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**SELF-ENHANCEMENT IN COUPLE RELATIONSHIP:
POSITIVE ILLUSIONS, SELF-SERVING BIAS
AND THE MODERATING ROLE
OF INTRUSIVE PARENTING**

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INTRODUCTION

The title of the present work “Self-enhancement in couple relationship: Positive illusions, self-serving bias and the influence of intrusive parenting” refers to the aspects that are the fundamental themes of this contribution. *Self-enhancement* is one of the most influential self-motives which pushes individuals to increase positive self-views and to protect their self-concept from negative information. The present contribution will focus on two mechanisms involved in the maintenance and protection of the self: *positive illusions* and the *self-serving bias*. Positive illusions deal with the tendency to perceive the self more favorably than the average other is perceived whereas the self-serving bias relates to the tendency to make internal responsibility attributions for positive events but to make external responsibility attributions for negative events. These two strategies will be analyzed in the context of *couple relationship*. In close relationships individuals are motivated to protect or enhance the significant other and to maintain the relationship and cognitive biases such as positive illusions and self-serving bias are transformed in order to achieve this goal. Positive illusions extend in fact to couple relationships so that people tend to perceive their relationship favorably when compared to the couple relationship of the average other. The self-serving bias, on the other hand, displays a reversed pattern in couple relationship: people tend to manifest the other-serving bias, giving credit to the partner for a success and blaming themselves for a failure. In the present contribution these mechanisms will be considered as two forms of pro-relationship bias, serving the purpose of maintaining and protecting one’s couple identity.

The present work will also focus on the influence that *intrusive parenting* exerts on these two pro-relationship biases. Intrusive parenting is a particular insidious parental behavior that intrudes upon their children's psychological self, violating children's psychoemotional boundaries (Barber, 1996). In particular the thesis will test the hypothesis that intrusive parenting hinders the process of building couple identity.

The organization of the thesis is as follows. The first chapter provides keys to the reading, clarifying the constructs investigated in the subsequent studies. The second chapter presents two studies dedicated to the examination of couple positive illusions. The first study, drawing on cross-sectional data, will offer a global picture of the phenomenon of couple positive illusions, exploring antecedents and consequences on well-being in a sample of premarital couples. The second study will focus on antecedents of couple positive illusions and, relying on longitudinal data, will clarify the direction of causal effects among two antecedents identified in the first study, family positive illusions and centrality of relationship, and couple positive illusions in a subsample of couples involved in the first study. These two studies together will provide also evidence of the impact of intrusive parenting on the development of couple positive illusions. The third chapter will focus on the other-serving bias in couple relationship and will present the results of the last study. This study, based on an experimental procedure, will provide additional evidence of the influence of intrusive parenting on pro-relationship biases in a sample of dating couples. Strengths, limitations and implication for future research and preventive intervention with couples will be then briefly discussed in the conclusion section.