

Work - family balance and separation-individuation process in emerging adults



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ABSTRACT

The transition to adulthood is no longer recognized as occurring at a specific time, with well-defined markers. This transitional period is now characterized by moments of exploration and experimentation which are often taken without full responsibility. This is only made possible because young adults have the emotional and financial help and support of their families behind them. In addition, recent economic and social changes, such as women entering the labour market and children growing up in dual income households, contribute to the unclear division of who goes out to work and who is responsible for family and home life. This study is part of the YAGISSP research project (Young Adults in Germany, Italy, Sweden, Spain and Portugal) that addresses the situation of emerging adults in Europe in a cross-cultural perspective. The aim of the present study is to investigate the expectations of Portuguese emerging adults with regard to balancing work and family responsibilities. These expectations are supposed to be linked with the goals concerning work and family as well as to the importance and meaning associated with both domains. It is expected that these expectations might also be explained by the process of separation-individuation towards parents. Participants were 463 universities students, 167 males (36,1%) and 296 females (63,9%), between 18 and 30 years of age (M=21,09; DP=2,63), 81% of which live with one or both parents. The Combining Job and Family Scale, The Importance of Job and Family Scale and The Goals Concerning Job and Family Scale (Kracke, 2004) were used to work out the expectations about job and family. A Portuguese version of The Munich Individuation Test of Adolescence (Walper, Schwarz & Jurasic, 1996) was used to assess individuation. All the measures presented adequate internal consistency and factor validity. Results support the main hypotheses.

OBJECTIVES

- Analyse the future expectations of Portuguese emerging adults with regard to balancing work and family responsibilities;
- Explore the relationship between these expectations and the process of separation - individuation towards parents.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS:

- 463 Portuguese emerging adults :
 - 167 boys (36,1%) and 296 girls (63,9%);
 - Age 18-30 (M = 21,09; DP = 2,63);
 - 81% live with one or both parents;
 - 53% have a romantic relationship.

PROCEDURE:

- Questionnaires were administered in University of Porto in different faculties during class periods;
- All were informed of the nature, purpose and confidentiality of the study and all questionnaires were filled out voluntarily.

INSTRUMENTS

Munich Individuation Test of Adolescence (Walper, Schwarz & Jurasic, 1996) (Mother/ Father)

- Relatedness (7 items; $\alpha = .83 / .86$)
- Fear of love withdrawal (3 items; $\alpha = .76 / .75$)
- Engulfment anxiety (6 items; $\alpha = .82 / .81$)
- Ambivalence (3 items; $\alpha = .73 / .67$)
- Denial of attachment needs (4 items; $\alpha = .77 / .77$)

Combining Job and Family Scale (Kracke, 2004)

- Idealization of the mother (5 items; $\alpha = .78$)
- Family orientation (3 items; $\alpha = .65$)
- Progressive role orientation (3 items; $\alpha = .66$)

Goals concerning Job and Family Scale (Kracke, 2004)

- Emphasis on physical proximity (3 items; $\alpha = .67$)
- Emphasis on professional achievement (3 items; $\alpha = .58$)

Figure 3.

Pearson correlations between MITA and Combining Job and Family Scale.

	MOTHER	FATHER	
+ Fear of love withdrawal	($r = .25, p < .01$) ($r = .21, p < .01$)	($r = .26, p < .01$) ($r = .23, p < .01$)	+ Idealization of the mother
+ Ambivalence	($r = .28, p < .01$) ($r = .14, p < .05$)	($r = .24, p < .01$) ($r = .14, p < .05$)	
MOTHER			
+ Denial of attachment need Engulfment anxiety		- Family orientation ($r = -.12, p < .01$) ($r = -.12, p < .01$)	
+ Ambivalence		- Progressive role orientation ($r = -.12, p < .05$)	
+ Relatedness		+ Progressive role orientation ($r = -.20, p < .01$)	

Table 1.

Pearson correlations between MITA and Goals Concerning Job and Family Scale.

	Boys		Girls	
	Emphasis on professional achievement	Emphasis on physical proximity	Emphasis on professional achievement	Emphasis on physical proximity
Mother				
Relatedness	-.183*	.108	-.076	.032
Fear of love withdrawal	-.281**	.185*	-.066	.093
Engulfment anxiety	.054	.116	.069	.009
Ambivalence	-.155	.236**	.048	.061
Denial of attachment needs	.234**	-.002	.136*	.051
Father				
Relatedness	-.183*	.026	-.071	.046
Fear of love withdrawal	-.218**	.198*	-.035	.086
Engulfment anxiety	.094	.079	.062	.027
Ambivalence	-.152	.163*	.096	.054
Denial of attachment needs	.245**	.048	.129*	.027

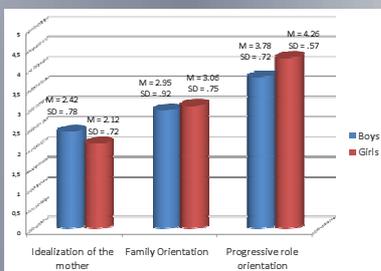
Note. ** $p < 0,01$; * $p < 0,05$

RESULTS

Analyses were conducted using SPSS 16 for windows:

- All scales were submitted to exploratory factor analyses and internal consistency analyses
- Differences between variables were tested using MANOVAs

Figure 1. Gender differences in Combining Job and Family



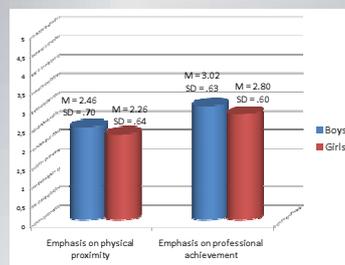
Note. Rating scale: 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

$$F(1, 431) = 16.15, p < .001, \eta^2 = .04$$

$$F(1, 431) = 1.87, n. s.$$

$$F(1, 431) = 58.49, p < .001, \eta^2 = .12$$

Figure 2. Gender differences in Goals concerning Job and Family



Note. Rating scale: 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).

$$F(1, 447) = 10.86, p < .001, \eta^2 = .02$$

$$F(1, 447) = 10.09, p < .05, \eta^2 = .02$$

DISCUSSION

Differences between boys and girls in combining job and family

- **Boys idealize more the mother:** however means show low values for boys and girls expressing the idea that mothers do not need to leave their jobs to be a good mother and to take care of children; actual economic situation does not allow that mothers stay at home with children.
- **No differences in family orientation:** desire for combining job and family and not choose one of them (Cinamon, 2006); girls refuse to devote their life only to family - the work as a way of getting autonomy and personal achievement (Guerreiro & Abrantes, 2007); boys more interested in family and more involved in child care (INE, 2010; McElwain, Korabik & Rosin, 2004; Perista, 2002).
- **Girls report higher progressive role orientation:** the division of households is still asymmetrical; girls are the primary responsible for them (Poeschl, 2010); role orientation as a strategy to combining job and family.

Differences between boys and girls in goals concerning job and family

- **Boys with more emphasis on physical proximity and professional achievement;** the possibility to value physical proximity but at the same time the desire for professional investments; professional achievement more important for boys.

Relation between MITA and Combining Job and Family Scale

- Although the low magnitude of correlations, different associations have been found:
 - In generally fear of love withdrawal and ambivalence were associated with a higher idealization of the mother - the desired mother or the mother they would like to be;
 - Only for girls and only towards mother: denial of attachment needs and engulfment anxiety were associated with less family orientation; no need significant relationships; child does not need the presence of mother. Ambivalence was associated with less role orientation - leave behind their needs because they have a strong dependency on others and need their acceptance and approval (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Relatedness was associated with more role orientation: the ability to ask for help and express their needs.

Relation between MITA and Goals Concerning Job and Family Scale

- Emerging adults who report higher denial of attachment needs and engulfment anxiety seem to value more professional issues, maybe because work can be viewed as an opportunity to satisfy attachment needs (Fonseca, Soares & Martins, 2006) or it can be viewed as a way to avoid proximity to attachment figures, specially because they have difficult in maintaining significant relations (Collins & Sroufe, 1999) and want to have a sense of independence. That's why it is easier for them to go away and start in a new place. Ambivalence was associated with emphasis on physical proximity: difficulty in exploring the world and tend to seek and maintain the proximity with friends and partners - the distance is felt as a threat (Cassidy, 1994).

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