

## Commentary

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*Rena L. Repetti, Tali Klima, and Tamar Kremer-Sadlik*

### **How might parents' work and family roles contribute to adolescents' future roles?**

*Marchena's chapter addresses an important and largely overlooked topic in the work-family literature, the experience of parents' role conflict from the perspective of a child living in the family. Using survey data from over 400 parent-adolescent dyads in the 500 Family Study, she examined how often teens thought their parents did a "good job of balancing work and family life." Overall, the teens gave their parents high marks, with the average response falling between "often" and "always." The generally positive impression conveyed by these teens is consistent with findings from another recent survey study involving over 1,000 children (Galinsky 1999). Interestingly, Marchena found differences in the teens' descriptions of mothers' and fathers' skill at role management. Whereas 63 percent said that their mothers "always" did a good job, fewer of the teens (47 percent) described fathers in this way. Marchena's analysis goes beyond descriptive findings to test hypotheses about the way that differences among adolescents in their perceptions of parents' role management are linked to aspects of their home lives and characteristics of their parents' jobs. For example, parents who devoted more hours to work were less likely to be seen as doing a good job of balancing roles. In this and many other ways Marchena's chapter suggests new avenues for work-family researchers to explore. We restrict our comments here to a single line of inquiry, one that is prompted by Marchena's focus on the adolescent offspring's perspective on work-family role management (WFRM). We ask: How might teens' evaluations of their parents' role management influence their thoughts about their own future roles?*

### **Adolescents' thoughts about their future roles**

*The chapter calls our attention to the rather unique position of adolescents in the family. While teens observe and evaluate their parents as children within the current family system, they are at the same time approaching and preparing for their own adult roles in a future family. Marchena notes that the role*

management children observe in their home may also influence their future work and family goals. Do working families reproduce themselves? Do some children expect to adopt the same patterns that they observe at home, while others anticipate using different strategies in order to improve on their parents' performance?

Galinsky's (1999) survey data provide a clue. In her study, most children said that they wanted to manage work and family life in a way that is "very similar" or "somewhat similar" to their parents. Galinsky also examined how adolescents' perceptions of parents' roles related to their hopes and expectations for their own future roles. Children were most likely to want to emulate their parents' role management if they believed their parents liked their work and put family before their jobs. Despite what appears to be a commonly held wish to model parents' role choices, the amount of time that children said their parents spent at work was inversely related to the amount of time that they hoped to spend at work as adults. Marchena's finding that adolescents believed their parents were doing a poorer job of balancing work and family life when they devoted more hours to work may help to explain this finding.

#### Adolescent girls' expectations

We know that men and women experience the balance of work and family roles differently (Kiecolt 2003). For example, even though women spend less time on household chores when their working hours increase, they still do more housework than men (Coltrane 2000; Hochschild 1997). Some estimates suggest that, in families with two employed parents, the fathers' proportion of child caregiving is about half the size of the mothers' proportion (Wood and Repetti 2004). In addition, women report feeling more torn between demands of work and family, and feel more responsible for their home and children (Hochschild 1989). Today, most adolescent girls are growing up in homes with mothers who juggle the roles of parent, worker, and spouse. As daughters they are privy to the challenges and the rewards that their mothers' experiences present for both mothers and their families. It is thus plausible that adolescent girls will turn to their mothers as models for how to manage their own work and family roles in the future. In fact, Galinsky found just that: boys and girls did not differ in their desire to emulate their fathers' WFRM, but daughters were more likely than sons to want to emulate their mothers' style of managing work and family. As they look toward adulthood, will adolescent girls expect their husbands to share equally in the running of the household and childcare? Do those who are planning to pursue demanding careers also anticipate feeling torn between work and home? Recall that Marchena reported differences in the teens' evaluations of how well mothers and fathers balanced work and family life. Do daughters expect to be better than their partners at managing work and family? In the work-family

realm, the expectations, hopes, and goals of adolescent girls strike us as having particular importance.

Studies of adolescent girls' gender role attitudes and career orientation and aspirations reveal that girls hold less traditional attitudes toward work and family roles than do boys (Bohannon and Blanton 1999; Ex and Janssens 1998; Galinsky 1999). One study found that adolescent girls were more inclined than adolescent boys to view a wife's career as equal in importance to her husband's, and to believe that men and women should share household and child-rearing duties (Tuck, Rolfe, and Adair 1994). At the same time, potential conflicts between their future work and family roles are inherent in the narratives that girls construct of their futures. For instance, while young females express a desire for careers, they also report strong maternal obligations and a willingness to move for their husbands' jobs at the expense of their own (Novack and Novack 1996). In another study, girls expected to start a career, get married, and become a parent within a time span of two years (Greene and Wheatley 1992). This projected life course was associated with girls' concerns about the temporal constraints of work and family, as well as pessimism about their futures. Thus, it seems that even as adolescent girls are planning ambitious careers, the seeds of work-family role conflict (WFRC) are already planted in their goals and plans.

#### The role of the developing self-concept

Adolescent girls' perceptions of their parents' role management, especially the ways in which they perceive their mothers' balancing of work and family responsibilities, may not have only a direct impact on their expectations, hopes, and goals for their future work-family roles. These perceptions may also indirectly influence their future roles through the developing self-concept. Self-concept refers to the way in which an individual describes herself. Developmental psychologists have found that during adolescence the self becomes increasingly differentiated into role-related multiple selves (Harter et al. 1997). This proliferation of selves is generally attributed to cognitive advances that allow adolescents to make greater and more subtle distinctions, as well as to handle the complex demands placed on adolescents in varying social contexts. Harter (1999) has demonstrated that individuals have different self-concepts in different social contexts. At times, these self-concepts may be contradictory or in conflict with one another, and contradictory self-concepts are associated with negative affect (Harter and Monsour 1992).

Interestingly, girls report more conflicting self-concepts than do boys in middle school and high school (Harter and Monsour 1992). Could the greater conflict felt by adolescent girls be shaped in part by perceptions of their mothers' WFRC? Perhaps a girl who sees her mother effectively balancing her two roles without

*much conflict is more likely to believe that two role-related selves can coexist harmoniously. In contrast, a girl who sees her mother struggling with her work and family roles may come to feel that two role-related selves will inevitably generate internal conflict. It is important to ask whether the processes through which role-related multiple selves are formed during adolescence and the contradictions that at least some girls sense in the various aspects of their self-concept could impact their expectations for their own futures. That is, would girls who have internalized a harmonious coexistence of role-related selves expect to hold fulfilling jobs while simultaneously experiencing a satisfying family life? Conversely, would girls who have conflicting selves express pessimism regarding the coordination of roles in the future?*

*Marchena's chapter brings to the forefront the importance of adolescents' perceptions of their parents' WFRC and WFRM. This commentary expands on Marchena's study by focusing on adolescent girls and their perceptions of their mothers' balancing of work and family responsibilities. In particular, we suggest that adolescent girls' perceptions of their mothers may influence their expectations, hopes, and goals for their own future work and family roles. We further propose that adolescent girls' perceptions of their mothers may affect their developing self-concept, which can, in turn, impact their expectations and goals. We believe this is a research direction worth pursuing as it may shed light on the development of both girls' and boys' expectations and goals for their future education, professional aspirations, marriage, and parenthood.*