

9th International Conference on  
Social Science Methodology  
Leicester (UK) - 15 September 2016

**Changing work preferences in the  
transition to parenthood?  
Evidences from a qualitative longitudinal  
research on Italian couples**



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# Topic of the paper

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How to use a qualitative longitudinal approach to analyse expectations and behaviors in different phases of the life course.

**Hypothesis:** the birth of the first child is a *turning point* around which individuals redefine priorities, preferences and roles regarding their participation and commitment in the labour market.

**Empirical material:** female and male members of 22 Italian heterosexual couples interviewed separately before and after the birth of their first child, for a total of 88 interviews\*.

\*Project “Practices and Policies around Parenthood. Work-family balance and childcare in multicultural contexts” coordinated by Manuela Naldini and co-funded by the Compagnia di San Paolo and the University of Turin. It was also part of the TransParent Project coordinated by Daniela Grunow (Goethe University) and Marie Evertsson (Stockholm University).

# Methodology and theoretical framework coherent

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- **Methodology:** qualitative longitudinal analysis
- *Advantages:*
  - Analysis of changes of preferences can *clarify the mechanisms, causes and consequences of change* by means of the analysis of individual narratives.
  - Capturing “*transitions*” (Calman *et al.* 2013).
- **Theory:** we assume that individuals are dynamic and interactive (micro level)
- Some perspectives do not explain the changes in preferences along the life course, but presuppose a static actor over time like:
  - The human capital theory (Becker 1964)
  - Hakim’s preferences theory (2000).

# Theoretical framework

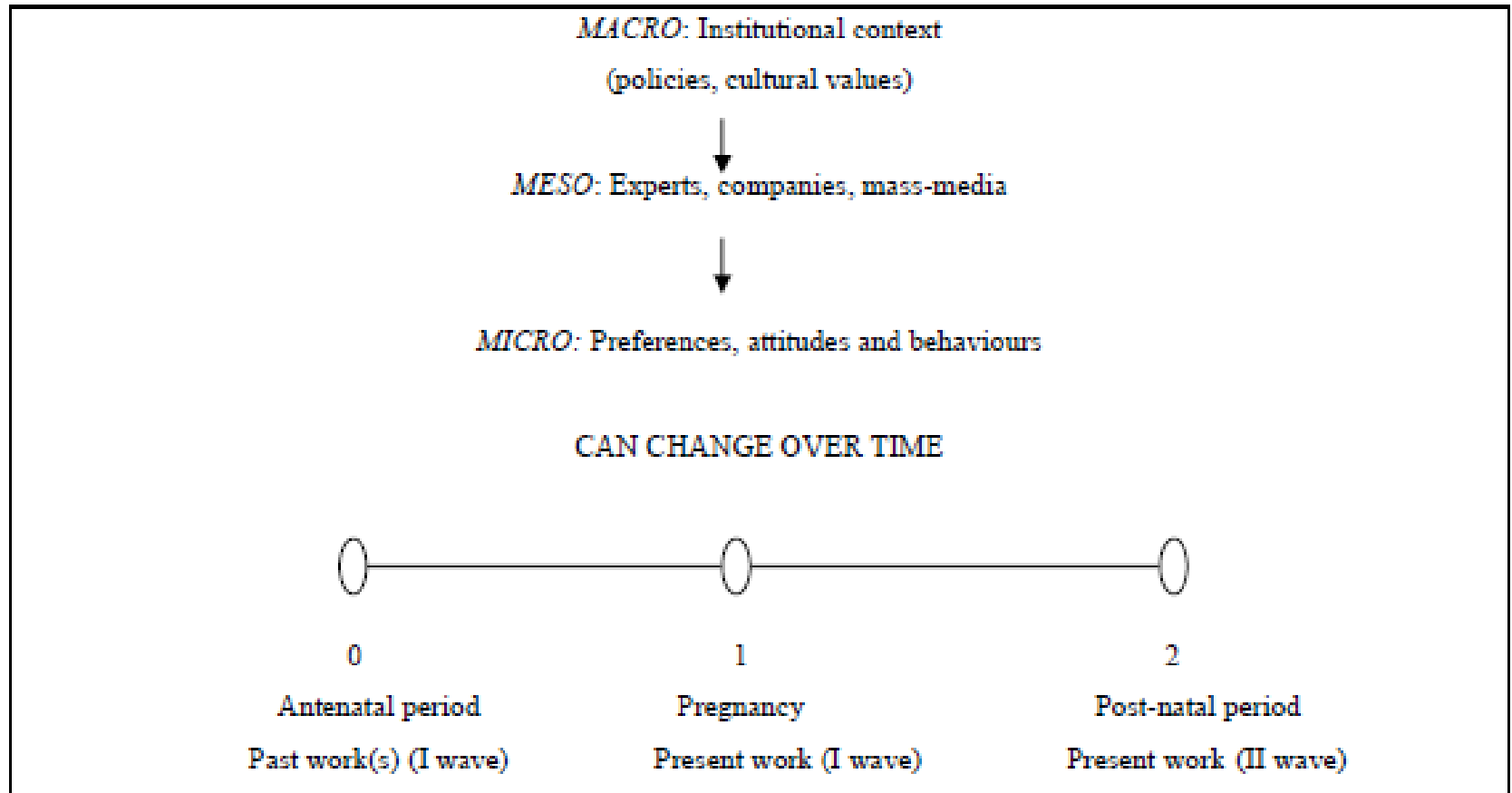
- *Theories of the life course* (Elder 1995; Saraceno 2001) and the transition to adult life (Ahn and Mira 2001; Mills and Blossfeld 2003):
- But taking into account that the majority *choices today have become reversible* and behavior with respect to the labor market may vary over time in relation to increasingly flexible contracts and the many family models
- We look at how expectations and preferences in different spheres change, in relation to an irreversible event, such as the birth of a child
- Work histories are the result of complex interactions, at the intraindividual and the interindividual levels (Blossfeld and Mills 2001), and here we reconstruct the interaction with the partner
- their explanation requires an analysis of determining macro and micro factors (Bosco and Negri 2003; Contini and Pronzato 2003).

# Theoretical framework

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- Berger and Luckmann (1966): the passage from being couple to being family implies a *re-socialization process*, that involves (...) the *availability of an apparatus of legitimation* (macro level)
- if not: *cognitive dissonance* theory (Festinger 1957; Schober and Scott 2012; O'Reilly *et al.* 2014) and *adaptive preferences* (Elster 1989), change their opinions in order to reduce the conflict between attitudes and behaviors.

# Our approach



# Methodology: synopses and coding

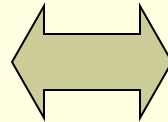
## Two methods of analysis:

### Synopses

Containing:

- a) background data
- b) synthesis of the main issues emerging on different topics explored by means of the interview outline, behaviour, feelings, emotions, points of view, strategies;
- c) **quotations**

We have created a synopsis for each of the couples of fathers and mothers interviewed, in which his and her longitudinal interviews have been summarized, and **compared both male and female interviews and I wave with II wave.**



### Coding in Atlas.ti

- In order to identify significant **quotations** we have coded the interviews in Atlas.ti7, by using a detailed **codebook** created intersubjectively, on **nine thematic areas.**
- We concentrated on the first time parents' narrative related to issues such as previous working career, current job, and preferences and orientation toward work.

# Methodology: integration between instruments

- The synopsis and the analysis codes (codebook and code declaratory) are used in an **integrated manner**, both:
  - in the stage of devising tools for analysis,
  - and in the analysis of the interviews,starting with the interview outline and theoretical framework

- QUOTATIONS: identity two points in the time;

- SYNOPSIS: quotations in history,  
longitudinal perspective

- For creating the Atlas.ti codebook, we used codes that recalled different sections of the synopsis:

(For example with regard to the “paid work” section in the synopsis, we included information and quotations of sub-codes “previous working career”, “current job”, and “preferences and orientation toward work”)



# Methodology: Families and Queries

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- We filtered these sub-codes for the following **families** of interviews:
  - Wave of interviews (pre-birth or post-birth);
  - Gender
  - Type of employment contract (self-employed, permanent or temporary).
- This allow us to extract the **queries (groups of quotations)** regarding to specific categories of respondents in relation to different moment of their transition to parenthood (example: Mother with unstable job post-birth).

# Sample: Working conditions and careers before and after the child's birth

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- At the time of the antenatal interviews:
- The majority of our respondents:
  - 30-39 cohort
  - have a university degree
  - have a qualified occupation in the service sector
- Only 9 couples: both partners permanent employment contract; 13 couples: at least one partner fixed term contract or self-employed.
- In the half of the cases:
  - net couple's income is max 3000 euro
  - wage gender gap is at least 500 euro

## Sample: Working conditions and careers before and after the child's birth

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- Re-interviewed about a year and a half after the birth of their first child, in 14 out of 22 couples conditions of employment have partially changed for at least one of the two partners.
- The most common changes are the reduction of working hours and the consequent reduction in pay, especially for the mothers; instead, some fathers' income had actually increased, but some fathers had lost their jobs.
- However, about three-quarters of the respondents have an almost stable path.

# Results: Behavior and preferences (in) consistent with each other at different times

## First example: *inconsistency between preferences at time 1 and behavior at time 2.*

- Gaia, hairdresser, entrepreneur (in couple with Giacomo, gardener, without contract)

Interviewee: Gaia

### 1. Preferences - Present work (I wave)

#### Quotation

The only thing is that we chose that I'll stay at home, and almost certainly will leave my shop, **I'll leave my company and stay home and be a mother, perhaps for two or three years** and then after we will see. Or I'll open another store or look for another job [...] it's also right that / mom is Mom and Dad is the breadwinner / (marking and emphasizing) that is to say that the roles are not too reversed. [...] I would like to breastfeed and spend time with her [...] I don't know [...] seems more like mother stuff to me.

### 1. Behaviour - Present work (II wave)

#### Quotation

And you went back to work after how long?

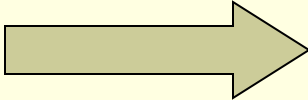
R: **Oh, actually I gave birth on Wednesday and on Monday I started again. With her, in her baby buggy.** Sure, it's a bit crazy but we needed this, also I no longer have my mother, my mother-in-law works on, so I needed to bring her.

I: And so you went right back to work.

R: Yes, actually at this time I'd go around to the homes of customers, to be able to keep [...] keep them all. [...] And then I went around a bit with her, working a bit at people's homes, then I found a good job and then she started going to nursery school.

# Results: Behavior and preferences (in) consistent with each other at different times

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- Mechanisms that led to this inconsistency (Calman *et al.* 2013)?
- the theory available.
- the synopsis that tells the couple's story.
- through Atlas.ti other quotations available under the I wave code "preferences and orientation toward work": 
- The situation is dictated by necessity rather than by a change in preferences.

# Results: Behavior and preferences (in) consistent with each other at different times

## ■ **Second Example:** *non-coherence between preferences and behavior in the two times.* Fabiola and Fabrizio: precarious teachers

### 1. Preferences - Present work (I wave)

#### Quotation

I: Have you ever thought of not working or reducing your work commitment to better combine family and work?

R: I'm thinking about it now [...] **if it were possible I would like to devote at least a year to my daughter** and my husband, my family. Something temporary.

I: Have you thought about how the professional and daily life of your partner will change?

R: There will certainly be a priority; even while dedicating ourselves with professionalism to our work - not that one wants to overlook it - but in my opinion the perspective will change when you return back home; the main thought will be devoted to the family, without excluding the partner. Family as a priority especially in the important moments. Surely change something will change from how it is now.

Interviewee: Fabiola

### 1. Behaviour - Present work (II wave)

#### Quotation

**I took the obligatory maternity leave** and then I made a choice, but for the type of school that called me, I made the choice instead of not asking for anything, even though I could have had the right to ask breastfeeding leave I didn't ask, but by choice [...].

On the other hand it is that work can also be used to disconnect a little bit and still have a life that's a little more individual, that is, find a part of your life that has completely changed, that's all.

### 1. Preferences - Present work (II wave)

#### Quotation

I: Is it important for the woman/man to go back to work soon?

R: Well, I think the woman would need to spend more time at home, however, devote most of her time to the family, I'm not saying she shouldn't have a job, but one that's a bit shorter, also for her husband's serenity when he gets home. I mean, I remember when \*\*\* (husband's name) would find us both at home, because I did not work, in the sense that it was his day off, he was more pleased, so in any case, for the man's peace of mind, then the man can go to work, even hoping for a job that allows him a little bit more also in the relationship with his children.

# Results: Behavior and preferences (in) consistent with each other at different times

Interviewee: Fabrizio

## 1. Preferences - Present work (I wave)

### Quotation

R: She wouldn't want me to be away from home so much in the sense that she would want that I was more here more than away. [...] And so there are discussions, quarrels, in quotation marks, but these are brought from outside. That I have so much to do, that is, I am pretty much exploited and she does not [...] just like me [...] because then I say to her [...] actually I don't like it either.

I: Do you intend to improve your working position? How? And your partner's?

R: Yes, above all to have a permanent contract.

## 2. Preferences - Present work (II wave)

### Quotation


This job, let's say sure, does not have the certainty of having the right amount of time with my family. So there, at this time there is no middle ground, one has to choose one side or the other, and I chose that one (smiles), that is, I prefer to have less certainties but spend more time with my family [...].

# Conclusions

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- The analysis of our interviews seems to suggest that it is not realistic to consider women's (and men's) individual preferences toward work and family as opposite poles of a continuum
- New instruments for analysis
- New model of actor
- Important for policies: shows unexpected effects of policy interventions.
- Similarities and differences between quanti and qualitative longitudinal approaches.





Thank you very much  
for your attention!

- Maybe I would have gotten a nanny [...] But, all this we must mix it with the death of my mom because [...] forced me to give a different weight to life when I saw her disease, when I saw her dead, when I saw my father and mother [...] Since that happened my mind has erased completely what I was before, and created a new person. **Before, I absolutely would not! I would never have[...] I said / <<I'm never getting married>> / (laughs). Only my career [...] Instead when I met \*\*\* (husband's name) and while my mother died, life was turned upside-down and I have given priority to other things: family first and everything else later.** Work is just to make a living. (pause) [...] but they all tell me I'm crazy because anyway the store is fine, there is a lovely clientele, it's a nice activity so someone says I'm crazy but I think I'm 27, I have my own career that I've already been doing for 11 years even if I leave it for two or three years, nothing will happen (Gaia, I wave).