

BALANCING FAMILY AND WORK ROLES : EXPECTATIONS OF PORTUGUESE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Unlike in the past, finding a job, getting married and having children no longer defines the normative transition from youth to adulthood. In fact, the ideal age for these tasks in the life cycle is no longer so well established as before. The phase of youth, as a time of freedom and exploration, without responsibilities, has become longer and makes the commitment to family and work less attractive for young people. Recent research has revealed that, to a greater or a lesser extent, this kind of change can also be observed in Portugal (Coupland, 1994 ; Vasconcelos, 1998). The overall process of assuming the new society demands is associated with developmental change particularly in the field of academic and professional training and family investment.

The sociological change in the field of opportunities in the labor context and the reduction of the workplaces, specially full time and stable jobs, leads people to remain in the education system for a longer period in order to look for a better training that can lead to better opportunities of getting a job.

The achievement of higher educational levels is especially important for women, as a strategy for ascendant social mobility, to better deal with competition and discrimination in the labour market (Estanque & Mendes, 1999). The new realities of women's participation in all spheres of social activities have brought a significant social transformation in women's role in society. Between 1981 and 1991, a significant increase in Portuguese women's participation in the work market was observed in every age group, although the increase was less spectacular among married women. In 1998, the rate of female activity was 43% (vs. 57% of male activity) and only 6% of women were unemployed (vs. 3.6% of male). The participation of Portuguese women in the labour market is the third highest in European community, after Denmark and the United Kingdom. Besides that, the percentage of Portuguese working mothers is the second highest in Europe, after Denmark, but although 34% of Danish women choose to work part-time, this type of work is only chosen by 4% of Portuguese women (INE, 1998 ; Vicente, Canço & Meliço, 1996).

Recently, the emergence of post-modern career ethics has brought to young people a new work perspective, based upon self-fulfilment. They hope to find a job, which brings them a sense of achievement in several domains, and spend more time exploring the work market to find this kind of job (Savickas, 1992).

Although young adults do not refuse the idea of having children, they want to include it in a programmed option, after raising general economic conditions as well as a stable family relationship to provide quality in their lives. For this reason, the average age of both women and men at the first marriage has risen substantially and so women tend to give birth later (INE, 1998 ; Vasconcelos, 1998).

This framework implies a longer economic support from parents, contributing to the delay of entrance into adulthood, and keeps young adults away from the responsibility of achieving their own independence from the family. Psychological autonomy increases with age and seem to have a positive impact on psychological well being and in the adaptation to other life contexts. However, the psychological separation process depends upon some variables such as family dynamics and gender.

Traditionally, parents tend to stimulate boys' levels of autonomy and establish stronger barriers to the development of girls' autonomy, through over-protection. When a democratic educational style is provided, girls tend to benefit more than boys, being encouraged to reach higher levels of autonomy and self-confidence. The achievement of autonomy, from a more complex perspective, is still strongly influenced by the social stereotypes related with masculine and feminine roles (Fontaine, 1990). Nowadays, because young people leave the family later, the longer parental support makes their access to autonomy more difficult, both in functional and emotional terms. In this climate of dependence, the interpersonal conflicts with parents will also be viewed as less natural and more threatening. Previous studies have shown that females are expected to be more sensitive to relational problematic (Almeida *et al.* 1996).

However, traditional education trains girls well to care about themselves and others. For this reason, they are expected to see themselves as more nurturing, and more competent in intimate relationships than males as well as better manager of the household domain. In general terms, females are expected to be more autonomous than males in functional aspects but less autonomous in emotional and conflictual ones.

In gender-stereotyped cultures, like the Portuguese, in spite of the emergence of new values in the sphere of professional work, conservative values are still largely transmitted and internalised by both men and women. Those values are the reference for women's self-evaluation as workers, spouses, housekeepers, and mothers (Andrade & Fontaine, 2000).

We can assume that, nowadays, working outside the home is a social value in Portugal, which is almost unquestionable for both genders. However, young women still do not want to reject the traditional view, maintaining the primary responsibility for home and childcare (Andrade & Fontaine, 2000). According to this perspective, women, more than men, are expected to balance their professional duties with family roles. The change of the social perspective about work and family roles seems to have more influence on women's life than on men's. The difficulty in supporting the burden associated with this change may lead young women to question sex roles, to explore different perspectives about social norms and values and, therefore, to develop their own representations about social values, attitudes and beliefs, which may be different from those of their parents. So, females are expected to be more autonomous in ideological terms than males. From the same perspective, students who do not share dominant social values are probably more independent ideologically from their parents than the more conformist students. The coexistence of new and old women's professional and family roles also implies the use of strategies to cope with the demand of both fields, integrated in a complex decision making process of establishment of life priorities. The traditional view of family is implicitly assumed by public policies.

Indeed, Portugal in comparison with other European countries has the lowest level of public equipment for childcare and domestic support. At home, Portuguese women are responsible for most of the domestic affairs and the more demanding ones.

In fact, nowadays, women are still educated in *ambivalence* : during the school years, they are asked to compete and prepare themselves for a more competitive work market, but, as they approach adulthood, they are also asked to moderate or renounce those values and assume other home and family oriented values which are more recognized by the society. Recent Portuguese studies have found that almost all young adults are in favor of equality between men and women, but agree that women should be more involved in domestic tasks such as taking care of children. Their opinion about feminine specialization in reproductive tasks is clear and very traditional, as they revealed that women should give more importance to her family role than to her professional career (Amâncio, 1994 ; Bardwick & Douvan, 1990 ; Inglez, 1996 ; Vasconcelos, 1998). From a very traditional perspective, men will be more concerned with their own career, professional mastery and involvement than with the career of their partner, while the opposite is expected for women who value more highly family and conjugality. The self-perception of professional competence and capability to be an adequate provider for the family is expected to be more important for men than women.

Thus the balance of family/domestic and professional/work roles remains *asymmetrical* for men and women. The work and home spheres are sequential for men and simultaneous and permeable for women. It is known that a housewife's time is continuous, without any differences between work and leisure, between working days and weekends or holidays references. No difference is expected for the working female graduates but the duplication of the demands (Inglez, 1996 ; Pleck *in* Duxbury & Higgins, 1991).

Faced with such a social transformation, the construction of gender role by women is more complex and three kinds of scenario have been identified in previous research (Amâncio, 1994 ; Costa, 1991).

A minority of women, from a counter-normative perspective shares the first scenario, which was dominant in previous generations. In this scenario, women assume the « traditional » values of marriage and family and some young women discouraged by their mothers' double burden in the work and family context will assume a different pattern for their own lives. Their claims of independence and equality are based on their right to be different and to reject the exclusive value of professional work. However, most women feel discouraged by the lack of social recognition of the value of family and marriage. Some of them react by assuming an image based exclusively on work competence, while others assume the double role in family and work.

The second scenario invokes the need of women to achieve their own independence through investment and success, especially in the work field. The main conception of this representation for women is considered closer to that of men involving characteristics such as autonomy, activity, competition, and a greater need of achievement, which implies rights, privilege and a new identity for women. These women usually do not give much value to family and marriage projects and, when they assume these projects, they do it later in their life.

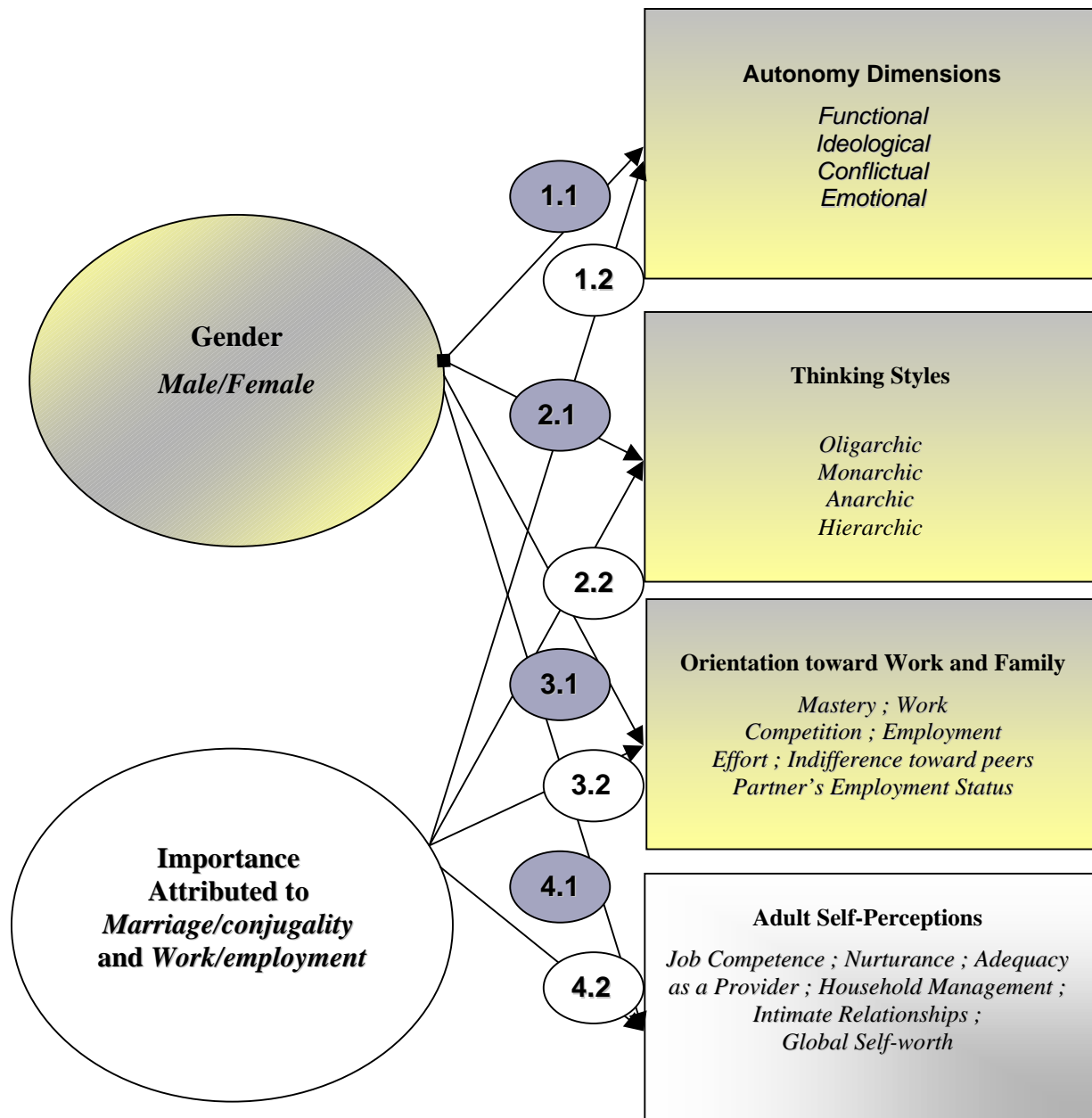
The involvement in both family and work duties challenges the need to be competent in both areas, characterises the third and last scenario. In practice, women consider these two dimensions essential for the construction of their identity.

We can see that the choice of life scenarios is becoming a challenge for young adults. In Portugal, striking a balance between family and work duties seems to be the rule for the majority of women but not for men, who invest almost exclusively in professional duties. This difference in social demands will be associated with the development of different psychological characteristics in males and females.

It is expected that men and women will develop different forms of fixing priorities and distributing their time (thinking styles), according to the number and importance of their life aims. As women need to establish priorities among the tasks to be done in the two life contexts, according to their order of importance and/or urgency, they tend to use mostly a hierarchical thinking style. It would be also the case of people who valued work and family roles and responsibilities equally. This need of priority is absent in the monarchic, or oligarchic thinking styles, which, therefore, are more expected in men or people who value work roles exclusively. In fact, monarchic people will concentrate their efforts on a single aim that mobilizes all their energy and attention (e.g. work). The oligarchic people avoid establishing priorities among aims, which is only possible when people have a limited number of aims that mobilize their energy. Finally, the anarchic people perform the tasks to be done, as they appear, apparently adopting unusual or casual way of approaching tasks (Sternberg, 1997). As this style is difficult to maintain in modern societies, it is expected that only people who don't value either work or family will manifest it.

1. AIMS

The aim of our study is to observe gender differences among a sample of Portuguese university students, as well as differences according the relative importance attributed to marriage/conjugality and work/employment, on several psychological dimensions related with balancing family and work: autonomy (functional, conflictual, ideological and emotional) levels, forms of thinking styles (hierarchic, monarchic, oligarchic and anarchic), work and family orientation (competition, work, employment, mastery, indifference towards peers, partner's career status) and self-perceptions on areas related to family and work (adequate provider, job competence, nurturing, household manager, global self-worth).



Graph 1. Aims and hypotheses

2. HYPOTHESIS

2.1 Expected differences in the autonomy dimensions :

a) Female university students are more ideologically and functionally independent, and less conflictually and emotionally independent of their parents, than male university students.

b) University students who place more value on work/employment than on conjugality/marriage will be less ideologically, emotionally, conflictually and functionally independent than those who value more highly conjugality/marriage.

2.2 Expected differences in thinking styles dimensions :

a) Male students will be more oligarchic and monarchic and less hierarchic than female students. No gender differences are expected on anarchic thinking style.

b) University students who value most highly work or marriage will be more oligarchic, monarchic and perhaps also more anarchic, but less hierarchic than students who value both work and conjugality/marriage.

2.3 Expected differences in work and family orientation dimensions :

a) Male students will be more oriented toward work, competition, mastery, employment, and effort and less oriented toward partner career and more indifferent toward peers than female students.

b) Students who value work/employment more will be more oriented toward work, competition, mastery, employment, and effort and less oriented toward partner career than students who place a higher value on marriage/conjugality.

2.4 Expected differences in the adult self-perception dimensions :

a) In comparison to male students, female university students will foresee themselves as more nurturing, ready for intimate relationships and as household managers than their male counterpart ; no gender differences are expected in job competence, adequate provider and global self-worth perceptions.

b) Students who value work/employment more will perceive themselves more as adequate providers and competent workers and less as nurturous, household managers, and ready for intimate relationship than the students who value more highly marriage/conjugality. No differences are expected on global self-worth.

3. METHODS

3.1 Measures

3.1.1 Psychological Separation Inventory (PSI)

The *Psychological Separation Inventory* (PSI) was developed by Hoffman (1984 in Almeida, Dias & Fontaine, 1996), based upon the Blos theory. The increase of psychological autonomy with age seems to be positively associated with psychological well-being (Almeida, Dias & Fontaine, 1996). Autonomy is a psychological construct that can be divided into specific dimensions, such as ideological, functional, emotional and conflictual. These four dimensions of independence are evaluated toward mother and father, separately. *Ideological autonomy* can be defined by the capacity of differentiation between self-representations and parents' representations of values, attitudes and beliefs. *Functional*

autonomy is the ability to take care of one's own needs without the help of parents. Freedom from the need for acceptance and emotional support from parents is the main characteristic of *emotional autonomy*. Finally, freedom from excessive guilt, anxiety and anger toward conflicts with parents defines *conflictual autonomy*. The Portuguese version of the inventory (Almeida, Dias & Fontaine, 1996) confirmed the four initial dimensions toward each parent, which presented good internal reliability (>.80). (Almeida, Dias & Fontaine, 1996 ; Fontaine, 1990) (Table 1).

3.1.2 *Thinking Style Inventory (TSI)*.

The *Thinking Style Inventory* (TSI) designed by Sternberg and Wagner (Sternberg, 1997) was based upon the *Self-Government Theory* (Sternberg, 1994, 1997). According to this theory, thinking styles includes five dimensions : *functions* (executive, judicial and legislative), *leanings* (conservative and progressive), *scope* (internal and external), *levels* (local and global) and *forms* (monarchic, hierarchic, oligarchic and anarchic). For the purpose of this study, only the latter was observed because it is expected to be closely associated with the organization of life goals.

Previous factorial analysis has shown that different forms of thinking styles loaded different factors : the oligarchic and the hierarchic styles are clearly differentiated (Table 1).

In spite of its validity and reliability, the TSI has never been used other than in the strictly academic domain, namely in role balancing studies.

3.1.3 *Work and Family Orientation Questionnaire (WOFO)*.

The *Work and Family Orientation Questionnaire* (WOFO) was constructed by Spence & Helmreich (1978) and presents seven scales which assess the commitment to the work role : orientation toward *work*, *mastery*, *competition* and *effort*, *employment concerns*, *concern with partner's career aspirations*, and *indifference toward peers*. It also includes, in a complementary questionnaire, some questions about the relative importance attributed to marriage/conjugality and employment/work, the ideal number of children, as well as other questions concerning educational aspirations.

This questionnaire has been used with secondary and college students in several investigations of the prospective balancing of family and work roles, focused on gender differences. Strong and positive correlations between masculinity and work, mastery and competition have been found (Table 1).

3.1.4 *Adult Self-Perception Profile (ASPP)*.

The *Adult Self-Perception Profile* (ASPP) was developed by Messer & Harter (1986) to assess the multidimensional adult's self-concept. It includes eleven scales that underline the differentiation of adult's perceived sense of competence/adequacy from a developmental perspective. For this study, five specific domains were assessed : *job competence* (or feeling of competence, productivity, pride in one's work) *household management* (the perception of capacity to effectively handle and oversee activities within domestic context), *nurturance* (the perception of ability to care for others), *adequate provider* (the perception of ability to supply the means of support for oneself and significant others) and *intimate relationships* (the capacity to create and maintain close, meaningful interactions with a

mate, a lover and/or special friends). Besides that, the *global self worth*, (one's global perception of worth, independently of the particular domain of competence or adequacy) was also evaluated (Table 1).

Table 1. Instruments : Psychological Separation Inventory, Thinking Styles Inventory, Work and Family Orientation and Adult Self-Perception Profile.

Instrument	Authors	Dimensions	N. Items	Examples of Items
Psychological Separation Inventory	Hoffman, 1984	Conflictual Emotional Functional Ideological	88	<i>Sometimes, I think I'm too dependent from my mother.</i>
Thinking Styles Inventory-forms	Sternberg & Wagner, 1997	Monarchic Hierarchic Anarchic Oligarchic	32	<i>I like to set priorities for the things I need to do before start doing them.</i>
Work and Family Orientation	Spence & Helmreich, 1978	-Work -Effort -Mastery -Competition -Partner's work status -Indifference toward peers	27	<i>I really like to work in activities which require skills and competition</i>
Adult Self-Perception Profile	Messer & Harter, 1986	-Job Competence -Nurturance -Adequacy as a provider -Household Management -Intimate relationships - Global Self Worth	26	<i>Some adults are not very organized in completing household tasks BUT other adults are organized in completing household tasks.</i>

3.2 Subjects

The sample comprised 672 male (33%) and female (67%) students, attending public and private university institutions from the North and Centre of Portugal. The mean age is 20,74 years old, with a mode of 19 (ranging from 17 to 45 years). The students were attending Arts/Foreign Languages, Law, Engineering, Psychology, Management, Social and Medical Sciences. For comparison purposes, subjects were distributed into five groups according to the importance attributed to marriage/conjugality and employment/work (Table 2). The distribution in each group is not casual (Pearson Chi-Square = 18.244 ; $p < .001$).

Table 2. Sample according to gender and importance attributed to marriage and employment

		GENDER		TOTAL
		Masculine	Feminine	
IMPORTANCE ATTRIBUTED TO MARRIAGE AND EMPLOYMENT	G1 Marriage as the most important	35	41	76
	G2 Marriage as more important than employment	91	147	238
	G3 Marriage as equally important as employment	76	204	280
	G4 Employment as more important than marriage	5	28	33
	G5 Employment as the most important	17	28	45
	TOTAL		224	448

4. RESULTS

4.1 Gender differences

As expected, the analysis of table 3 shows that female university students are more independent of their parents, on ideological ($F=8.840$; $p \leq .005$) and functional ($F=11.773$; $p \leq .001$) dimensions, than their male counterparts and less conflictually independent ($F=4.515$; $p \leq .050$). However, male university students are less emotionally independent than female students ($F= 41.693$; $p \leq .001$) (Graph 2). The hypothesis 1.1 is partially confirmed.

Table 3. Emotional, ideological, functional and conflictual autonomy : Frequencies, means and standard deviations according to gender

Gender		AUTONOMY			
		Emotional	Ideological	Functional	Conflictual
Masculine	Mean	49,46	52,76	48,57	46,50
	Std. Deviation	9,96	10,92	11,03	8,90
	N	202	209	197	203
Feminine	Mean	55,49	55,63	51,73	44,87
	Std. Deviation	11,21	11,51	10,39	9,02
	N	396	397	405	414
Total	Mean	53,46	54,64	50,70	45,41
	Std. Deviation	11,17	11,38	10,70	9,01
	N	598	606	602	617

As expected, the higher hierarchical thinking style of female university students ($F=7.838$; $p \leq .005$), and the absence of difference between male and female on the anarchic dimension confirm hypothesis 2.1. Unexpectedly, no difference is found in the two other thinking style dimensions (monarchic and oligarchic), and so hypothesis 2.1. is not totally confirmed (Table 4 and Graph 3).

Table 4. Hierarchic thinking style : Frequencies, means and standard deviations according to gender

Gender	Hierarchic Thinking Style		
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Masculine	23,33	3,08	218
Feminine	23,99	2,74	441
Total	23,77	2,88	659

Male university students are more oriented to competition ($F=12.960$; $p \leq .001$) and less preoccupied with their future partner's employment status ($F=7.018$; $p \leq .010$) than their female counterparts. These results partially confirm hypothesis 3.1, since no differences were found on the other dimensions of the work and family orientation (mastery, work, employment, effort and indifference toward peers).

Table 5. Importance of competition and partner's work status : Frequencies, means and standard deviations according to gender

Gender		Work and Family Orientation	
		Competition	Partner's work status
Masculine	Mean	13,22	5,74
	Std. Deviation	2,30	1,57
	N	223	224
Feminine	Mean	12,55	6,04
	Std. Deviation	2,26	1,33
	N	438	451
Total	Mean	12,78	5,94
	Std. Deviation	2,30	1,42
	N	661	675

As expected, female university students perceive themselves more as nurturing and household managers than male university students and no difference is observed on global self-worth (Table 6). However, contrary to our previsions, no difference is found on all other self-perception dimensions (adequate provider, employment competence, intimate relationship). Hypothesis 4.1. is only partially confirmed.

Table 6. Self-perceptions as nurturing and household managers : Frequencies, means and standard deviations according to gender.

Gender		Adult self-perception	
		household management	nurturance
Masculine	Mean	10,25	11,29
	Std. Deviation	3,03	2,38
	N	185	180
Feminine	Mean	11,04	12,50
	Std. Deviation	2,73	2,37
	N	423	422
Total	Mean	10,80	12,13
	Std. Deviation	2,85	2,43
	N	608	602

4.2 Differences according to the importance attributed to marriage/conjugality vs. employment/work

Comparing the five categories of university students according to the value they place on professional work and marriage/family, differences were observed on emotional

($F=3.652$; $p\leq .010$), ideological ($F=3.618$; $p\leq .010$), functional ($F=3.657$; $p\leq .010$) and conflictual ($F=3.306$; $p\leq .010$) autonomy dimensions.

Students who value employment most highly are less emotionally, ideologically and functionally independent of their parents than those in intermediate positions who value marriage more than work, work more than marriage or attribute equal importance to both, sustaining hypothesis 1.2. (Table 7, Graph 6). But it is also observed that the group of students that value marriage most highly are less emotionally independent than the group who value marriage and work equally.

The inverse pattern of results is observed about the conflictual dimension of autonomy : students who place the highest value on work are more autonomous than those who place more value on marriage than on work or value marriage and work equally. These last results partially question hypothesis 1.2.

Table 7. Emotional, ideological, functional and conflictual autonomy : Frequencies, means and standard deviations according to importance attributed to marriage and employment.

Marriage and employment		Autonomy			
		Emotional	Ideological	Functional	Conflictual
Marriage the most important	Mean	51,70	54,89	50,16	45,36
	Std. Deviation	9,97	9,36	10,37	8,88
	N	63	65	70	67
Marriage more important than employment	Mean	53,19	54,75	50,42	44,54
	Std. Deviation	10,86	11,08	10,44	8,79
	N	209	216	214	218
Marriage and employment equally important	Mean	54,81	55,46	52,07	45,21
	Std. Deviation	11,17	12,01	10,93	9,28
	N	254	253	245	252
Employment more important than marriage	Mean	56,07	56,18	51,97	46,81
	Std. Deviation	10,38	10,06	9,85	7,62
	N	29	28	30	31
Employment most important	Mean	48,56	48,13	45,43	49,77
	Std. Deviation	13,91	11,52	10,81	9,60
	N	39	38	40	44
Total	Mean	53,56	54,71	50,81	45,40
	Std. Deviation	11,20	11,40	10,73	9,08
	N	594	600	599	612

Unexpectedly, no difference is observed among the five categories of students on three of the thinking style dimensions (monarchic, oligarchic and hierarchic) (Table 8 and Graph 7). Differences were only observed on the anarchic one ($F=4.548$; $p\leq .001$) : students who put the highest value on marriage (but not those who put the highest value on

work) tend to present a more anarchic thinking style than the students who value work more than marriage, concede equal importance to work and marriage or put the highest value on work. Hypothesis 2.2. is, in that way, partially confirmed.

Table 8. Anarchic thinking style : Frequencies, means and standard deviations according to importance attributed to marriage and employment.

	Anarchic Thinking Style		
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Marriage and employment			
Marriage the most important	22,21	2,57	72
Marriage more important than employment	21,70	2,45	230
Marriage and employment equally important	21,45	2,12	273
Employment more important than marriage	20,50	3,05	32
Employment most important	20,73	2,72	44
Total	21,52	2,41	651

No difference is found on the work and family orientation and on the adult self-perception dimensions, questioning hypotheses 3.2 and 4.2.

5. DISCUSSION

Gender differences confirm that female university students, more than their male counterparts, foresee themselves as performing a double role, both in family and professional contexts. In the family context, this role remains traditional. Results point out the importance of the dimension of nurturing and household management for women's self-definition. In the work context, the traditional emphasis put on male professional status is also shared by males and females : the latter are more concerned about their partner's status than the former, who describe themselves as more competitive. Although gender-stereotyped roles still remain in society, a new representation of woman emerges in the work domain. Employment concerns, orientation towards work, the value put on effort and mastery of the task more than on interpersonal relationships (indifference toward peers) are shared by women and men equally. Both genders include in their self-evaluation, the perception of their suitability as family provider and their professional competence.

As expected, change in social roles is associated with important psychological characteristics. Although longer permanence of young people in the « nest » should

increase their dependence on parents, female university students are more independent of their parents than males, ideologically, functionally and emotionally. However, they still need to be able to better cope with the relational problems in the family without anger or guilt (conflictual autonomy) if they want to resist family pressures to take on family duties, almost exclusively, later in life. The higher women's hierarchical thinking style also suggests that female university students anticipate a balancing strategy based upon an efficient, but demanding way of defining priorities in order to cope with qualitatively different tasks in both contexts. These findings would suggest that socialization practices involve girls more than boys in multiples duties (school and family) and so develop hierarchic thinking style more in females. This kind of thinking style becomes salient when the concept of family and work duties are simultaneously activated.

Nowadays, the labour market conditions make employment a much more salient issue for students than conjugality. Finding employment and reaching economic stability is a priority. It is also a less controllable task, depending more on opportunities than on personal effort. As they have to face uncertainty before they can establish themselves in a profession, students who value work more than marriage need more support from their parents and are generally less emotionally, ideologically and functionally independent. As work is highly valued in Portuguese society, students need to be more autonomous from their parents (emotionally, functionally and ideologically) in order to value marriage more highly than employment. This pattern is closer to the female one while the pattern of university students who value employment more than marriage is closer to the male pattern, as they are more conflictually independent and seem to present more difficulties in managing their time and priorities

It was also observed that students who value marriage more than work have a higher anarchic thinking style. It may be hypothesized that family is a more tolerant context for emotional expression and in which the pattern of habits and activities is less determined by social conventions. It is also true that university students usually feel more worried about work issues than family ones, as they are about to begin their professional life. Therefore, the option to value marriage more than work is, in this specific group, a less usual option, which may be based on their anarchic thinking style.

It seems obvious that the range of young adults' choices in all spheres of modern society has increased, as well as their complexity. Nowadays, both professional and family goals are perceived as very important and neither men nor women want to exclude either of them. The balance of important projects in the family and in the occupational settings should be a shared challenge. Although some change in social values associated with work has been observed, the lower value of diplomas in the traditional areas of female employment and the women's responsibility for family chores introduce obstacles for a real equality of opportunities. This exploratory study has also shown that life choices in work and family contexts and the way young people foresee themselves in these contexts are not independent of psychological variables, such as thinking styles, dimensions of autonomy or self-perceptions. Much remains to be studied about the strategies for balancing family and work duties in adulthood, differences between educational and professional patterns in terms of expectations and true achievement, as well as real change from generation to generation. Future studies could contribute to the identification of emerging variables in this

field in order to better understand the construction of this role balance from adolescence to adulthood.

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