>												
Financially independent	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Living alone	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	n.s.	n.s.	.08	.08
Living together	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	n.s.	n.s.	.25	.25
Parenthood	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	n.s.	n.s.	.20	.30
Parental bond	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.14	.14
Well-being	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
R^2	.26		.23		.45		.61		.31		.17	

Notes. Standardized β coefficients. D = direct effect; T = total effect; n.s.: not significant (significant effect: t -value $> |1.96|$, $p < .05$, resp. $\beta \geq |0.05|$). Symbol '—': influences excluded from the path model.

^aGender: 0 = male, 1 = female.

of their own at Wave 2 than young people whose parents lived together. Parental divorce showed a negative relationship with the parental bond at Wave 1—when the respondents were still relatively young—but not at later waves. A negative relationship between parental divorce and well-being was found at Wave 1, whereas a positive relationship was found at Wave 3.

Parental Bond

With regard to the various life course stages in relation to the parental bond, at Wave 1 only parenthood showed an effect: young people

Table 2c
 Path Analysis for Life Course Stages, Parental Bond and Well-being of Adolescents and Young Adults ($N = 1,064$)

Influences	Wave 3 (6 years after Wave 1)											
	Financially independent		Living alone		Living together		Parent-hood		Parental Bond		Well-being	
	D	T	D	T	D	T	D	T	D	T	D	T
Gender ^a	n.s.	-.05	n.s.	n.s.	.11	.12	n.s.	n.s.	.07	.05	-.06	-.08
Age	.63	.33	-.28	-.11	.42	.33	n.s.	.47	.16	n.s.	n.s.	-.06
<i>Wave 1</i>												
Divorce parents	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	-.10	.12	n.s.
Financially independent	-.12	-.06	.09	n.s.	-.10	n.s.	.07	.10	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Living alone	n.s.	-.07	.07	.20	-.08	-.07	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	-.09	n.s.	-.06
Living together	-.18	-.25	n.s.	-.08	-.11	-.09	.07	.29	n.s.	-.13	n.s.	n.s.
Parenthood	-.14	-.27	n.s.	-.07	n.s.	-.24	n.s.	.45	n.s.	-.20	n.s.	n.s.
Parental bond	n.s.	n.s.	-.08	-.12	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.16	.42	n.s.	.10
Well-being	-.06	-.05	n.s.	-.11	-.07	-.05	n.s.	.09	n.s.	n.s.	.16	.26
<i>Wave 2</i>												
Financially independent	.23	.23	n.s.	n.s.	.10	.10	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	-.08	-.08
Living alone	-.20	-.19	.38	.37	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	-.15	-.11	n.s.	n.s.
Living together	-.16	-.14	n.s.	-.05	.22	.24	.25	.25	-.17	-.14	n.s.	.11
Parenthood	-.20	-.17	n.s.	-.06	-.26	-.22	.69	.69	-.26	-.19	-.19	n.s.
Parental bond	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.48	.49	n.s.	.08
Well-being	.07	.07	-.19	-.19	.11	.11	n.s.	n.s.	.06	.05	.30	.30
<i>Wave 3</i>												
Financially independent	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Living alone	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.07	.07	n.s.	n.s.
Living together	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Parenthood	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.09	.09	.19	.20
Parental bond	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.09	.09
Well-being	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
R^2	.26		.23		.27		.59		.41		.19	

Notes. Standardized β coefficients. D = direct effect; T = total effect; n.s.: not significant (significant effect: t -value $> |1.96|$, $p < .05$, resp. $\beta \geq |0.05|$). Symbol '—': influences excluded from the path model.

^aGender: 0 = male, 1 = female.

who were parents themselves reported a weaker parental bond than those who were still living in the parental home. At Wave 2, no cross-sectional relationships between life course stages and the parental

bond were observed, whereas two associations were observed at Wave 3: youth who were living alone reported a better bond with parents than those still living in the parental home; and parenthood at this later point in time was associated positively with the parental bond.

With regard to longitudinal relationships, financial independence showed no effects over time on the parental bond. However, the life course stages involving the living situation showed unequivocally negative effects: compared to young people living with their parents, those living alone and those living with a partner—with or without children—reported a relatively weak parental bond three years later. This was true for the comparisons between Waves 1 and 2 as well as between Waves 2 and 3. These results suggest an adverse long-term effect of departure from the parental home on the parental bond. In all, the negative longitudinal effects of these life course variables (with the exception of financial independence) neutralized the positive age effect on the parental bond mentioned earlier. Nevertheless, the quality of the parental bond showed considerable stability from Wave 1 to Waves 2 and 3, and from Wave 2 to Wave 3.

On the other hand, the quality of the parental bond itself appeared to have no effect longitudinally on the later life course transitions of the respondents, with one exception: respondents at Wave 1 with a weak parental bond were more often living alone six years later than were those with a stronger parental bond.

Well-being

At Wave 1, living alone and living with a partner showed negative relationships with well-being, whereas the same variables showed positive relationships at Wave 2 and no significant relationships at Wave 3. These findings suggest that there is a particular life course phase—not too young, not too old—when living independently or with a partner has a favorable effect on well-being. Similarly, only at Waves 2 and 3 we found a positive relationship between parenthood and well-being. Financial independence was not associated with enhanced well-being at any measurement wave.

At all three measurement waves, the parental bond showed a positive relationship with well-being. This suggests that parents continue to play a meaningful role in the well-being of their children. The estimates in our model suggest that the strength of the effect decreased somewhat over time. We tested whether the differences across the three waves in the estimates of the relationship between the parental bond and well-being were significant by comparing our model with a second model ($\chi^2 = 94.58$, $df=95$, $p = 0.49$) in which the corresponding

parameters were constrained to be equal across the three waves. The chi-square difference test revealed no significant fit differences between the constrained and the unconstrained model ($\Delta\chi^2(2) = 5.01, p > .05$). This results indicates that the strength of the relationship between the parental bond and well-being is relatively stable over time.

Longitudinally, our results suggested few direct effects of life course stages on well-being. Young people living alone at Wave 1 reported higher levels of well-being at Wave 2 than those living with parents; those with children at Wave 2 reported relatively lower levels of well-being three years later as compared to those living with parents.

Furthermore, longitudinal effects of well-being on life course variables were found. Respondents with higher levels of well-being at Wave 1 were more likely to live together with a partner and to have children themselves three years later than those with lower levels of well-being; respondents with higher levels of well-being at Wave 2 were less often living alone and more often living together three years later than those with lower levels of well-being. These results suggest that, in general, young people with higher levels of well-being complete important life course transitions at an earlier age than those with lower levels of well-being.

Finally, general well-being at Wave 2 appeared to exert a slight positive effect on the parental bond at Wave 3. The well-being of the adolescents and young adults was relatively stable over the six-year research period, albeit to a lesser extent than was observed for the parental bond.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

An important overall finding in this study is the considerable continuity observed in the relationship between parents and children. This is consistent with prior research suggesting that adolescents and young adults have relatively close and stable relationships with their parents (Aquilino, 1997; Thornton et al., 1995; Van Wel et al., 2002). Moreover, after middle adolescence, age appears to have a positive effect on the parental bond (Van Wel et al., 2002).

Nevertheless, our longitudinal results suggest that this strengthening of the parental bond with age is tempered by the life course transitions that adolescents and young adults undergo. After children have left the parental home, have started to live together with a romantic partner, and have become parents themselves, they report feeling less

close to their parents. This is not an immediate effect, however, but one which manifests itself over the longer term (i.e., after three years). These results are in line with results from previous studies (Aquilino, 1997, 1999; Berger & Fend, 2005). No effects of financial independence were observed.

These findings are inconsistent with role identity theory, which would predict positive effects of life course transitions as a result of increased similarity in the experiences and social roles of parents and children. Broadly speaking, the present results are also inconsistent with theories emphasizing the effects of potential stressors on the parental bond during life course transitions. Instead, our results appear most in line with individuation theory (Buhl, 2000; Youniss & Smollar, 1985), which posits that life course transitions enhance autonomy and independence, and that the latter in turn necessitate a transition to a less close parent-child relationship. However, it is important to note that although the parent-child relationship becomes less close, there is certainly no radical detachment as suggested by earlier perspectives on individuation (Blos, 1979): the overall quality of the parental bond remains rather high.

In the short term, there appear to be few broadly generalizable relationships between life course transitions and the parental bond. Nevertheless, there are indications that certain age periods may be differentially suited or conducive to certain transitions, and as such, may lead to greater or lesser tensions in the relationship between parents and children. For instance, whereas parenthood at a relatively young age appears to affect the parental bond adversely, the same transition later in life may have a favorable effect.

In our model, we also investigated whether life course transitions were affected themselves by the quality of the parental bond. Another recent study concluded that a negative relationship with parents can be a push factor for leaving the parental home (Mitchell, Wister, & Gee, 2004). In general, however, our study did not provide evidence of such effects.

Furthermore, a positive relationship between the parental bond and well-being was observed at all three measurement waves. This suggests that the relationship with parents remains important for the psychological well-being of adolescents and young adults, which is consistent with previous research (Umberson, 1992). In line with prior research (Roberts & Bengtson, 1993), the effects of the quality of the parent-child relationship on well-being became weaker over time; this trend was, however, not statistically significant.

The effect of life course transitions on well-being has been the subject of several recent studies (Kohler, Behrman, & Skytthe, 2005; Noma-

guchi & Milkie, 2003; Woo & Raley, 2005). Our findings suggest that an important moderating variable in this relationship may be the particular phase of the life course in which a transition takes place: the positive effect of living alone or living with a partner appears to be linked to a specific life course phase—when individuals are not too young; but not too old—whereas the transition to parenthood is experienced as positive as long as individuals are not too young.

In conclusion, it appears that both adolescents and young adults generally experience close relationships with their parents, and that the parent-child bond remains important for the child's psychological well-being. Following the frictions of early adolescence (Van Wel, Linsen, & Abma, 2000; Van Wel et al., 2002), children report increasingly close parental ties as they grow older. However, this age-related effect is counteracted by a tendency toward a weakened parent-child bond in response to important life course transitions experienced in adolescence and young adulthood. Future research will be needed to establish whether the negative effects of departure from the parental home, living with a partner, and becoming a parent on the relationship between children and parents represent lasting changes.

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