



# Ideas of Family and Work—Their Impact on the Careers of Young Men\* and Women\* †

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† The present text largely corresponds to ZGS discussion paper Nr. 2 (Baumgarten et al. 2018). By using the gender asterisk, we want to emphasize the variety of masculinities and femininities. We do not depart from a sexual original, which understands “other” forms of gender as “included”, but rather we understand every gendered sexual existence as a variant.

## 1. Introduction

The division of the professional sphere into female- and male-dominated occupational areas is more pronounced in Switzerland than in other countries (Estévez-Abe 2005; Charles and Bradley 2009). While the educational levels of women\* and men\* have become largely even on a vertical scale (BfS 2009), horizontal, gender-specific segregation in the professional world remains widespread (Charles 2005; Leemann and Keck 2005). Thus, occupations with high percentages of women are characterized by comparably low salaries, fewer (financial) opportunities for advancement and worse work conditions (Levy et al. 1997; Buchmann and Kriesi 2009). In contrast, in occupational fields with high percentages of men, paused employment or working part-time is difficult to realize. This circumstance is, in part, responsible for the persistence of gender inequality. In this respect, the path to more gender equality can only be paved with a precise and complex understanding of the respective relationships (as specific simultaneity of change and persistence). For this purpose, context-specific studies such as this analysis are of great relevance.

Gender-atypical work interests often remain untracked, and young adults are usually not institutionally encouraged to pursue them (Maihofer et al. 2013). The one-sided focus on occupations that correspond to social gender stereotypes means that women and men can only make limited use of their talents and gifts. Switzerland thereby loses a great potential of skills and abilities. Furthermore, distinct segregation in the professional sphere contributes to an intensification of the shortage of skills in technical and social jobs.

The starting point for our project, “How do ideas of family and work impact the careers of young men\* and women\*?”, was the hypothesis that, first of all, the ideas of

a future family and one's own occupational activities reciprocally influence each other, and secondly, that it is precisely this interrelationship that causes occupational gender segregation.<sup>1</sup> Based on previous research projects (see (Maihofer et al. 2013; Schwiter et al. 2014; Wehner et al. 2012)), we looked not only for institutional factors, such as the absence of paternity leave and inadequate and expensive childcare provisions, but also for subjective positions and motives such as ideas of family and gender norms as an explanation for the persistence of occupational gender segregation.

We thus assumed a complex interaction of subjective, institutional and gender-normative factors, which we all understand as the structural elements of the dominating, heteronormative gender order. According to our findings, these ideas already influence career decisions at a point where the question of starting a family is not yet present for many. Therefore, we focused on adults of about 30 years of age. At this age, they have already gained some professional experience and have developed both professional and familial prospects for the future.

To answer our research question, we conducted 48 problem-centered interviews with thirty-year-old women\* and men\*, who work in gender-typical, gender-neutral and gender-atypical jobs.<sup>2</sup> We asked them about their perspectives regarding the possibility of starting a family,<sup>3</sup> as well as asking about their further careers.

In the first step, we explain how the interviewed men\* and women\* conceptualize family and work, and what ideals, expectations and attributions form the basis of these positions. In the second step, we illustrate how these ideas of family and work impact their further careers.

## 2. Anticipated Fatherhood and Occupation

### 2.1. *Today, Being a Father Means Taking Time for Your Kids*

It has been widely proven that men\* today want to be active and present fathers. We have described the currently predominant perspective in our Discussion Paper I (see (Maihofer et al. 2010)) as that of the emotionally involved, present,

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<sup>1</sup> The project funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation was carried out at the Centre for Gender Studies at the University of Basel under the direction of Professor Andrea Maihofer (duration 2014–2016).

<sup>2</sup> A gender-typical profession is defined according to the fact that more than 70% of the professionals therein belong to one gender (e.g., dental assistants\* or social workers\* are female-typical professions, while train driver\* is male-typical; the retail business is a gender-neutral occupation).

<sup>3</sup> For most interviewees\*, founding a family has not taken place yet. In a few cases, interviewees\* were pregnant at the time of the interview.

breadwinner father. This shows a strongly changed attitude toward the norm of the single breadwinner. Thus, being an involved father means spending time with the child and building up a continual emotional relationship.

In the interviews, it was striking how important these ideas about relationships are for future fatherhood. The (yet childless) men\* considered that it is of the utmost importance to consciously take the time with the child for oneself, but also to develop a father–child relationship. We understand this as a clear rejection of the “absent breadwinner-father”, who mostly sees his kids asleep or on the weekends (Maihofer et al. 2010; Wehner et al. 2010).

By now, men\* also include the baby and toddler period in their notion of fatherhood. In the past, when fathers referred to their already grown children (see (Schwiter 2011)) in their reflections on fatherhood, our recent interviews showed how important their relationship with their child had been to them from birth. Watching their own children grow up means being there from the very beginning, as opposed to merely when the children are already a little older.

## *2.2. The Desire to Spend Time with the Child Changes the Relationship between Men\* and Full-Time Work; It No Longer Represents an Unquestioned Normality*

Due to the desire to have time together with the child, men\* begin to think critically about their workload (see (Baumgarten et al. 2017a)). Consequently, they appraisingly deal with the question of if, in their profession, it is possible to reduce their work time in order to realize their ideals of fatherhood. The engagement with part-time work is not only based on the wishes of men\* themselves. Increasingly, this is an external (normative) demand. The current change in the fatherhood ideal is also reflected in the fact that talking about fatherhood now includes addressing questions of how to spend more time with one’s children and if part-time work would be possible, at least temporarily.

This does not mean that all men\* want to work part-time, but rather that their relationship to full-time work changes through altered expectations and the desire for an intense father–child relationship. Part-time work is increasingly considered as a possible component of a male employment biography, and working full-time is no longer an unquestioned normality.

When it comes to part-time work, most of the interviewed men\* and women\* understood an 80% workload. They talk about this extra day off, notwithstanding weekends and holidays, as “dad-day” (see (Schwiter and Baumgarten 2017)), where men\* are solely responsible for taking care of the child. The rebuy, quality time with the child, where the mother is absent or uninvolved, has become a priority.

### *2.3. Industries Differ Strongly in the Practicability of Part-Time Work for Fathers*

The wish of future fathers to spend time with their child and, therefore, the desire for part-time work are in contradiction with the (normative) demands of a full-time employment, as well as the possibilities for professional development and career opportunities. Regarding its realistic implementation, the industry and the respective job culture are of central importance. In some occupational fields (mostly in female-typical or gender-neutral jobs such as teaching), men\* view themselves as being in a part-time-friendly work environment, where their requests are easily negotiable. In other, often male-typical professions, such as consulting, part-time work is difficult or even impossible. Here, possibilities are limited to all but those who become self-employed or find a different occupational field.

All in all, the interviewed men\* hoped to find individual arrangements with their superiors and work teams but were insecure about whether they would manage to do so. The currently prevalent work culture is being perceived as extremely resistant. Interestingly, they often come to this conclusion without ever having taken an active interest in the company's internal policies regarding part-time work. The structural conditions of the professional world are predominantly seen as a given and, therefore, as unchangeable, and they do not address the possibility of campaigning in solidarity as employees for changes in the company.

### *2.4. The Idea of Professional Development Is a Central Part of the Male Understanding of Their Careers*

According to men\*, gainful work is, on the one hand, necessary for economic security. On the other hand, they also want to actualize their talents and affinities and take pleasure in their work: *"One has to like what one does"*. This is due to the amount of time they spend at work.

Apart from remuneration, the need for professional satisfaction is especially evident, i.e., when the interviewed men\* saw how their efforts were making a difference. The importance of salary and content is evaluated pragmatically: *"I am not an idealist who says that the salary does not matter. ( . . . ) No, I want to have a job where I also receive some money and where I have the feeling that I am worth it"*. Therefore, gainful work is essential for societal inclusion and achieving broad recognition.

Beyond this, advancement orientation is not only a central part of the male understanding of a career; it is also part of their expectation of normality. After education and years of travel, professional consolidation naturally takes place which takes into account the commitment and diligence of the initial period. Medium-

and long-term career and development opportunities are very important to men. We found such an idea among women\* only in exceptional cases.

### *2.5. Men Are Still Supposed and Want to Be the Main Breadwinners*

Next to men's\* desire to be present fathers, the demand that they are responsible for the financial subsistence of the family continues to exist. Taking responsibility for the financial stability of the family is not only demanded societally of men; often, women\* also expect this, as much as men\*. Admittedly, their work should correspond to their interests; yet, especially with regard to anticipating starting a family, it should also enable them to take on the role as the main breadwinner. The reb, the wish to spend more time with the children is contradictory to the workload they accept, willingly or otherwise. For men\*, there is an increasing problem of reconciling what would be characterized as "good" or "desirable" fatherhood activities with the demands of gainful employment.

## **3. Anticipated Motherhood and Occupation**

### *3.1. Gainful Work Is an Inherent Part of Female Identity, Which Is Why Women\* as Mothers Want to Be Steadily Employed*

The women\* from our sample had, at the time of the interview, distinct professional confidence. After their education, all of them found their way into a job which suits them, with which they can identify and which gives them economic independence and self-reliance. All had been through advanced training and have evolved in their professions. However, in contrast to the interviewed men\*, they talked about this without expressing desire for further, long-term career advancement.

Part of their professional understanding is the feeling of being needed, the possibility of participating meaningfully or the experience of a good and productive work atmosphere. Generally, for women\*, gainful employment is as much a form of societal inclusion and recognition as it is a part of their identity.

For this reason, they want to remain employed after starting a family, even with a part-time work schedule: *"I do not want to do without being a part of the professional world—in any way"*. They were concerned about being out of touch with working life and *"hav(ing) a foothold in employment"*. With regard to starting a family, gainful work is an important addition and change from everyday family life, but it also enables women\* to participate in a social environment beyond that of their family.

What is striking is that none of the women\* mentioned financial necessity as a reason for seeking steady employment. Their earnings after starting a family were often considered as additional. Not being bound to sustaining a family with their

jobs and relying on their partners for economic security, therefore, form the basis of their attitudes towards their careers and their expectations of normality.

### *3.2. Motherhood Continues to Be a Central Part of Female Identity, about Which Women\* Want to Decide Autonomously*

The women\* from our sample wishing to become pregnant demanded from themselves that they would spend a lot of time with their children. They identified as the “key carer” with a strong emotional tie with the child. *“That is the way it is: the Mom remains the Mom”*. They often mentioned their own mothers\* as positive role models for shaping their motherhood. The reason for being the main parent is based on the biological abilities of giving birth and breastfeeding. The special proximity between woman\* and child evolves. These preconditions suggested a gender-typical arrangement.

At the same time, the women\* refused to view their biological characteristics fatalistically and emphasized their autonomy in the distribution of familial tasks, but also with regard to establishing a family. In accordance with this self-determination, there is a demand for them to decide for or against motherhood and to develop their own ideas of what form this should take. Thereby, the women\* often understood family as being private in nature, i.e., where they are, in contrast to the workplace, their own bosses. Family life represented for them a counterpart to work, where the atmosphere is structured by competition and heteronomy. The decision to start a family was therefore not only understood as a self-determined withdrawal from full-time work but also as a form of autonomy in the familial sphere.

### *3.3. The Female Professional Understanding Stands in Tension with the Ideal of Motherhood*

For most interviewees, family plans became more concrete when they were in their early thirties. At this point, the conflict between their professional understanding, which implies steady employment, and their ideas of motherhood increased ever more (see (Baumgarten et al. 2017b)).

Upon starting a family, women\* anticipate a great shift in their emotional priorities towards the child and family: *“When I have kids, then I have the feeling that (my) priorities would lie more strongly with the kids and the family”*.

Such an adjustment of everyday life presents a major organizational and mental challenge: *“I just know that this could be something that would bother me”*. Through the (anticipated) focus on familial care work, they fear a loss of attractiveness, independence and a sense of belonging. At the same time, they assume that their employment could make it difficult for them to be adequately present in the family,

both emotionally and time-wise. This means that even before having children, women\* are noticeably struggling to reconcile conflicting wishes and demands. In addition, they also believe that resolving these issues is their own responsibility. This means that the persistent expectation that women\* are mainly responsible for the family and children leads to a nearly unsolvable dilemma. On the one hand, they have to justify their professional employment both to themselves and to others, and on the other hand, an exclusive focus on family can lead to being seen as backward and overly maternalistic. Anticipated motherhood already leads women to continuously reflect upon their (potential) behavior and to justify it against criticism or even hostility. According to the contradictory ideal of the “*emotionally involved, present breadwinner-father*” formulated for men\* (vgl. (Maihofer et al. 2010)), for women\*, the prevalent ideal of motherhood can be summarized as the “*part-time employed involved mother, who is the key carer of the child*”.

### 3.4. Industries Differ Strongly in the Practicability of Steady Employment for Mothers

In many industries, women\* are confronted with a job market that is oriented toward the ideal of a male full-time employee; entailed therein are intense time requirements, undivided availability and a job history without interruptions. In opposition to this, women\* wish to pursue their employment in a manageable manner with a high degree of flexibility. Employment is outlined as an addition to everyday family life with a part-time workload of between 20 and 40 percent, or in some cases, 60 percent. With regard to their ideas, which, as they know, differ from a normal employment relationship, they already anticipate professional disqualification and reduced career perspectives: “*One has to be aware of the fact that you cannot simply pick a fun job anymore. ( . . . ) that you, rather, will be doing periodical work as a clerk*”.

For the interviewed women\*, the possibility of (part-time) employment is inherently dependent on a *concession* from the company. Knowing about the structural obstacles, they only introduce their want for employment in a defensive manner and formulate it cautiously: “*That I might be able to stay with a reduced workload*”.

As for men\*, the choice of industry plays an important role with regard to opportunities for part-time work: In rather female-typical jobs such as care-givers\* or psychologists\*, part-time work is more attainable. The re, women\* are more likely to be able to combine their professional aspirations with motherhood and are more flexible in terms of balancing out both realms. Even in this field of employment, women\* do not anticipate promotion prospects for employed mothers.

### 3.5. *The Responsibility for Childcare Is Part of Self-Determined Motherhood, Which Should Ideally Be Passed on to the Private Sphere*

Apart from the few supportive structures in the professional sphere, the personality of the child also plays a central role in determining the extent to which the mother provides childcare or to which she is gainfully employed. Children are imagined as being very different in character, which is why it might be difficult to estimate how much presence and care they are going to need. Although the interviewed women\* hoped to be able to plan their everyday lives more independently as their children grew older, they expected themselves to meet the children's needs first and foremost. The concept of self-determined motherhood includes a distinct amount of personal responsibility on the part of the woman\* for taking care of and supporting the children: *"This is not the responsibility of the society. Just because you have children now, others do not need to care about it"*. This includes fathers. Women\* expect very little responsibility for childcare from the fathers. If fathers take on childcare work, it is because they have expressed a wish to spend time with the child. The refore, it is not to be taken for granted that care work can be handed over to the father. The "dad-day" is thus more of a supplement, rather than a clearly demanded engagement.

Public support for childcare work was seldom anticipated by the interviewed women\*. Daycare centers are mainly conceptualized as institutions for families—especially single mothers—who are unable to reduce their workloads. The opposite of the self-determined mother who is mainly responsible for the child is, therefore, the mother who is driven by financial struggle and restrictions, whose economic situation does not allow her to take over the care work herself. For their own children, they value daycare centers as places of exchange with other children. This should take place from one to three days per week. The y often explicitly rejected the idea of handing over a child to a daycare five days a week. In total, the interviewed women\* imagined childcare to be privately organized. The intimate, small family was, in the minds of most of the interviewed women\*, the first and most important form of childcare.

## 4. **Synopsis—Anticipated Parenthood and Familial Labor Division as a Couple**

Even though we did not interview any couples, the anticipated ideas of gendered labor division and the organization of everyday life among the interviewed men\* and women\* complemented each other astonishingly well.

Current ideas of (heterosexual) partnerships are still based on the complementarity of men\* and women\*.



For a successful partnership, it is important, according to our interviewees, to meet the needs of the partner and to value his/her respective accomplishments. However, this complementarity is not the traditional one. This is the basis upon which couples nowadays negotiate the division of care work and employment, and the individuality of partners\* in a relationship must be catered to in such negotiations.

In this understanding of labor division as a collaboratively negotiated consensus, there is astonishingly little awareness of how gender-stereotypical the ideas of employment and family, and thus the foundation for this decision-making process, still are.

In this way, the mutually formulated regulation of the division of labor usually leads to a high level of male employment, i.e., with a workload of 80 to 100 percent, with one “dad-day” at most and a great responsibility of the mothers in terms of childcare, with supplementary employment of 20 to 40 percent, or, in a few cases, 50 or 60 percent. Even though men\* and women\* regard it as important that the father build an intense everyday relationship with their children and thus take on a “dad-day” if possible, the latter is not considered a non-negotiable part of the division of childcare, much less is it mentioned as a possibility for the woman’s\* return to work after giving birth. Childcare provides relief and thus enables the woman\* to pursue a career, while the private, predominantly female environment, i.e., the woman’s\* parents or in-laws (including grandfathers), sisters, friends and godmothers, as well as other mothers in the close circle of friends, plays an especially central role.<sup>4</sup>

The accurate fit of the gender-specific attribution of responsibility for care work or gainful employment leads to a reciprocal complementarity (in terms of “complementing each other”).<sup>5</sup> Even though we conducted individual interviews, the interviewed men\* and women\* drafted a congruent idea of a (heterosexual) partnership, for which the clear division of responsibilities implied a simultaneity

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<sup>4</sup> This can be explained with the specific conditions in Switzerland: the different cantons and communities are responsible for family-complementary childcare. The role of the federal state is subsidiary. Of all OECD countries, Switzerland invests the least in childcare, a 0.2% share of its BIP. Despite an impulse program initiated in 2003, in the context of which 370 million Swiss francs have been invested and almost 60,000 daycare places have been created, Switzerland exhibits a bland supply of family-complementing childcare and in most regions, there are large gaps in supplies. At the same time, the costs for external childcare in Switzerland are higher than in any other OECD country. A full-time space in a daycare can reach up to two thirds of the mean income.

<sup>5</sup> Contrary to childcare and gainful employment, we did not ask about the division of housework in our interviews. Insofar, we cannot make any statements about the ideas of our interviewees in this regard. Housework, however, was not mentioned in any interviews as being important.

of change and persistence. On the one hand, the anticipated familial arrangements were clearly reminiscent of the bourgeois ideal of the family, but at the same time, there, momentous changes could be observed, not least the idea of an equal form of negotiation of the division of labor among the family. In this sense, both the work culture and society in general were perceived as being of little help. However, changes are also not demanded in such a decisive manner.

## **5. Conclusions for Current Gender Relations in Switzerland**

In total, our analyses show the interconnections of institutional and individual perspectives. They show how the present socio-cultural living and working conditions may act as the basis for possible family arrangements (keyword: reconciliation). However, gender norms internalized through lifelong processes of socialization and cultural perceptions regarding the abilities of men\* and women\* have an equal impact on the way in which young adults imagine their familial and professional obligations, and how this influences the career perspectives of men\* and women\*.

First of all, with regard to gender relations, two things can be stated: Currently, for both genders, there are strong tensions between notions of work and family, between the requirements of masculinity and femininity and between ideas of fatherhood and motherhood.

For men\*, fulltime gainful employment and an orientation towards a professional career continue to be an important part of their identity. At the same time, we find an increasing problematization of this one-sided orientation. They increasingly want to be fathers who are involved in everyday family life.

Due to this simultaneous juxtaposition of traditional demands toward masculinity and new ideas of fatherhood, men\* have to deal with their role as the breadwinner and come up with ideas as to how they can engage in raising their children in an active and present way. Through the changed relationship of men with generativity, they increasingly formulate their own problem of reconciliation.

For women\*, in contrast, the ideal of the mother who puts her needs after those of the child and the family, and who is carrying the main responsibility for domestic duties, continues to be the dominant orientation.

At the same time, it has by now become a part of their self-understanding to be gainfully employed and to have an identity as a working woman\*. Therefore, there is an increasing tension for women\* between the previous norm of motherhood and the new ideas of gainful employment and their intensified identification as an employed woman\* or mother. Even though ideas of motherhood are beginning to

change, the problem of how to reconcile family and work is being yet intensified through the demand to be a flexible and constantly available (good) mother and the desire to hold continuous and close-to-fulltime employment.

All in all, both genders\*—albeit in an inverted manner—are now struggling with the contradictions of traditional and new gender ideals and requirements. Through reflection and awareness of the old order (Woltersdorff 2013), both know much more clearly than before about the deficits of traditional gender concepts and practices, such as the lack of inclusion of fathers in the everyday lives of children, given their persistent responsibility for the family income, as well as the nonexistent personal and professional development perspective of the mother, given their domestic responsibilities.

Thus, men\* and women\* cannot fully exhaust important aspects of their identity, their abilities and their life plans. This is aggravated by the fact that neither gender can rely on new role models. Equitable ideas of work and family have to be laboriously tested and realized against professional and fiscal incentive structures, against the conditions and demands of the employment sphere (availability, flexibility, mobility) and against established and obsolete stereotypes in everyday life.

This does not make it easy for individual perspectives to be positively experiential beyond normative restrictions. Demanding and forcing through new ideas of work and family are thus often perceived as exhausting and energy-sapping.

Secondly, “traditional” gender norms have become more flexible and individual, but they are still very powerful for those involved.

In the interviews, most presented themselves as being open to alternative familial work arrangements, with the caveat that these have to fit the “type” of partner they have. Furthermore, the idea of a special relationship of a woman with her child—due to pregnancy and the possibility of breastfeeding—suggests a clearly modified, yet still “traditional” work division for most of the interviewed men\* and women\*. The reb, they clearly no longer understood biology as “imperative fate”, but rather as a foundation for pragmatic action according to physical constitutions. They were aware that, just as many women\* have to learn how to take care of their children adequately, so do men\*. In this combination, i.e., of an imagined division of work as a potential reality and the simultaneous restriction of the practicable validity of this notion to certain “types” of men\* or women\*, the current handling of gender norms becomes visible: These are no longer rigid but rather offer some leeway. At the same time, they are still very effectual; everyone is aware of what “deviation from the norm” consists of, and of which critiques and sanctions are threatening or which difficulties still exist vis-à-vis their structural implementation. If, for example,

work arrangements are defined as different, or if the caring behavior of fathers is equated with the idea that “*men want to be more involved nowadays*”, then notions of the “other”, “new” and “changed” clearly point to the extension of the norm or the emergence of new possibilities. Still, women\* and men\* try to conform to normative gendered expectations, e.g., when they see themselves confronted with the notion of being a “good mother” only when mainly focusing on the family, or of being a “proper man” only when working full-time. Who is doing which work in both the household and childcare and when they are doing it is no longer conventionally prescribed, yet it has always been defined qua gender. Even though social norms have become more flexible, this does not mean that deviations therefrom do not underlie a process of disciplining and normalization. Those who transgress central gender norms, such as when women\* do not have kids or when men\* would rather be “househusbands”, are, despite flexibilization, continuously confronted with critical questions.

The individual shaping of family lifestyles is still an arduous and by no means sanctionless process. The possibility for the realization of such is highly dependent on the specific context as well as the ability to act in a self-determined manner which corresponds to one’s own wants and skills, even if it does not match the dominant norms.

Simultaneously, we can state that, thirdly, the interviewed women\* and men\* assumed an equitable relationship between man\* and women\* in the family sphere. This assumption was seen as foundational for the current self-conception of men\* and women\* and their organization, and the shaping of everyday family life.

Thus, familial arrangements are understood as individual solutions between two equal people who do not have a hierarchical relationship (any longer). In their understanding, gender does have normative power, for instance, regarding some of their ideas of motherly or fatherly tasks, but it is a question of differentiation, not stratification.

Furthermore, an “equitable” division of gainful, household and childcare work does not mean a distribution in the sense of both parties doing 50 percent of each. Rather, both take over the part which corresponds to their preferences. Especially when viewing collaborative task divisions from a perspective of gender equality, gendered structuring seems unimportant or even individually desired. The reby, the interviewed women\* and men\* did not anticipate the way in which, within the context of starting a family and despite their assumptions regarding equity, a dynamic evolved, which leads them toward a nonequitable situation, and therefore one that is traditionally structured in terms of gender. The discourse of individual

uniqueness leads to a masking of persistent, or emerging and intensifying gender inequalities.

The previously described potency of gender norms leads to a situation where couples, in starting a family, establish a hierarchical relationship with each other. The imbalance resulting from the division of work, e.g., 100% (him) and 40% (her), is not always noticeable right away in relationships, but in the long term, its effects unfold through, e.g., the risk of a social decline for women\* in the case of separation or inadequate pensions after retirement, or, in the case of men\*, the pressure of (in future) bearing sole responsibility for the family, as well as the risk of becoming an "alimony-dad" with 14-day visiting rights with the children in case of a separation. Furthermore, like this, both parties cannot fully exhaust their abilities and desires with regard to employment and family.

Fourth, an individualized notion of cultural life and work forms could be observed in the ideas of the young adults interviewed.

Anticipated difficulties in the compatibility of work and family ideas were also perceived as a societal-structural problem. Following neoliberal logic, however, in the interviews, it was the responsibilities of the individual that were being talked about, i.e., to design a life plan independently of the surrounding living and work conditions, and to solve the tasks arising from starting a family as an individual (see (Schwiter 2016)).

Oftentimes, luck was mentioned, e.g., of having a good job, a tolerant boss\* or an optimal workplace, so that the reconciliation of gainful employment and having a family can be lived according to one's own ideals. According to this, the failure of one's life plan was regarded as being the result of one's own unsuccessful planning. The interviewed individuals were not aware of the notion and thus did not claim that beyond their own responsibilities, there is also a responsibility of society as a whole for the implementation of equality in terms of the compatibility of family and work.

Socio-cultural life and work conditions were seldom mentioned in the interviews as either impeding or enhancing, and hopes or expectations were seldom formulated with regard to changing parameters. Political demands directed toward society or the professional sphere, or toward public institutions, and which would entail structural and material support or the recognition of parenthood were not expressed

by the interviewees.<sup>6</sup> According to this evidence, changing current work and living conditions is rarely thought about or proposed.<sup>7</sup>

The attitude of self-responsibility and the growing freedom of decision making and choice, which has been strongly established within the framework of modern neoliberal processes of transformation, lead to a lack of critical reflection regarding persistent power relationships, as well as relationships of dependency and inequality. The reby, inequality is being individualized and privatized, which consequently intensifies the phenomenon whereby mutual decisions in the process of forming familial arrangements lead to inequity.

Finally, it has become clear that through individualized responsibility and privatized gender inequality, young women\* and men\* do not form alliances and do not formulate claims.

Our results show that the neoliberal rhetoric of self-responsibility intensifies the fact that, at present, there are hardly any ideas of governmental or societal responsibility for the concrete implementation of equality, and thus for the development of solutions to the current problems of the reconciliation of women\* and men\*. This makes it more difficult to uncover persistent gender discrimination and inequalities. Such connections only become clear through a thorough analysis of both the concrete structural living conditions and individual gender stereotypes. A simultaneous overview of both the structural and individual dimensions of gender norms is indispensable for achieving gender equality. By individualizing collective problems (e.g., of parents) and not regarding them as common, solutions cannot be found, and no claims for a new work culture or for necessary societal, legal or political and institutional changes can be made, even if individuals would profit from such (Schwiter 2016).

All of this is, however, indispensable, for, as paradoxical as it might sound, the more individualized that life plans and family arrangements become, the more they are dependent on socio-cultural frameworks (Maihofer 2016). The livability of the current life plans of women\* and men\* depend not only on the will of the

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<sup>6</sup> This stands in contrast to the French-speaking part of Switzerland, where there is a bigger demand for family-complementary care facilities, and where parents demand more governmental support.

<sup>7</sup> An exception existed in the statements regarding paternal leave. This does not only represent a plausible demand among most people interviewed, but many also regard the current regulations as problematic or even scandalous. Paternal leave may be described as a legal reenactment of the described changed practices within which the parental roles remain unequally distributed—where parental care is not exclusively the role of the mothers and, thus, where fathers have the right to undertake (restricted) care time in the first year of their child's life.

individual and its consequences but also on the necessary societal and institutional living and work conditions. If these are not given, the gap between growing possibilities for individual ways of life and the withholding of the conditions needed for these is becoming ever more obvious. Consequently, people, without actually wanting it, have to decide against the life plan they prefer as an employed and involved father or employed and involved mother.

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