

COVID Generation: An Exploratory Analysis on the Impact of the Pandemic on the Relational Modes of Students from a School in Palermo

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has radically transformed social, educational, and economic life worldwide, with containment measures such as social isolation and school closures profoundly impacting relational dynamics and psychological well-being, especially among children and adolescents. Numerous studies have highlighted how the educational and social contexts were altered, with long-term implications still uncertain (Panchal et al., 2020). The school-age group, from 6 to 18 years old, is particularly vulnerable as, during this phase, the process of socialization is crucial for identity development and relational skills. This research aims to investigate the relational modes of students in the post-pandemic context, analyzing changes in interactions with peers and teachers. Using a qualitative methodology and the Core Conflictual Relationship Theme (CCRT), the study seeks to understand how the pandemic has influenced young students' perceptions of others and their psychological adaptation.

Keywords: COVID-19, Pandemic, Relational dynamics, Psychological well-being, Social isolation, School closures, Children and adolescents, Identity development, Socialization, Post-pandemic, Educational context

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic brought radical changes in the social, educational, and economic spheres, significantly affecting the psychological well-being and relational dynamics of young people. Containment measures, such as social isolation and school closures, profoundly altered the educational and social environment, with long-term consequences still difficult to predict (Panchal et al., 2020). The school-age group, from 6 to 18 years old, is especially vulnerable because, in this phase, the process of socialization is key to building identity and relational competencies. This research aims to examine how the pandemic influenced the relational modes of students from a school in Palermo, analyzing changes in interactions with peers and teachers through a qualitative approach using the Core Conflictual Relationship Theme (CCRT). Changes in the students' relational modes are identified through an ipsative comparison, evaluating the relational episodes described by the students and placing them along a temporal continuum of pre-pandemic, pandemic, and post-pandemic periods.

Through qualitative analysis and the application of CCRT, this study aims to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has changed students' relationships with their peers and adult reference figures at school. Specifically, the research seeks to identify any shifts in the perception of others and the psychological adaptation of the young participants involved.

Lockdown, School Closures, and Their Effects

The COVID-19 pandemic had global repercussions, influencing various areas such as the economy, public health, and social relationships. The pandemic caused a significant recession, reducing global GDP and increasing unemployment rates across many countries (Monitor, I.L.O., 2021). These economic effects had direct repercussions on family well-being, increasing inequalities and limiting access to essential resources like education and healthcare (Schleicher, 2020).

Regarding mental health, the World Health Organization (2022) reported an increase in cases of depression, anxiety, and stress associated with the pandemic, with a higher incidence among younger populations. Social isolation measures restricted interactions, leading to increased feelings of loneliness and a rise in psychological disorders, especially among adolescents and young adults. Moreover, while the intensified use of technology facilitated communication, it also contributed to increased dependency behaviors and issues related to excessive social media use (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2021).

A systematic review (Viner et al, 2022) examined the effects of school closures on the health and well-being of children and adolescents. The review included 36 studies from 11 different countries, almost all highlighting negative impacts on individuals aged 0 to 20 during school closures and lockdown periods. The most severe effects were observed during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, from February/March to May/June 2020. Among the various studies included in the systematic review, 25 focused on mental health and well-being, all revealing a significant emotional and behavioral impact, including issues such as restlessness, inattention, and general psychological distress among children and adolescents.

Specific Issues Identified:

- **Increase in Suicidal Ideation Among Adolescents (Aged 15-18 Years):** According to a Canadian study (Loades, 2020), the reported rate of suicidal ideation increased from 6% before the lockdown to 17% during the first week of the pandemic. Two other studies from the systematic review (Isumi et al., 2020; Odd et al., 2020) found no significant rise in national

suicide rates among individuals younger than 18 and 20. However, another study (Tanaka & Okamoto, 2021), not included in the systematic review, analyzed the variation in suicides between the first and second waves of the pandemic, reporting a substantial increase in suicides following the second wave, coinciding with the end of school closures (IRR = 1.38, 95% CI 1.27-1.49). Additional research indicated that school attendance could be a risk factor for violence and suicide among students, as returning to school after a prolonged home confinement may have heightened stress.

- **Lower Stress Tolerance:** An increase in post-traumatic symptoms was noted among children and adolescents aged 13 to 18 during the lockdown. Anxiety symptoms increased by 53% in females and 44% in males, while depressive symptoms rose by 19% in females and 21% in males. A British study found higher scores for anxiety and depression among young people who previously reported having "poor" family and friendship relationships before the pandemic (Levita et al, 2020).
- **Reduction in Child Protection Measures (27%-39%):** The number of reports to medical professionals regarding at-risk situations (e.g., abuse, trauma) was halved in British schools (Garstang et al, 2020).
- **Decrease in Psychiatric Consultations:** Psychiatric visits dropped by up to 40% in the UK and up to 65% in the USA. This decline, combined with the challenges of lockdown, negatively affected children and adolescents already facing difficulties (Ougrin, 2020; Sheridan et al, 2021). An editorial by Lee (2020) published in *Lancet Child and Adolescent Health*, emphasized that the lockdown and school closures resulted in the absence of essential support for children and adolescents with mental health issues, worsening symptoms, especially in cases of depression.
- **Increased Screen Time:** There was a substantial rise in the time spent on devices (PCs, tablets, phones) and the use of social media due to school closures.
- **Reduced Physical Activity During Lockdown and Increased Consumption of Unhealthy Foods:** Physical activity levels declined, while the intake of unhealthy foods increased (Roy et al., 2020), and there was a decrease in the consumption of fruits and vegetables (López-Bueno et al, 2020). A separate study (Rundlen et al, 2020) noted that school closures may have exacerbated childhood obesity in various regions of the USA.
- **Sleep Difficulties:** One-quarter of young people aged 16 to 24 reported sleep issues during the lockdown. Studies from the UK and China, included in Viner's review, analyzed this aspect (Falkingham et al, 2021; Zhou et al, 2020).

From the Classroom to the Screen: The Consequences of Remote Learning

The COVID-19 pandemic radically transformed the global education system, profoundly altering learning methods and the overall educational experience. School closures and the adoption of remote learning were crucial measures to curb the spread of the virus, but they introduced unprecedented challenges for students, teachers, and families (Di Pietro et al., 2020). According to UNESCO, over 1.6 billion students across more than 190 countries experienced disruptions in their education, often with long-lasting consequences (UNESCO, 2021).

The introduction of remote learning exacerbated existing educational disparities. Many students struggled to access online lessons due to a lack of technological devices or stable internet connections, especially in socio-economically disadvantaged contexts (Bhamani et al., 2020). As a result, the learning

gap widened, exposing some students to significant academic setbacks that may be difficult to recover from.

Beyond technical difficulties, social isolation affected the emotional well-being of students. Schools, traditionally seen as spaces for socialization and relational development, were replaced by virtual experiences that, while ensuring educational continuity, limited direct interactions with peers and teachers (Garbe et al., 2020). This led to increased psychological distress and a sense of loneliness, particularly among children and adolescents who lost a crucial support environment for growth and development (Brooks et al., 2020).

Teachers also had to rapidly adapt to new tools and methodologies, often without adequate training and under additional pressure to maintain teaching effectiveness. This contributed to increased professional stress levels, affecting the quality of teaching and the educators' ability to provide emotional support to students (Kuhfeld et al., 2020).

Overall, the impact of COVID-19 on schools led to a redefinition of education, with the emergence of new models and challenges that require long-term support strategies to address the educational and psychosocial consequences of the pandemic period. The implementation of psychological support tools and academic recovery programs is essential to promote resilience and student well-being in the post-pandemic era.

Data on learning outcomes indicate a 15% decline in academic performance among boys and a 12% decline among girls (Burgess, 2020; Ilzetzki, 2020; Kuhfeld, 2020). A Dutch study (Engzell et al., 2020b) reported that primary school students experienced a 20% decrease in academic performance after just two months of lockdown. The most drastic decline was observed among children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, including those with disabilities and special educational needs (DSA), who were unable to effectively engage with remote learning.

Other studies identified additional factors that contributed to increasing social disparities and affected learning outcomes. These include:

- Low Parental Education Levels, Job Loss Due to the Pandemic, and Economic Hardships: These factors led to increased anxiety and family conflicts, as well as a decline in motivation and attention to studies (Engzell et al., 2020a).
- Difficulties Faced by Parents in Assisting Children with Remote Learning: This was particularly challenging for large families or those where parents were also caregivers for elderly or disabled individuals (UNESCO, 2020).
- Challenges Related to Assessment and Learning Measurement Strategies: The inadequate organization of schools, with some not fully implementing remote learning, led to neglect in addressing complex cases (Kim, 2020).

It is crucial to understand the impact of restrictive measures adopted by Italian schools during the early months of 2021. According to ISTAT, in the second quarter of 2020, only 62.4% of individuals aged 24 to 64 held a high school diploma, compared to the European average of 79%. This figure drops to 54% in the Puglia and Sicily regions. Even more concerning is the rise in NEETs (youth aged 15 to 29 who are not in employment, education, or training), which increased by 2% compared to 2019, reaching 23.9% of the category. Additionally, there was a significant rise in NEET rates in Northern Italy, particularly among males and foreigners (Istat, 2020).

Identity Development and Social Isolation: The Consequences of the Pandemic on Students

The COVID-19 pandemic, as previously highlighted, had a profound impact on global mental health, both directly and as a result of the restrictive measures adopted. This impact was particularly significant for the age group corresponding to primary and secondary school years (6-18 years old), where socialization plays a key role in the development of individual identity.

The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, along with the redefinition of everyday life it caused, have strongly influenced the mental health of students across all educational levels. A recent WHO report (Cosma et al., 2023) highlighted that children, pre-adolescents, and adolescents were among the most affected categories, showing significant negative impacts on mental well-being, life satisfaction, mental and physical health problems, family relationships, friendships, and academic performance.

The literature further emphasizes that, particularly during adolescence, there has been an increase in rates of anxiety and depression. These conditions have been linked to difficulties with online learning and increased family conflicts, as well as a rise in hospital admissions related to eating disorders and substance use, especially alcohol and cannabis (Ramsey et al., 2023). Problematic internet use, feelings of loss associated with unexpected bereavements and missed life milestones, social isolation, and the exacerbation of pre-existing socio-economic vulnerabilities are just some of the variables identified by Garagiola et al. (2022) as factors related to the pandemic emergency, which have had varying

degrees of impact on the key developmental stages of the affected population.

Research findings show a high level of agreement in indicating that the pandemic period had a significant influence on adolescents and pre-adolescents. These groups have been identified as the most affected by isolation, loneliness, and, in general, the negative consequences of the pandemic.

Despite the notable differences highlighted in the dimensions discussed above, it is currently not possible to estimate the long-term impact of these factors on individual personality or on more specific changes in relational modes for this target group.

Although the literature provides detailed information on the psychosocial aspects influenced by the pandemic, contributing to the emergence of negative outcomes at various levels, there is still a lack of a qualitative perspective. Such a perspective would attempt to distinguish between diagnostic classifications and the lived experiences elicited by the pandemic—and the "return to life" following the end of restrictions—as well as any significant changes in interpersonal relationships, expectations of others, and self-evaluation. Therefore, the importance of combining qualitative analyses with single-case studies becomes crucial for clinicians working in public and private institutional contexts. Clinicians are immersed in the complexity outlined in the literature and require tools to understand and manage this intricate bio-psycho-social interplay.

Methodology

The proposed research is a correlational/exploratory survey. The research project, aimed at students, sought to identify the relational modes among students and between

students and teachers, using narrative psychometric tools. It also aimed to determine whether these modes changed as a result of the pandemic. Participants were asked to describe, through a classroom essay prompt, two different relational episodes: one involving teachers and one involving peers. The choice of a narrative tool stems from the belief that writing helps to organize storytelling, a social and educational practice that has always served multiple and complex functions: from “memory-making” to sharing collective experiences, from learning to pure entertainment.

A preliminary autobiographical questionnaire/interview was created, in which participants provided a guided self-description.

The general hypothesis of the research is that the pandemic served as a cross-cutting stressor, negatively affecting the lived experiences of the students involved.

The general objective is to increase awareness of the students' relational modes. Specifically, the study aimed to:

- Evaluate the students' relational modes and their effectiveness in forming relationships with peers and teachers.
- Identify changes in relational dispositions through an ipsative comparison of the narratives produced, considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Gather information to design potential future relational interventions aimed at enhancing and improving group dynamics among students and between students and teachers.

Instruments

A biographical/narrative questionnaire was administered to middle school students in

Palermo. This was a structured interview form in which participants were asked to provide a guided self-description, effectively creating a kind of guided autobiography.

The narratives were subsequently analyzed using the Core Conflictual Relationship Theme (CCRT - Luborsky 1976, 1977, 1997), a clinical tool developed by Lester Luborsky to identify the "Central Conflictual Relationship Theme."

This method aims to understand the core themes of the subject's desires, needs, and intentions in relation to others.

The method was initially developed in 1976 as part of a tool for measuring the therapeutic alliance. Later, Luborsky's focus shifted to studying interactions within relationships, particularly emphasizing three key categories: the subject's desires towards others, the responses from others, and the subject's reactions to these responses. These categories became the three main components of the CCRT:

- **W:** Wishes, needs, intentions.
- **Ra:** Responses from others.
- **Rs:** Responses of the self.

The CCRT method was the first quantitative approach to measuring transference—the natural process that unfolds within relationships and defines, in some way, the subject's “relational stance”, a stance or disposition that the subject may not always be aware of. This method provides a more objective and quantitative way of doing what clinicians typically do qualitatively. It is the first relatively rigorous method for deriving relational themes from psychotherapy sessions.

Some clarifications on instruments. From Freud to the CCRT: points of contact

The concept of transfer in Freud is present in various of his works ranging from studies on hysteria (1892-1985) to the "postscript" to the Clinical Case of Dora (Freud, 1905) to subsequent works. Freud revisited the concept on more than one occasion throughout his writings. If in its first definition the phenomenon "Tranfert" was defined as the transfer of attitudes and behaviors from early relationships to the current relationship with the therapist; in his 1902 writing (1902 a) the phenomenon leaves the exclusivity of the analysis room to be understood as a relational cliché: as a prototypical central relational model that guides the subject in future relationships. It is clear that this more mature formulation is strongly similar to the Conflictual Central Relational Theme (CCRT). By analyzing Freud's writings and comparing them with the data coming from the studies conducted using the CCRT tool, many points of contact emerge, by way of example, we cite those in our opinion most relevant: Freud talks about the existence of instincts, goals and impulses that must be satisfied: these are nothing other than the category that in the CCRT groups together desires, needs and intentions.

- In Freud the Transfer has a reduced awareness: this would have been confirmed by some research conducted by Crits and Luborsky in which by comparing the ccrt described by the clinicians and the interpretations of the narratives given by the patients it appeared clear how the clinical judgment was more capable of differentiates the aspects of the central relational model

- Freud identifies early relationships as the element of relational imprinting at the ba-

sis of transfer. The use of the CCRT on narratives belonging to early childhood episodes with parental figures compared with narratives regarding current relationships shows a similarity of 6.4 (on a scale from 0 to 7)

- Interpretation changes the expression of the model, this is Freud's thought. This statement is echoed by Luborsky's studies (Luborsky et al, 1988) from which a greater number of interpretations on the patient's central relational theme correlates positively with the outcome of the therapy.

- Freud, speaking of transference, makes a distinction between positive and negative (Freud, 1912) depending on whether the subject's expectations are frustrated or satisfied; Perhaps this is not the meaning of the classification in the CCRT of other responses and responses as positive or negative.

What has been said leads us to think of CCRT as a tool that has in fact operationalized the concept of Transference

Alternative measures

The CCRT is not the only tool that tries to investigate the "relational prototype" that each of us tends to follow, nor is it the only tool that uses the narratives of the patients followed as the main source of data. Below we will describe very briefly some alternative measures, the in-depth analysis of which goes beyond the scope of this contribution.

The plan diagnosis method (Sampson & Mount Zion Psychotherapy Research Group, 1986) this method identifies the following components

- objectives that the patient aims to achieve,
- the obstacles that prevent this achievement,

- the actions that the patient carries out to challenge the therapist

- insight

Method of the structural analysis of social behavior (SASB) The author Benjamin (1979, 1982) bases the method on taking note of the sequences of associations that the patient makes during the session, the variables detected, after breaking down the session into single units and codifiable, they are

- the focus;
- affiliation;
- interdependence

Configurational analysis method (Horowitz, 1979, 1987) the method allows us to identify, starting from the material coming from the sessions:

- the states;
- relational models;
- the information

the relational models revolve around the concept of role, describing within them another 5 elements: (1) the roles and traits of the self-schemas (2) the schema of the person-object (3) the objectives of each towards the other (4) the response of the other (5) the reaction of the self

Plan analysis method (Grawe & Casper, 1984) This method is based on observed and non-verbal behavior. The plan analysis method mainly includes interactional plans that are in conflict with each other. The method aims to understand what the purpose of the behavior is; what means are used for a behavior; which emotions the subject's action elicits in others and the behavior of the emotions considered a reactive perspective.

Our choice fell on the CCRT because it is the only tool that also included application to short stories: which are the papers written by the subjects

The Research

The study involved 39 students, all from the first two years of the high school "Danilo Dolci" in Palermo. Students were asked to write two brief essays describing interactions they had experienced with specific individuals. Before writing their essays, participants were asked to provide basic demographic information, including gender, age, and the number of family members.

The prompt given to the students was as follows:

“Each of us is immersed in a relational world. Describe two episodes (one involving a teacher and one involving a peer) that particularly impacted you. Describe the events as you remember them: what you said, how the interaction unfolded, and how it concluded. Try to indicate: When the event occurred;

1. The other person involved (peer or teacher); we are not interested in the name, but rather the nature of your relationship with them;
2. Part of what the other person said or did, and what you said or did;
3. What happened in the end.”

The sample consisted of 39 students: 11 were first-year high school students, 26 were in their second year, and two did not specify their year of study (Table 1).

	Class Year			
	1st Year	2nd Year	Not Specified	Total
Number	11	26	2	39
Percentage	28,2%	66,7%	5,1%	100%
Average Age	14,3	15,3	Not Specified	15
Median Family Size	4	4	5	4

Table 1: Sample Distribution by the Variable "Class Year"

The vast majority of the sample was female (33 out of 39); one student chose not to disclose their gender. The average age of the sample was 15 years, and the median family size was four members (Table 2).

	Class Year			
	1st Year	2nd Year	Not Specified	Total
Number	5	33	1	39
Percentage	12,8	84,6	2,6	100%
Average Age	14,6	15	15	15
Median Family Size	4	4	5	4

Table 2: Sample Distribution by the Variable "Gender"

Relational Episodes Identified in Student Narratives

The relational episodes identified in the students' narratives totaled 77, distributed as follows:

- 18 episodes involved friends,
- 35 episodes involved teachers,
- 19 episodes involved classmates,

- 5 episodes involved other individuals.

Students were given the freedom to identify the time frame of the events they described. This choice allowed for an assessment of how the pandemic influenced the relational dynamics of students, based on the assumption that the temporal distribution of their narratives (in relation to the pandemic) could indicate the degree to which the global event had been processed.

Of the 77 relational episodes reported:

- 4 episodes pertained to the pre-pandemic phase,
- 7 episodes pertained to the pandemic phase,
- 56 episodes pertained to the post-pandemic phase,
- 10 episodes were difficult to place temporally.

The small number of episodes associated with the pre-pandemic and pandemic phases suggests that the health crisis is, for the most part, no longer a primary focus for these subjects: they seem to concentrate instead on the present.

This finding aligns with observations from some studies on personality in relation to the pandemic. Sutin and colleagues (2022) demonstrated that certain aspects of personality, as assessed through the Big Five model (a five-factor framework: neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, conscientiousness), changed with the pandemic conditions. After an initial decline in neuroticism, all five factors returned to levels similar to those observed pre-pandemic in the post-pandemic phase (Sutin et al., 2020).

It is plausible that defensive mechanisms in the studied population are limiting or even preventing access to deeper emotional elements—elements likely triggered by the pandemic. These include dysthymic emotions associated with death, a sense of control, effectiveness, and pro-social dimensions. This integrative interpretation appears particularly necessary to understand the investigated phenomenon, especially considering that the assigned task of writing a narrative was predominantly cognitive. The act of writing operates primarily at a conscious level during the actual process of composition.

The coding of the relational episodes followed the guidelines in the manual *Understanding Transference* (Luborsky & Crit-Christoph, 1990). For each relational episode, the following were identified:

1. Wishes, needs, and intentions, coded as W;
2. Responses of the other (the co-protagonist of the episode), coded as Ra;
3. Responses of the self (the subject's reaction within the described interaction), coded as Rs.

For all three categories, specific descriptors presented in the second edition of the manual were used. The identified wishes (W) numbered 35, from W1 to W35; the responses of others (Ra) numbered 30, from Ra1 to Ra30; and the responses of the self (Rs) numbered 31, from Rs1 to Rs31.

Additionally, the sequences in which the three components appeared were identified. The average degree of completeness in the narratives was 2.89, compared to a cut-off of 2.5.

This suggests that the students in the sample were generally capable of following the task instructions and distinguishing between the various dimensions within the proposed narratives.

After transcribing the relational episodes, individual units of thought (the part of the text subjected to coding) were identified. Furthermore, regarding the responses of others (Ra) and the responses of the self (Rs), a qualification was provided:

- “+” if the response met the expressed wishes, needs, or intentions,
- “-” if the response did not meet the expressed needs,

- “+ **expected**” if the subject anticipated that the other would respond in a way aligned with their needs,
- “- **expected**” if the subject did not expect the other to meet their needs.

Regarding the responses of the self (Rs), when possible, an additional qualification was applied: “**expressed**” or “**not expressed**,” depending on whether the subject explicitly

articulated their response and emotional state to the other person involved in the interaction.

Finally, as outlined in the manual, in some cases, moderate inference was applied during the coding of narrative elements to appropriately identify and code individual units of thought. In such cases, the coding is marked in parentheses.

Results

Table 3 summarizes the results obtained from the coding of the relational episodes analyzed by three independent coders (Table 3).

The pre-pandemic and pandemic phases do not show a substantial change in the order in which the dimensions investigated (W-Ra-Rs) contribute to defining the relational disposition of the sample. The most significant element appears to be the **responses of the self (Rs)**, revealing that subjects were highly focused on their own responses to events. This self-focus was more prevalent during the pre-pandemic phase, where Rs were distributed along a continuum ranging from "being inhibited" (Rs8) to "being anxious" (Rs27), "competing with others" (Rs11), and "being angry" (Rs21). This diverse range of self-responses underwent a sharp reduction during the pandemic phase, where the predominant personal

dimension was that of dysthymic feelings (Rs22).

The **needs and desires (W)** dimension ranked second during both the pre-pandemic and pandemic phases, consistently reflecting the desire W11, which corresponds to "being close to others," "belonging," "not being alone," and "making friends."

In both the pre-pandemic and pandemic phases, **responses of others (Ra)** constituted the final element in the construction of the relational disposition of the sample. This dimension showed no consistent trend, ranging from feelings of understanding to feelings of betrayal, from being mean to being uninterested. The pandemic event appears to have influenced the order in which the components investigated operate within the relational structure of the sample. Responses of others—the way others respond to one’s desires and needs—become the central element, as if the "other" in relationships, so deeply affected by the pandemic, assumes significant importance. In the pre-pandemic and pandemic phases, the response of others was the last element to emerge in the relational sequence. In the post-pandemic phase, the primary concern shifts to the "other" and their response, which is characterized by a polarization between two extremes: **Ra4** ("they are rejecting") and **Ra13** ("they are willing to help me"). This dichotomy seems to have been accentuated by the pandemic, considering that in the pre-pandemic and pandemic phases, responses of others were more varied.

Coder	Sample	W(%)	Ra(%)	Rs(%)	Sequence	W	Ra	Rs
Coder 1	GENERAL	38%	32%	30%	RS-W-Ra*	W11*	Ra 13*	Rs17
	PRE-PANDEMIC	41%	24%	35%	W-Ra-Rs*	W11*	Ra 8,1*,26,30*	Rs8
	PANDEMIC	33%	17%	50%	W-RS-Ra	W10	Ra 2,13,25,28	Rs 22**,23
	POST-PANDEMIC	39%	34%	27%	Rs-W-Ra	W11*	Ra 4*,13*	Rs 17
Coder 2	GENERAL	25%	42%	33%	Ra-Rs-W	W11*	Ra 13*	Rs 11*,22
	PRE-PANDEMIC	31%	31%	38%	W-Ra-Rs*	W11*	Ra 1*,18,19,30*	Rs 1,5*,11,21,27
	PANDEMIC	25%	42%	33%	W-Ra-Rs	W11	Ra 12	Rs 7,22**
	POST-PANDEMIC	24%	44%	32%	Ra-Rs-W	W11*	Ra 13*	Rs 11*
Coder 3	GENERAL	37%	27%	36%	Rs W Ra*	W13	Ra 4	Rs 11*
	PRE-PANDEMIC	31%	25%	44%	Rs w Ra	W9	Ra 2,4,9,10	Rs 5*
	PANDEMIC	34%	26%	40%	Rs W Ra	W13	Ra 15	Rs 8,11,17,22**,26,2,9
	POST-PANDEMIC	36%	29%	35%	W Rs Ra	W13	Ra 4*,6	Rs 11*

Table 3: CCRT Coding Results; *Agreement Between Two Coders; **Agreement Among All Coders.

Another notable difference following the pandemic event is the relationship between the other two components: **W**(wishes) and **Rs** (responses of the self). In the pre-pandemic and pandemic phases, subjects appeared more focused on their self-responses (**Rs > W**), suggesting greater difficulty in accessing their volitional dimension associated with desires and needs. However, in the post-pandemic phase, subjects seem to have greater access to their volitional dimension (**W > Rs**), expressing the fundamental desire to be close to others (**W11**). The prevailing self-response in the post-pandemic phase reflects a tendency to engage in conflict, likely as a potential reaction to the deep variability and ambivalence that characterize the responses of others.

Conclusions and Limitations of the Research

This exploratory study aimed to investigate the relational modes of students following the pandemic. The results suggest a noticeable difference in the relational modes emerging from the narratives of relational episodes, depending on their temporal classification as pre-pandemic, pandemic, or post-pandemic.

In particular, narratives from the pre-pandemic phase highlight a focus on self-responses within relational events. These self-responses reflect a diverse constellation of ways of being in relation to others. During the pandemic phase, this constellation undergoes a significant reduction, flattening self-responses into a state of radical impotence accompanied by dysthymic consequences. This result aligns with the impact that a global pandemic, as a collective trauma, had on individuals and their relational worlds.

Moreover, it emerges that the driving desire behind these relational modes is centered on seeking proximity with others. This desire clashes with a post-pandemic relational world that has become unfamiliar and generally hostile for students. In their inability to comprehend it, students process this world through splitting mechanisms, expressed in the radical dichotomy of post-pandemic responses (**Ra**) oscillating between viewing the other as a rescuer and the other as rejecting.

The analysis of narratives through the **CCRT methodology** thus proves to be a valuable tool for clinicians and researchers. It enables the investigation of prevailing relational modes in response to significant environmental changes, as demonstrated in this study. This approach helps expand the qualitative understanding of socio-organizational contexts while also facilitating the development of clinical intervention strategies. Unlike interventions based solely on a clinician's theoretical framework, this methodology incorporates a degree of falsifiability and thus improves alignment between interventions and contextual needs.

However, this research presents limitations that affect its generalizability. These include sample heterogeneity in terms of gender and geography, as the sample was predominantly composed of female participants and entirely located within the Palermo region. This latter point highlights additional limitations, such as the analysis being restricted to a single school within a narrowly defined territory, both of which inevitably possess unique local cultures and socio-cultural influences that shape relationality and perceptions of phenomena, including the pandemic. These limitations open up new avenues for further exploration and research. Future stud-

ies should investigate the effects of the pandemic on the relational modes of Italian students, expanding the sample size and making it more homogeneous in terms of gender and geographical distribution. Additionally, future research should examine the differences observed in the variables identified based on socio-cultural factors, such as local socio-organizational and territorial dimensions. This would enable clinicians to design interventions informed by the complexity of the professional contexts in which they operate.

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