"Voice to the youth": An interpretative phenomenological analysis of pandemic experience in Italian young adults

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Abstract

The present study aims to explore how the Covid-19 pandemic was experienced by young adults, a demographic that has often been defined at high psychopathological risk. In the context of an action research, the study set out to provide the participants with a protected space in which they could be heard, and potentially re-process their experience through the construction of their testimonial narration. A semi-structured interview was developed to retrace the phases of the pandemic, i.e., March 2020 (lockdown), summer 2020, fall/winter 2020 (pandemic wave II), and the beginning of 2021 (vaccine plan), as they were experienced by 23 participants (18-30 years old). The interviews were transcribed and analyzed according to the structural principles of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Four superordinate themes emerged: "The impossible in a very short time", "Things were better when times were harder", "I control… therefore I am and will be" and "Ambivalence". The traumatic impact of the pandemic was perceived in all the phases explored, especially during the second wave. The analysis of the testimonial narrations highlighted the main difficulties encountered during that time, the resources used to deal with them, a symmetrization of the respondents' relationship with their parents, their relationship with the Covid-19 infodemic, and a progressive decrease in institutional trust. While the size of the sample is consistent with the methodology used, it constitutes the main limitation of the project. This research should be seen as the initial phase of a larger study, which aims to investigate the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on young adults using quantitative methods.

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1. Introduction

The Sars-CoV-2 infection, which first appeared in Wuhan (China) in October 2019, has spread worldwide in a short time, causing disruptions at the relational, social and economic levels. Italy was the first European country confronted with the spread of the virus. This led to the rapid

implementation of major restrictive measures, first in Northern Italy (Law Decree no. 6 23 February, 2020) and shortly after in the whole country, which soon underwent a general lockdown (Prime Ministerial Decree 9 March, 2020). The end of the first lockdown (4 May, 2020) inaugurated a phase of progressive relaxation of restrictions, which were then lifted during the summer. This allowed sociality to flourish again. The pandemic, however, was still ongoing, and the price to pay for the newfound summer freedom was an exponential rise in infection, hospitalization and death rates. The highest peak was reached in the autumn-winter season of 2020: the increase in infections (40,902 daily infections on 13 November) was probably also prompted by the illusion of having defeated the disease. The economic unsustainability of a new lockdown led the national government to categorize the regions according to the severity of the spread of the virus: consequently, restrictions varied depending on the region's risk level (Prime Ministerial Decree 3 November, 2020). Finally, the approval of Covid-19 vaccines by the European and the Italian pharmaceutical institutions led to the start of the vaccination campaign, which became a new parameter for establishing territorial restrictions and introduced the green pass system (D.L. 17 June, 2021), which was then strengthened (D.L. 29 November, 2021) and recently called for mandatory vaccinations for the population aged 50 years and older (G.U. no. 4 of 7 December, 2022).

Research exploring the sudden upheavals that the pandemic imposed on individuals and communities has led to defining the pandemic as an event with traumatic potential since its inception (Horesh & Brown, 2020), i.e., as a new historical-collective trauma "with which humankind will have to come to terms" (transl. by the authors; De Rosa, 2021, p. 7). As we are still experiencing this trauma at a time when the "turbulence of affects, primary processes [and] defensive organizations" prevail (transl. by the authors; Kaës, 2020, p. 188), we certainly lack the right distance to be able to attribute a collectively shared meaning to this event, while facing a "crisis of meaning" and the subsequent disintegration of group identity that it implies (Hirschberger, 2018). Starting to shift the traumatic experience towards a system of culturally shared meanings can support the ability to face the aforementioned crisis of meaning (Hirschberger, 2018) as well as the "representational gap" (Viñar, 2016) that the trauma implies. In doing so, the collective identity disintegrated by the event may be rebuilt through the creation of a usable memory that, over time, can become a new epicenter of community identity, and a new way of looking at reality. Indeed, as in any extreme collective situation, the traumatic nature of living through a pandemic is also the result of the disruption of the symbolic system of belonging through which a group, a society and a culture attribute meaning to reality.

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated complex and long-standing social and economic issues (Watson et al., 2020), as well as a great psychic fragility hidden – and at the same time produced – by the sense of omnipotence, the control culture and the denial boundaries that characterize post-modernity (De Rosa, 2021; Chicchi, 2021; Kaës, 2013); this fragility soon began to arise due to the traumatic impact of the event.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, scholars investigating its impact on mental health in different age groups have warned specialists and well as laypeople against its risks: not only can it potentially exacerbate pre-existing mental disorders, but it might also promote new and pervasive stress disorders (Horesh & Brown, 2020). The concerns that now interest the scientific community are in line with studies conducted before the pandemic, namely that public health emergencies have an impact on people's mental health not only in the acute phase of the emergency but also in its subsequent periods (Tucci et al., 2017). These studies revealed that the experience of quarantine is associated with post-traumatic symptoms (Wu et al., 2009), e.g., irritability, insomnia (Lee et al., 2005) and acute stress (Bai et al., 2004). Moreover, quarantine length, fear of being infected, inadequate healthcare facilities and supplies, chaotic information, and emotional states of boredom and frustration – which are typical of lockdowns and life during a pandemic – can be considered as stressors with a negative effect on psychological well-being (Brooks et al., 2020). The experience of a lockdown, the spread of an unknown virus and the lack of socialization have been associated with an early increase in anxiety and depression levels and with the appearance of post-traumatic symptoms (Qui et al., 2020). Several Italian studies have also shown how the lockdown has increased post-traumatic and stress-related symptoms, anxiety, depressive states, insomnia and sleep disorders (Cellini et al., 2020; Rossi et al., 2020). The pandemic, therefore, had a strong impact on mental health from its earliest moments. It has been reported that the most common factors correlated with an increased risk of developing depressive symptoms are associated with being female, young, a student, single, northern Italian, bearing a grudge against the lockdown and governmental guidelines, and having a low perception of the contagion risk (Balsamo & Carlucci, 2020).

With respect to young adults (18-30 years old), who represent the target of the present paper, much national and international scientific work considers them to be a population that is potentially at risk. Current studies emphasize how the experience of the lockdown and living with the virus have been associated with high levels of anxiety, depression and distress, as well as with post-traumatic symptoms in young adults more than in other age groups (Balsamo & Carlucci, 2020; Cao et al., 2020; Mazza et al., 2020; Qui et al., 2020; Rossi et al., 2020; Varma et al., 2021). An Italian longitudinal study was conducted during the first four weeks of lockdown

in March 2020 on young people aged between 19 and 29, which revealed that this experience progressively generated an increase in anxiety and depressive symptoms, isolation, somatization, internalizing and externalizing disorders (aggressive behavior) together with a decrease in personal resources (Parola et al., 2020). Another longitudinal study conducted in the southeast of the United States showed that the pandemic increased alcohol consumption and symptoms associated with mood disorders in college students (Charles et al., 2021). Finally, research conducted longitudinally pre- and post-pandemic on young adults has highlighted how the experience of forced isolation and restrictions affecting sociality and relationality have increased levels of perceived stress and anger (Shanahan et al., 2020). The distress present in pre-pandemic periods was the main predictor of high emotional distress during the first phase of the Covid-19 pandemic. Conversely, creating a routine, continuing to be physically active and adopting a positive outlook on the problem were the main coping strategies employed by young adults to mitigate the emotional challenges arising from the experience of the pandemic and forced isolation (Shanahan et al., 2020).

In young adults, the greater risk of developing various forms of psychological distress because of the pandemic is probably due to the complexity of the developmental tasks related to this specific age group (Hendry & Kloep, 2007, 2010). Precarious socio-economic conditions, further compromised by the pandemic, make becoming an adult an increasingly complex experience that gathers "many concomitant transitions (social roles, residence, work) which can sometimes occur simultaneously, even in a relatively short period of time" (transl. by the authors; Shanahan, 2000 in Aleni Sestito & Sica, 2016, p. 20). From this perspective, the Covid-19 pandemic can be seen as a traumatic event that hinders the transition to adulthood, exacerbating deep-rooted socio-cultural characteristics hinged on job insecurity, interfering with the definition of identity peculiar to this age group, and further affecting young adults' well-being, which has already been observed to be particularly low (Bonanomi & Rosina, 2020).

As previously shown (De Rosa & Regnoli, 2022), the adoption of both a psychodynamic and a trauma psychology perspective on the understanding and the interpretation of the pandemic allows exploring its traumatogenic experience, whose core could be linked, as in the case of past collective traumas, to the representational impossibility of the event (Viñar, 2017).

Drawing on the need of the participants to narrate their pandemic through the co-construction of testimonial encounters, the present study sets out to investigate the evolutionary potential embedded in the trauma-generated crisis of meaning (Hirschberger, 2018). In particular, it aims to support the informants' re-organization and re-elaboration of the pandemic through their

recalling of subjective experiences and emotions across the pandemic's different phases. For this reason, the study uses a bottom-up approach in the coding of semi-structured recorded interviews. The data have been analyzed using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) framework (Smith, 1995, 2011; Smith & Osborn, 2008). This research and clinical practice method (Bradfield, 2007) has been selected for the importance it places on the analysis of subjective (Bagnasco et al., 2015) and traumatic (Tessitore, 2019) experiences, the understanding of socio-relational phenomena (Troisi, 2021) as well as on the aetiology of different kinds of mental illnesses (Davidson, 2004).

We postulated that the narrative structure of the meeting, in which the participants are considered the true experts on the phenomenon under consideration, could connect, through a fluctuating trend, the memory of the experience with the scenery of consciousness (Groppo et al., 2017). This may favour the participants in re-appropriating their emotions and subjective experiences which had never been given a narrative space of emergence and potential transformation. Moreover, as with phenomenological clinical practice (Fuchs et al., 2019), the testimonial encounter may help shift the interviewer's focus to the interviewees' pre-reflective experiences and inner personal worlds by creating an accepting and non-judgemental atmosphere.

2. Materials and methods

2.1 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: the methodology

The narratives collected were investigated by means of an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, 1995, 2011; Smith & Osborn, 2008), an investigative approach that allows accessing the sphere of the participants' personal experiences by highlighting their unseen aspects. IPA investigates the process by which individuals construct meaning around their own experiences and considers the dynamic relationship between individual and context. Starting from a defined theoretical framework, it interconnects the act of 'giving voice' with that of 'giving meaning' through the interpretation of the material collected (Larkin et al., 2006). The idiographic nature of IPA allows a greater focus on the specificity of the phenomena under investigation, thus enabling the study of individual instances and bringing to light unprecedented and personal experiences rather than general ones. Hence, it is a method of analysis that does not aim to confirm hypotheses defined *a priori*. In addition, it is generally carried out with a small group of participants (from 1 to a maximum of 30). The core of the methodology is centered on the double hermeneutic interpretation, i.e., the double process of attribution of meaning, which merges the interpretation that individuals attribute to their experiences with that of the

researcher. Moreover, IPA assumes that the research participants are the real experts on the phenomenon under investigation; for these reasons, it places greater value on their narrative truth. The different steps of IPA are described in section 2.5.

2.2 Participants

The study involved 23 Italian young adults between 18 and 30 years old (average age: 24.73 ≈ 25). The participants (nine males and 14 females) are equally distributed by occupational status (seven students, eight student-workers and eight workers). At the time of the interviews, seven participants declared to live in the south of Italy, 11 in the center and three in the north, while the remaining two subjects resided outside Italy, only one of them permanently. Out of the total number of participants, 12 declared to live with their families, six with their roommates, three alone and two with their partners (Tab. 1). In line with the idiographic approach of the methodology, general inclusion criteria were defined to achieve a homogeneous group of subjects. Participants had to be:

- between 18 and 30 years old;

- Italian;

- interested in narrating how they experienced the pandemic until that moment.

Table 1. Characteristics of the group's participants

Gender	N	Geographic prov.	N	%	Formation	N	%	Cohabitation	N	%
Male	9	South	7	30%	Humanities	10	43%	Family	12	53%
Female	14	Centre	11	48%	Scientific Area	13	56%	Roommates	6	26%
		North	3	13%				Alone	3	13%
		Abroad	2	9%				Partner	2	9%

2.3 Framework and Procedures

The present pilot study is part of a wider research project. It was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Naples Federico II, and it was conducted in compliance with the latest Helsinki declaration, the Ethics Code of the Italian Association of Psychology, and the Ethics Code of the National Order of Psychologists. All participants gave their consent to the recording of their interviews; they were made aware that the data collected would remain anonymous and that privacy laws would be observed (L. n. 219 22 December, 2017). Participants were then given a pseudonym and their initials were reported in the analysis. The interviews were conducted during the second wave of the pandemic in the autumn-winter 2020/21, precisely from late November 2020 to early January 2021. Research participants were

contacted through informal media channels, mainly through social media, and interviews were conducted almost entirely through online platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Skype and Zoom, due to both the elevated risk of contagion and the red zone restrictions imposed on many Italian regions at the time of data collection. The interviews, which lasted on average one hour each, were preceded by a description of the objectives of the research and the collection of the following socio-demographic information: age, sex, place of residence, level of education completed or in progress, current occupation, cohabitation.

2.4 Research Instruments

A semi-structured interview was constructed to collect testimonial narratives. This is a flexible instrument that facilitates both the establishment of a relationship of mutual participation between the interviewee and the interviewer and the subsequent narration, as well as the emergence of the 'unexpected'. Through the interview, participants were invited to retrace the history of 'their' pandemic in its different phases (lockdown of March-May 2020; summer 2020; pandemic wave II of autumn-winter 2020), gradually constructing a testimonial narrative. The interviewer gave ample space to free personal narration while gradually shifting the focus on certain areas and themes (Atkinson, 2002). Following the principles of IPA, which require research hypotheses not to be identified and defined *a priori*, the interview was structured around the following research questions:

1. Can contagion containment strategies and fear of infection be associated with lower mental and emotional well-being?

2. May characteristics of family relationships, especially with parents, have influenced the mental and emotional well-being of young adults during the pandemic?

3. Could the political management of the pandemic and hyper-exposure to the media have influenced how young adults experienced the pandemic?

4. May constraints and restrictions aimed at containing the contagion have influenced young adults' desire to plan their future, and their future orientation?

The semi-structured interview was preceded by a socio-demographic section and followed by a concluding section which led the participants through the exploration of their representation of the future, towards the end of the meeting. The interviews explored four thematic areas:

• An area concerning personal experiences, difficulties and possible resources: the participants were asked to recount their own 'stories' about the pandemic by retracing its different phases through recollection; the participants were encouraged, through further 'prompt' questions,

to recall the concerns that they experienced, and to describe their 'typical day', with particular reference to the things that they missed the most, to the obstacles that they encountered, and to the resources that they used to cope with them. A final question explored the perception of time and how it possibly changed during the different phases of the pandemic.

- An area concerning relationships, difficulties and possible resources: this area explored the relationships that the respondents had with their adult persons of trust, first of all with their parents, investigating if and to what extent the interviewees perceived them as an obstacle and/or as a support, and whether there were other adults perceived as significant and supportive in the respondents' relational world.

- An area concerning the respondents' relationship with information: this area investigated the relationship with the media and the news about the pandemic in its three different phases, with particular reference to the information sources that were used the most, the time dedicated to the research of information and the evaluation of its quality.

- An area concerning the respondents' relationship with institutions: this area observed how the participants judged the containment measures adopted by the national and regional governments and the political management of the pandemic in general. Trust in institutions was also explored to understand the extent to which the participants felt protected by the adopted measures, and whether this had changed during the different phases of the pandemic.

2.5 Data analysis

The testimonial narratives were analyzed according to the different steps of IPA (Smith, 2011), adopting a psychodynamic perspective in the interpretation of the collected material. In the first step, interviews were carefully listened to by the research team, which provided an initial description of the recurring and/or previously unknown contents. Interviews were then transcribed manually and analyzed; the narrative material collected was thus cross-checked by each member of the team. By reading the texts and listening to the audio recordings of the interviews, the research team could get acquainted with the narrative material, and then highlight its uncommon and/or recurring aspects through notes and comments to leave space for one's interpretation.

Table 2. Superordinate and subordinate themes with frequencies

Participants / Sex	F f	A f	C f	M m	D f	E f	I f	G f	J m	L f	B m	O m	Z m	U m	M f	S f	W m	N f	Y f	Q m	T f	Z m	V f	F
1. The impossible in a very short time																								
1a "Chaos": the pandemic as a disruptive event			*	*	*	*	*	*	*		*	*					*		*			*	*	13
1b The virus far from me				*		*	*		*			*			*	*		*	*	*			*	11
1c Summer illusions					*	*	*	*	*								*						*	7
1d Avoidance: a way to go on for the individual and the community		*	*	*	*	*			*	*	*	*	*	*		*		*		*	*	*	*	17
1e Emotionally fragile parents			*	*	*	*		*	*	*	*									*	*	*	*	12
1f Information: "an overwhelming bombardment"	*	*	*		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*				*	*	19
2. Things were better when times were harder																								
2a Coming back to life in phase II: between disillusionment and guilt	*	*	*		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*			*	*	*		*	19
2b Phase II: a perception of time as liquid		*	*	*	*				*			*	*		*					*	*			10
2c News avoidance: limiting the search for information		*	*	*	*	*	*							*			*	*	*	*	*	*		13
2d Attitudes towards the government: from Conte-iner to disappointment	*	*	*	*	*	*	*			*	*	*	*	*	*	*					*			15
3. I control...therefore I am and will be																								
3a Work as salvation	*			*							*			*			*		*				*	7
3b Planning the day: "a breath of fresh air".		*	*	*	*	*			*	*	*	*	*	*				*	*	*	*	*	*	17
3c *Horror vacui*: the use of time to relieve the anguish of emptiness				*		*		*	*	*	*	*		*			*	*					*	11
3d The future? It cannot be worse than how I saw it before	*	*		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*			*	*		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	19
4. Ambivalence																								
4a "A relationship in-between": family as a potential space for regression				*	*	*			*			*		*					*			*	*	9
4b Technologically advanced and technologically frustrated			*		*	*	*				*	*	*	*						*			*	10
4c Online university: a controversial container			*		*	*	*	*	*															6

Theme 1. The impossible in a very short time.

This superordinate theme, together with its subordinate themes, encapsulates the potentially traumatic effect of the Covid-19 pandemic. The theme contains the disruptive effects related to the emergence of the virus in our country and the unprecedented experience of the lockdown (March-May 2020); it reveals not only the obstacles, new concerns and fears that this experience has brought to light but also the resources and coping strategies that young people who were interviewed have readily adopted.

The disruptive impact brought about by the global outbreak of coronavirus is well described by Josh's words, which resonated widely with the group of participants and gave the theme its name:

"The impossible happened in a short amount of time [...]psychologically, it was a devastating situation, being locked in the house with the suffering we had to live through, watching television and the victims the Covid-19 was claiming" (Josh).

Subordinate theme 1a *"Chaos: the pandemic as a disruptive event"* serves as a container for the descriptions of the beginning of the pandemic reconstructed by the interviewees some eight months later; they described this event as something difficult to imagine and place in reality, to the point of comparing it to something fictional, to 'a movie':

"I didn't really realize what was happening" (Erika).
"It feels like we are living a reality that is not real, like a movie" (Gilda).

The disruption of the pre-pandemic 'dynamic balance' was, however, quickly overcome through the definition of a 'stable equilibrium' (Semi, 2016, p. 14), as often happens following experiences with traumatic potential. In our interviewees, it took place on the one hand through a controlling organization of daily life (cf. overarching theme 3.) and, on the other, through a defensive physical and emotional distancing from what was happening outside the holding walls of their home.

The reality of the pandemic had long been experienced as 'far away', 'other than me'. This aspect, contained in subordinate theme 1b *"The virus far from me"*, takes into consideration both the geographic origin of the initial spread of the virus, which was really located in a 'faraway place' such as China and also the fact that the subjects interviewed came mainly from central and southern Italy: since these areas had been less affected by the spread of the contagion until

autumn 2020, the respondents had been able to live the first period of lockdown in partial tranquility:

"[The virus] hadn't even affected Europe yet, not even Italy, let alone my world" (Selene).

This identification of the danger with a place and a culture different from one's own can be interpreted as an attempt at defensive distancing, which was likely determined by the impossibility of promptly attributing meaning to what was happening through culturally shared symbols and signs (Bruner, 1991), as often happens in traumatic realities (Hirschberger, cit.). However, it can be hypothesized that, if on the one hand, this emotional distancing allowed the reduction of the distress caused by the current events, on the other, it may have made people less prepared to tolerate, manage and reduce the traumatic impact of the pandemic from a psychic point of view. This has been associated with the initial contagions, store closures and human losses in our territory, but also with the more complex and general second wave of the pandemic.

Subordinate theme 1c *"Summer Illusions"* encompasses the regaining of social freedoms during the summer of 2020 at the end of the lockdown. A significant proportion of the young people interviewed described the summer as a period of 'rebirth', 'free will', 'light-heartedness' and 'relaxation', states of mind that were also fueled by the shift of focus in the world of information from the pandemic to summer holiday themes, which, by fueling the illusion of the pandemic's real and definitive conclusion, contributed to a reduction in the perception of risk:

"I realize that sometimes I have been a bit careless, I used to go out with the mask on but when we were with friends, I would take it off and never put it back on" (Gilda).
"We went to the seaside, we went out, almost as if it was over" (Lea).

This subordinate theme was included in the superordinate theme of the pandemic as a traumatogenic event because the presence of the illusion that the pandemic had come to an end during the summer was associated with a greater traumatic and stressful impact of the second wave of the pandemic. On the contrary, young people who experienced the summer period as a phase of 'transient well-being', without entertaining the illusion that 'it's all over', seemed to cope better with the arrival of the second wave, the new peak of infections and restrictions.

Starting from the words of some young people such as Daria, which are taken as an example below, it was possible to hypothesize that remaining alert during the summer and knowing that it was nothing more than a temporary respite may have been a protective factor when the second wave of the pandemic arrived.

"I was afraid that the others would think: it's all gone so now we can stay calm, we can pretend that nothing happened, which of course isn't true[...] I saw my friends again, not all of them, the essential ones, those I liked to be with, considering the situation it wasn't the time to meet random people" (Daria).

Theme 1d *"Avoidance: a way to go on for the individual and the community"* shows that avoidance was the most commonly used strategy to cope with the pandemic in both the first and second waves. The destructuring of everyday life caused by the pandemic activated avoidance coping in many of the young people interviewed; these, together with a controlling organization of daily routines (cf. theme 3c.), allowed them to control defensively their fears and worries. The narrative material collected led to identifying two types of avoidance coping, which were often used in combination: on the one hand, indirect avoidance, centered on controlling the organization of time to saturate every moment of the day, which made it possible to keep away any thoughts about what was happening:

"In my head, it is "work, work, work!" as if by working this thing could end sooner or later, if I keep my mind occupied sooner or later it will end" (Valerie).
"I used to read books. I used to do yoga... it was like this period had to pass" (Ylenia).

On the other hand, a direct typology of avoidance was hypothesized, often associated with denial as a coping mechanism which, through the implementation of concrete actions (such as turning off the television, going out despite the danger, etc.), allowed to control anxiety and worries. The latter strategy is also attributed by the interviewees to their fathers (see theme 1e):

"I put a stop to looking for information, as if I didn't want to know anything anymore, as if the thing had stopped and I didn't want to know anything anymore" (Agata).
"I'd rather watch a Netflix episode and ignore all information because objectively the only reaction I get is to make myself annoyed and to ruin the mood I was in" (Daria).

Intentionally keeping one's 'mind busy' is a defensive mode of coping with the unexpected and the uncontrollable; while it is effective in reducing anxiety, it appears to have contributed to the depletion of mental resources needed to cope with the period of the pandemic, which would prove to be much longer than the three-month lockdown. As explored in overarching theme 2 and subordinate theme 2a, this hypothesis seems to be supported by the greater stressogenic magnitude of the second wave of the pandemic (autumn-winter 2020) reported by most of the young people interviewed.

"The lockdown quietly passed thanks to the creation of a routine [...] this second phase definitely hit me more than the first [...] because there is a semblance of freedom but in reality, you finish work at 4.30 pm and then

everything closes at 6 pm and at 10 pm you have to be at home, so there is little space left, but I think that in this case as well it is important to build your own physical and mental spaces [as was done in the lockdown]" (Umberto).

Theme 1e "*Emotionally fragile parents*" contains the interviewees' representation of how their parents reacted in the face of the pandemic. Parents were not spared by this event's traumatic impact: they are described as 'fragile', 'suffering', 'frightened', 'worried', 'tried', and 'apprehensive' because of the unpredictability of the event; above all, they are depicted as unable to cope adequately and, as a result, unable to provide their children with security, holding and protection:

"They [parents] should give security and now they don't have it and they are scared [...] it's bad to see a parent suffer because usually you see the parent as someone who gives you the strength to go on" (Lea).

Specifically, as mentioned above, the father figure is mainly described as avoidant and disinterested in the pandemic and its risks, while the mother figure is described as fragile, careful and anxious:

"For my dad, it's like nothing happened, like there was no pandemic" (Zack).

"[My] mother is anxious, she's had a very hard time, information is contagious, she feels suffocated whenever she feels she has any covid-like symptoms [...] The one who's worse off is mum, she can't stay calm [...] I don't know how many times she disinfects her hands per minute" (Cassandra).

The last subordinate theme, 1f, namely *"Information: an overwhelming bombardment"*, includes the potentially traumatic impact of the way in which the media disseminated information about the pandemic. Consistent with the literature (Cheng et al., 2014; Biondi and Iannitelli, 2020; Brooks et al., 2020; Shanahan et al., 2020; Dong et al., 2020), this study also found that the information provided by the media — too often "chaotic", "incoherent", "confused", "terroristic" — turned out to be a particularly intense stressor for the respondents; it was one of the factors with the greatest traumatogenic potential, associated with negative affective states such as "panic", "fright", "anxiety", "discouragement", "anger", "hate" and "distrust":

"Journalists terrorize, they don't provide real information [...] they only spoil our day" (Josh).
"I find it macabre that when you turn on the TV there is a kind of war bulletin" (Umberto).
"During the lockdown, we were bombarded, it was suffocating" (Willy).

Theme 2. Things were better when times were harder

This theme encapsulates the experience of the second wave of the pandemic (autumn-winter 2020), which seems to have had a greater traumatic impact on most participants. In encouraging the participants to reconstruct the events that they had lived, the interview allowed them to

understand how much harder they were hit by the second wave compared to the first, due to factors such as the exponential increase in contagions, the nationwide spread of the virus, or the first cases among family and friends. These events reactivated anxieties and fears that already existed during the lockdown, but in such an intense and pervasive form that they generated strong effects of "uncertainty, not knowing what to expect", "fear", "panic". The traumatic impact of the second wave seems to have been increased by the renewed loss of social relations regained over the summer but also by the feeling of having already spent all available psychic energy in coping with the lockdown:

"I suffered much more during this second lockdown than in the first one because it came at a time... I mean, especially at this age we are in a moment of growth and we should experience university [...]. We used up all our energies during the first lockdown and now we have reached the end of our rope" (Lea).

Subordinate theme 2a *"Coming back to life in phase II: between disillusionment and guilt"* encapsulates the transition from the summer illusion of 'all gone' (theme 1c.) to the traumatogenic disillusionment brought about by the pandemic upsurge in autumn. As shown in previous studies (Brooks et al., 2020; Horesh & Brown, 2020), the fact that people had the possibility of going out in the second wave (albeit with some restrictions), triggered a greater awareness of the risk of contracting the virus and spreading it to others, fueling fears and concerns, despite the exponential increase in contagion and death rates.

Among the interviewees, the fear of being infected with the virus was lower than the fear of infecting others, probably also because of their younger age, which made them less likely to develop serious symptoms. In our opinion, however, it is important to emphasize the sense of responsibility that emerged from the interviews with regard to loved ones, those who belong to a high-risk group, and coworkers. This contrasts sharply with the narrative that circulated at various stages of the pandemic, which labeled young people as irresponsible, indifferent to risks, and almost as 'plague spreaders'. The respondents' sense of responsibility is accompanied by a specific form of stress, defined by some as 'moral stress', which increased considerably during the second wave:

"Even when I am careful, I'm afraid that I'm not careful enough. [...] I wasn't a danger to anyone in the first lockdown, now I have to live... because I have to live... but with a big responsibility on my shoulders. If that happened I'd feel too guilty! [...] Even young people got sick and died. We are responsible for everyone [and] your behavior affects society as a whole" (Selene).*"I'm afraid that I could be a carrier of the disease [...] that's the thing that scares me the most, I would never want someone I know to be sick because of me [...] or to harm someone unintentionally [...]"* (Boris).

"It's a bit distressing because you always think you're the positive one who could bring death to other people [...] to me it's more important to say 'I don't want to get it for my parents' sake' than to get it for myself" (Valerie).

Subordinate theme 2b *"Phase II: a perception of time as liquid"* describes the way that the perception of time changed from the first period of lockdown to the second wave of the pandemic. From a quantitative temporal alteration, in which time is described as slowed down and/or stopped, a shift has been observed during the second wave of the pandemic towards a qualitative change in which time, regardless of the speed at which it flows, is perceived as "fluid", "unusable", "static", "not productive", thus acquiring pervasive stressogenic traits:

"I have the impression that time is being wasted. It's as if I can't be productive and I don't know how to use the time I have in the most appropriate way" (Agata).
"Time is a prison where one has to do things immediately, and it becomes painful when you take a break. Now if you lose time, you feel guilty, before [referring to lockdown] it was nice to waste time" (Zack).

Fluid time is an ungovernable time, that "flows over you" and cannot be used as one should, a time that prevents one from making plans and, therefore, generates guilt; on the contrary, several interviewees experienced the lockdown as a chance to take some time for themselves, a slowed down time that was a harbinger of well-being and regeneration – very different from the restlessness and urgency (Chicchi, 2021; De Rosa & Regnoli, 2022; Kaes, 2020) of pre-pandemic life.

Theme 2c *"News avoidance: limiting the search for information"* encompasses the evolution of the relationship with information that occurred between the first and the second wave of the pandemic; the difference observed is important, given the persistent perception of news as chaotic and disorienting. Indeed, during the lockdown, the search for information was an important tool to orient oneself and understand what was happening, which also implemented veritable family rituals (cf. 1f). However, during the second wave, there has been a clear reduction in the intake of information which, because of the stressful effect of the infodemic, ultimately discouraged people from trying to orient themselves and understand the current events:

"[During the lockdown we were] always glued to the news" [...] there was almost a ritual, at 6 pm we would go and sit in front of the TV because there was a report from the health minister. Updates on COVID were continuous in order to understand what was happening and what could be done or not "because everything was new" (Marc).
"During the second wave I haven't been keeping informed anymore, it's wrong but I haven't; on the one hand [the information] opened my eyes because if you don't see certain images you can't even imagine [...] but after a

while, I was exhausted of seeing, seeing, seeing, all I could hear was death, death, death and I couldn't take it anymore" (Selene).

"I put a stop to the search for information as if I didn't want to know anything anymore, as if the thing had stopped and I didn't want to know anything anymore" (Agata).

Between the first and the second wave of the pandemic, there seems to have been an increase in the perception of information as 'nauseating', 'confusing', 'chaotic', 'intrusive', 'exploited' and, consequently, an increase in the awareness of the seriousness and risks intrinsic to poor-quality information, often subjected to manipulation:

"Major newspapers picking up news from the internet written by just anybody...it's serious, you can't scare or delude others by sharing false news... false information is at the foundation of conspiracy theorists and deniers" (Willy).

"They are not clear; the information is not clear [...] they play with the coronavirus, and they play too much [...] the mass media have brought inner chaos. No one is good at shutting everyone up and saying I'll handle it, a dictatorship… For the Italians who are as dumb as oxen, we would only need a dictatorship" (Valerie).

In line with the subordinate theme just described, theme 2d *"Attitude towards the government: from Conte-iner to disappointment"* shows how trust in the government declined from the period of lockdown to the second wave of the pandemic, probably due both to the resumption of the political struggle that generated too many "conflicting voices", and to the growing awareness of the exploitation of the pandemic for economic reasons to the detriment of citizens' security. The work of Conte, the Italian Prime Minister during the lockdown, is instead assessed positively by virtue of the holding and protective effects of his government.

"In the early stages, I had total confidence, especially in the national government [...]. Currently [second wave] I feel a deep mistrust [...] they could have done much more [...]. In the summer there was too much freedom [...] we citizens and the decision-makers were a bit lost, thinking that we could get out of it easily. I have a lot less confidence in the government now than I had in the early stages... especially with the holidays coming up... we don't know how we're going to live through them yet" (Selene).

"Conte seems to really care about the good of the country, and he doesn't seem to think about his own benefit [...] I trust his work and that of those around him and even if he has made mistakes, he is a person too, [...] he tries to do what he can with the people around him, inevitably there will always be someone who will be unhappy" (Mafalda).

Theme 3. I control...Therefore I am and will be.

This overarching theme comprises the main difficulties experienced by the interviewees during the different phases of the pandemic and the resources they found to cope with them. The dimension of control, in the sense of maintaining control over one's own life, emerged with enormous force from almost all interviews; it constituted a resource for coping with both the rigid restrictions of the lockdown and the anxieties and fears associated with the flare-up of the virus in the autumn months.

Theme 3a *"Work is wisdom"* shows how for these young people (workers and student-workers), work was a fundamental resource for coping with the pandemic, as it reduced the anxiety associated with its unpredictability. Working was an anchorage to pre-pandemic normality, and as such it allowed them to maintain control over their lives – an active role at a time when they were passively crushed by the uncontrollability of external events. Similarly, as will be explored in more detail in the overarching theme 4 and in the subordinate theme 4c, studying also performed this salvific function for some young people, anchoring them to a normality that had been suddenly taken away from them by the pandemic and its consequent restrictions.

"Thanks to my job I was able to get out of the house, get some air...normality wasn't broken too much" (Marc). *"During the first lockdown I have always worked [...] and that saved me so much...to have a normal life, in my small way"* (Willy).

In contrast, for those who were forced into isolation during the lockdown, and those who drastically reduced social relationships during the second wave of the pandemic, it was the organization of daily life that acted as a useful coping strategy.

Subordinate theme 3b *"Planning the day: a breath of fresh air"* shows how the strategy of organizing daily activities in a structured and defined way (e.g., cooking, watching a movie, exercising, in some cases even writing a diary) helped to keep fears and anxieties at bay. Sometimes, perhaps not surprisingly, this strategy was also associated with avoidant tendencies (Direct avoidance: see 1d.). As was already pointed out (see theme 2b), the possibility to devote time to oneself - that is, to "stop and rewind", blocking out the frenetic nature of the pre-pandemic world - was an important resource, especially during the lockdown, as it fostered well-being and a sense of regeneration, and it reduced the fear of the unpredictable:

"I used to organize my day in steps, taking up activities such as training, puzzles..." (Valerie). *"I'm taking a half-hour to myself, period, I'm important, the things I do are also important, but before anything else I'm important, because if I'm not okay mentally then the things I do will never turn out okay either, I devote time to physical activity and initially [referring to the lockdown] also to writing a diary"* (Agata).

Trying to maintain control over one's own life through work or daily activities allows coping with the main fear reported by the young people interviewed: the fear of losing control over one's own life. Subordinate theme 3c, *"Horror vacui: the use of time to relieve the anguish of emptiness"*, precisely describes the state of unease and helplessness expressed by many interviewees resulting from the upheavals caused by the pandemic, and from the impossibility of "being able to choose freely what to do" or of "being able to do something to stop what was happening":

"I feel a bit useless and dull compared to before [pre-pandemic] [...] I can't do what I want, explore new things..." (Lea).

"At first it didn't seem possible because I didn't believe there was anything that could escape human control" (Boris).

The domination and control over everything that happens constitute a peculiarity – at times dysfunctional – of contemporary society, in which the absence of limits, the inexperience of the unexpected and the "unmanageable" lay the foundations for temporary psychological distress (Kaës, 2020; Chicchi, 2021). The fear of losing control over one's own life is in line with the following subordinate theme, 3c: *"The future? It cannot be worse than how I saw it before"*. It contains the representation of a future – sometimes unimaginable and mostly envisaged with pessimistic overtones – described as "grim" and "unplannable", a sign of the deep malaise that, for decades now, seems to have pervaded this generation of young adults, and other age groups as well (Parrello, 2014).

This negative representation of the future, which had also been highlighted in pre-pandemic studies (Wang, 2020; Zambianchi, 2019), seems to be heightened by employment uncertainty and by the economic crisis; these factors make reaching adulthood more complex and place the evolutionary tasks characteristic of this transition ever farther ahead (Aleni Sestito & Sica, 2016; Hendry & Kloep, 2010; Larson, 2011):

"I have the exact same uncertainty about the future that I would have felt even without the pandemic... I mean, the pandemic is definitely an additional obstacle but I don't know...in general I have a quite problematic vision regardless [...] It is not the pandemic that changed my image of the future, it was an image that I see and that I already saw as difficult before anyway... it might be because of my study path and what I want to do...the pandemic is added to the list of difficulties that already existed [...]. The pandemic has not made me see things any worse than how I already saw them before" (Zeno).

"I'm afraid of the future; I can't... by now I've entered so much into this current normality [...] that there's always something lurking [...] now it's happened with COVID, what if it happens with something else? I'm a bit discouraged" (Agata).

It has been hypothesized that the perception of an uncertain future and the difficulty of finding a glimpse of positivity, while pre-existing, were severely exacerbated by the pandemic, and may invalidate the identity function of 'futuring' (Sica et al., 2016), which is crucial for the construction of the vocational domain (Porfeli et al., 2011) in the transition to adulthood. Moreover, recent studies show how the vision of a threatening future, reiterated by our young interviewees, is positively associated with lower subjective well-being, a fact that is aggravated in cases where such a negative representation of the future is added to negative past experiences and a fatalistic perception of the present (Zambianchi, 2019).

Theme 4. Ambivalence

The fourth superordinate theme encompasses the respondents' relationship with their families, in particular with parental figures, the controversial relationship with technology and the role that university played for the students interviewed; all of these relationships are marked by ambivalence. Theme 4a, *"A relationship in-between: Family as a potential space for regression",* brings together two aspects deemed relevant in the testimonial narratives collected. In the case of young people who had moved away from their nuclear family for study or work reasons, the need to return to it because of confinement not only made readjusting to living together harder but also generated in them a sense of regression, of "moving backwards". Indeed, receiving the attention, but also the control, typical of their teenage years, on the one hand, fostered a sense of protection and support; however, on the other hand, it triggered a sense of 'loss' of the autonomy that they had yearned for and achieved in the pre-pandemic period:

"I almost felt like a high school student again, like a child again" (Marc).
"Being back home gave me a taste of being controlled again... not spied on, absolutely, but I still had to account for my state of mind, whereas in Milan I wouldn't necessarily have had to communicate it [...]. I lost my independence, I mean, for example, you had to answer to them even to go for a walk" (Daria).

In line with the reference literature (Becciu & Colasanti, 2021), the forced cohabitation imposed by the lockdown led to greater tensions and conflicts in the family, which were, in particular, the consequence of the sense of loss of personal freedoms and the sense of oppression resulting from being forced to share the same living space. Moments of conflict have gradually given way to more shared and serene ways of living together:

"It was really difficult to live in an unusual situation with all four of us at home...I felt almost oppressed because I was not used to this overcrowding...I could not even have a minimum of time away from my family [...] and this feeling was oppressive" (Iris).

"In March the cohabitation started in conflict, but then it turned into harmony [...] we started walking almost in the same direction, I had to understand them because they also had to work from home [...] we managed to meet halfway" (Cassandra).

In this theme, a relevant element is a sort of symmetrization of roles that many young people say to have established with their parents, with whom a 'neutral' relationship seems to prevail, not only in the sense of being unaltered by the pandemic but above all in which parents are not perceived as a source of support and assistance when faced with difficulties. As will be seen later (see theme 4c), this trait seems to characterize the relationship with the adult world in general, extending also to the relationship with teachers; on the contrary, their peers were perceived as a source of support.

"During the pandemic, the relationship with my mother remained the same, [there was] neither more closeness nor more sharing...let's say [family relationships] are neutral. It is as if at the family level there was no pandemic... [...] it's always the same thing" (Erika).

"They have not been more supportive than others... When I was practically panicking, I was on my own rather than looking for the adult who could console me, it is not as if they had already lived through it and knew what to do" (Ylenia).

"I don't feel that I have received protection or help from them (extended family and grandparents), nor from my parents and the adult world in general" (Tosca).
"I feel more understood by people my age, but not by adults my parents' age" (Quinto).

Theme 4b *"Technologically advanced and technologically frustrated"* shows how, in addition to the family, ambivalence has also characterized the relationship with technology, especially in those who have been forced by the pandemic to be totally dependent on it to continue working. In fact, if on the one hand, technology was perceived as a resource, as the only way to keep alive the social life they had been forced to give up, on the other, the excess and pervasiveness of its use constituted a further element of stress that they had to cope with:

"I can no longer stand the computer, any technological apparatus... [I can no longer stand] that everything happens through technology [...]. On the other hand [technology] is what let us feel close to each other and so as much as it is good it is also bad" (Cassandra).

"Every morning when I pick up this screen, it's a huge weight! [...] the computer has become my workplace, going into the computer is like going out to work" (Gilda).

Theme 4c *"Online university: a controversial container"* describes how the students interviewed perceived their relationship with a university environment deeply disrupted by the pandemic.

During the initial period of lockdown, online universities constituted a fundamental resource to "maintain that contact with the normality that was rapidly being lost". However, the 'in person' university context is not only a place to meet, exchange ideas and socialize, but also an opportunity to open up to the unprecedented, the unexpected; as such, its loss was perceived by the students interviewed as a huge loss, and it originated negative feelings and concerns. With the prolonged closure of the universities and the students being aware of the lower effectiveness of distance learning, even the initial advantages of online learning quickly gave way to an exacerbation of malaise, which seem to have found neither understanding nor support from the adult points of reference, their professors.

"University was very important [...] if it wasn't for university, it would have been very hard, at least I had something to do [...]. After class, I would read something, catch up on classes or do physical activity...I tried to keep myself as busy as possible" (Iris).

"Taking classes in pajamas was also fun [during the lockdown] but now it has become frustrating [...], it is harder to follow, it is much easier to get distracted" (Gilda).

"Now I'm not saying that motivation was at an all-time low, but almost [...]. Teachers start to treat these students as if they had no souls as if they were little objects: I log in with 200 tiny people on teams and then if they have a soul I don't care [...], I can't even intervene, to write on the chat" (Josh).

"My study was successful but not as much as I wanted [...], I filled my time studying, reading... to avoid thinking, but I saw that it was not the same thing, I could study all day long but I saw that my performance wasn't the same as before" (Lea).

5. Conclusions

The results of the present study are in line with the literature, which has shown the extent to which the Covid-19 pandemic has negatively influenced the well-being of young adults, a target that is already ever struggling with a delicate and complex evolutionary transition. At the same time, our study aimed at the testimonial reconstruction of the different phases of the pandemic, and therefore it was structured in such a way as to provide the interviewees with the stimulus to go through them cognitively and emotionally. The characteristics of this study allowed to highlight some innovative aspects as well as to provide the interviewees with an opportunity for reflection and potential re-elaboration of the way they experienced the pandemic. From this point of view, the study falls within the area of action research since the adoption of the testimonial narrative as a reconstructive and transformative experience tool allowed the majority of the interviewees to come into contact with their experiences and emotions around which it was possible to construct new meaning. The encounter with the Other and the narrative

oscillation between past, present and future allowed both the interviewees and the interviewer to re-experience the different phases of the pandemic starting from a common ground. Furthermore, it allowed rethinking one's own experiences by acknowledging points in common and of difference, as is the case with clinical psychology (Frisone, 2021). The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis framework adopted as an inductive and ideographic approach to the investigation of the phenomena at issue as well as the role of the double reflectivity between interviewer and interviewee (Smith, 2004) shed light on the participants' experiential subjectivity. Moreover, it favored the emergence of personal experiences linked to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Following the studies that consider the pandemic as a new collective historical trauma (Biondi & Iannitelli, 2020; De Rosa, 2021; De Rosa & Regnoli, 2022; Horesh & Brown, 2020), this event also appears as a destabilizing experience in the present research, one of rupture, which had harmful consequences on psychological and social well-being; it is also confirmed that its unpredictability and uncontrollability were a source of emotional distress characterized by negative emotions, anxiety and depressive states (Cao et al., 2020; Shanahan et al., 2020.), often translated into somatization and insomnia (Cellini et al., 2020; Parola et al., 2020). The new element that emerged in our study is the greater traumatic impact that the second wave of the pandemic (autumn-winter 2020) allegedly had compared to the lockdown (March 2020) and, in particular, the relationship between the aforementioned traumatic impact and how the summer of 2020 was experienced: unlike those who expected a new wave of infections, people who experienced that summer as if it were the end of the pandemic seem to have suffered more from the impact of the second wave. Further studies should explore the hypothesis that the higher degree of summer delusion affected psychic unpreparedness for the second wave, setting the stage for potentially traumatic disillusionment.

As in previous research (Brooks et al., 2020; Horesh & Brown, 2020), fear of contagion and becoming infected was prevalent among our interviewees, but in particular, during the second wave of the pandemic, it was overwhelmingly supplanted by fear of becoming vectors of contagion for others — especially high-risk individuals —, by the resulting sense of guilt, and an acute form of stress that young people described as moral stress. Accompanied by carefulness and respect for the rules, these feelings denote a high sense of responsibility in the young adults interviewed, in open contrast to what was often conveyed by the media, particularly during the autumn-winter of 2020.

In both the first and second waves, the organization of different activities to 'pass' the time appears to be a strategy to maintain control over one's life, as loss of control apparently

represents the interviewees' main fear. However, it is hypothesized that the strategy of control, which is functional in reducing anxiety about the unpredictable, has depleted them of the psychic resources necessary to face the second wave of the pandemic, which proved to be more traumatic than the lockdown. In any case, the fulfillment of work and study commitments represented valuable resources that, particularly during the lockdown, made it possible to maintain a certain degree of contact with normality, which had been compromised by the pandemic. However, the extended period of remote working and distance learning, which became necessary due to the pandemic, turned this resource into a further source of stress, increasing the psychological distress of the young adults interviewed; as also noted by others (Balsamo & Carlucci, 2020; Barari et al., 2020.), this feeling of distress was intensified by the second wave. Among university students, difficulties in concentrating, boredom, demotivation and fear of 'falling behind' had largely supplanted the enthusiasm and 'comfort' enjoyed during the lockdown thanks to distance learning, at least at the time when the interviews were recorded (autumn-winter 2020). The aggravation of youth distress during the second wave is also underlined by the negative change in the way that time was perceived: if during the lockdown the forced slowing down of daily rhythms opened up space for a slow time, which was essentially dedicated to self-care and therefore a harbinger of well-being, during the second wave it becomes 'fluid time (...) that passes by', a wasted time.

We would also like to emphasize the sense of abandonment perceived by students on the part of their professors who, like the adult world in general, did not appear to be a source of support in times of difficulty. Indeed, this perception also affects parental figures and other adult points of reference, who did not seem able to provide any protection from the anxieties and fears associated with the pandemic. Our interviewees seemed to be particularly affected by the traumatic impact that the pandemic had on their parents, to the point that they declared seeing their peer group as their main reference point. These data lead us to formulate the hypothesis that the pandemic has exacerbated a 'symmetrization' of the relationship between young people and the adult world, primarily between parents and children, which has already been reported in the past as a possible evolutionary risk factor of parent-child roles (Bellavita, 2020; De Rosa, 2012, 2014; Kins et al., 2012).

Regarding the cohabitation forced by the lockdown, as already highlighted in previous research (Becciu & Colasanti, 2021), the present study also observed that an initial period full of conflicts gave way to more contractual and sustainable forms of cohabitation. In our study, we also highlighted how the lockdown period was particularly difficult for students and/or workers who lived away from home: when forced to return to their families, they felt particularly oppressed,

intruded upon and stressed, perceiving this constraint as a regressive movement with respect to the independence that they had previously gained.

In line with the literature, the media was one of the main stressors in all the pandemic phases explored, a source of anxiety and agitation probably enhanced by the unlimited and uncontrolled access to information that, through social media, characterizes the younger generations (Biondi & Iannitelli, 2020; Cheng et al., 2014; Dong et al., 2020). Our study reveals that the chaotic "culture of the number", pervasive in the mass media, has fueled disorientation, anxiety and fear, activating a defensive strategy of information avoidance in the transition from lockdown to the second wave – a strategy that has deprived subjects of the possibility of orienting themselves and understanding what was happening. The relationship between the world of information, social media and increased levels of anxiety seems to be in line with what has already been shown in the literature (Bettman et al., 2020).

As with the world of information, trust in the institutional world and its ability to manage the pandemic seems to have followed the same trend: trust was high during the lockdown, then it gradually waned during the second wave, as political differences and the government crisis that occurred during the autumn-winter of 2020 became more acute.

As Settineri (2021) suggests, politics and the media seem to have lacked the psychological sensibility in dealing with the pandemic and in the spread of information, calling upon a potentially disorganizing "nomotethic song" (p. 2) which has fueled the invisibility of specific needs, especially in young adults, by neglecting space dedicated to the unpredictability and uniqueness of human behavior.

In a socio-cultural framework in which becoming an adult has been a developmental transition fraught with obstacles and ambivalence for decades, the pandemic seems to have had a particularly strong impact (Wang, 2020), further eroding young adults' ability to project themselves into the future. The vision of the future, both individual and collective, that our interviewees reported has gray and worrying tones, with no room for dreams and desires, and no confidence in the possibility of realizing one's aspirations. As a result of this, because of the pandemic, we are witnessing a worrying increase in quite serious nosographic pictures in this age group, such as anxiety, depression, somatizations, difficulties in impulse control, isolation, suicidal ideation and attempts (Cellini et al., 2020; Frisone et al., 2020; Parola et al., 2020). The scientific community is aware of the urgency of dealing with the specific difficulties experienced by young people during this pandemic. In our opinion, it could be important to try and accompany young people as they re-experience and potentially re-elaborate this historical

trauma, placing it in a new frame of meaning to make sense of it and obtain tools for intelligibility. Indeed, the experience of the pandemic as a traumatic event of rupture of the narcissistic omnipotence of today's society can therefore be considered a new key to understanding contemporary malaise. The possibility of allowing oneself some space for reflection, that is, critically rethinking oneself in opposition to the deadly speed of the culture of urgency and performance (Chicchi, 2021), could open the way to a gradual work of *Kulturarbeit* through the rediscovery of those values and needs, first and foremost those of a bond, hidden by the frenetic nature of the contemporary world, as happened in the lockdown period (De Rosa, 2021).

In conclusion, it should be added that this study is the exploratory phase of a larger project that aims to build, from the data collected here, a quantitative research tool to be extended to a significant sample of young adults, thus responding to the main limitation of the study, namely the small number of subjects on which it is based.

Ethical approval [*]**:** The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Naples Federico II. It was conducted in compliance with both the latest Declaration of Helsinki and with the code of ethics of the Italian Association of Psychology and the Code of Ethics of the National Order of Psychologists.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study and all participants expressed their consent to the audio-recording of their interviews, aware that the data collected would remain anonymous, that privacy laws would be observed (L. n. 219, 22/12/2017), that they had the possibility to leave the study at any time, and that the narrative material would have been subsequently analyzed.

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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