

TransParent Workshop – Stockholm – September 26-27, 2012

The Care of the Baby: a Family Affair in Italy

Sonia Bertolini, Rosy Musumeci, Manuela Naldini,
Paola Maria Torrioni



*Department of Cultures, Politics and Society
University of Turin*

**Italian group's members: Sonia Bertolini, Rosy Musumeci, Manuela
Naldini, Cristina Solera, Paola Maria Torrioni**

Structure of chapter

- Introduction: aims of chapter and sample's characteristics
- First part *illustrates the main parenthood model emerging in the discourses about motherhood and fatherhood and identifies the plans for childcare arrangements;*
- Second part: *analyses ideas, plans and decisions concerning parental leave and paid work career of both members of couple;*
- Third part: *shows some conclusions about couple's patterns in transition towards parenthood*

Gender division of paid and domestic work (before birth)

continuum

Egalitarian	Neo-traditional	Traditional
Equal sharing and equal orientation towards paid and domestic work	Equal sharing of housework But she is in part-time or has a lower attachment to labour market than her partner	Inegalitarian on both domestic and paid work division
N (couples): 10	N (couples): 7	N (couples): 4

Sample: 21 couples, 26-45 aged; period of fieldwork: Feb2010-Jan2012; Place: Turin and Its surrounding area

Main questions

- Have egalitarian couples also a "parenthood model" less "gendered" in comparison to the traditional and neo-traditional couples?
- Have the former a different representation of "what is best for the child" and who is a "good" father and a "good" mother?
- From this perspective we want to understand if the egalitarian couples rely on the idea that the good father is a "participating father".

Plans for childcare arrangements

- The mother's presence is the best for the child, especially since all couples believed in breastfeeding the child as much as possible.
- The father's presence is often thought to be more as a support to the maternal role. He doesn't seem to have an "active" role distinct from the mother's.
- In the words of the fathers and a few mothers, there is a tendency of men towards *helping with* rather than *managing care* (see also Coltrane, 1989). The experts in this field are the mothers; the fathers can only be of assistance to them.

Some variations on theme

- Period of time in which the exclusive presence of the mother is planned: from a minimum of 3-4 months to a maximum of 12;
- Presence of other caregivers: 3 different models when the child is aged 6-7 months:
 - mother centered (8 couples);
 - family centered (7 couples) ;
 - multi-childcare strategies oriented (6 couples)

Toward parenthood... in a gendered way?

Couple's patterns (before pregnancy)	Planned Childcare arrangements		
	Mother centred	Family centred	Multichildcare strategies
Traditional (4)	3	1	-
Neo traditional (7)	1	4	2
Egalitarian (10)	4	2	4

The ideal childcare and the good parenthood

- Couples prefer the childcare provided within the family context;
- Services for very young children are not considered as an alternative to family care during the first year of life;
- *Being a good mother* means, above all, assume the responsibility of childcare;
- *Good fatherhood*, instead, can include a diverse range of acceptable behaviour. In particular, for most of Italian couples, a good father is one who, at the time of pregnancy, does all he can to provide more income for the family and assure a good livelihood.

Couples' decisions on parental leave

a)

- A very gendered choice
- Why do not dads take up it?

Arguments used more frequently by the expectant fathers to motivate their decisions and plans of not taking up parental leave:

- ✓ cultural norms in the place of work (employers and colleagues are not expecting such behaviour *from a man*)
- ✓ opportunity cost: “it is more costly to lose 70% of his salary than 70% of her salary”
- ✓ Perception about their job and their position as being impossible to interrupt for different reasons depending on whether he is a temporary or a fixed worker; for the first “it is not only a matter of salary” (Fabrizio Citiso, 36, C. 3), for the second, fear losing their jobs especially in crisis time as now, and perceive their presence within their workplace as being indispensable and irreplaceable by other workers

Paolo
Celidonia

Raniero
Cerfoglio

Couples' decisions on paid work career

b)

- A “**good father**” is often one who thinks about investing more in work in order to increase the family's income. Whereas, the father's help in childcare is seen as secondary.



Davide
Loglio

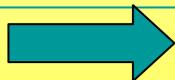
- In contrast, a “**good mother**” is one who, even if she loves her job, decides to reduce her work commitment to take care of her child, almost always taking time off work for as long as and whenever she can, and then possibly asking to go part-time or reducing the number of working hours.
- Negotiation is allowed within the couple on the sharing of household chores, but not on childcare in the early years: a good mother cannot be a career woman.
- As other research has shown in Italy, we do not see a greater demand on the institutions to facilitate reconciliation of work and family life: reconciliation is seen as a **private matter**.

[Some conclusions. Couple's patterns in transition towards parenthood a)]

How egalitarian, neo-traditional and traditional couples change (or not) in relation to the maternity event?

Towards a traditionalization of the work and family roles over time?

By looking to couple's future intentions about parenting roles, childcare arrangements and his/her intentions regarding to his/her own future working career the expected change is that after the baby arrival most couples will be yet equal oriented with respect to the division of homemaking but she resizes her job involvement, while he reinforces it (Annex).



[Some conclusions. Couple's patterns
in transition towards parenthood b)]

A “participating father”?

Men’s and women’s discourses and representations on future childcare responsibilities appear more gender-divided than their images of the current division of paid and housework even among the most egalitarian couples...

Some conclusions. Couple's patterns in transition towards parenthood c)

But... *"between dream and reality..."*

What is the role of institutional, economical and labour market constraints on childcare arrangements planning?

And what the role of informal resources in the shaping of satisfactory childcare and work-family reconciliation arrangements with respect the baby good?

In some cases being gendered does not seem to be the ideology about gender roles and motherhood and fatherhood, but the *real patterns of behaviour that expectant parents are planning for the near future*; some couples are planning a certain childcare arrangement (for example the mother-centered one), not for "choice", not for "ideals" but because they have no options.



**THANK YOU FOR YOUR
ATTENTION!**

Toward parenthood: *the subjective interpretation of the transition to motherhood and fatherhood*

WOMEN

- High involvement of all future mothers and high level of planning of pregnancy;
- Intense turmoil if the pregnancy comes unexpected, or earlier than planned by the couple
- Body's transformation as process that leads some respondents to rediscover their womanhood

Patrizia

Gaia

Daniela

MEN

- Higher variability in the group of the fathers in the reactions to pregnancy;
- Different patterns of fathers' participation: *high involvement and consciousness, active waiting, no specific preparation*

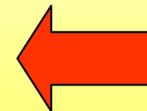
Davide

Gabriele

Luca

[Toward motherhood (1)]

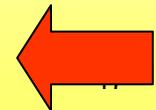
Patrizia Celidonia (32, DTI, FT, C. 1) “[...] *an upheaval in our lives, lifestyles, and, for me, in a way it's also an upheaval in my identity because, as a woman, apart from my body changing, which is just temporary, I feel that your actual identity changes, yeah. / So it's a great upheaval/, very exciting and now and then it can be quite overwhelming, definitely [...]*”



[Toward motherhood (2)]

Daniela Loglio (37, vice-president of a no profit social cooperative, DTI, FT, C.5).

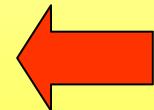
“[...] The changes that pregnancy brings in women, it's really about listening to your body, trying to regain those skills that are inherent in women and I think that have got a little lost [...]”



[Toward motherhood (3)]

Gaia Ciclamino (27, hairdresser, self-employed, FT, C.12)

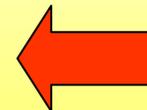
"[...] Let's say that things were tragic in the beginning for me, because we said right from the start that we should have children. We would say: "Yes! we have to become parents while we're young!" I would say: "Yes, we're young so even in two or three years' time; and then one day/my period didn't come [...] For the first two or three days I was a bit up in the air, crying and laughing because I didn't know how... I said ... "no! I'm young!"



[Toward fatherhood(1)]

Davide Loglio (42, researcher, DTI, FT, C. 5)

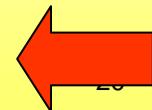
[...] I feel good, happy, a little impatient. ' [...]. I'm not too frightened about it in that /I feel/(firmly) quite convinced about being able to understand what will need to be done because I'm sure about this choice of having a child and becoming a father [...].



Toward fatherhood (2)

Gabriele Tamerici (36, Teacher, DTI, FT, C.19)

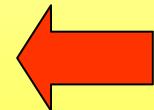
“[..] How do I feel? Better, now. It's been very tiring. It's been a time when I've analysed myself continuously, in an unconscious way, about what my experiences have been and the things I experienced when I was eight, ten, fifteen years old and my relationship with my parents. It's been a few months of/intensive psychotherapy/ (laughing) but it happened naturally, I didn't deliberately think about it, but I was reminded of experiences, things I've done. [..]. [....] There are so many questions, there are. My desire is to be a good father. I believe being a good father is more difficult than being a good husband, precisely because a mutual decision was made. [...]



[Toward fatherhood (3)]

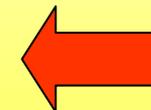
Luca Verbasco (29 , waiter, unemployed out of a week, PT, C.11)

“we were not planning the baby but when we heard, we decided to keep it. It took a while for me to take it in. She realised immediately but I say, "but I'm going to be a dad!" (Pause) How do I feel? /I don't know/ (annoyed). I'm happy... I'm a little scared about if I can't find work... (pause) Anyway, I think it'll be fine. I take it one day at a time. It's such a big thing when I start to think about him and when he grows up... it doesn't solve anything”



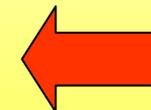
Parental leave: why dads cannot take up it (1)

- **Paolo Celidonia** (36, employed with the municipal council, DTD, FT, C. 1) *“(my employer has reacted) /badly/ (emphatically). When I told them my girlfriend was pregnant, the response was “great! Ah, well, luckily you are not a woman” (he laughs) And I said “yes, but then I was thinking of taking a short period of parental leave”; I brought out the two magic words, but no concrete plans were made for the future, no. [...] Certainly, today, if a male, a man, even one working for a small town council, were to say “I want to stay at home because I’ve got a son”, he’d be look at as if he were a Martian. /I’ve already been looked at as if I were Martian/ (laughing). [...] my employer will think “can we rely on a person who disappears for a month?”, because, if I go away for a month, it would be “chaos”. If I were a woman, it would be a chaos in that case, too, but they [the firm] would understand because it’s normal to think like that, but in the case of man, it wouldn’t be seen as normal.”*



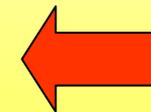
Parental leave: why dads cannot take up it (2)

- **Raniero Cerfoglio** (36, mechanical designer, DTI, FT, C. 2) *“I would like to take at least two weeks' holiday after the birth, but I'm afraid I'll only ask for one... I don't see another possibility, I can't take too much advantage of my job given the economic climate”.*



Couples' decisions on paid work career

- **Davide Loglio** (42, researcher, DTI, FT, C. 5) *“I consider my present job as stable but I also want to do some extra work, not only to increase the family income but also to growth professionally”*



Annex 1: Couple's patterns in transition towards parenthood



Couple's code	Fantasy name	Couple's patterns (before pregnancy)	Planned Childcare arrangements	Expected Couple's patterns (after childbirth)
1	Celidonia	Egalitarian	Multi-childcare strategies oriented	Neo-traditional
2	Cerfoglio	Neo-traditional	Multi-childcare strategies oriented	Neo-traditional
3	Citiso	Traditional	Mother-centered	Traditional
4	Falasco	Egalitarian	Family-centered	Egalitarian
5	Loglio	Egalitarian	Family-centered	Neo-traditional
6	Mercorella	Neo-traditional	Family-centered	Egalitarian
7	Mirride	Egalitarian	Mother-centered	Egalitarian- neo-trad
8	Robinia	Traditional	Family-centered	Traditional
9	Salice	Traditional	Mother-centered	Traditional
10	Tamerici	Neo-traditional	Family-centered	Egalitarian- neo-trad
11	Verbasco	Egalitarian	Mother-centered	Neo-traditional
12	Ciclamino	Egalitarian	Mother-centered	Neo-traditional
13	Solarino	Neo-traditional	Multi-childcare strategies oriented	Neo-traditional
14	Bluma	Egalitarian	Multi-childcare strategies oriented	Egalitarian
15	Albizia	Traditional	Mother-centered	Traditional
16	Mangiafuoco	Neo-traditional	Family-centered	Neo-traditional
17	Lupetto	Neo-traditional	Mother-centered	Neo-traditional
18	Poli	Egalitarian	Multi-childcare strategies oriented	Egalitarian
19	Calendula	Egalitarian	Mother-centered	Egalitarian
20	Loto	Egalitarian	Multi-childcare strategies oriented	Egalitarian
21	Oky	Neo-traditional	Family-centered	Neo-traditional