INTERGENERATIONAL (DIS) CONTINUITIES IN THE COMMITMENT TO WORK: 
THE RELATIONAL IMPACT OF PARENTS’ WORK

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It is widely accepted that family, and parent-child relationships in particular, are fundamental factors in the psychological and social success of individuals. The family system is the primary relational context of human development, the one in which relevant emotional, cognitive and behavioural acquisitions take place. Childhood and adolescent years are certainly important periods of the life cycle regarding the consolidation of these basic developmental structures, but the family of origin's influence does not stop when the basic developmental tasks that allow for autonomy from parents are completed. Its influence proceeds, directly or indirectly, throughout the whole life cycle, both when individuals face problems or situations that can be handled with the emotional or instrumental support of their relatives or when they turn to their internalized family references to decide what to do, what to really value or how to place themselves in their entire life-space (Super, 1980, 1990).

In spite of this generalized recognition, only recently there was an increasing interest in the interface between work and relationships (Blustein, 2001; Flum, 2001; Phillips, Christopher-Sisk & Gravino, 2001; Richardson, 1993, 2001), reflecting the perspective that work and vocational development in general should not be thought independently of the relational and interpersonal spaces of human experience. In result of this new impetus to a broader understanding of the interplay between work and relationships, the domains of family-to-work and work-to-family relations have registered a considerable evolution in the last decades, including the consideration of the role of significant others such as parents in the process of career choices.

Way and Rossman (1996), for example, concluded that family support has a prominent role in facilitating a sound move to the adult world of work. Philips et al. (2001) also found that in the transition from high school to work, parents figured prominently in the array of others that take part in the pool of helpers or consultants of the young-olds in the decision-making process. Together these findings suggest that an individual's interpersonal and familial relationships and the quality of these relationships could have a strong impact on how and how well his or her career decisions are made but, once again, family and vocational tasks appear related simply at a time of developmental transition which suppose difficult circumstances and a period of some predictable stress.
Career development and family attachment

Indeed, to date, little research efforts have been devoted to the analysis of the transactional effects of parent-child relationships in the construction and commitment to career projects (Blustein, Devenis & Kidney, 1989; Grotevant & Cooper, 1988; Young, 1983; Young et al., 2001). In spite of this, it is possible to find some contributions in that direction. Young and colleagues’ work (2001) about the family-career-project is especially eloquent with respect to family participation in adolescents’ management of career issues. He proposed that adolescents’ career development is a jointly constructed project in the family that engages participants in goal-oriented and intentional day-to-day actions. His study demonstrates that, some of the family career projects were a part of another salient project: the “parenting project”, that is, the career project of the adolescent contributes explicitly “to that series of goals and actions in which the parent’s role as a parent was constructed” (p. 198). The overlap between family relationships and career is also well documented in Chusid and Cochran’s work (1989) when they stated that the meaning of the occupational role is embedded in one’s family of origin dramas and scenarios, which form a tacit basis for career options and behaviours. All of it happens as if an individual learns at the family of origin prototypical dramas that can be adapted to make sense of other settings, such as work, shaping the way one construes and acts (Zimmerman & Cochran, 1993). Savickas (1996) too, has stressed the importance of subjects’ life story as a potential basis for work meanings’ construction considering that the first life episodes that are meaningful to career development should be searched in the family of origin. These authors make explicit the idea that work is pervaded by family circumstances and that the work role can mirror some of the contents of family relations making it possible to revisit some unresolved vocational or family dilemmas. In spite of this consensual view, the psychological mechanisms and factors that participate or moderate the association between family relationships and career behaviour have not yet been explicitly explored.

However, there is some evidence about the role that attachment relationships play in the commitment to the process of career choices (Blustein et al., 1991). Some recent works on the relation between attachment and career development, for instance, have been exploring the indirect and direct contributions of attachment to vocational development transitions emphasizing its conceptual and empirical connection with identity formation, pre-implementation career tasks and adult career behaviour (e.g., Blustein et al., 1991; Blustein, Prezioso & Schultheiss, 1995; Hazan & Shaver, 1990). But, in spite of its expected importance to the exploration or adjustment to new roles and/or settings (Blustein, et al., 1995), attachment with parents has not yet been studied with respect to its potential influence in children’s later commitment to the parental and worker roles. O’Brien (1993) has noticed that attachment to mother and attitudinal similarity with mother were moderately predictive of career orientation and incongruent mother-daughter career choices, but so far we have no data about the degree
in which attachment and internal working models may explain generational continuity and discontinuity in the meanings that underscore the patterns of commitment to parental and worker roles.

**Intergenerational transmission of work models**

An abundant research literature, departing from an attachment perspective, has been providing some knowledge about the construct of the internal working model and its instrumental role in the understanding of the intergenerational transmission processes. However, in most cases, studies have been centred in the domain of parenting where internal working models are presented as emotional-cognitive structures that influence people assumptions and regulate their interpersonal behaviours including those directed to their children (Bowlby, 1982; Main et al., 1985; Steele & Steele, 1994). In fact, researchers are confirming that young adults' attachment to parents is a critical factor in the emergence of some beliefs and expectations about what it is to be a parent, a finding that seems to indicate that certain subjective models of parenting and of parent-child relationships can be formed before the transition to parenthood (Rohles et al., 1997). Although there is not any evidence regarding the role of attachment in the formation of "work" models, there are some good reasons to believe that attachment to parents may also be associated to children's development of positive or negative work representations and may even predict continuities and/or discontinuities in the meaning that each generation gives to work. We may start to argue with cultural transmission theories which claim that intergenerational transmission can be facilitated by the existence of affection ties between the model and the receptor (Euler et al., 2001; Tedesco, 2001). The first implication that can be derived from this proposition is that the nature of the parent-child attachment may influence the degree in which parents' work experience contents become meaningful for the next generation. But, at this point, we should also acknowledge that parents' relationship with work might also be consequential for the quality of their relationship with children.

This last claim corresponds to the recognition that parents do not function in an ecological vacuum (Koren-Karie, 2000) but are subject to certain environmental circumstances that can interfere with the full expression of their emotional potential to be sensitive, responsive and skilled parents. Indeed, from an ecological point of view, it is necessary to take into account that there are other substantially demanding roles in a parent's life that sometimes may render it difficult for them to construct positive relationships with their children. The worker role, independent of the meaning it may have for a parent, corresponds at least to a highly time and energy consuming activity and, therefore, it may interfere negatively in the quality of parent-child relationship either by subtracting time or presence or by lowering parents' psychological availability for interaction. As such, parental work may influence children's lives by altering men and women's investment in parenting and/or by limiting their availability. Some studies that have
used the “emotional transmission” construct can be evoked to demonstrate that different levels of commitment to the worker role may affect the quality of the parent-child relationship. They make clear that certain parental emotional states, emerging from parents’ daily work experiences, may generate a chain of dysfunctional parenting behaviours detrimental to the parent-child relationship. Repetti (Repetti & Wood, 1997 cit. in Perry-Jenkins, 2000) stressed the negative consequences of this work to family spill-over when he observed that: “although social withdrawal may be an adaptive, short-term coping response [to occupational stress] for both the individual and the family, over time, repeated instances of withdrawal may corrode feelings of closeness and lead to feelings of resentment and negative interactions” (p. 985).

It can be speculated that what happens as a consequence of occupational stress, can also occur in the case of high work commitment especially when it is associated to low parental commitment. Such a pattern may produce a reduction in the amount of emotional responsiveness to children, and may affect the pattern of parent-child interaction in a way that can be significant in the development of specific (positive or negative) models of work and of parenting. We can turn to recent studies about “workaholics” to support that expectation: these studies show that greater work involvement is related to less communication, less clearly established roles in the family, fewer affective responses and less affective involvement (Robinson & Post, 1995). Spouses and children of “workaholics” report feeling lonely, unloved, isolated and emotionally and physically abandoned (Robinson, 1996). Therefore, it seems that when parents are not capable of maintaining a positive balance between work and parental commitments their over-involvement with the worker role may reduce physical and psychological unavailability eventually giving rise to less secure attachments.

The results of Hazan and Shaver’s study (1990) are encouraging in what concerns the place and importance of attachment in the question of how parents’ personal resources can be allocated to the parental and worker roles. Their work indicated that securely attached people value work but they tend to value relationships more and do not allow work to interfere with those relationships. Based on these results, perhaps it makes sense to consider that the level of parents’ commitment to the worker and parental role may vary according to the degree of parents’ effort for preserving the quality of the relationship with their children. We can go further and consider that individuals’ childhood experiences with respect to the parent’s personal resources that were available to them and to work, once integrated in their working models, may serve as guidelines regarding the place they want for work and parent-child relations in their lives. They probably would not develop a positive representation of the parental role if they perceive that their parents prefer to invest in the work domain more than in the parent-child relationship, unless there is a secure attachment working model that favour positive
interpretations of parents’ dedication to work (instead of thinking that their father/mother do not worry about them, children may think that their parents are working a lot because it matters to them that their children have all the conditions and things they need or want). This is consistent with the proposition that internal working models can be conceptualized as a set of rules that are used by individuals for organizing information about interpersonal experiences, feelings and ideations (Main et al., 1985). In this case, we consider that those rules can also be applied to the way children perceive and organize information about the consequences for themselves of their parents’ parental and work experiences. The emotional consequences that children may experience in relation to their parents’ work or parental higher or lower commitments (that may give rise to internal representations of more or less caring parents) may stimulate the construction of subjective emotional-cognitive models of work and parenting from which they may evaluate their own involvement in those roles as more advantageous or disadvantageous for themselves and (using their own filial experience as a reference) for their children’s development. Therefore, through interaction with parents, individuals may become more sensitive to certain values and may start to construct the meanings that will enable them to make sense of their future parental and worker adults’ roles. Family culture and relationships can be the departure point from which they may define “the particular roles they deem worthy of vigorous performance” ( Marks & MacDermid, 1996, p. 419) and may decide how these roles should be integrated with one another.

Internal working models are thus seen as the basic structures that participate in the process by which children attribute meaning to work and parenting, being, therefore, associated to the degree in which meanings are transmitted from parents to children and are reflected in similarities (intergenerational continuity) or differences (intergenerational discontinuity) in parents’ and children’s commitment to the worker and parental roles. As such, we can consider that in the daily interaction with parents an ongoing process of career exploration is in motion. The parental and worker experiences of both father and mother in the family may represent to children the possibility of identifying, evaluating and deciding upon the alternative meanings parents attach to each role and to make options regarding the investment they want to make in the parental and worker roles that adulthood will carry. By interacting and interpreting parents’ behavior children actively explore and participate in the co-construction of parental and worker roles and then can create or re-create the gendered and commitment patterns of parental and worker roles. In Milkie’s (1997) words: “children’s perceptions and evaluations of parental roles may profoundly colour parental identities and interactions with their offspring and may be more influential than other actors’ views” (p. 234). We add to this, that the same process may operate for worker identities and for children’s relationship to the world of work as well. Once again the experience of felt security that secure attachment relationships can provide may be an essential part of this exploratory and meaning construction activity. The existence of an internal working
model of a secure attachment relationship would contribute to more positive interpretations of the parents’ patterns of commitment (parents’ high commitment to work, for instance, would not be interpreted as parental rejection or personal unworthiness) and would encourage a more active exploration of parents’ parenting and work experiences.

In a world in which attaining the traditional markers of adult status has become more difficult, in which the establishment of long-term goals and commitments may be rendered problematic, in which adult role-identity may not be well-defined until the thirties (Furstenberg, 2000), it seems that parents are needed for longer as the secure basis that children can use for continuing exploration in spite of the anxiety and frustration that could result from the delayed transition to adulthood. On the one hand, in the context of significant affection ties, parents may have become more enduring role-models for their children. But, on the other hand, the social and cultural changes that took place may have diminished the validity and usefulness of parents’ experiences to children’s lives. At a time in which it is not clear what is or should be transmitted from parents to children (Tedesco, 2001), it is both timely and important to investigate whether parents’ commitments are influential in children’s development of adaptative orientations to work and parenting: What kind of relationship does exist between parents’ and children’s patterns of commitment to work and parenting? How are children’s perceptions of their parents’ commitments related to parents’ involvement with work and parenting? To what extent are parents’ patterns of commitment to work and parenting related to children’s internal representations of attachment? How do internal working models affect the intergenerational transmission of commitment patterns to work and parenting? What is the role of gender in all those possible relationships?

Study goals

The study presented here is just a first step in addressing this set of questions. It is a small part of a larger researcher project and it represents a preliminary empirical effort toward the exploration of the relational impact of parents’ work. We approach this issue by analyzing the relationship between late-adolescents and young-adults’ perceptions of parents’ commitment to work and parent-child relationship using a modified version of the Parental Bonding Instrument (Parker, Tupling & Brown, 1979). We also intend to explore some possible relationships between the quality of parent-child relationship and some socio-demographic and socio-psychological variables.

It is important to clarify that it is a retrospective study. Subjects were instructed to evoke their lives and their relationship with their parents during their childhood and adolescence, based on the assumption that this corresponds to a critical period regarding not only identity formation but
also career planning and educational transitions (Erikson, 1988). It is certainly a period of novelty and of enhanced risk-taking both in the career (the selection and implementation of career decisions) and interpersonal domain (the initiation of romantic relationships) that may prompt individuals for enhanced exploration. The adolescent effort to deal with career issues may increase his/her awareness to the reality of work (to their parents’ commitment to work too), and their experience of parents’ emotional availability and responsiveness in a time strongly anxiety-provoking may, along with their increasing autonomy and ability for perspective taking, have great impact in the actualization of internal working models (Main et al., 1985).

Method

Sample. The analysis is based on a convenience sample of 250 subjects with a mean age of 23.9 years old (SD=4.11) and an age range from 18 to 34 years. Regarding gender, 66.8% are female and 33.2% are male. The majority of participants are firstborn children (56,2%). 15,6 % are single child, 59,6% have one brother/sister and 24,8 % have two or more brothers/sisters. Most of them are still living in their parents' household with both parents (64,8%). In general, participants indicated their parents as their main caregivers during their first 18 years (Both parents= 72,8 %; Only mother= 18%; Only father=1,2% and Others=8%). Subjects are predominantly from intact families (89,6%) and are single (82,8%). Only 16,8% have already formed a family with 5,6% having children. 35,6 % are already working but the majority are students from high school and university (64,4%). Most fathers and mothers didn’t complete grade 9 (54,8% fathers and 53,2 % mothers), 15,2% of fathers and 11,6% of mothers have completed secondary education and 16% of fathers and 23,6% of mothers have attended university. Parents’ jobs are representative of various occupational categories varying from blue to white-collar professions. Approximately, half of the fathers are distributed for two main categories: 25,3% are managers, directors and high staff and 25,7% are factory workers and craftsmen. Mothers distribution for occupational categories is a little more homogeneous: the highest proportion of mothers pertain to the factory workers and craftsmen group (17,7%) but there is also a significant number of mothers in higher occupational positions (managers, directors and high staff-16,5%; high skilled intellectual and scientific professions-13,5%; intermediate level technicians- 13,9%; administrative personal- 13,9%). Most fathers and mothers are described as full time workers (86,8% and 90,8%, respectively). Only 27,6% of the fathers and 18,4% of the mothers are pointed as self-employed. The majority of parents are identified as employees of other person (72% and 70,4%, respectively). According to participants’ indications 11,2 % of the mothers were not working when they were between 14 and 18 years old.
**Instruments.** Subjects completed a self-administered questionnaire including:

a) **socio-demographic items** (gender, age, academic level, occupation, age of brothers/sisters, mother and father educational attainment and occupation, ...);

b) a **subjective measure of parents' work in terms of its benefits** using 8 items to assess father and mother accessibility, (e.g.: For professional reasons, my father/mother frequently have to be outside home a couple of days; My father/mother decided his/her work schedule by him/herself; My father/mother used to bring work to do at home);

c) one item to assess subjects' **identification with father and mother with respect to work and parental domains**: “How much would you like to be like your father/mother in the dedication to work/ in the dedication to children?”;

d) one item to assess **actual satisfaction with both father and mother**;

e) a measure of **parent-child relationship quality**, a modified version of The Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI; Parker, Tupling & Brown, 1979; Baptista & Lory, 1997), that considers participants' retrospective memories of their parents with two parallel forms of 25 items each, requiring respondents to rate each parent separately, according to how accurately the item corresponds to recollections of parental behaviour during the first 18 years of the respondents’ life. The PBI is organised in two main scales: Care (general levels of parental warmth and affection) and Overprotection (levels of parental control and intrusion versus encouragement of autonomy). This two-dimensional solution was validated both for the mother and the father sets with good reliability coefficients (mother: Care \( \alpha = .88 \) and Overprotection \( \alpha = .84 \); father: Care \( \alpha = .92 \) and Overprotection \( \alpha = .85 \));

f) one item to assess subjects' **perception of damages provoked by parents' dedication to work in parent-respondent relationship** (My father/mother's dedication to work has damaged his/her relationship with myself);

g) 10 items regarding perceptions of the **advantages of parents’ work** (e.g., Having both parents working gave the opportunity to better understand the importance of work in people’s lives; Given that my parents’ work made it impossible to have them closer, I have gained more responsibility and confidence in myself; My parents’ work gave them the possibility of getting money to pay all the things I needed or wanted). Using a factor analysis with varimax rotation only one factor with 4 items showed a satisfactory reliability (\( \alpha = .73 \)); the items involved perception of parents' work as a vehicle for exploration, centred in the general importance of work for people.

A 6 point Likert scale was used for items b) through g) (1 = “Strongly disagree” to 6 = “Strongly agree”).
Results

Parental bonding

Allowing a maximum score of 66, mean scores of 49.4 (SD=12.2) for the father-Care scale and 29.0 (SD=10.1) for the father-Overprotection scale were obtained for the sample. Mean score estimations for mother (the care and overprotection subscales allow, for mothers, a maximum score of 66 and 60, respectively) revealed a mean of 58.3 (SD=10.1) for mother-Care scale and a mean of 26.7 (SD=9.4) for mother-Overprotection scale. The possible influence of gender, both of the parent and of the respondent was examined. The results show that respondents experienced fathers as less caring (t (243) =-14.337, p =0.000) and somewhat more overprotective than mothers (t (245) =- 4.417, p =0.000). It is interesting to notice that there is a positive correlation between respondents’ actual satisfaction with father and mother and their recollections of both as caring (Pearson= .709, p< 0.01; Pearson= .545, p<0.01, for fathers and mothers respectively) and a negative correlation between actual satisfaction with parents and overprotection scores (Pearson= -.366, p< 0.01; Pearson= -.352, p<0.01, for fathers and mothers respectively). The means comparative analysis has revealed that, independently of gender, in general subjects are more satisfied with their relation with mothers (Mean= 5.26; SD= 0. 91) than with their relation with fathers (Mean= 4.83; SD=1.28) (t (238)=−5.977, p=0.000).

Participants gender did not influence significantly the way they describe their parents but there is a tendency for girls to perceive their fathers as more overprotected than their male counterparts (t (245)=−1.900, p =0.059). Being the oldest or the youngest of the progeny didn’t have any significant effect in respondents’ evaluation of their parents. The same occurred with respondents’ age even if it had a slightly influence in how subjects remember their mothers’ overprotective behaviour: participants less than 24 years old perceived their mothers as somewhat more overprotective than older participants (t (242)=1.944, p=0.053). There were not differences in the experience of father or mother as more caring or overprotective between those who are still in school and are financially dependent on parents and those ones who are working and are economically self-sufficient. The academic level, both of the parent and of the respondent, was associated to differences in the mean scores of the caring scale. Parents that have high or college level studies were described as more caring than those with lower grades (t (242)=−2.589, p =0.010 for fathers; t (242)=−2.315, p=0.022 for mothers). Respondents with higher grades (high school and college) presented their mothers as more caring than subjects with academic basic levels (t (242)=−2.847, p=0.005).

The relational impact of parents’ work

The relational impact of parents’ work was explored using an objective measure of parents’
work status (occupational category) and three subjective measures of the work-family interface: 1) subjects’ identification with parents in work and parenting; 2) subjects’ perception of work interference in parents’ physical accessibility; and, 3) subjects’ perception of damages provoked by parents dedication to work in parent-respondent relationship. Participants’ scores in each of these measures as well as in the exploration factor were compared to participants’ scores in both caring and overprotection scales for father and for mother.

Parent’s occupational category

There were variations in subjects’ caring and overprotection scores associated to parents’ professional complexity. For father and mother, we compared subjects’ answers to the care and overprotection scales considering the two professional categories that assembled the biggest proportions of cases. Fortunately, in both parents, the categories in this situation were the same and were sufficient contrasted for allowing meaningful comparisons. A t-test for independent samples was performed with subjects’ whose parents pertained to the category of managers, directors and high staff (n=30) and to the category of factory workers and craftsmen (n=30). No differences were found for relationship with mothers in any of the occupational categories. On the contrary, father-Care (t (118)=2,362, p=0,01) and father-Overprotection (t (118)=2,405, p=0,02) means showed significant differences according to fathers’ occupational category.

When having higher occupational positions, fathers were described as more caring (Mean =51,03; SD= 12,43) and less overprotective (Mean = 27,43; SD=10,03) than when they work in lower level professional activities (Mean = 44,90; SD= 13,09 for care; Mean=31,87; SD= 10,16 for overprotection).

Identification with parents in work and in parenting

Results show that there is only a significant difference between participants’ answers with respect to parenting. Subjects’ have stronger identifications with their mothers (Mean= 5,18; SD=1,09) than with their fathers (Mean= 4,49; SD=1,49) (t (247) = -7,296, p= 0,000). There is no influence of both parents’ and subjects’ academic level or occupation. Only participants’ gender seems to be associated to identification with mother in the domain of work with girls describing higher identifications than boys (t (239)=2,402, p=0,017).

Participants who present high identifications with father in the parenting dimension describe the paternal figure as more caring (t (243) =11,135, p=0,000) and less overprotective (t (243)=3,842, p= 0,000) than participants with low identifications. Correlational analysis also showed positive significant relationships between self-identification with parents in parenting and self-identification with parents in work. The more participants identify themselves with father and mother with respect to their dedication to children, the more they identify with both in what concerns work dedication (Pearson=.471, p< 0.01; Pearson=.397, p<0.01, for fathers and mothers respectively).
There was also found a negative correlation between identification to father/mother in the parental and work domain and subjects' answer to the question about the damages parents' work has caused in the relationship with them. The less participants considered that parents' dedication to work has damaged their relationship, the more they want to be like their parents in the dedication to work (Pearson=-.144, p<0.05, for fathers; Pearson=-.206, p<0.01, for mothers) and in the dedication to children (Pearson=-.436, p<0.01, for fathers; Pearson=-.306, p<0.01, for mothers).

Perception of work interference in parents' physical accessibility

In this sample, the separate estimation of the physical accessibility index for father and mother, has evidenced a significant difference between subjects' perceptions of each parent's accessibility, showing higher means for mothers (Mean=34.82; SD=6.04) than for fathers (Mean=31.44; SD=5.47) (t (249)=8.017, p=0.000). Mothers, but not fathers, occupational category is associated with differences in the perception of physical accessibility (t (124) =2.451, p = 0.02). Mothers in higher occupational positions were perceived as more accessible (Mean=35.3; SD=5.61) than mothers in lower occupational categories (Mean=33.3; SD=3.89).

The accessibility index was used to determine if there was any difference in identification and bonding to father and mother as a function of the degree to which subject's perceived both parents' accessibility. This variable was recoded in order to form two groups of subjects with perceptions' scores below and above the total sample index mean for each parent. T-tests were performed having these two groups as independent variable. The perception of parents' accessibility was not related with the self-identification with parents but it seems to influence subjects' internal working models. Results showed significant differences in the experience of the father and of the mother as caring, in relation to fathers' accessibility. Participants who perceived their fathers as less accessible described both their fathers and mothers as more caring (t (244)=2.069, p=0.04, for father; t (244)=2.337, p=0.02, for mother). The same results appeared when we tested the two groups having the perception of mothers' accessibility as the comparison criteria. Mothers and fathers were experienced as more caring in the case of subjects that reported their mothers as less accessible compared with subjects that pertained to the above of mean group (t (244)=3.532, p=0.00, for father; t (242)=2.204, p=0.02, for mother).

Perception of damages provoked by parents' dedication to work in parent-respondent relationship

The mean comparison of subjects' answers to the question of the relational negative effect of parents' investment in work showed a significant influence of parents' gender (t (248)=4.511,p=0.000). Although participants' didn't show themselves clearly in accordance with
the statement (the mode of answers is equal 1) participants evaluated fathers’ dedication to work as more harmful to their relationship (Mean=2.10; SD=1.51) than mothers involvement with work (Mean=1.73; SD=1.17). For both fathers and mothers, subjects’ perceptions of relational damages related to parents’ work, correlated significantly with caring (negative correlation) and overprotection (positive correlation) scores. The more participants agree that father and mother relationship with them has been negatively affected by parents’ work, the less they perceived parents as caring (Pearson= -.514, p< 0.01, for fathers; Pearson= -.495, p<0.01, for mothers) and the more they perceived their parents as overprotective (Pearson= .229, p< 0.01, for fathers; Pearson=.207, p<0.01, for mothers).

The advantages of parents’ work for respondents: the exploration factor
Four items were computed to obtain an exploration score (maximum score of 24) that was used in comparative analysis. We didn’t find significant difference in exploration scores according to parents’ occupational category. On the contrary, participants’ gender showed to be related with different exploration degrees (t (247) =-2.845, p= 0.005) with female participants revealing higher exploration scores (Mean=19.6; SD= 3.36) than their male counterparts (Mean=18.3; SD= 3.38). The exploration score was used to compare subjects with respect to parent-child relationship. The sample has been splitted in two groups: subjects with exploration scores higher and lower the total group’s mean (Mean=19.22; SD=3.42). Subjects of both groups were compared to examine if they did differ in their mean scores for care and overprotection. Significant differences were found for mother- Care (t (242)=-5.802,p=0.000), mother-overprotection (t(245)=2.309, p=0.022), and father-Care (t (244)=-4.728, p=0.000). Participants that have profited more from their parents’ work for exploration, experienced their mothers (Mean=61.77; SD=8.84) and fathers (Mean=52.89; SD=11.62) as more caring than participants with lower exploration scores (Mean= 54.75; SD=10.03 and Mean=45.84; SD=11.77 for mothers and fathers, respectively). Subjects with lower exploration scores experienced mothers as more overprotective (Mean=28.09; SD=9.18) than participants who reported higher exploratory scores (Mean=25.34; SD=9.54). There is no difference in subjects’ exploration scores as a function of parents’ occupational category.

Conclusion
Although this study was just a small attempt to capture some of the paths between the relational dynamics in the family of origin and the influence of the parents’ worker role, it has produced interesting findings regarding the relevance of children’s perceptions of parent’s work commitment for the quality of parent-child relationship.
When having higher occupational positions, fathers were described as more caring and less overprotective than when they work in lower level professional activities. This result is not totally unexpected given that the jobs that are included in the higher occupational category are those requiring a higher academic level, a variable that is also related to the experience of parents as more caring and less overprotective. In fact, parents’ education has been reported in the literature as an important factor for people behaviour in the role of parents. But here just the occupational complexity of father and not that of the mother is associated to participants’ experience of caring and overprotection. Perhaps, in the case of fathers, that traditionally have not been so involved in the caregiver role, more complex and challenging jobs make it difficult for them to keep up with their children’s daily activities. The low involvement of father, compared to that of the mothers, in monitoring children activities, may result in the participants’ experience of low overprotection from fathers. On the other hand, it is possible that fathers whose jobs tend to draw them from parent-child interaction, try to show more warm and responsive behaviour toward children when they are really available to them. It is also possible that high-quality jobs influence fathers’ mood-state at home and that warmth could be anticipated on the basis of a spillover or generalization of positive affect derived from gratifying work experiences. It seems that because mothers are used to cope with multiple role demands, they tend to show warmth and to be caring independently of their specific job characteristics.

Participants who present higher identifications with father in the parenting dimension describe the paternal figure as more caring and less overprotective than participants with low identifications. In a life-period marked for the striving for autonomy it is not surprisingly that participants tend to identify more with their fathers when they consider the paternal figure as more encouraging of independence. But irrespectively to parents gender, when participants wish to be like their parents in the relationship with children they also want to be like their parents in the relationship with work. This observation points to the existence of a link between the way subjects perceive their parents commitment both to work and to parenting. This association can be took as a picture of the cases in which parents reach a positive balance between both roles, and in which parents’ commitment to the worker role is not perceived by participants as occurring at the expense of their commitment to children. In fact, participants reported that they want to be like their parents in the dedication to work only when they consider that their parents’ commitment to work was not distressing to the parent-child relationship. This result is very stimulating regarding the hypothesis of the mediating role of attachment in the patterns of commitment intergenerational transmission, especially when we found that participants’ perception of work relational damages was related with their experience of less caring parents. The more participants agree that father and mother relationship with them has been negatively affected by parents’ work, the less they perceived parents as caring and the more they perceived their parents as overprotective.
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Subjects seem also to perceive work as a domain that competes with fathers’ but not mothers’ commitment to parenting. It may be inferred from this finding that participants are aware that work and parental roles are differentially salient to men and to women. But, and perhaps more importantly, it seems to express the perception that fathers’ work intrudes more into their parental role than happens with mother’s work. If we look at Hazan and Shaver’s (1990) conclusions, this finding suggests that, from the subject’s point of view, their mothers may be more capable than their fathers to protect the quality of their relationship with children. Even though they may value work, they probably don’t let work threat the core of their mother identity, that is, the mother-child relationship. Probably, participants’ fathers are still oriented to the traditional role of breadwinner and this orientation may create some difficulties for them in managing their work role in a way that is not perceived by children as troublesome for the father-child relationship.

The finding regarding subjects’ perception of the work interference in parents’ physical accessibility has brought relevant information for what seems to be the complementary functions of the parental dyad elements in the provision of emotional security for children. When subjects describe their mothers or fathers as less accessible, both the focal and the non-focal parent were experienced as more caring. At one hand, this finding seems to describe a situation in which each parent is seen as someone who tries to compensate with warm and responsiveness the fact of his/her low physical accessibility. On the other hand, it also depicts a picture in which one of the parents seems to supply the child’s needs of care when the other is perceived as not being so much accessible. This verification certainly deserves attention regarding the possible influence of spousal support in the way parents devote themselves to work and parenting. The way children interpret both parents’ commitments and, ultimately, the existence of mother-child or father-child intergenerational congruencies in the patterns of commitment to work and parenting may be strongly influenced by the level of agreement, support and consistency there is in the marital dyad with respect to the work and parental role. According to some authors the intergenerational transmission of attitudes is stronger when there is homogeneity in the cultural models (Cavalli-Sforza & Feldman, 1981, cit. in Shonfflug, 2001). Some studies also show that fathers’ involvement in childcare decisions is positive related to adolescents’ short-term plans for family formation (Starrels & Holm, 2000).

Parental care appeared associated to higher exploration scores. This finding offers support to the idea that exploration is favoured by positive parent-child attachment relationships (Blustein et al., 1995; Grotevant & Cooper, 1988). Subjects’ representations of their parents as caring attachment figures may have facilitated the exploration of their real-life experiences, namely those related to their parents’ relationship with work. In opposition the sense of overprotection that is reported to mother-child relationship may have inhibited the degree of exploration that was desirable for them to outline some initial ideas about the importance of work in people lives.
Boys presented less exploration gains from their parents’ work than girls. It may be that for girls, who appear in this study significantly identified with mothers in the work domain, the family of origin might have constituted the context where they have learned the challenges and gratifications that to be mother and work at the same time may carry for their lives. However we should approach this finding with cautious given that this gender effect may have result from the prevalence of female participants in the comparison sample.

Perhaps empirical efforts in the area of intergenerational transmission of role-commitment, developed from the perspective of attachment theory, can contribute to a greater awareness of the processes that generate continuity and change in the meanings that, across generations, are attached to the work and parental roles. As Ferree (1990) argues it is the meaning attached to role behaviour that holds consequences for individual and family functioning. As primary motivators of the parents’ action, those meanings probably determine what and the way through which one generation passes its ideas on to another.

References


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