

# THE NORM OF MOTHERHOOD AND ITS IMPLICATIONS IN THE LIFE COURSE OF WOMEN WITHOUT CHILDREN

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## Premise



## Research question

**How women who did not have children negotiate their life course condition in contexts of normative motherhood in Switzerland?**

## Theoretical Perspectives

### Life Course Perspective

- Childless is not a one time point choice but a process
- The absence of a normative expected event shapes the life course
- The linked lives perspective (couple and social networks are involved) (Elder *et al.*, 2003)

### Gender Perspective

- Gender roles and interaction within a couple
- Heterosexual norm (Rich, 1981)
- Gender roles according to biological sex

### Social Networks Perspective

- Social influence (Bernardi, 2003)
- Social support

## Research design

### Research Approach and Data

- Qualitative approach
- Content analysis of semi-structured interviews with couples
- The unit of analysis is the couple
- For each couple there are 3 interviews planned: with the couple, and with the woman and the man separately
- Data collection starts in January 2013 (Pilot study during Fall 2012)

### Sample

- Heterosexual couples where the woman is childless
- Couples took part into the longitudinal survey – *Couples contemporains – Cohésion, conflit, régulation* (Widmer, Kellerhals, Levy, Ernst, Hämmer, 2004)
- Purposive sampling stratified by age
  - 35 – 45 biological parenthood is still possible
  - 46 – 55 biological parenthood is virtually not a choice anymore
  - 56 – 65 biological parenthood not possible and issues of grandparenthood becomes relevant



Couples without children  
**N = 48**



Couples where men have children  
**N = 13**



Women alone without children  
**N = 8**

### References

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