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Anticipated Gains: Motherwork, Organizational Brokerage and Daughter’s Occupational Development

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ABSTRACT
Research on mothers’ efforts to protect their families from scarcity tends to separate individual action and the organizational context. We propose an intergenerational approach focusing on the convergence between the two, and ask: how are resources, acquired by motherwork vis-à-vis organizations, transferred to daughters to advance their occupational development? Based on 30 interviews with economically marginalized mother-young adult daughter dyads, the findings reveal an intergenerational brokerage of organizational ties, creating a resource for the occupational development of young women. We argue that in the context of poverty, organizational ties are crucial for mothers striving to support their daughters’ occupational development.

KEYWORDS
Intergenerational brokerage; mother-daughter relations; poverty/welfare; young women; organisational ties

Introduction
The challenges faced by economically marginalized young adults in the neo-liberal era have been documented by several scholars (e.g., Furlong and Cartmel 2007; Silva 2013), especially in the realms of post-secondary education and labor market participation. There is an extensive body of scholarship highlighting the pivotal role played by parents in supporting their young adult children as they grow up (Hartnett et al. 2013; Newman 2012; West et al. 2017). However, parental support has rarely been considered from the vantage points of gender and class. Specifically, it has neglected a thorough consideration of motherwork: ongoing care work provided by mothers to advance their children’s wellbeing (Hill Collins 2016), and specifically the investment of resources and support that mothers, striving to provide for their families in poverty, can pass on to their young adult daughters.

Mothers providing for their families in conditions of economic scarcity are generally portrayed in the literature as lacking the capacity to be significant sources of support with respect to the occupational development of their children. This is explained through their lack of knowledge about post-secondary education options and the labor market (Swauger 2010), and as a consequence of being consumed by the daily responsibilities of survival – the latter leading them to rely on their daughters for support with housework responsibilities, at the expense of their personal development (Dodson and Dickert 2004).

The idea that mothers can proactively support their young adult daughters’ aspirations for occupational development, through their ongoing ties with social welfare organizations, has not been examined. Thus, scholarship to date reproduces a theoretical invisibility with...
regard to mothers in poverty and their contribution to family life – a research gap that feeds a limited conceptualization of the intergenerational contribution that mothers living in poverty can make to their young adult daughters’ development. This gap, indirectly, also promotes neo-liberal concepts of autonomous self-reliance and “do-it-yourself biographies,” which tend to highlight notions of individual choice and agency for young adults (Daly 2011), while overlooking the investment of working-class mothers in supporting the development of such biographies. Even Mario Small’s (2009) seminal work on organizational embeddedness – a theory based, to a great extent, on mothers’ accounts of relationships of support with social organizations – frames the process of gaining access to resources as a product of organizations connecting service users to organizational networks, marginalizing mothers’ agency in activating these processes.

Considering the possibility of treating the moment of gaining access to resources by itself, this paper applies both a long term and a feminist perspective to Mario Small’s theory of organizational embeddedness (Small 2009). We interpret motherwork as key to the ongoing process that precedes the critical moment of gaining access to resources. Taking account of the social marginality that defines the lives of these mothers and daughters, together with the characteristics of their relations with support organizations, we found ourselves unable to join Small (2009) and his fragmented conceptualization of the resource gaining moment, which presents the transferred resources in terms of “unanticipated gains.” Rather, we propose a theory that ascribes value to the continuity of relations between mothers, professionals and daughters, and takes into account not only the immediate, purposive actions that Small (2009) sees as crucial in creating opportunities to acquire needed resources, but also the “projective dimensions” (Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 984) of mothers’ actions. In this respect we adopt Emirbayer and Mische (1998) conceptualization of human agency as “immersed in a temporal flow, [where mothers] move ‘beyond themselves’ into the future and construct changing images of where they think they are going, where they want to go, and how they can get there from where they are at present” (984). Thus, we define the products of motherwork as “anticipated gains” based on the understanding that these are an amalgamation of mothers’ “fears, anxieties, hopes and dreams” (984) that are part of her experiences of life in poverty; and on the notion that her close ties with the organizations are a resource within itself which she invests in knowing that in the future she could potentially count on it.

Within this framework we ask: how are resources, cultivated by motherwork and vis-à-vis the organizational context, directed toward the occupational development of their young adult daughters?

From our point of view, research to date has focused either on the organizational context (Small 2009) or on independent efforts by mothers to access resources, the latter mainly through building networks of support (Hanson and Pratt 1995; Henly, Danziger, and Offer 2005; Offer 2020). We seek to develop an understanding of the inter-connectedness of these two domains, which becomes visible when an intergenerational perspective is applied. This perspective makes it possible to conceptualize the processes that facilitate access to resources over time as meaningful, giving full value to the support enabled by looking beyond specific goals and isolated instances of assistance. In adopting this lens, we seek to unpack the qualitative aspects of a phenomenon recently identified in a quantitative study, namely the long-term positive effects of an increase in parent income-support on children from low-income families: an increase in earnings, a fall in teenage birth rates, and improvements to high-school academic achievements.
In other words, the value of the allocation of resources by welfare organizations receives full contextual evaluation when considered from an intergenerational perspective, and when considered in relation to its impact on the next generation.

In what follows, we introduce our conceptualization of motherwork, in the context of social organizations, as part of an intergenerational process of accessing anticipated gains. We begin by setting out our understanding of motherwork and its embeddedness in networks of support, focusing on welfare organizations. We then conceptualize the link between the two in the intergenerational process of resource-gaining operating between mothers and their young adult daughters.

Recognition of Motherwork

Until several decades ago, mothers’ work, whether in the home or in the community, was largely obscured under the gender-neutral term “parenting” – a representation currently criticized in feminist scholarship (e.g. Gillies 2006a). Similar criticism has been directed toward the cultural assumption that caring for children comes naturally to women (Dalla Costa and James, 1972 in Tong 2009), and thus should not be considered as work. In contradistinction to this, critical analysis of motherhood has developed the notion of motherwork, characterized by an ongoing struggle for survival, for power and identity formation for both themselves as mothers and for their children, within a system of multiple axes of domination (Hill Collins 2016: 61). One of the central projects of feminist scholars in highlighting the concept of motherwork has been to categorize the investment of mothers, as opposed to parents, in the educational and occupational development of their children (Smith 1989). These scholars made a distinction between the lived experiences of middle-class and working-class motherwork (Gillies 2006, 2007; Reay 1998, 2004), placing emphasis on the investment of time as well as mental and emotional labor (Reay 2004). Gillies (2006, 2007) showed that while the emotional labor of middle-class mothers is mostly invested in their children’s future educational prospects, school involvement on the part of working-class mothers focuses on protecting and supporting their children in situations of failure, violence, and racist labeling. Lavee and Benjamin (2015) extended this point by stressing the struggles of working-class mothers against decisions made by school staff which threaten to channel their children toward what presents as inferior educational opportunities. Furthermore, they depicted the complexities that mothers face in attempting to synchronize their many time-consuming responsibilities in response to caring emergencies.

Focusing on the analysis and recognition of the work that mothers perform in pursuit of their young children’s educational development and wellbeing, we suggest that in many respects, the current discourse on the contribution of parents to the occupational development of their young adult children “suffers” from similar problems. Both assume hegemonic parental practices – middle-class privilege in terms of resources of support, and heterosexual, traditional parenting. However, within a context of economic scarcity, many of the parents are actually mothers, and in the main single mothers. In other words, even though feminist scholarship (Gillies 2006, 2007; Reay 1998, 2004; Smith, 1989) has pointed to the crucial contribution of mothers to the educational development of their young children, it is yet to recognize the significant contribution made by economically marginalized mothers to the occupational development of their young adult children, and specifically their young adult daughters. This investigation is essential at a time when neo-liberal ideologies feed a discourse of “do-it-yourself-biographies,” which
highlight notions of individual choice and agency for young adults, (Daly 2011) while disguising the mothers’ investment and support in creating these biographies.

**Networks of Support**

Within the project of unraveling the *motherwork* (Hill Collins 2016) invested in daily survival, and the efforts that mothers put into protecting their families from deprivation, scholars (Hanson and Pratt 1995; Henly, Danziger, and Offer 2005) have highlighted the significance of mothers’ ability to create networks of support. These networks have been found to serve as sources of information, providing emotional and instrumental support to help low-income mothers with their household and childrearing responsibilities. The “work of sociability” (Nelson 2005: 5) invested in these networks of support has been a central issue of investigation: unraveling the complex process of widening the scope of support; analyzing the socio-cultural criteria that affect the perception of legitimacy, on the part of low-income women, to ask for support (Lavee and Offer 2012); and unveiling the burdensome aspects of support networks (Domínguez and Watkins 2003; Offer 2012, 2020). Another key issue in the discussion of social support networks is their role as a form of coping social capital that facilitates daily survival, as opposed to merely bridging social capital and enhanced wellbeing (Granovetter 1973; Warr 2005). Some scholars (Offer et al., 2010; Domínguez & Watkins 2003; Ewick and Slibey 2003; Warr 2005) have found that women’s ties with activists working for NGOs or other community organizations affords them access to enhanced resources such as information and guidance in claiming benefits – resources that subsequently improved their everyday living conditions. Mario Small (2009) advanced this discussion one step further by crossing the boundaries between individual relations of support, focusing on ties of support at the organizational level. In his study on community institutions in New York City, Small described how in neighborhoods characterized by poverty, mothers with children enrolled in local childcare centers were able to gain access to resources that would have otherwise been unavailable to them. This process of facilitating access to resources, which he named “brokerage” (Small 2009), is based on the daily practices within organizations. By embedding themselves in welfare and support organizations, “people can acquire significant advantages through the workings of these (organizational) networks which yield palpable effects on their well-being” (Small 2009: 177). His analysis of the brokering mechanisms of these organizations goes beyond their “global purposes”; it extends their operation to enhancing access not only to the gains that would be expected from such an organization, such as childcare facilities, but also to what he termed “unanticipated gains” – resources offered by other organizations. Nevertheless, Small’s breakthrough conceptualization does not give enough attention to *motherwork* as critical in activating this process of brokerage, or to the existence of organizational ties with other members of their family. Small (2009) does make reference to gender, noting that most of the staff members in his study were themselves women living either in or close to poverty, and that this assisted in building trust between them and the women clientele of these institutions. However, his analysis placed emphasis on the organizational aspect of the brokerage, and less on brokerage between women who were linked by similar life conditions. From a gender perspective, conceptualizing such gains from an organizational lens only, and terming them “unanticipated,” reproduces the erasure of gender and *motherwork* as key components of such brokering processes. Building on Warr’s (2005) call for further investigation into women’s capacity to generate bridging networks within marginal locations (both geographic and social), this study seeks to unpack the meaning of Small’s “unanticipated
gains” in the lived experiences of mothers and daughters, and in the context of the daughters’ eventual occupational development.

Before progressing to a full description of the study, it is important to first explain the circumstances that lead to the creation of the intergenerational framework described here.

**The Intergenerational Framework**

Relationships between mothers and daughters in the context of schooling and occupational aspirations have been described by Girlhood Studies scholars (Cauce et al. 1996; Swauger 2010; Taylor 1996) as close, caring and encouraging. However, mothers have also been described as posing barriers to their daughter’s personal and occupational development. Mothers have been portrayed as unable to discern their daughters’ needs; channeling them toward traditional gender roles by counseling them not to challenge manifestations of benevolent sexism (Montañés et al. 2012); and expecting them to fulfill household responsibilities at the expense of their own personal growth and development (Dodson and Dickert 2004). More recently, it has been shown that these household requirements may constitute a source of pride for the adolescent girls (Oppenheim-Shachar and Benjamin 2016). But, more relevant here, the study uncovered that for immigrant mothers without links to the welfare system, and thus unable to broker organizational ties, daughters showed a pattern of avoidance toward social support programs (Oppenheim-Shachar and Benjamin 2016). Such patterns indicate the need for a learning process with regard to the creation of supportive ties (Offer et al. 2010).

Shifting the focus from adolescent girls to young adult women and their occupational development, an emphasis on the possible importance of the intergenerational scope has emerged. This sheds light on cultural and economic contexts as shaping parenting practices, and on the transmission of resources from parents to their children (Brannen et al. 2011). We apply this perspective in the current study, analyzing *motherwork* during adolescence as a form of intergenerational transmission that will become beneficial later in the lives of their young adult daughters.

The intergenerational transmission perspective is crucial in a period of socio-economic change (McLeod and Thompson 2009). Studies have shown that transmission and subsequent outcomes within micro parent-child relationships can be affected by processes operating at the macrosocial level (Brannen et al. 2011). One example is the historically more generous orientation of welfare services, which made it possible for social workers to devote more time to developing specific relationships with mothers in need.

In the context of the occupational development of marginalized young women, intergenerational transmission may be as much defeating as enabling. Alongside neo-liberal requirements of self-actualization (Harris 2004; Newman 2012) and “do-it-yourself-biographies”) Daly 2011), the young women absorb the model created by their mothers’ lack of formal education and recurrent employment experiences at the bottom of the labor market (Benjamin 2011). Within this gap, our study seeks to investigate how mothers can contribute to their daughters’ educational and occupational development, despite their inferiority in these pivotal fields.

The specific position of the working-class intergenerational brokerage of maternal resources requires, as suggested in the argument advanced by Small (2009), an organizational perspective,
highlighting the embeddedness of access to resources within community organizations. According to Small, research mapping access to resources should examine the forms in which welfare institutions, such as NGOs and statutory organizations, broker resources for mothers living in poverty by deploying the full influence of their organizational network. Small’s perspective directs attention to the organizational level of resource brokerage, naming these “unanticipated gains.” In emphasizing the lack of anticipation, it appears that Small does not recognize the work invested in maintaining relationships with the community organizations as a necessary precondition for the brokerage process. Thus, his perspective excludes the work put in by the mothers to make the process possible, such as their investment in ongoing negotiation with these community organizations; it also excludes the outcomes of these contacts for their daughters. What we offer below is an extension of Small’s perspective, but in a way that recognizes the work put in by mothers and its significance for the brokerage process. For this purpose, we highlight the need for two analytical distinctions: The first is the distinction between the definition of “anticipated gains” as concrete, purposeful pre-defined goals as suggested by Small (2009) in his conceptualization of “Unanticipated gains,” to the interpretation of “anticipated gains” based on Emirbayer and Mische (1998) analysis of agency as a resource existing within a temporal flow which will become crucial at some given moment. In other words, the motherwork invested in relations with professionals from support organizations as a means for potential anticipated support and care from these organizations who overtime become familiar with the family and specifically the daughters’ worries and needs.

The second, is the distinction between intergenerational transmission that reproduces dependency on welfare organizations; and the intergenerational brokerage of resources that facilitates access to organizations which will further broker resources for both the mothers and their daughters, enabling the latter to develop educationally and occupationally. In what follows, we outline the Israeli context in which mothers and daughters are situated.

**The Israeli Context**

**Welfare Support for Families in Economic Scarcity**

The mother-daughter experiences that this study focuses on are situated in the context of three decades of ideological change in the Israeli welfare state. During the 1990s, a prevailing neo-liberal ideology fed the New Public Management reform, which integrated principles of competition and cost reduction into welfare policy and services (Benjamin 2020). In terms of welfare support, this meant that resources were kept to a minimum; enough to provide a basic income based on eligibility testing and applicants’ attempts to locate employment (Benjamin 2020). These policy changes minimized (even further) the scarce material resources available to mothers providing for their families in poverty, adding the burden of synchronizing childcare and paid work – even though the state did not equip mothers in poverty with the resources needed to handle both caring for their families and labor-market responsibilities (Co-author et al., 2016). Alongside public welfare institutions – the Ministry of Welfare and the National Insurance Institute, the main welfare support organizations in Israel – social support to families in need is also provided by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Benish 2018). The scale of NGO support in Israel has expanded since the 1980s, following the spread of neo-liberal
ideology and a drastic reduction in government expenditure on social services in the following years (Benish 2018).

**Support Services for Marginalized Young Women**

Welfare support and services in Israel have been systematically reduced over the last 30 years. However, the understanding that that the disengagement of young adults from educational, occupational and social settings will lead to a loss of precious human capital (Katan 2009) has encouraged the development of a tranche of services focused on providing support to young adults aged between 18 and 35. These services can be divided into in two central types: 1) Support for young adults as a social generational group; 2) Support for young adults defined by the welfare system as being “at risk.” The first form of support is offered within “Young Adult Centers,” operating in 60 local authorities across the country. These centers offer support in 4 fields recognized as central to the transition from adolescence to young adulthood (Bonny-Noach, Nathan and Ben-Refael Galanti 2018): post-secondary education, employment, social involvement, and recreation. Services offered by the centers include employment workshops, occupational assessments, study scholarships, and cultural events. Following recent criticism of the failure of the centers to adequately cater to the needs of young adults at risk, the Ministry of Welfare and Social Services developed the “For Me” program; an initiative allowing social workers to work more closely with young adults at risk by making processes more accessible to this population (Komem 2015). The second type of support, focused on young adults “at risk” is led by the “Yated” program, initiated in 2014 by the Ministry of Welfare and Social Services. Operating in 114 local authorities across the country, the program’s key objective is to promote the full potential of young adults aged between 18 and 25 who are deemed to be at risk, and to support their integration into Israeli society. In this context, the term “risk” refers to the experience of deprivation, or of distress in any of the following fields: education, employment, mental health and wellbeing, physical safety and health, and the sense of family/social belonging. Some of the services offered by the program are similar to those offered by the young adult centers. However, the Yated program takes experiences of economic scarcity and distress into consideration. Under this specific remit, they also operate a number of housing projects, and offer material support (retrieved from: www.yated.org). Without diminishing the significance of the support and services offered within these two arenas, it should be noted that they both have a gender-neutral perspective.

This notwithstanding, the Israeli welfare system has operated programs and services directed specifically at adolescent girls since the 1970s (Krummer–Nevo, Berkovitch-Romano and Komem 2015). There is a history of government ministries and philanthropic agencies working together to support NGOs focusing on work with young women at risk (Zeira, Benbenishty and Refaeli 2012). Such organizations seek to support marginalized young women to fully engage with the transitional stages characteristic of their age cohort (military/civic service, post-secondary education, employment, community involvement). Even though each of these organizations has its own unique objectives, it can be said that they all subscribe to a feminist ideology concerning the lives of young women: a special focus on both the gender-specific barriers faced by young women on the one hand, and on the resources and agency that they may have access to (Komem 2015).
Scholars have found that young women at risk turn to welfare services for support at higher rates than young men in similar circumstances. However, young adults at risk generally have low self-referral rates. This has been explained in previous studies (Zeira, Benbenishty and Refaei 2012) in terms of a lack of knowledge about these agencies and the support services that they provide. This point highlights the importance of this study’s interest in the process of mothers passing organizational knowledge on to their young adult daughters.

**Methodology**

The data presented in this paper is drawn from 30 semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted with 15 mother-daughter dyads, interviewed separately, between the years 2017–2019. The dyads consisted of young women and their mothers, living in communities that could be described as disadvantaged in terms of economic scarcity, peripheral geography, and/or marginalized ethnicity. The mothers ranged in age from 42 to 63: none had any higher academic qualifications and were either dependent on state benefits or employed in low-income service sector or blue-collar jobs (factory work, cleaning, childcare, elderly care). All the mothers had work experience in at least one employment setting, either at the time of the interview or in the past. The study did not explicitly focus on single mothers: however, just over half (8) were single mothers. 7 were married (3 not to the father of their daughter(s)). The mothers had between 1 and 8 children, with an average of 3; just over half (8 out of 15) were their children’s sole providers. The mothers had ongoing support relationships with a variety of public organizations, including local welfare and social services departments, housing offices, women’s shelters, health and mental health organizations, etc.

The daughters ranged in age from 19 to 28. They all had work/study experience lasting at least 3 months in the year preceding the interview. None had made the transition to motherhood. Like their mothers, they too had relationships of support with social organizations, both state institutions and NGO’s.

The dyads were all Jewish. Most were of Mizrahi origin (12 dyads); two dyads were immigrants from former USSR, and one had Ashkenazi origins. The interviewees lived in urban and rural communities in the south of Israel, with the exception of one of the young women who, at the time of the interview, had moved to a city in the center of Israel to pursue a job opportunity.

The participants were recruited through contacts in state welfare organizations and NGOs working with young women defined as “at risk” – meaning that they and/or members of their family had contended with one or more of an array of hardships including violence, sexual abuse, poverty, neglect, drug and alcohol use, etc. The organizations in question were focused on the educational and occupational growth of young women at risk, and on active participation in the transitional stages normative for their age cohort (post-secondary education, employment, community involvement, military/civic service) in Israeli society. In other words, the participants in the study were recruited based on their receiving support from a welfare organization, whether statutory or an NGO, at the time of the interview or at some point in the past. The first author, a practitioner in the field, made use of her professional connections to establish contacts with young women and mothers who fitted the criteria for participation in the study.
Interviews were conducted in locations most convenient for the participants, either in their homes or in professional settings near their homes. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and three and a half hours, with an average duration of one and a half hours. Each interviewee was given a gift card worth 100 New Israeli Shekel (approximately $25) as a token of appreciation for her time.

As part of the interview, the mothers and daughters were asked to describe their relationships in terms of everyday life and coping with hardship. Based on previous research regarding the importance of support networks for women contending with economic deprivation (Hanson and Pratt 1995; Henly, Danziger, and Offer 2003, 2005), the interviewees were asked about existing relationships of support beyond the nuclear family. The interviews also focused on the mothers’ and daughters’ work/study experiences in the past and present, and the role that the mothers took in supporting their daughters’ occupational development aspirations. This line of inquiry prompted questions such as: What do you know about your daughter’s occupational plans? Do you sometime speak about her plans? Do you feel that you were (are) able to support her with this? What do you think of her plans? For their part, daughters were asked questions including: Do you feel that your mother supports you and your occupational development? How? Has she helped you access jobs? What about information relating to study or employment programs?

Data analysis was carried out in line with the principles of Grounded Theory (Charmaz 2014), using the Maxqda 2018 data analysis program. The coding process was conducted in stages. Firstly, interviews were read freely and openly, to give the researchers a feel of what was unfolding in the text. A further reading and analysis of the text allowed for the breaking down of initial codes into categories describing mother-daughter relationships with different types of community organizations. In classifying the different types of community organizations that the interviewees were embedded in, we identified a distinction between allowance and basic need-focused organizations, and human potential-focused organizations. Participants’ names and information about the organizations have been changed, to protect the privacy of the participants.

**Findings**

In what follows, we describe a process that we have identified as organizational brokerage, from mothers to their young adult daughters as shown in Figure 1. Based on the inter-generational framework, we were able to articulate the stages of this dynamic. Namely, how motherwork vis-à-vis organizations, during crisis points in the past, facilitated the young adult daughters’ access to resources for advancing their occupational and educational development in the present.

**Mothers Generating Relationships of Support with Organizations**

When speaking about the past, interviewees shared details about living in poverty and dealing with family trauma experiences; of the mothers facing various caring emergencies, where their own personal initiative, or support from family and friends, was insufficient as a solution. As part of their mothering work, they saw themselves responsible for seeking support from public organizations, to protect their family from material deprivation and similar conditions:
Q: How many children do you have?

A: Eight. It’s not easy and it’s not simple. I think somehow, we were thrown into the streets. I remember we were there on the grass, sitting and . . . I took all of them (the children) and we went to the city council . . . and there we embarrassed ourselves a little bit . . . we shouted until we got what we deserved by right. [. . .] We went to the mayor and he helped us. He “paid” the debt we had (to the council), and then we went to the public housing office and we got this apartment. (Lili, 46, mother).

Recognizing her and her family’s eligibility for welfare support (Regev-Messalem 2013) made it possible for Lili to benefit from a form of resource brokerage, whereby the city council removed the barrier blocking access to a resource administered by the public housing office. Like Lili, Dalia also described how she turned to the welfare services for help; in her case, to protect her family from physical harm and trauma when she decided to leave her husband for a shelter, after years of physical abuse directed toward both her and their children:

I did not have help [from my family] during this transition. I stood alone, on my own two feet. I left with only my clothes, I didn’t have anything else. And the shelter helped me. [. . .] It was a very tough period for all of us. Very hard. But they [the children] have good memories from the shelter. It built them, it made them into what they are today. It helped them get up on their feet, they felt safe there. They saw, when we got out, [that] I didn’t get back together with their father. (Dalia, 47, mother).

Dalia stresses the hardships of the critical move for her as a mother – being isolated and alone, leaving all her belongings behind, coping with tough times; but she concurrently appreciates the positive outcomes for hers and her children’s lives, highlighting her motherwork as ultimately worthwhile.

Besides stories of turning for help for the family as a whole, mothers also nurtured relationships of support with public organizations, in order to harness resources and professional assistance of specific utility for their daughters. In so doing, the mothers
aimed to make ties that would help them cope with the challenges of caring for their
dughters, invariably on their own. Rena described how, as an adolescent, her mother
turned to her teacher at school following her disclosure of sexual abuse within the family:

And then, after I told my mom, she went to the school and informed them about the situation.
And then the school started to be more aware. I was transferred to a class with extra therapeutic
care mainly . . . then really, I was transferred to the therapeutic class. (Rena, 22, daughter).

Rena recalls how the tie that her mother had been able to establish with her teacher
expanded the existing reservoir of support; it opened up opportunities, within the school
and with other organizations, for therapy and support at a level that her mother would not
have been able to provide.

Living in a peripheral area added a level of complexity to accessing specific professional
services considered uncommon outside the urban metropoles. Receiving such services
demanded insistence and assertiveness on the part of the mothers. After a long period
trying to access professional help in the local medical clinic to treat her daughter’s eating
disorder, and fearing her death, Maya realized that she could no longer cope by herself, and
felt that “causing a riot” may be the only solution:

Until one day I came to the clinic and said: “I am not leaving here until I get a solution.”

Q: And what happened?
A: I caused a riot.
Q: What were you asking for, Maya?
A: Help!
Q: I see, but I don’t exactly understand what help was missing at the medical clinic.
A: There was nothing, no-one, no-one to talk [to us] about eating disorders, no-one with the
professional understanding, and no doctor in the south (of the country) who could deal
with it. So, they sent us to another city (over 100 km from her home town).
Q: And what did you find there?
A: A special clinic for eating disorders. A doctor, a psychiatrist, someone normal that knows
how to deal with it. (Maya, 52, mother).

Maya, like Lili (above), describes the climax of an ongoing preliminary process of attempting
to secure health-related care for her daughter. She highlights both the physical (recurring attempts) and emotional labor involved in the process of seeking help. Pleased that her
daughter was eventually referred to a professional eating disorder clinic as a result of her
endeavors to support her daughter, she isn’t critical the lack of similar services within her
locality.

Across the interviews, the mothers and daughters shared instances of the mothers
initiating organizational relationships in their quest to gather resources and support in
the shadow of a family crisis. As a part of these encounters – whether physically (as in Lili
and Dalia’s accounts) or essentially at the center (as in Rena and Maya’s accounts) – the
daughters were first-hand witnesses of their mothers’ help-seeking and tie-building
practices within organizational contexts, as part of their motherwork. These initial encounters, in due course, turned into lasting relationships of support.

**Maintaining Relations with Organizations and Brokering Resources to Daughter**

Following initial requests for help by mothers during a family crisis, the interviews elicited stories of on-going support relationships between mothers and organizations. The interviews also detailed occasions when mothers were able to pass information to their daughters about programs or services that they had secured access to through these organizational contacts, and to encourage their participation accordingly. We depict this process here in two stages: first the mothers’ relationships with organizations, and then the brokering process.

After leaving her abusive husband, Dalia turned to support from a shelter, where she stayed (with her three children) for two years. In her interview, she mentioned staying in touch with the staff after leaving the shelter for years thereafter, and the staff generally supporting her in her routine survival struggles. She mentioned how her ties with the welfare department in her city opened up support opportunities for her daughter as well:

Q: How did you know about the girls’ club?

A: The welfare services told me about “the girls’ club” and I suggested to my daughters that they go. They would go there two-three times a week, after school. *(Dalia, 47, mother).*

The girls’ club in question was a center for adolescent girls operated by the local authority. The aim of the center was to create an informal space for girls, to socialize and take part in various enrichment activities alongside doing their schoolwork. Contrary to the type of support that the mother received from her social worker, successfully brokering the information about the girls’ club facilitated another level of resource for her daughter: enrichment activities. The young women enrolled in girls’ clubs$^2$ as teenagers recalled how the clubs were a significant source of support during their adolescence – and later, in the form of providing information about military and civil service,$^3$ and study and work opportunities.

Naomi, whose relations with the welfare services began following her separation from her abusive husband, shared how she maintained a strong relationship with her social worker for many years, and how she found this tie extremely supportive:

She was more than a sister, Rachel. She was with me for 6 years. If I didn’t call her, she would get mad at me. She cared for me, financially too. […] No one believed she was a social worker. I told her things I didn’t tell my family. And she helped me. When they took [transferred] her, they took my heart. I cried. *(Naomi, 52, mother).*

Naomi’s ties with her social worker were a source of support, both financially and emotionally. Her ongoing relationship with the social worker became a form of organizational embeddedness, enhancing her access to valuable information. When the social worker told her about available services and programs for young women, she encouraged her daughter to take part:

I was happy when Gaby enrolled in the program.$^4$

Q: Remind me, how did she find out about it?
A: It was through the welfare department, I told her about it and I also told her she should register herself at the welfare department, and [that] they may help her with funding for study tuition. (Naomi, 52, mother).

Thanks to the information passed from the social worker to the mother – no doubt due, at least in part, to the close and supportive relationship between the two – Gaby was able to establish a relationship with a different type of organization, one focused on her educational development rather than mere providing support for daily survival. Further, this triggered another tie with the youth center in their community, which gave her a scholarship covering part of her tuition to complete her high school matriculation studies, through a special course for students who didn’t complete high school.

Iris, like Naomi described the close, supportive relationship she had with her social worker:

A: We’ve come a long way with Lily (social worker). She joined us during Tali’s temperamental teenage years, when Tali was in a lot of trouble.

Q: Really?

A: She has had an immense impact on our lives. We met her through the welfare department. Tali was very problematic and she helped us, she took care of us […] every problem we had, around the clock, she was always there. (Iris, 47, mother).

The ties that the mothers established with support organizations were never single encounters, but rather ongoing mother-organization relationships – or, borrowing from Mario Small (2009), the mothers’ embeddedness in public organizations. Tali, Iris’s daughter described how the tie created by her mother facilitated access to valuable information:

Our social worker met my mom yesterday and told her about a special program that she thought would suit me. And my mom said to me that I must call her and that it’s a program involving work and training. It’s something prestigious and they don’t just give it to anyone … (Tali, 28, daughter).

Tali formed a relationship with a community organization where her occupational development was the center of attention, the result of her mother’s ties with a support organization. The mothers’ “organizational embeddedness” (Small 2009) opened up opportunities for exposure to and the subsequent take up of services, information and material goods – for the family as a whole but also, specifically, for their daughters.

What these excerpts highlight is that the involvement with support organizations played a crucial role in the daughters subsequently gaining access to resources – whether a program, a service, or a scholarship. As some of these narratives show, support relationships were not always pleasant; at times, the mothers had to insist on having their needs acknowledged and met, even when these had been ignored. In other words, we argue that meeting professionals regularly, sharing personal and family problems with them, insisting on receiving support, and building trust over time is all part of Motherwork; practices which, over time, yielded opportunities for their young adult daughters. We now turn to describe how the daughters leveraged these resources.
**Young Women Leveraging Organizational Ties for Their Occupational Development**

Listening closely to the descriptions of the mothers’ efforts, vis-à-vis their daughters’ current experiences of organizational support, highlighted a process where organizational embeddedness served as a source for brokering resources for their young adult daughters. We analyze this process as characterized by both continuity and change: continuity in terms of both mothers and daughters leaning on organizational assistance; and change in terms of the type of community organization. The mothers received support from organizations that responded to emergencies or crises. Their daughters, however, turned to organizations providing opportunities for personal growth and occupational development. In other words, while the organizational tie was a resource passed on from mother to daughter, the narratives indicate that the daughters themselves were active in cultivating it.

As a teenager, Lilac was enrolled in an afterschool program after her mother turned to the welfare department for support, searching for a place where Lilac “could eat and take part in social activities.” Besides acceding her mother’s request and Lilac’s initial needs, the afterschool program became, via the staff members, a significant source of emotional support, information, and onward referral to other organizations – proving critical for her occupational development:

> I have meetings with a social worker, the emphasis is less on therapy, more on achieving my goals, it means, we sit together and ask: What do I want to study? Where can I study that? […] and then she [the social worker] brought up the fact that I could get a scholarship, so I’ve filled in all the documents and I have applied for it, it’s 65% of the tuition. […] She is a sweetie. Really, one of those people that does her job from the heart. She calls me, even out of the blue, just to ask, “So, did you do what you were supposed to? Did you find out?” How are you?” I really love her. (Lilac, 23, Daughter).

The opportunity to apply for a scholarship came about because of her mother’s ties with the welfare support organization. Her mother described her long-term organizational ties with a social worker, whom she admired very much; Lilac follows this by generating a good relationship with professionals, maintaining the organizational tie albeit in a different form: rather than welfare support for basic living needs, she receives support for developing her educational potential.

Rebecca, a high-achieving student who however was subject to severe anxiety, has been continually encouraged by her mother to further her education. A widow from a young age and coping with physical and mental health problems herself, Rebecca’s mother had been supported by the welfare department for many years. She encouraged Rebecca to take part in a special civil service program, supporting young women who had experienced difficult life situations. When Rebecca completed her mandatory national service, she turned to the co-ordinator of the program, asking for support in order to progress her academic aspirations:

> I finished my civil service and two days later I started to study.

Q: So you started the whole application process while you in service?

A: Yes, there was a social work student that guided me through every step. She helped me with everything, I was still in a bit of a daydream, like I didn’t know you had to apply in February, go to an open day … I didn’t have the guts …
Q: She came with you?

A: She came with me to the open day, she helped me with scholarships, she helped me with the decisions: What to study, where, all these things you have to take into consideration. (Rebecca, 21, daughter).

Unlike Rebecca, most of the young women in the study had significant educational gaps; most had completed less than 12 years of education i.e., had not matriculated from high school. Therefore, their occupational trajectories began with their integration into study programs, or planning a study program and searching for funding. Nevertheless, a minority did use their organizational ties to seek employment opportunities. Rena, for instance, works as a youth guide in a program that she herself had been a member of in the past:

The fact that I participated in this program, really opened [an opportunity] to apply for this job. I would never have found a job like this somewhere else, without matriculating [. . .] What I do here allows me to enjoy work without having to pass some criteria that you would usually have to in a “normal” job. In this job I do what I really want to do in life, it’s something therapeutic, I can’t see myself doing anything else. (Rena, 22, daughter).

Rena’s “journey” in this program was nurtured by her ties with the welfare department in the city she lived in. These ties were initiated by her mother, who had sought support for Rena after she had experienced sexual abuse some years earlier. Besides finding a job in this organization, Rena continued to utilize her good relationship with the staff to gain access to resources which would help her advance her study and employment aspirations. In her interview, she discussed how the social worker in the organization helped her “fill in forms” and connected her to personnel like the youth social worker, who “is a source for a lot of information about programs and services for youth.”

Part of the experience of growing up in families with limited material means, the young women in the study witnessed the efforts that their mothers invested in gaining access to crucial everyday resources. At times, the young women were physically present during these efforts, a part of what some of the mothers described as “embarrassing” and “tough” encounters. Alongside this, the young women also witnessed long lasting, caring relationships emerge between their mothers and welfare professionals – relationships with a significant impact on their wellbeing and the wellbeing of the family as a whole.

As the findings show, the young women were able to leverage the organizational support passed on by her mother in the direction that they aspired toward. More so, the findings point to the wide definition of “occupational and educational development,” as it is grounded in the lives of young women in marginal social locations. While for some this meant completing their high school matriculation or seeking funding for an undergraduate degree, for others it meant the opportunity to earn an income for the first time. What we found was that the intergenerational scope of this research, and the decision to analyze both individual action and organizational practices, uncovered a “triangle of brokerage”: young women gaining access to organizational support based on the combination of their mothers’ brokerage of information and resources, proactive practices by social welfare organizations, and the young women’s ability to leverage the two. In other words – and counter to Mario Small (2009), who focused on the unanticipated gains of organizational embeddedness
based on organizational practices – we argue for a feminist perspective to organizational embeddedness, one which takes into consideration the intended gains of both the mothers and their young adult daughters.

Discussion

Previous research on the role that economically marginalized mothers play in their children’s educational and occupational development has focused mainly on young children (Gillies 2006; 2007; Reay 1998, 2004; Smith, 1989) and adolescents (Cauce et al., 1996; Dodson and Dickert 2004; Swauger, 2010; Taylor 1996). Moreover, it has mostly examined individual action by mothers, as opposed to organizational practices and the impact that the mothers can have on these processes. In this paper, we considered the motherwork invested in the occupational development of their young adult daughters. We applied an intergenerational perspective to Mario Small’s (2009) organizational embeddedness theory. Our investigation highlighted the possibility that the embeddedness of mothers in need within the organizations providing them with material support may contribute to the process of developing bridging relationships (Co-author et al., 2010; Warr 2005) for the benefit of their young adult daughters. This allowed us to highlight the long-term value of the organizational ties cultivated by these mothers with welfare organizations. Our analysis identified a long-lasting process of intergenerational brokerage, which we have conceptualized in 3 main stages: 1) Mothers generating supportive relationships with organizations; 2) Mothers maintaining supportive relationships with organizations and brokering resources for their daughters; 3) Young women leveraging organizational resources.

Overall, the study unraveled a high embeddedness in relations of support with organizations. The mothers’ accounts of their experiences with welfare organizations were organized around receiving support at crucial points, as well as on an ongoing basis more generally, across their child rearing years. These were statutory institutions, such as local welfare and social service departments, public housing offices, health clinics, and schools.

In contradistinction to this, the daughters utilized the organizational ties to advance their educational and occupational aspirations. These included, access to information, services, programs, scholarships, and job opportunities. In other words, the mothers’ relationships with the support organizations stayed in the realm of coping social capital (Henly, Danziger, and Offer 2005; Warr 2005). But at the same time, their organizational embeddedness enabled them to broker diverse resources for their daughters. Firstly, they established the material conditions necessary for their daughters to grow up in as positive an environment as possible; secondly, they provided a role model for their daughters on maintaining productive relationships over time with social workers, demonstrating how these could yield significant support; thirdly, and highly significant, is the information they accumulated as part of their organizational embeddedness, which they were able to transmit to their daughters. The last allowed their daughters to leverage (Briggs, 1998 in Dominguez and Watkins 2003) organizational support toward their own development. We interpret this process as inter-generational resource brokerage, based on the mothers’ bridging social capital (Granovetter 1973; Warr 2005).

Consistent with Mario Small’s (2009) study, through being embedded in key organizations mothers were exposed to and offered access to resources extending beyond the initial need that established their ties with the organization in question. However, where Small (2009) defines these resources as “unanticipated gains,” we interpret them as “anticipated” in the sense that
mothers’ relational maintenance was not always instrumental or focused on a specific goal such as those referred to in Small’s (2009) study, but rather on the relations with organizations as a resource that would become crucial at a given moment – a resource within itself which the mothers could then pass on to their young adult daughters.

Unlike their mothers, who had initiated these ties in the shadow of family crisis, their daughters did not initiate access to resources by themselves. The services and programs, relevant to their occupational development, were the outcome of an organizational embeddedness that Mario Small (2009) termed “unanticipated gains.” Nevertheless, and without underestimating the significance of Small’s (2009) theory, it can be argued from a feminist perspective that these resources were by no means unanticipated. On the contrary, we object to the fragmented conceptualization of resource-gaining processes, which focus only on the moment of access to a resource as opposed to the prolonged process that creates it. We would instead argue that the salient resources in the mother and daughter narratives were the anticipated outcomes of motherwork: the mothers’ long-lasting “work of sociability” (Nelson, 2005) with professionals from support organizations – who are familiar with the family and have known the daughters for years, and thus cognizant of both the mothers’ worries and the daughters’ needs. Indeed, these outcomes were not always clear or defined from the start, as is the case in Emirbayer and Mische’s interpretation of human agency (Emirbayer and Mische 1998) and in relational work in economic transactions (Butler and Waldroop, 2004 in Bandelj 2012); but, rather, directed toward these gains.

Although the study the role of motherwork and of the mother’s embeddedness in organizations, the daughters interviewed for this study were by no means passive; they, too, invested mental, emotional and relational labor to establish ties with organizations (and the professionals working for them) in order to leverage the resources offered to them.

What we contribute is the distinct value of two aspects of motherwork: transmitting ties which they have maintained; and transmitting the knowledge, skill, and experience of shaping organizational ties that eventually open up access to opportunities and resources. Scholarship must not join the historical invisibility of motherwork. Instead, we need a feminist understanding of organizational gains, wherein hard and continuous efforts are understood as critical.

It is important to integrate these findings within the current discourse on young adulthood, which has highlighted the significance of parental support to young adult children during the traditional stages of early adulthood – such as post-secondary education and integrating into the labor market (Hartnett et al. 2013; Newman, 2012; West et al. 2017). These studies stress the centrality of financial and material support such as cash gifts, rent and tuition, normalizing middle/upper class privilege and implying the deficiencies of parents of limited means. Directing attentions toward mothers providing in poverty, this study has conceptualized a new kind of a bridging parental resource, passed on from working-class mothers to their daughters while remaining grounded in specific social and material survival efforts. It is important to note that for young women who have had disorderly secondary education biographies, a lack of material support, and family employment experiences rooted at the bottom of the labor market, their occupational development begins with overcoming both material and emotional gaps and takes much longer to attain.

The study also points to the problematic aspects of the self-actualization project and its focus on individuality, so central in the current discourse on young adulthood. Firstly, as we have showed, in relation to the erasure of the support and work that mothers invest in their young adult children’s occupational development. Secondly, but no less important, is the
fact that the support that mothers are able to offer in marginal social locations pivots, crucially, on their ties to organizations of support. The participation of young women in the education and/or labor markets occurs within a context of supportive relationships – not only with mothers, but also with social organizations.

The main limitation of the study lies in the absence of a temporal dimension, specifically its inability to follow the outcomes of the intergenerational transmission that it describes in the young women’s subsequent participation in occupational development programs and services. In other words, the study does not fully gauge their integration into quality jobs and upward mobility.

Future research should adopt a longitudinal methodology to examine how motherwork, as embedded within social organizations, can become significant in protecting young adult daughters from lower quality jobs and labor market vulnerability, and how it can contribute to their upward mobility. Future research projects should aim to expand the conceptual realm of mothers’ support and resources, not only for their daughters but for their children in general. This would allow for a full analysis of gender nuances, as well as the nuances or differences in terms of each child’s personal agency, considered against structural barriers and opportunities. Lastly, the intergenerational perspective, instrumental in illuminating productive learning processes between mothers and their daughters, should be adopted in future research. The working assumption is that one generation is not always sufficient to document complex family practices which may otherwise go unnoticed (Brannen et al. 2011).

As for policy recommendations, our findings suggest that welfare organizations should design institutional practices based on a wide understanding of family needs across a long-time span, taking into consideration all the members and extending beyond the specific context of support sought in times of crisis. In other words, the study calls organizations to anticipate mothers’ long-term gains, and to recognize organizational relationships with mothers as pivotal in constructing supportive relationships with their children. This is especially crucial in terms of marginalized young adults, who have been found to lack formative awareness of the occupational development programs and services that will facilitate their upward mobility.

Notes

1. A social worker.
2. Just under 50% of the young women who participated in the study were enrolled, at some point, in a girls’ club in their local authority.
3. Both compulsory for young women in Israel.
4. A program aimed at personal growth and development for young women.

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