

## 7. The transition to parenthood in Switzerland: between institutional constraints and gender ideologies

**Nadia Girardin, Felix Bühlmann,  
Doris Hanappi, Jean-Marie Le Goff,  
Isabel Valarino**

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### MODERNIZED FAMILY TRADITIONALISM

What most aptly characterizes the current situation in Switzerland is the dynamic created by the split between forces of modernization and conservation (see Chapter 2). Switzerland remains a relatively conservative country, which is still defined by its agricultural and religious past, marked by the opposition between Catholic rural areas and Protestant urban regions. However, its highly internationalized and future-oriented labour market cries out for further integration of the female population into the workforce and presses hard for more gender-equal conditions and new family models. Thus, Swiss society can be characterized as ‘modernized family traditionalism’ (Bühlmann, Elcheroth and Tettamanti 2010; Levy, Widmer and Kellerhals 2002): ‘modernized’ because occupational and family spheres are no longer separated and because gender equality norms have gained importance; and ‘traditional’ because neither the permeability between the occupational and family spheres nor the norms about gender equality have actually fundamentally challenged the breadwinner–homemaker family model. The predominant family organization is one where men work full-time and women work part-time while shouldering the majority of the family work and associated responsibilities.

These contextual specificities make Switzerland a particularly interesting case for the qualitative study of the representations and intentions of Swiss couples at the transition to parenthood. In the following substantive sections, we will draw on qualitative interviews conducted between 2006 and 2007 within the project ‘*Devenir Parent*’ (Becoming a Parent). Our

analysis focuses on 18 couples wherein the woman earns more, an equal amount to or only slightly less than the man does. These configurations do not correspond to the norm in Switzerland, where women usually earn less than their partners. In accordance with these sample characteristics, we expect the selected couples to have rather progressive outcomes when it comes to gender relationships.

## THE SWISS CONTEXT

While Switzerland was often considered a liberal welfare regime until the 1970s, political scientists, reacting to recent policy changes, tend to increasingly define it as conservative (with remaining liberal traits) (Armingeon 2001; Obinger 1998; see also Chapter 2). In part, this ambiguity is due to the federalist political system. Social policies are conceived and implemented on a cantonal or even communal level and, thus, can vary widely according to one's place of residence (Armingeon, Bertozzi and Bonoli 2004; Bühlmann, Elcheroth and Tettamanti forthcoming). Consequently, until the 2000s, very few family and gender policies had been implemented at the national level. This local anchorage of policies creates large differences between more progressive urban areas and more conservative rural areas.

A series of national family policies was introduced in the decade and a half preceding this publication. In 2003, a temporally limited<sup>1</sup> Law on Financial Support for Childcare became effective. The program of 440 million CHF (about 370 million Euros) in total sought to create more childcare places. Another important policy introduction concerns maternity leave. Although the principle of maternity insurance was accepted by the population and was already introduced into the constitution in 1945, the implementation of the law was rejected in national votes on four occasions (1974, 1984, 1987 and 1999). In 2004, a maternity insurance, which was less comprehensive compared to what has been planned in former attempts to change the law, was finally adopted (Commission fédérale pour les questions féminines 2001). Even though many childcare places were created in the last ten years, Switzerland still suffers from a considerable lack of available services. Many parents-to-be struggle to find a childcare place for their child and must face planning uncertainty as the time between the registration (usually from the fourth month of pregnancy) and the allocation of a place is variable and unknown. For example, in 2013, only 40 per cent of the parents living in the Waadt canton obtained a place in childcare for the date they requested (Bonoli and Vuille 2013). Another problem concerns the high costs of childcare.

Switzerland has joint taxation for married couples and an income-based tariff progression system for public childcare in which tariffs increase up to a certain proportion of the household income (Bütler and Ruesch 2009). Finally, while the introduction of maternity insurance was a significant improvement of family policies, Switzerland's leave scheme remains minimal. Employed and self-employed women are granted 14 weeks of maternity leave paid at 80 per cent of their prior earnings. They are entitled to two additional weeks of unpaid leave. There exist no parental or paternity leaves; men have no access to any kind of statutory leave (Valarino 2012). Switzerland is the only European country with no paternity or parental leave (Moss 2012).

Reflecting 'modernized family traditionalism', gender ideologies and family values are still rather traditional in Switzerland. Women's right to vote was only introduced on the national level in 1971 and was only granted in the last canton in 1990 (Appenzell Innerrhoden). A comparison of gender ideologies, based on the European Value Survey 2008, shows that Switzerland is, on average, predictably more traditional than its neighbours, France and Germany, and not to mention the more gender-egalitarian countries such as Sweden or Denmark (authors' calculations).<sup>2</sup>

Although female employment is high in Switzerland in an internationally comparative perspective (see Chapter 2, Figure 2.1), part-time employment is high among women and female employment is frequently shaped by family transitions (Kellerhals and Widmer 2007). Furthermore, several years of employment interruption after a birth are common. Many women return to part-time employment later or permanently retire from the labour market (Giudici and Gauthier 2009; Widmer et al. 2003). As children grow older, mothers tend to increase their hours of employment.

## THE INTERVIEWS

The aim of the 'Devenir parent' study was to investigate the impact of the first child's birth, as a critical life event, on the division of work and identities of couples living in French-speaking Switzerland, with a focus on the emergence and/or reinforcement of inequalities between the two partners (Le Goff and Levy 2011; Le Goff and Levy forthcoming). Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected at three points during the transition to parenthood: four months before the birth, four months after the delivery (during the maternity leave) and approximately one year after the birth. The quantitative sample consists in the first wave of 232

couples who responded to a questionnaire between late-2005 and mid-2007. The interviewees were recruited via institutions and professionals related to the birth, such as maternity wards, gynaecologists, midwives, consultants working in family associations and so on. In addition, we used other channels of recruitment, such as newspaper articles, specialized websites for parents-to-be and new parents, and a stand in the annual exhibition 'Baby planet' in Lausanne.

Among these 232 couples, 31 participated in the qualitative study in 2006 and 2007. These couples were selected among those who declared at the end of the first quantitative interview that they would also like to participate in a qualitative interview. As the quantitative sample is biased towards members of the middle class, particularly towards couples working in public-service middle-class professions (such as teachers or social workers), this selectivity is reflected in the qualitative sample. Out of the 31 couples, we chose 18 in which the woman earned more, equal to or only slightly less than the man. This selection was chosen in order to be in accordance with the present edited volume. Separate semi-structured interviews were conducted with male and female partners. Although the interview guidelines were developed independently from many of the guidelines established in this edited volume, the set up was very similar.

While our study is focused on French-speaking Switzerland, we do not expect there to be many differences in how the couples experience the transition to parenthood compared to similar couples in other language-speaking regions. At the moment of the survey, vital statistics show that the average total fertility rate in the French-speaking cantons of Switzerland was slightly higher, at 1.54 children per woman in 2008, compared to 1.47 and 1.37 respectively in the German- and the Italian-speaking ones (Encyclopédie statistique de la Suisse 2014, authors' calculations).

The interviews were analysed by thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). As a first step, we used the main theoretical questions (see Research Question and Motivation, Chapter 1) as a rough analytical grid and coded interview segments into categories such as 'family and employment', 'childcare arrangements' or 'motherhood/fatherhood'. In the second step, we allocated each sub-theme (employment, care, representations of motherhood and fatherhood) to a team member and, in a common discussion, related the themes to each other, identified and clarified links between them and proposed provisional explanations with insights from other themes.

## INSTITUTIONAL CONSTRAINTS ON MOTHERHOOD AND FATHERHOOD

The institutional setting influences how Swiss couples construct motherhood and fatherhood. In this section, we specifically examine the constraints related to parental leave, childcare and the legal recognition of fatherhood.

### **Constraints Related to Parental Leave**

In order to counterbalance the short maternity leave that mothers are entitled to, some interviewed women reported that they would extend their actual work interruptions to five or six months by using holiday leave and sometimes unpaid leave.

So it's a paid leave of sixteen weeks and then I'll add two months [...] I'll take two or three unpaid weeks, but they have to be approved by the School Committee, so I do not know yet. But I think they usually grant it quite easily. (Patricia, teacher)

Alors c'est un congé payé de seize semaines et puis je fais deux mois pour prolonger [...] je prends deux trois semaines non payées par contre et ça ça doit être accepté par la commission du gymnase donc pour l'instant je ne sais pas encore mais normalement je sais qu'enfin il semblerait qu'ils le fassent assez facilement.

As this citation suggests, employers' 'family friendliness' plays an important role in mothers' capacities to organize their child-related leave in a concrete and prearranged way. Access to unpaid leave depends on the employer and is subject to his/her approval. Employer-based measures that exceed the statutory minimum, such as more generous maternity leave (typically 16 weeks of fully paid maternity leave in the public sector) or unpaid leave, can be granted to employees, including fathers (Valarino forthcoming). However, the interviewed men did not report that they benefitted from these employer-based measures.

Another particularity of institutional constraints in Switzerland is that the short amount of available statutory leave forces parents-to-be to organize childcare solutions and make binding decisions about labour market participation even before the birth of the child.

[A] crazy system where we have to book a childcare place so quickly, but without any guarantee that we'll get one. It was very difficult to imagine ... Not only did I have trouble realizing that I was going to be a mother and have a baby and bond with him [...] I already had to think about the separation ...

And it seemed crazy to imagine my baby in childcare when I still can't really imagine that I'll be with him. (Odile, psychologist)

[...] le système assez fou pour qu'on doive réserver des places euh ... tellement vite ... sans garantie du tout que on en ait ... donc euh ... ce qui était très difficile c'était d'imaginer ... non seulement j'avais d'la peine à réaliser que ... j'allais être maman et que j'aurais réellement un bébé et que j'allais m'y attacher [...] et pi alors il fallait déjà que je pense à la séparation ... et ça ça me paraissait complètement fou ... euh ... d'imaginer euh ... de faire garder mon enfant alors même que j'ai encore de la peine à l'imaginer ... que je vais être avec.

This quote is also indicative of the anguish with which some mothers speak about the early age at which they will have to leave their child in childcare. Odile expected this to be when her child was between four and six months old.

### **Constraints Related to Childcare**

Most of the interviewed couples had discussed childcare decisions, except for one couple where the man explicitly said that his partner was fully in charge of choosing and organising the appropriate childcare solution. The scarcity and cost of institutional childcare<sup>3</sup> did not allow parents-to-be to make concrete plans. Only four couples reported clear plans at the time of interview regarding childcare arrangements. Their intention was to share the care of the child between the partners or place the child into the care of his/her grandparents. The certainty of these couples' intentions was related to the type of childcare they planned to use. By not planning to resort to institutional childcare, some parents-to-be avoided being reliant on obtaining a place in a childcare institution since the waiting period is unknown and place allocation is not guaranteed. Among the other couples, almost all planned to use institutional childcare. At first glance, the use of childcare can be perceived as supporting women's labour market participation. However, the scarcity, associated uncertainty and subsequent cost of institutional childcare, in addition to joint taxation and income-based tariffs for public childcare, operate as a strong disincentive for women's participation in paid work (Bütler and Ruesch 2009). Thus, it might be more attractive, especially for middle-income families, to choose for the woman not to work or work only a few hours to save on taxes and childcare costs. This is also the case if parents opt for child minders and private childcare centres, something that Christophe discusses.

My wife, she will probably work 80, maybe 60 [per cent] [...] and I'm gonna work 100 [per cent] ... that's for sure [...] I'll be following the tradition where the father brings home the money and the mother ... she will look after [the child] ... because now we enter a circle where a lot of money has to be paid out to a childminder anyway ... you see what I mean ... taxes ... the childminder [...] that costs 1000 to 1200 francs per month ... and plus taxes. If I earn ... 8000 francs [...], in the end [...] we earn ... 4000 and 6000 ... the difference is not great if my wife maintains 60 per cent and keeps one additional day for the little one ... you see it is all stuff like this ... but I will work 100 per cent (Christophe, unemployed<sup>4</sup>)

Ben ma femme elle va bosser à 80 ... pt'être à 60 [...] et pi moi j'vais bosser à 100 ... ça c'est sûr hein ... et pi euh ... j'vais faire ... selon la tradition le papa ramenant l'argent au foyer et la maman elle sera ... elle s'occupera plus de ... parce que maintenant on arrive dans un cercle où de toute façon gagner beaucoup d'argent euh ... qu'il faut redistribuer à une maman d'jour ... vous voyez c'que j'veux dire ... les impôts ... la maman d'jour ... qui coûtent euh ... 1200 ... 1000 à 1200 francs par mois ... plus les impôts. Si je gagne euh ... 8000 francs [...] au final euh ... on gagne euh ... 4000 et 6000 euh ... la différence elle est pas grande vu que si on ... si ma femme elle peut travailler à 60 pourcent et pi garder un jour de plus la p'tite euh ... vous voyez c'est toutes des choses comme ça ... mais moi je travaillerai à 100 pourcent euh.

### **To be Legally Recognized as a Father**

To understand the position and representation of men as fathers, the theoretical distinctions made by Hobson and Morgan (2002, pp. 9–11) between father, fatherhood and fathering are helpful. According to these authors, 'father' is related to social processes by which a man is defined as a father. Many Western societies privilege the biological father. 'Fatherhood' is related to the status of the father, especially his rights, duties and responsibilities. This notion refers to tension, in normative discourses, between the father as the economic provider and the father providing care. According to Hobson and Morgan (2002), 'fathering' is related to practices and is parallel to the term of mothering, as is often used in the case of women.

'Fathering' as a daily practice is discussed by female interviewees (see below). By contrast, male interviewees express strong preoccupations about their designation as a 'father' and their status, while they do not really discuss their future daily practices. Instead of fathering, men discussed fatherhood more as a role that creates links between generations. Men and women highlighted the importance of the male lineage (line of descent) during the interviews. In some cases, the informants' own absent father, after his death or a separation, was mentioned. The interviewees' fathers were evoked as elements of the generational lineage



and to have a child meant to perpetuate this lineage. One's own father could then be a model for fathering as a role of transmission, for example, in the professional domain:

It's to open him [the future child] up to other things because it's true that when you're 16 years old ... it's not easy to decide which path one should take and that maybe, one takes a little ... I would like to be like my dad. [...] We are both interested in mechanics. (Emmanuel, technical collaborator, father-to-be of a boy)

C'est d'l'ouvrir sur d'autres choses parce que c'est vrai que quand on a ... 16 ans ... c'est pas facile de se décider sur euh ... sur une voie et pi euh ... pt' être qu'on prend un peu ... ben j'ai envie de faire comme mon papa [...] on est tous les deux proches de la mécanique.

One important point is that members of the lineage and the link between generations are clearly conceptualized as male, as revealed in this quotation:

In fact, it disappointed me to learn that it's a girl [laughing]. Because I come from a family of men. We have only men. For four generations my family has produced only men. My grandfather, they were four men ... no, the great grandfather four men, the grandfather, five men. After he had two men. Mine also had two men and my wife comes out with a girl (Bruno, chemist)

Ça m'a brisé de savoir que c'est une fille [rires] ... [...] parce que moi j'ai ... enfin on est issu euh ... d'une famille de ... de ... d'hommes ... on n'a que des hommes ... ça fait quatre générations [ah oui] ... que ma famille fait que des hommes donc euh ... c'est euh ... le grand-père ils étaient quatre hommes ... le ... enfin l'arrière-grand-père quatre hommes ... le grand-père cinq hommes ... ensuite lui il a fait euh ... deux hommes ... mon a fait deux ... deux hommes aussi ... et pi ma femme me sort une fille.

Such a quote is especially illustrative as it was formulated by a research scientist working at a University in which equality between men and women is strongly promoted. It illustrates the anchoring in Swiss society of the role of transmission between generations from men to men. It is also indicative of the degree to which girls, in this context, are perceived as breaking the lineage with earlier generations.

Along the same lines, unmarried fathers-to-be often discussed the question of surname transmission (Le Goff and Ryser 2010; Ryser and Le Goff 2011; Levy, Ryser and Le Goff 2012). At the time of the interviews, according to Swiss law, if the parents were not married, the child would take the surname of the mother, which meant that the links with male ancestors would be broken. Although some fathers claimed



this was a minor problem, keeping the lineage was referred to as a cultural thing that eventually made them feel more naturally linked to the child.

Even if at the beginning, it [the marriage] was not important, there is also the issue of the name. But I do not know why, because whether the child carries her name or mine, it's not important. She/he<sup>5</sup> will still be our child. She/he won't grow up differently or live differently because she/he has one name or another. But, it's probably deeply rooted in our culture. There's something very deep that makes ... that tickles and says that ... This child will have my name. As a father it seems important because the mother, it's her child. I mean, she carried her/him. She felt her/him growing inside her. She/he came out of her tummy. So everybody knows that she/he's her child. For the father, the relation is a little more distant. So the fact that she/he takes his name, somehow, it links them. (Fabrice, biologist in pharmaceutical company)

Même si j'ai envie de dire au départ que pour moi c'est pas important y'a aussi le ... la question du nom ... mais je sais pas pourquoi parce que ... j'me dis que l'enfant ... qu'il porte son nom ou le mien finalement c'est pas important ... ce sera quand même notre enfant ... y va pas grandir différemment ou vivre différemment la chose parce qu'il a le nom de l'un ou de l'autre ... mais ... c'est probablement très ancré dans notre culture ... y'a quelque chose de très profond qui fait que ... oueh y'a quand même un p'tit quelque chose qui titille et pi qui dit que ... ben cet enfant il aura mon nom ... en tant que père ça me paraît important parce que ... ben la mère c'est son enfant ... j'veux dire elle ... elle l'a porté en elle ... euh ... elle l'a senti grandir ... il est sorti de son ventre ... donc tout le monde sait que c'est son enfant ... le père la relation est un tout petit plus éloignée donc de s'dire qu'il aura son nom ... ben quelque part ça le rattache à ça.

Another reason that drives pregnant couples to marry relates back to the argument of men's recognition as fathers. Under Swiss law, unmarried fathers cannot be recognized as fathers and do not have parental rights. In the event of the death of an unmarried mother, the parental rights are transmitted to a guardian who is not the father unless a declaration of joint parental authority was in place. Men experience this institutional rule as a constraint, as Fabrice's quote illustrates. Furthermore, because they must apply for joint parental authority, a procedure often considered long and humiliating, many men preferred to marry during the pregnancy or just after the child's birth.

In particular, for me as a father, it's true that rights are not the same, in fact, if something happens to the mother for example or if something happens to the child or if we break up later on, I won't have a lot of rights to this child, in fact no rights at all. (Fabrice, biologist in pharmaceutical company)

En particulier pour moi en tant que père ... c'est vrai que les droits ne sont pas les mêmes ... euh ... s'il arrive quelque chose à la maman ... ou bien si ... euh ... s'il arrive quelque chose à l'enfant ... ou bien si nous on se sépare ... plus tard ... ben je n'aurais pas ... pas beaucoup de droits sur l'enfant en fait ... voire aucun droit.

We're not married. But I would still like to have, let's say, all the rights of a father because we're together and we're in the process of dealing with the registry office to see if he can have my surname without us being married and what we have to do. All this paperwork and in fact that's a little bit annoying. You hear that the state wants to be flexible, but in fact, nothing's flexible. The only option for me is to get married if I don't want to do all this paper work. (David, actor)

Dans le sens que nous ne sommes pas mariés ... moi j'ai quand même envie d'avoir ... j'ai quand même envie d'avoir euh ... euh ... tous les droits on va dire ... du père puisqu'on est ensemble et donc on est en train de regarder avec l'état-civil si sans être marié ... est-ce qu'il peut porter mon nom ... qu'est-ce qu'il faut faire ... toutes ces démarches et ça c'est un peu ... c'est un peu chiant quoi [...] on dit que l'Etat euh ... veut être euh ... veut être assez souple mais en fait y'a rien de souple quoi c'est ... le seul moyen pour moi c'est de me marier si ... si je veux pas faire trois quatre démarches différentes.

Unmarried men in our sample wanted to play their role as fathers in everyday life, whatever they thought this role might be. However, as they were not recognized as fathers, they felt that their paternity was denied by institutions if they remained unmarried.

## WORK IDENTITIES AND THE GENDERED TRANSITION TO PARENTHOOD

In accordance with the predominant model of 'modernized family traditionalism' in Switzerland (Levy, Widmer and Kellerhals 2002), the analysis shows that the majority of interviewed women considered reducing their hours of employment, while only a few men intended to do so. These intentions had gendered implications for interviewees' identities. We observed the creation of tensions for women between their worker and mother identities (Moen and Oorange 2002). In the following subsections, we examine both female and male work identities and how the interviewees expect them to be affected by the transition to parenthood.

**Women's Work Identities in the Transition to Parenthood**

Interviewed women did not focus exclusively on their future maternal roles and many were concerned about their work lives. To decrease the tension between maternal and worker roles, a (at least temporary) reduction of hours of employment was often envisaged. We chose a quote from Florence, a public sector employee, who reported concrete intentions to reduce her weekly work hours. Florence explained that she had already agreed with her employer to work at 60 per cent of full-time after her return.

So, it's been a month and a half that I've been off work due to a pregnancy related sickness leave. I do not plan to completely abandon my work because I do not want to devote all my time to my children. [...] And then I will continue to work afterwards at a rate of 60 per cent [of a full-time job]. This is also already organised! (Florence, physician)

Alors là ça fait un mois et demi que j'suis en arrêt de travail ... euh ... j'compte pas abandonner complètement mon travail parce que j'ai pas envie de ... de m'consacrer complètement à ... aux enfants ... [petit rire] à mes enfants [...] et puis ... je reprendrai le travail après à 60 pourcent ... donc ... euh ... donc ça c'est aussi ... déjà ... déjà en place quoi!

Many women in our sample expressed a wish to reduce their hours of employment, having already negotiated or been in the process of negotiating to reduce work hours. Worth noting, though, is that we analysed couples where the female partner was a strong earner. Some of the interviewed women mentioned that they would decide whether or not to work part-time once the child was born and the moment had come, but considered adapting to whatever was needed in terms of childcare demands. One woman reported thinking about a job change in case her employer did not allow her to reduce her work hours. Several other women said they did not intend to reduce work hours for reasons such as having an interesting job or being the one in the couple with a fixed income.

The negotiation of work adjustments with the present employer reflects a model in which women change from full-time to part-time work. These adjustments are decided on by the firm and therefore can theoretically enable women to continue working with the same employer (Levy, Widmer and Kellerhals 2002). Nevertheless, there is no statutory entitlement to reduce or use flexible working hours for employed parents (Valarino, 2012). It is up to each employee to find an agreement with his/her employer. The following case illustrates how Estelle negotiated a

reduction in her hours of employment, indicating that part-time work is not self-evident in her company:

Well, we have a lot of mothers at work and they all obtained a reduction of their work hours to 80 per cent [of a full-time job], but it is true that when I talked to them they all said to me that it was a slow and difficult process. They [the directors/managers] do not tell you their decision quickly. (Estelle, clerk)

Ben ... c'est ... c'est-à-dire que ... quand j'ai ... beaucoup ... on a beaucoup d'mamans chez nous ... au travail ... et elles toutes eu leur 80 mais c'est vrai que quand je parle avec elles ... elles m'ont toutes dit que c'était ... ça a traîné ... jusqu'au bout ... ils donnent pas les réponses facilement.

Female interviewees discussed the consequences they believed motherhood would have for their personal and couple lives, consequences they also felt could challenge their worker identities. Women who had invested in their education and/or who had long work histories expressed fears of having to cut back on their careers, even though they also felt they should adjust to parenthood obligations. The tension and dilemma that motherhood represented to them were apparent in the case of Caroline. She had a secure career and her partner was unemployed. She described the coming change in her professional life as a burden, and tried to view it as something necessary:

For a woman it's not easy [...] I've always worked ... I have been working 18 years in the same company ... So for me it also means changing my life [...] More than for him [...] And it's true that it's a burden [...] so she [the baby] comes before my own desires, before my own choices, it's normal ... I think that's also what being a parent is about for me [...] Perhaps it's necessary. (Caroline, accountant/bookkeeper)

Pour une femme c'est pas évident quand même hein ... parce qu'il y a ... j'ai toujours travaillé ... ça fait 18 ans que je travaille dans la même société ... donc pour moi ça veut dire aussi euh ... changer de vie ... donc euh ... plus que pour lui ... j'pense à ce niveau-là ... et ça c'est vrai que ... c'est quelque chose qui pèse ... [...] donc j'la fais passer avant mes propres désirs ... enfin avant mes propres choix ... donc c'est normal ... c'est aussi ça être parent pour moi [...] c'est peut-être nécessaire.

Stepping back from occupational life was seen as somewhat less problematic among the female interviewees with lower levels of education and/or those who earned less than their partners. Similar to Caroline, Aline perceived motherhood as burdensome, however, she took it for granted that having a career and a family were incompatible, as this quotation suggests:

I reckon we cannot have a great professional career and a family at the same time. I think one has to make choices and my choice is to say I want to dedicate a little bit to my children, but also keep some time for me. (Aline, management and sales clerk)

Vous savez j'crois pas qu'on puisse mener ... euh ... une ... une super carrière professionnelle et une famille en même temps je crois qu'il faut faire des choix pi moi mon choix ben c'est de dire ... euh ... euh j'veux me consacrer un peu à mes enfants mais garder quand même mon p'tit bout d'jardin à moi.

Thus, the prospect of motherhood implied a change in women's work identities. It had concrete implications for their intentions regarding paid work, which they felt needed, to some extent, to be sacrificed. The degree to which such changes were perceived as unwanted or problematic varied with socio-economic status, women's educational level and their career investments.

### **Men's Working Identities in the Transition to Parenthood**

During the interviews, it became clear that the male breadwinner role was still taken for granted by the couples. Although we interviewed dual-earner or even female main-earner couples, very few of the fathers-to-be stated concrete plans to reduce their hours of employment. A majority of the interviewed men explicitly noted that they were thinking about adjusting their work hours after the birth, but few men actually desired to work reduced hours. Most male interviewees said that their workplace or type of occupation would not allow them to reduce their hours of employment or that a reduction would not be accepted by their employers. Another reason mentioned for not planning to reduce work hours was financial constraints. The issue of financial constraints, however, appeared primarily among couples wherein the women already worked part-time. Among the few fathers-to-be in our sample who were flexible and willing to reduce their work hours, some of them mentioned that they earned less than their female partners. Men's reduction in hours of employment was apparently not yet a common practice, as it was for women in the workplace. For fathers, their presence in the workplace was, according to their own reports, still widely taken for granted and an adaptation of work to family responsibilities was not raised as something that had been actively discussed at work in the same way as for mothers-to-be:

Where I work, the director insists that people are hired at 100 per cent [a full-time job] ... [to work] with pupils ... so it [a reduction of work hours] is not actually discussed. (Steve, specialized teacher and lecturer)

Bon j'suis obligé ... là où j'travaille ... euh ... la directrice insiste vraiment pour que ce soit des personnes engagées à 100 pourcent ... auprès des élèves ... donc euh ... ça ça se discute même pas tellement.

This quote is also symbolic of difficulties encountered by full-time working fathers-to-be, when direct supervisors or firm specific management structures would not support a reduction of work hours. In the example above, the director argued against the possibility of negotiating a decrease in work hours due to a need for a high level of engagement with the school's pupils.

The combination of work and family responsibilities was perceived as more feasible if work hours were flexible (for example, if an employee had autonomy over his/her work or worked for a family-friendly employer). It was also facilitated if working hours were distributed across weekdays rather than weekends or nights and the commuting distance was short. This was true for both men and women, with the difference being that women stated that they gained such flexibility, among other things, by reducing their work hours. On the contrary, men did not specify how they would obtain such flexibility in practice. Their arguments focused mainly on how important work hour flexibility was for them in order to spend time with their child, that is, to be a present father and to reduce the time their child would spend in childcare.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, it appears that most interviewed men solved the time problem by using work autonomy available to them in terms of time schedule and where they work (for example, from the office or at home). However, they only planned on reducing their work hours as long as they perceived that they could maintain their job performance. We present a quote from Hervé, a man who was willing to spend an afternoon or two per week caring for his child after his wife Hélène's return to work. Whether Hervé would realize this plan or not, however, was conditional on his options for arranging work hours around childcare. He described his options as more limited compared to Hélène's options. Whereas his wife worked in the educational service sector where her work consisted mainly of one-to-one contact with families of children with special needs, he was teaching at a secondary school with a fixed class schedule. The additional assumed teaching assignment that Hervé took on prior to his wife's pregnancy limited his schedule flexibility by increasing his overall workload. Moreover, he expected that his chances of promotion would reduce if he worked part-time.

If I reduce my working time ... I cannot quite organise my working time as I would like ... while my wife, if she says she has a 50 per cent [of a full-time job] that means she decides on when to make appointments. Working at 50 per cent is guaranteed in her case, since it is she who arranges the schedule [...] whereas me, I have no flexibility, I cannot combine classes [by myself] to optimise working time ... and with that [...] there's still the plan also ... I took ... in addition to teaching, charge of an Executive Assistant function. [...] and there's the possibility of becoming Director [...] a higher level position. (Hervé, teacher)

si moi j'réduis mon temps de travail ... moi j'peux pas organiser tout à fait mon temps de travail comme je veux ... tandis que mon épouse [...] si elle dit elle a un 50 pourcent ça veut dire qu'elle [...] les place comme elle veut [...] en travaillant elle à 50 pourcent c'est garanti euh ... comme c'est elle qui fait l'horaire [...] c'est que moi j'ai aucune souplesse ... j'ai aucune garantie que ... j'peux pas condenser ces heures d'enseignement ... et puis après [...] y'a quand même l'idée aussi de ... j'ai pris ... en plus de ... de l'enseignement une euh ... une charge d'adjoint de direction [...] c'est quand même une possibilité après de ... de devenir directeur [...] un poste un plus haut.

While the prospect of fatherhood did not seem to substantially affect the plans that most men had for their work, fathers-to-be perceived that their everyday lives would change when their child was born. The domain of life in which the prospect of fatherhood seemed to be more closely associated with change was the future fathers' social lives. Some of them expressed awareness that they would have less time to spend with friends or for leisure activities outside the home:

With friends, it's maybe more complicated. In the sense that, well, I think that friends feel, they feel also that as a man, as a future father, one ... one will change a little, for example in the daily schedule, in priorities that will be given to things ... (Steve, specialized teacher and lecturer)

avec les amis euh ... c'est ... c'est pt'être plus délicat ... dans le sens où ... ben les amis j'pense qu'ils sentent ... ils sentent aussi que ... ben en tant qu'homme en tant que ... que futur père on ... on va changer un p'tit peu ... déjà rien que dans l'emploi du temps ... où on ... dans les priorités ... qui seront accordées.

The majority of interviewed women also expected that the transition to parenthood would modify their social lives, but in contrast to their male peers, who saw their lives becoming more complicated, they did not think that a change in priorities and use of time for daily activities would threaten their social lives.



It will be more limited [...] Most of my friends who have children, it's true I see that their hobbies change [...] I don't see this as a threat. (Florence, physician)

Ça va être beaucoup plus limité mais [...] la plupart de mes amis j'dirais ont des enfants donc c'est vrai que ... euh ... j'vois déjà que les loisirs ils changent [...] j'vois pas ça comme quelque chose de ... de ... menaçant j'dirais.

## THE DIVISION OF PARENTAL WORK AND ROLES

Although interviewees expected both parents to be involved in childcare and childrearing, parenthood implied gendered short- and long-term changes and responsibilities. As shown in the following section, parenting roles were seen to be divided into maternal nurturing and paternal education, the latter with the objective of transmitting important values and principles after early childhood. The difficulty for interviewees to anticipate a man's role with the newborn child reveals a lacking blueprint for caring fathers in the Swiss context and the taken-for-granted dominance of the maternal role during the early stages of parenthood.

### **Breastfeeding as Evidence for Being a Good Mother**

If several interviewed men declared being anxious about their recognition as a father (their fatherhood), expectant female interviewees expressed more anxiousness about being a good mother:

A good mother is ... I don't want to make mistakes. Will I know [...] how to feed him properly, how to recognise his tears when he's sick, when he's hungry, when he wants a hug? To be able to understand him, you know! (Virginie, staff adviser)

Une bonne maman c'est, je ne veux pas faire d'erreurs, est-ce que je vais savoir [...] l'alimenter comme il faut, savoir reconnaître ses pleurs quand il est malade, quand il a faim, quand il veut un câlin ? Arriver à le comprendre, quoi!

Women's anxieties about being a good mother were associated with the fact that they would have to learn to perform childcare activities. This questions the often assumed natural, more or less 'biological' way in which the transition to motherhood is expected to equip women with the right skills and competences to be a good mother. Hence, motherhood seemed to be at the crossroads of activities, which has to be learned and

practiced and, at the same time, is considered innate and natural. Such an example is breastfeeding:

I reckon you must trust nature as well as yourself. There are things ... For example, will I know how to breastfeed? [...] You have to learn it, it doesn't come the first time, but nature makes it possible. (Aline, management and sales clerk)

J'crois qu'il faut aussi faire confiance à la nature et à soi-même en s'disant ben y'a des trucs ... euh ... euh ... est-ce que je saurai allaiter par exemple [...] y faut apprendre ça vient pas du premier coup mais ... euh ... mais la nature est faite de telle manière que c'est possible.

Interviewees considered breastfeeding and pregnancy as features that distinguished motherhood and fatherhood. Motherhood was appropriated through the bodily changes (that is, the increasing size of the stomach, episodes of sickness and medical visits) and associated feelings experienced by the woman. There was a general agreement among interviewed mothers that breastfeeding was part of their role and that it was desirable to breastfeed the child for several months, up to one year. However, the length of maternity leave was considered an obstacle to fulfilling this aspect of the role and interviewees had doubts about the practicalities of breastfeeding after returning to work:

My maternity leave will be followed by three months of breastfeeding leave so ... I will be unbothered, let's say ... until mid-August ... and I think ... if everything goes well, I will find ... another job ... at 50 per cent [of a full-time job] ... before the beginning of September ... If I can find it here [...], which would be good, I would be able to do it every morning ... like this I could ... well it wouldn't disturb my breastfeeding too much ... because I would like to breastfeed for at least ... a year. (Tania, clerk)

J'aurai mon congé maternité suivi d'un congé d'allaitement de trois mois donc euh ... euh ... je serai tranquille on va dire ... jusqu'à mi-août ... et pi je pense euh ... si tout va bien pouvoir euh ... trouver un autre poste ... un 50 pourcent ... euh ... d'ici début septembre [...] si j'le trouve ici [...] c'qui serait bien ce serait de pouvoir faire tous les matins ... comme ça j'pourrais ... enfin ça perturberait pas trop mon allaitement ... parce que je voudrais allaiter quand même ... bien jusqu'à une année.

### **Men's Involvement in Parental Work**

Beyond these biological dimensions of parenthood, interviewees perceived that there were further differences between mother and father. While the mother's presence was taken for granted, the importance of fathers spending time with the child was stressed. The expected absence

of men in the home after the child's birth, due to the lack of statutory paternity leave, implied that special father-child moments had to be arranged – often by the mother. In the process, some caring activities became reserved for the father.

I already discussed that with him and he's the one who'll be giving the baby a bath in the evenings [...] because I think it's normal that he has a privileged moment alone with his child [...] to see him [...] because he'll go to work in the morning and the baby will be asleep ... He'll come back in the evening [...] it's an important moment I find. (Tania, clerk)

J'ai déjà parlé avec lui et ce sera lui qui donnera le bain au bébé ... le soir [...] parce que j'trouve que c'est normal qu'il ait un moment privilégié rien qu'avec son enfant [...] pour le voir [...] parce qu'il va ... il va aller travailler ... il partira le matin et le bébé sera endormi ... il va rentrer le soir [...] c'est un moment qui est important j'trouve.

In most accounts, men were considered to have more distant roles than women, at least at the beginning of their child's life. Their main role was expected to include bathing or playing with the baby, but it was taken for granted that he would be less involved in regular care. Two women, in contrast, expected their partners to behave very similarly to the ways in which mothers performed parenting. In their accounts, however, this behaviour was marked as (positively) deviant since these women mentioned that their partners would develop a protective role similar to the role of traditional mothering. An often-used expression by these women is 'papa-poule' (literally, a 'hen dad'), a vernacular expression that literally indicates men who have a very protective and mothering role towards their child.

Men expressed the wish to be involved as a father and their partners also wished for them to be involved. However, many of the interviewees found it difficult to define the fathers' participation. It seems that they had not discussed what the fathers' concrete involvement would be. In order to palliate this lack of a blueprint for them, men 'dreamed' or 'projected themselves' into the future:

It's a source of dreams also [...] yes dreaming and imagination of what comes next, even though I know it won't be the same [...] I don't have a well-defined vision or a particular wish [...] I'll try to be open to lot of things and to live it as best I can. (Olivier, teacher)

C'est un peu une source de ... de rêverie aussi de ... oueh ... de rêverie et d'imagination de la suite ... en sachant que ... ce sera ... pas ... la même chose [...] j'ai pas une euh ... une vision définie ... ou des souhaits

particuliers [...] j'essaierai au mieux de pouvoir euh ... ben d'être perméable à tant d'choses et pi euh ... et pi de vivre ça au ... au mieux.

Probably, as a consequence of the lacking blueprint for the fathering role during infancy and early childhood, projections into the future could span several years and even reach into the child's adolescence:

I don't expect that he'll be like me. I expect that he'll be himself [...] I'll answer his questions, I'll interact a lot with him and I'll try to simultaneously be a dad who sets limits and in other moments 'come on, let's fool around'. (Arnaud, adult trainer in hospital computer science)

J'attends pas qu'il me ressemble j'attends qu'il soit lui-même [...] je répondrai à ses questions je dialoguerai beaucoup avec lui j'essaierai d'être un peu ... à la fois le papa qui dit ça c'est une limite à pas franchir et puis à d'autres moments 'viens on va faire les fous ensemble'.

Some very general principles of education were mentioned in these dreams, in which the role of a father was, for example, to be present at important moments during the child's life. However, participation in day-to-day care, especially when the child was an infant, did not explicitly belong to these dreams.

Both mothers and fathers-to-be had difficulties envisaging the paternal role and everyday life with the child. The role of the father seemed vague for women, especially during the first months after the birth when they would be on maternity leave and breast-feeding:

I think, however, that the role ... roles are very different. [...] I think it depends also on periods ... stages ... Let's say the age of the child. Maybe the mother will have a bigger role to play at the beginning and the father a little less. (Florence, physician)

J'pense quand même que le rôle ... oueh ... que les rôles sont quand même très différents ... [...] j'pense ça dépend aussi des périodes ... des stades ... enfin disons des âges de l'enfant quoi ... pt'être que ... que la mère aura un plus grand rôle à jouer au début et pi après ... euh ... le père un p'tit peu moins ...

The normative assumptions about proper parental roles can be illustrated by two interviews in which the family model to be adopted would transgress dominant norms. For example, Caroline, who was planning to be the main earner, felt like she was failing her maternal role and her own expectations regarding commitment to the child. In this case, the partner was unemployed and the couple therefore planned for him to take on the main caregiver role. However, the mother's expressed concerns

suggest that involved fatherhood more or less automatically called into question her motherhood identity.

I mean if he wants to get involved and do it ... It's true it's not very common, it's not quite a regular practice and it's true that this gives me the impression that it takes away my role, as a mother, as I idealise it ... But at the same time nowadays children who have working parents are not more unhappy, they don't look unhappier than others. (Caroline, accountant/ bookkeeper, (creditors))

Parce que je veux dire s'il a envie de s'investir là-dedans pi d'le faire c'est vrai que c'est pas très courant de nos jours ... c'est pas encore tout à fait dans les mœurs ... et pi ce côté-là c'est vrai que j'ai l'impression que ça m'enlève mon rôle à moi ... de maman ... comme je l'idéalise ... mais en même temps aujourd'hui euh ... les enfants qui ont des parents qui travaillent ils sont pas plus malheureux ... ils ont pas l'air plus malheureux qu'un autre.

The prospect of transgressing norms also triggered mechanisms of resistance to perceived pressures on mothers to reduce or pause their occupational activity. In the previous quote Caroline questioned gender norms and felt a need to justify her choice. This is also the case for another couple, Jessica and Julien, in which Julien planned to stop working while Jessica, who had a more interesting and more highly paid job, planned to continue her job full-time. Here, Jessica claimed that parenting tasks were gender neutral, thereby justifying why her partner, and not she, would take care of the child on a daily basis. The quote below reveals a persistent norm that it is best for the child to stay at home with one of his/her parents, no matter if it was the mother or the father.

I have a job which changes too fast for me to quit. I would never leave everything, that's for sure ... I would have reduced to 50 per cent or to 30 per cent and for him, it's true that his work ... he likes it, but not so much ... while I adore mine. So it was obvious that ... Moreover, I earn a bit more than him working full-time [...] and he wants to care for the children. Personally, I didn't want at all to do only that [caring for the children]. Well, that was a piece of luck actually. We reached an agreement ... it was logical ... But it's true that it wouldn't have bothered me to put the child into a childcare centre but for him, it's a bit in the family schema ... His mother did the same thing, my mother did the same thing. (Jessica, nurse)

J'ai un métier qui évolue trop vite pour euh ... quitter ... j'aurais jamais tout quitté c'est sûr ... j'aurais réduit à 50 pourcent ou à 30 pourcent et pour lui c'est vrai que son travail ... ça lui plaît ... mais sans plus ... alors que moi j'adore ça ... donc c'était un peu évident que ... en plus je gagne légèrement plus que lui quand même à plein temps [...] et en même temps il a envie de

s'occuper des enfants ... moi j'avais pas du tout envie ... de faire que ça en tout cas ... donc ça tombait bien quoi en fait ... on est tombé d'accord ... c'est ... c'était logique quoi ... mais c'est vrai que ... ben moi ça m'aurait pas dérangé de ... de mettre l'enfant à la garderie mais pour lui c'est vrai que c'est ... c'est un peu dans le schéma familial ... sa maman a fait la même chose ... ma mère a fait la même chose.

In this quote Jessica says that both her mother and her partner's mother stayed at home when their children were young and that this preservation of the child being at home with one of his/her parents was important for her partner. The fact that her partner insisted on reproducing this arrangement shows that certain elements, which may be seen as traditional family values, can even persist among couples with potentially reversed gender roles.

## CONCLUSION

Interviews with parents-to-be in Switzerland allowed us to investigate how institutional constraints and normative pressures shaped their transitions to parenthood. Our main focus was on the impact of these factors on the meaningful construction of parenthood among men and women and on their intentions for the practical organization of work and family life. In particular, we looked at how these factors interlinked and jointly influenced how parents-to-be envisaged motherhood and fatherhood.

Despite the fact that the interviewees in our study are probably among the most gender equal couples in Switzerland, the modernized family traditionalism model is apparent in their interviews and the couples are not spared the 'traditionalization' experienced by many of their western European peers. Both institutional structures, composed of limited leave policies and complex, scarce and expensive childcare solutions, and intentions regarding occupation and childcare, are intertwined with gender ideologies in our informants' accounts. While not identified by the interviewees as such, these ideologies were revealed through the narrative of the parents-to-be.

First, gender ideologies were reflected in the couples' organization of the time schedule that was planned after the child's birth. Mothers-to-be envisaged their employment hours as something they needed to balance with the time dedicated to their child. Especially, the higher educated mothers perceived this balancing of work and family as something that would have consequences for their careers. In contrast, the time spent by the fathers in paid work was not perceived as competing with their time in devotion to childcare. Men rarely expressed reaching a point at which

they would have to decrease their hours of employment. Fathers only considered scaling down on paid work when such changes did not come with negative, long-term career consequences and/or when their job was perceived as of minor importance to them.

Moreover, while a *woman's* participation in the labour market was not called into question, paradoxically, the time that a *mother* spends separated from her child, because of her occupation, was perceived as more problematic. This finding provides information about norms associated with motherhood: following the accounts of our Swiss couples, what is considered to be in the child's best interests is for it to be cared for by its mother and the 'right' place for a mother to be is with her child at home. However, Swiss institutions do not support what our informants considered to be in the best interests of the child. The state does not offer long (paid) maternity leave or parental leave as in Germany, for instance. Moreover, the Swiss norm of good mothering conflicts with what is best for the career-oriented, high-achieving women in our sample. The meaning of time is very gendered and, in the case of women, contributes to generating tension between employee and mother identities. Some mothers expressed putting what they considered to be the best for their child before what they considered was best for them in their career as a way to be a good parent. These intentions are, for example, reflected by mothers' plans to decrease their hours of employment when the maternity (or extended unpaid) leave ended. Still, in cases when the mother is the main breadwinner, her putting her career on hold will have financial consequences not only for herself but also for her partner and children.

Complementary to the norms regarding motherhood, the provider role was still attributed to the fathers in the vast majority of the interviews. The transition to fatherhood was expected to modify the social life of men. Father involvement in care was evaluated rather positively and in the best interests of the child, but was envisaged in terms of special father-child moments. Both women and men had problems envisaging fathers' concrete roles and activities in everyday life, thus reflecting the lack of a blueprint for a new gendered division of care. Taken-for-granted gendered ideologies were even reflected in the few cases in which the time spent by the father with the child would exceed the time spent by the mother. In these cases, the mother's absence from home was still not considered self-evident and instead was perceived as putting into question regular motherhood/fatherhood norms. Not least important here was the perceived conflict between being a 'good' mother and a 'good' employee and the need to justify any reasons for plans that would result in the mother not being the full-time carer.



Overall, we show in this chapter that norms of time use in paid and care work are highly gendered and fuelled by the rather conservative family policies that motivate most of the mothers-to-be to work part-time or even stop working while their partners continue to work full-time. It is noteworthy that in Switzerland, where women compete more and more on equal terms with men in the labour market, many couples do not see full-time childcare as a solution as it is expensive and scarce and at odds with their norms of good parenting. It is especially challenging for mothers to pursue a career while having children as such dual goals conflict with the still persistent norms of good mothering.

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## NOTES

1. This support is planned to last until January 2019.
2. There are considerable differences among linguistic regions and between urban and rural areas. See, for example, Bühler (2001).
3. Institutional childcare represents childcare centres and childminders (called in French-speaking Switzerland 'maman de jour', which literally means 'day mom').
4. He should start working in a new company six months after the interview. Meanwhile, he still continues looking for a job.
5. In the French quote, the father uses 'he' and 'him' to talk about his future child. In French, it is common to use the masculine for a child whose sex is not already known. However, since this future baby could be a girl, we chose to use the dual gender terms 'she/he' and 'her/his'.
6. This matches the findings of the Swedish sample in which the relationship to the father was stressed much more than the relationship to the mother (see Chapter 4).

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