Women, Men and Children in Families
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Private Troubles and Public Issues
Contents

Preface 7

Eriikka Oinonen
Relatedness of private troubles and public issues 9

I
VARIOUS ROLES OF WOMEN

Aino Luotonen
Mothers’ return to work: contradictions, negotiations and strategies 29

Gina Gaio Santos and Regina Leite
Portuguese academic women’s experiences of combining work and family: a focus on spousal sources of support 55

II
MEN IN TRANSITION

Anna-Lena Almqvist and Lars Dahlgren
Swedish fathers’ motives for parental leave take-up in different scenarios 91

Julia Brannen, Ann Mooney and Valerie Wigfall
Changing fatherhood through an intergenerational lens: the UK case 113

Berit Brandth and Grete Overrein
Farming fathers between work and care in Norway – an intergenerational study 141
III

DIVERSE CHILDHOODS

Johanna Mykkänen and Marja Leena Böök
Photographing as a research method – Finnish children’s views of everyday life 169

Katja Repo
The child in the context of home care – Finnish mothers’ assessments 195

Anna Maria Ifland
Political discourses on childcare in Germany and Norway: outside or within the family? 213

Writers 245
Preface

This collection of articles comes from the 4th International Conference Community, Work and Family: Actors, Structures and Theories held at the University of Tampere in Finland from 19 to 21 May 2011. We, the editors, were members of the conference organizing committee. While reading the submitted abstracts, and later, the conference papers, we realized that many papers contained interesting and fresh perspectives on familial life. We initiated this book in order to further cultivate the presented ideas and to generate wider academic discussion of the issues.

This specific volume includes eight separate articles based on the work presented in Tampere in 2011, and a theoretical introduction. The articles comprise a valuable contribution to the discussions concerning the changing roles of women, men and children, as well as different transitions within the framework of generations, gender roles and work-life balance. In addition, they entail interesting data and methodological innovations.

We are deeply indebted to the authors who devoted their time to make this volume come alive. We also want to express our gratitude to Tampere University Press, who accepted this volume into their publishing schedule, to The Finnish Work Environment Fund and Tampere University’s School of Social Sciences and Humanities for financial support, to the Childhood, Youth and Family Research Unit for inspiring working environment, to Ev Charlton for excellent copy editing and to Maija Repo for her valuable help with the final editing.

Eriikka Oinonen and Katja Repo
Eriikka Oinonen

Relatedness of private troubles and public issues

Introduction

In his classic book *The Sociological Imagination*, C. Wright Mills states that “Social science deals with problems of biography, of history, and their intersections within social structures” (2000: 143). Mills argued that the social scientists’ task is to relate ‘private troubles’ with ‘public issues’, implying that we need to question the distinction between private and public issues.

Family is a fruitful object with which to study how social structures, changes and events influence people’s personal lives, or, in Mills’ words, how biography and history intersect within social structures. Family and family life is commonly considered to belong to the private sphere, but family and family life is and always has been a target of public interest (see Oinonen 2004b, 2008). A recent example is the programme of Prime Minister Jyrki Katainen’s government (22 June 2011). According to the programme, higher birth rates are one of the principal ways for Finland to reduce the sustainability gap and consolidate public finances (ibid.: 8). Therefore, Finns need to be encouraged to have more children (see Aamulehti, 7.8.2012).

Family has also been at the centre of the theoretical debate about individualization or de-traditionalization. Family is regarded as one of the institutions, social structures and categories that have lost much of their influence in individuals’ lives. It is claimed that individuals have become disembedded from the traditional roles and are free to choose how to live their lives (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Giddens, 1991; see also Dawson, 2012). There is no denying the decline of regulative traditions, but this does not indicate that individual agency is
unbounded. Although people have leeway, their social actions are shaped by ‘meaning constitutive traditions’ – that is, patterns of sense-making passed down from one generation to the next (Gross, 2005).

Yet families are part of our everyday lives and everyday life appears to us as private and personal, and as the very product of our individual choices (Scott, 2009). We tend to feel that events like moving out from the parental home, setting up a home with a partner, getting married or becoming a parent are unique to us. Or, that we make individual and independent decisions and choices that determine the unique way we practice fatherhood or motherhood. But, in fact, many aspects of our lives are socially shaped. For example, in western societies, most people go through the transitions to adulthood and to parenthood at roughly the same age. Although we have more than one or two ways in which to exercise our familial roles, we tend to found our ways of acting on ideals and models that are passed on from one generation to another. These kinds of patterns in our life course attest that our individual choices are not made in isolation. Personal life is relational. It is affected by other people, and by social structures, institutions, norms and traditions. Yet this does not mean that we have no agency. People are not mere puppets played by social forces but have a degree of free-willed control over their lives. Furthermore, how people live their personal lives, what kind of choices and decisions they make, have an effect on society as well. Thus personal life matters, not only on the level of individual persons but also on the level of the public sphere (May, 2011a, 2011b).

In this book we take up the task that C. Wright Mills assigned to sociologists: to relate ‘private troubles’ with ‘public issues’. The private troubles or dilemmas of personal life we discuss and study in this book are: how to combine family and work; how to fulfil the roles as a mother and father; what are the roles, places and spaces for women, men and children? Furthermore, we are looking for ways (methods) to study the everyday realities of our personal lives. This chapter provides a theoretical frame for the articles in this book by contemplating the public/private distinction from the viewpoint of family, women, men and children, the relationship between individual and social, and by discussing the relatedness of personal.
Private and public

We use distinctions, dichotomies and categorizations to make sense of the complex reality but very often our use of concepts such as ‘public’ and ‘private’ is ambiguous (Tervonen-Gonçalves and Oinonen, 2012). In fact, public/private distinction is protean. Different ways of making the distinction emerge from different theoretical discourses, each having their own historical baggage of assumptions and connotations (Weintraub, 1997: 2–3). Usually, however, public and private are used to distinguish different kinds of human action and different realms of social life or different physical and social places where human actions take place. One common way is to see the public/private distinction as a distinction between State administration and the market economy. Another, also very common, way is to define private as the realm of intimacy and family, and public as the realm of sociability and the larger economic and political order (see Weintraub, 1997).

This latter type of public/private distinction reflects the ‘privatization’ of the family in modern times. A commonly accepted view is that along with modernization, the boundaries between the private world and public life emerged. A strict line was drawn between the private and intimate world of home and family, and the public world of business, associates, acquaintances and strangers. In the meantime, work and non-work (‘living’) came to be separated and located in strictly separate spheres (e.g. Ariés, 1979; Goody, 2000). The private sphere became identified almost exclusively with the family, and the public became associated with an uncontrollable and even threatening outside world from which the family offered a refuge. It is perceived that the modern family differed drastically from the pre-modern family, which was neither public nor private but, rather, was both at the same time (Kumar 1997: 209–10).

Both social scientists and laypeople have largely accepted the above sketched family history and the distinction between public and private. Undeniably, privatization has occurred and families have changed, but its location strictly in the private sphere is questionable. To grasp the reality regardless of the historical time period we need to see the family as being both private and public at the same time. The family and family life is and always has been a target of public interest. How obvious or discreet the interest is varies over time and place, and depends on the issue. As an example, between the World Wars, measures of the pro-natalist population politics were very obvious around Europe. In Finland, for instance,
those who reached the age of 24 and remained single and childless were punished by an increased tax rate called the spinster’s and bachelor’s tax, and in Spain, the State awarded annual prizes for families with the largest numbers of children, among other things (Oinonen, 2004b).1 There are more subtle ways to influence our ‘private’ lives. One good example is the OECD, which has no executive power but has a huge impact on national policies through its studies, reports and recommendations, such as those concerning child care arrangements and models of work-life balance. With its recommendations, the OECD also comes to define the proper or desired way for people to lead their familial and personal lives. International organizations such as the OECD and the EU influence national policies and politics, and hence the surroundings within which we make our private choices and decisions (Oinonen, 2008).

In reality, it is not possible or even desirable to strictly compartmentalise our lives into distinct life spheres. Family matters interfere with our work and work often tags along to home (e.g. Rönkä and Kinnunen, 2009). Besides, there is more to life than just family and work. The public/private distinction is blurred. Arlie Russel Hochschild (1997) makes an insightful point in claiming that home is being invaded by the time pressures and efficiency demands characteristic of work, while for many, the workplace provides emotional support and self-fulfilment, things we would like to associate with home and family (see Chapter 1).

It is not only the family whose location is ambiguous; different family members also have different positions in the public/private axis. Women and children have traditionally been located in private and men in public. According to the ideal of the modern nuclear family, a man is the breadwinner who spends most of his time in the public world of work and a woman is the care taker in the private world of home. In an updated version, the division of proper places and roles for genders is not as clear-cut. Now, the ideal European family is an ‘adult worker family’ that ideally places both women and men equally into the public and private spheres. However, in practice, the adult worker family often translates into a one-and-a-half-earner family model, at least for those who have small children. We may

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1 Although the most intense period of pro-natalist policies in Finland and Spain dated between the World Wars, the laws and practices aiming at encouraging people to marry and have children held until the mid-1970s. The spinster’s and bachelor’s tax in Finland remained effective from 1935 to 1975 (Finlex, 2012) and in Spain, large families were rewarded with the annual prizes from 1941 to 1976 (Meil, 2006).
say that the contemporary European ideal family (imposed by the OECD, EU, governments and research) is composed of a full-time working father, a part-time working mother and their two children who early on are socialized, educated and taken care of by professionals outside the home most of the time (Oinonen, 2008: 178–182; see also Esping-Andersen, 2009; Esping-Andersen et al., 2002). To ensure economic growth, competitiveness, survival of the welfare state and cognitive development of children, it is desirable that women with small children not only dedicate themselves to child-care at home but also take an active part in working life. So today, women are expected to have one foot firmly in the private sphere and the other in the public sphere. Men are also hoped to position themselves in a new way in the axis of public and private. They are given the opportunity to be active fathers and take a more participative role in child-care at home by taking advantage of paternity leaves and daddy quotas. Thus men too are encouraged to put more weight on the foot in the private sphere while having the other foot sturdily in the public sphere.

Regardless of these changes, there is a constant debate revolving around the right and proper place of women and children. In Chapter 8, Anna Maria Ifland studies how children and childhood are constructed in political discourse and shows how children’s upbringing is not only a private family matter but also, to a great extent, a matter of politics. Thus discussion of whether small children should be taken care of at home (private) or in kindergartens (public) is unresolved and on-going. Some advocate for early childcare provided by professionals outside the home based on pedagogical advantages and equalizing effects on the children’s environment for cognitive and social development (see Repo, 2009: 93–97). Others insist on home care provided by parents, and particularly by mothers, based largely on attachment theories (Vuori, 2003). As a case in point, in Chapter 7, Katja Repo reveals how Finnish mothers who have decided to take care of their small children at home after the parental leave period see children as developing and vulnerable beings who need unhurried time and protection from social and institutional pressures. Both camps base their views upon ‘the best interest of the child’.

Johanna Mykkänen and Marja Leena Böök (Chapter 6) point out that child-rearing, and also family culture, has become increasingly child-centred as nowadays children have rights and responsibilities both in private (home) and in
public (society). As an example, children are no longer only subject to obligations such as compulsory education but they also have subjective rights such as the right to day-care (in Denmark, Finland and Sweden). Thus although children are strongly associated with the home, family and private spheres, they do have their other foot firmly in the public sphere.

A continuous debate revolves around women’s proper place and role. Value and attitude surveys attest that the great majority of Europeans disagree with claims that a man’s job is to earn and a woman’s job is to look after the home and family (e.g. ISSP, 2004). Although gender equality and equal opportunities are strong and shared norms and values in European societies, their realization is limping (Oinonen, 2008: 172–173). In practice, caring and family tasks are primarily women’s responsibilities, indicating that women’s inherent place is in private. This remains true also in societies where women’s and mothers’ labour force participation rate is equally high as men’s and where women’s (and mothers’) full-time work is the norm, like in Finland and Portugal (Barreto, 2005; Eurostat, 2012).

Gina Gaio Santos’ and Regina Leite’s study on Portuguese academic women’s experiences of combining work and family (Chapter 2) indicates that women do not have the same emotional and instrumental support to invest in their careers as men do. Even those couples who do not compete with each other over their rights to build a career and who prefer equality both within and outside the home tend to end up following traditional patterns. In many two-career families it is the man’s career that is prioritized. His long working hours, overtime, work-related travelling and absence from home, and lack of time spent with his children or spouse or on household tasks comes with the territory. A woman is expected to deal with work demands, children’s demands and partner’s demands, and, if she complains, it is to blame her lack of organizational skills rather than lack of support. The tacit outlook seems to be that the proper and most suitable place for a woman, and especially for a mother, is more on the private side, although, in principal, everyone should be equal in all aspects of life regardless of sex and family situation.

In the same vein, Aino Luotonen (Chapter 1) shows how challenging it is for women to negotiate their place and roles along the public/private axis. Analysis of the data gathered by group discussions among Finnish mothers planning to return
to work after maternity and family leave demonstrates what an arduous process it is to negotiate strategies to balance ‘private’ family life and ‘public’ work life. Although women do negotiate with employers and partners over the strategies to balance family and work, the toughest negotiations a mother has are with herself. Especially women who have a strong attachment to work seem to be riven with their double role, expectations and aspirations. They feel strong loyalties for their children, partners and family but also for their colleagues and employers at work and for their own career. Whether a mother stays at home with her small children or whether she goes to work and leaves her children to be taken care of by others, she feels guilty and society lays a guilt trip on her. This is a pronounced tendency, at least in Finland, where both full-time wage work and home care for children under the age of three are strong and vigorous norms (see Chapter 7).

Today, men’s proper place and role has become a topic of discussion too, but it does not have the same moralistic undertones as in the case of women (and children). In the name of reconciliation of work and family and gender equality, men are encouraged to take better advantage of the care leave days earmarked for fathers and to take a more active role in childcare in general (see Chapters 3 and 5). But fathers of small children are not frowned upon if they do not exercise their right for a stay-at-home-dad period and withdraw from public to private. Anna-Lena Almiqvist’s and Lars Dahlgren’s study of Swedish fathers (Chapter 3) indicates that the most common reasons for men’s decisions for taking only a few days of leave (or not at all) are difficulties in being away from work, either because colleagues should not be let down or because of the family economy. It appears that a provider role is still the primary role expected of men with families and thus the decision not to take a more active role in the private sphere and use their right for paternity leave is interpreted as a decision made for the (economic) benefit of the family. Besides, fatherhood is perceived as something personal that may be chosen, whereas motherhood is seen more as a duty (see Vuori, 2009). Furthermore, it is still perceived both by society and by individual men and women that a father’s primary duty is to provide for the family, which is an action located in the public sphere, and a mother’s primary role is to care and nurture, which is an action located in the private sphere (see Gross, 2005).
Individual and social

Family and family life has been at the core of the discussion and theorising on individualization. The key argument of the individualization thesis, or de-traditionalization thesis, is the increase in individual choice (Smart, 2007).

In short, the individualization thesis claims that in western societies, traditional social structures, categories and institutions such as class, gender, family, kin and the Church have lost much of their influence in individuals’ lives. Consequently, individuals have become ‘disembedded’ (Giddens, 1991) from traditional roles, giving them more freedom or agency to choose how to live their lives. It is claimed that in the past, gender, social class, family, kin and the Church defined our lives so that the ‘path’ was clear. In other words, people had predestined life trajectories. In contemporary societies, however, individuals must construct their own biographies (see Beck, 1992). They have to accumulate resources and competences and use them to create the kind of identities and lives they want. In Zygmunt Bauman’s (2000) terms, individualization means that identity is transformed from a ‘given’ to a ‘task’ and individuals need to take responsibility for this task.

The increase in individual choice has led to both pessimistic views (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995) and to a more positive outlook on family (Giddens, 1992). According to the pessimistic view, de-traditionalization and atomization of individuals in their task of creating their individual life trajectories produces a reaction in the form of a yearning for love and stable relationships. This explains why the majority of people want to and eventually do get married and have children, even though divorce is common and the demands of equality and flexibility and mobility in the labour market, and changes in gender roles and relationships push families and partners apart. According to Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck–Gernsheim (1995), there is no structural basis on which to sustain such relationships. On the contrary, all of the social forces seem to work against them.

There are social forces, for example, in the labour market that put pressure on partnerships and family relationships, and pose conflicting demands (see Chapters 1–3, 8). But, at the same time, there are social forces that seem to endorse marriage and family. For example, at frequent intervals the media reports on research attesting that stable relationships and, particularly, marriage promote...
physical and mental health and well-being. Furthermore, in different societies there are laws and policies that bolster couple and family relationships. In Finland, inheritance laws, for example, tend to encourage people to contract marriages as co-habiting heterosexual couples are not regarded as equal to married couples (Oinonen, 2008). So, not all social forces are necessarily working against marriage and family.

Anthony Giddens (1992) has argued that due to the increase in individual choice, marriage as an institution has weakened. Marriage is no longer the precondition for an active sex life or having children, nor is it contracted for life as divorces are more and more common. Giddens claims that this reflects the profound change that has occurred in the views about relationships. Because relationships are based on romantic love, communication and trust, and because they are no longer held together by external constraints, they survive only for as long as they satisfy both partners. Thus the freedom to choose leads to more equal relationships, which Giddens refers to as “pure relationships” (Giddens, 1992; May, 2011a). Although western societies have relaxed their legislation and given spouses the right to decide whether to stay together or not, without explanations to others, external constrains do exist. Custody laws might keep partners together because both parties want to be full-time parents; the economic situation, proprietorships or social standing may hold spouses together; kin may do so as well. Freedom to choose is relative. We may even say that we have no choice but to choose, and sometimes we have only undesirable options to choose from.

The individualization thesis has been much criticized, both for its simplistic view of the past and for its tendency to exaggerate the emphasis on individual choice (Archer, 2007; Smart, 2007; see also Dawson, 2012). Although it is evident that people in western societies have more leeway in their lives than has been the case before, the traditional categories, institutions and norms have not become so weak and insignificant as the individualization thesis suggests. Traditional institutions such as marriage have not become meaningless. Most people marry, and an increasing number of people marry several times. If marriage was insignificant, we would not have heated debates about to whom the marriage is fitting nor would same-sex couples demand full marriage rights (see Oinonen, 2008).
When it comes to individual choice, the reality is that some have more leeway than others. As Bauman suggests, being an individual de jure does not guarantee individuality de facto. Thus individualization is an uneven ‘redistribution of freedoms’ (Dawson, 2012: 307). One’s class origin, gender, ethnicity and even religion still matter and influence one’s chances in life. Not all have monetary or other resources to be reflexive individuals free from social constrains. Portuguese academic women provide an illustration of stratification within individualization. Women are freed from traditional expectations and norms, as suggested by the individualization theorists, in the sense that they are able to pursue and create an academic career. But, contrary to the theorists’ claim, they are not freed from the traditional norms and routines associated with women. Most Portuguese academic women in Gina Gaio Santos and Regina Leite’s study (see Chapter 2) had difficulties in combining a career with family life precisely because they were expected to fulfil their traditional roles as caregivers and homemakers. Women who had established themselves in academia and had a steady and adequate income could pay for someone else to take over the household and care work at home while they chose to invest in their careers. Academic women who have fixed-term contracts and a low and erratic income cannot buy the freedom to choose. This is only one empirical example of how freedom is relative and stratification within individualization exists.

Despite its shortcomings, the theory of individualization or de-traditionalization has animated scientific and popular debate over families, intimacy and relationships. It has also generated a wide range of empirical research, which provides us with elements for understanding the mechanisms, processes and meanings of everyday and personal lives, and thus refines our theories (Smart, 2007).

Neil Gross (2005) provides one example of theory refinement. He agrees with the individualization theorists that ‘regulative traditions’ have declined. This means that people do not have to live in the traditional way. Regulative traditions are those that involve a threat of or actual exclusion from a (moral) community if an individual fails to act according to the ways regarded as important and proper. Related to intimacy and family, such a regulative tradition has been heterosexual, lifelong marriage, which certifiably has declined in all western societies (Gross, 2005: 288): nearly every second marriage ends in divorce (e.g. in Finland, Sweden
and the UK), and those remaining single are no longer punished by an elevated tax rate or a woman no longer has to marry a man in order to become a respectable mother.

However, a decline of traditions does not mean that unbounded individual agency has replaced traditions. In other words, ‘anything does not go’, because social action is shaped by ‘meaning-constitutive traditions’, which are patterns of sense-making passed down from one generation to the next (Gross, 2005: 288). Although a woman who decides to become a mother but not a wife is not a subject of equally intensive social sanctions as in the past, and we do nowadays recognize a variety of living arrangements as families, the image of (heterosexual) coupledom remains to function as a hegemonic ideal and basis for parenthood and family. Meaning-constitutive traditions shape social action, but differently from regulative traditions. They establish limits by constituting the actor as a being who understands and is oriented to the world in a particular way (Gross, 2005: 295–296). Gross emphasizes the importance of shared traditions, habits and habituality, and thus the individual does not appear as a free agent but is embedded in culture and history (see Smart, 2007: 19–20). Therefore, it is understandable why most women do marry the father of their child, even though they don’t have to. In fact, there is much empirical research showing how the majority of people have quite conventional dreams, hopes and expectations concerning intimacy and relationships, and most of us also arrange our lives in a quite conventional manner (e.g. Mary, 2012; Oinonen, 2004a).

Julia Brannen, Ann Mooney and Valerie Wigfall (Chapter 4) examine change and continuity in the practice of fatherhood across family generations. The socio-economic status may change, but certain values, such as a strong work ethic, are transferred from father to son. The transmission of a strong work ethic influences the time spent with the children, but not the second-generation men’s subjectivities as fathers. According to Brannen and others, most second-generation fathers regarded themselves as different from their fathers and more involved with their children. In other words, family generations coexist and are linked by intergenerational transmission, but they belong to a different historical era and thus to different historical generations (see Mannheim, 1952). Intergenerational transmission, like the ‘meaning-constitutive traditions’, influences the way in which we make sense of the world by providing us with norms, values, models of
behaviour and a sense of propriety, which we then (consciously and unconsciously) apply in ways we see suitable for our times.

Relatedness of personal

The concept ‘individual’ portrays people as autonomous, isolated and detached individuals (May, 2011a: 7). The concept ‘personal’ signals the fact that people are not isolated individuals but connected to others. According to Carol Smart (2007: 28), the ‘personal’ denotes an area of life that has a strong impact on and meaning to people but does not presume that it is an autonomous individual who makes free choices and exercises unimpeded agency. Therefore, personal life is premised on the idea that personal is always a part of social because the very possibility of a personal life is dependent on self-reflection and connectedness with others. In other words, “to have a personal life is to have agency and to make choices, but personhood implicit in the concept requires the presence of others to respond to and to contextualize those actions and choices. Personal life is reflexive state, but it is not private and it is lived out in relation to one’s class position, ethnicity, gender, etc.” (ibid.: 28).

It is not only other people that individuals are connected to but also social categories, structures and institutions. As Mills (2000: 10) said, to understand the changes of many personal milieux we are required to look beyond them. Our ‘personal milieux’ is shaped and conditioned by macro, meso and micro-level structures and actors such as economy, credit rating agencies, politics, international organizations, governments, labour markets, policies of all kinds (tax, health, housing, education, labour, welfare, etc.), media, norms, values, traditions, class, gender, ethnicity, religion, kin, family, friends and peers.

Berit Brandth and Grete Overrein study how farming men’s fathering practices have changed over the last generation in Norway and they show how changes in agricultural production and normative changes like emphasis on gender equality affect fathering (Chapter 5). Technological development and increased efficiency have turned farms into mills that have to produce large quantities at a fast pace. Unlike contemporary farmers’ childhoods, farms are no longer a suitable and safe place for children nor are there tasks that children used to do on farms. Besides,
contemporary farming fathers do not see the point in teaching the trade to their children. Furthermore, unlike 30–40 years ago, farming families are increasingly dependent on outside income and most farmers’ wives work outside the farm. Owing to structural and normative changes, farming men ‘do fatherhood’ differently than their fathers did (see Morgan, 1996). Farmers and their wives have to negotiate for child care arrangements and the fathers’ active participation is needed as the mothers work outside the farm and the children are no longer minded while working.

In their everyday lives, people are not always consciously aware of the social, cultural, legal, economic or political factors that frame their personal lives and affect their choices, nor does the term ‘personal life’ belong to their daily vocabulary. Nevertheless, personal life as a term is well suited to capture the contemporary reality of peoples’ lives. Unlike ‘the family’, which emphasises and gives priority to ties based on biology or marital bonds, personal life does not exclude any kind of living arrangements and life styles, be they families of choice, same-sex intimacies, reconfigured kinship formations, etc. Furthermore, the concept ‘personal life’ includes the idea of change and movement. Unlike the concept of the life course, which is widely employed in family studies and concentrates on the social dimensions of generational and cohort ageing, personal life captures a wider range of factors that change and shift people’s lives into new directions (May, 2011a, 2011c; Smart, 2007). For example, financial crisis, retrenchments of care services and benefits, unemployment, divorce or illness, among other things, can transform personal life, affecting income, housing and division of labour between partners, decisions concerning childbearing and general well-being, and shift people into completely new and different places, spaces and situations.

Portugal provides an example of how politics can redirect individuals’ lives. The Colonial War (1961–1974) had significant effects on Portuguese families, their intimate relationships and, particularly, women’s lives. Young men had to leave their country and family for years to fight in the African colonies. Many of them died or came back seriously injured. The war pushed women into the labour market in large numbers and shifted many of them into the role of main breadwinners in their families, and placed them in the public sphere unlike ever before. Male-dominated emigration enforced this shift. The history of the Colonial War and emigration are seen as the major reasons for the high female
full-time employment rate in today’s Portugal (Chapter 2; see also Costa Pinto, 2005).

Personal life is not placed in any specific domain but it is lived simultaneously in many different places and spaces (Smart, 2007: 29). Therefore, the concept personal life also has the potential to overcome the old sociological distinction between the private and public spheres, which has located family life as a distinct domain apart from other social spaces and structures. C. Wright Mills argued that the task of sociologists (and other social scientists) is to relate ‘private troubles’ to ‘public issues’. The articles in this book do just that as they examine how the social structures, norms and categories in different societies and times form the frameworks for individuals’ lives and how individuals live their lives and make their choices within these structures or frameworks.

In this book we reveal relatedness on several different levels. We show how things we tend to perceive as the most private, intimate and individual are in fact quite public, shared and influenced by other people, structures and cultures. One important aim of this book is to bring forth and discuss innovative ways to capture the relatedness of personal lives. To study personal life we need to be open to different sources of data. In this book, all the articles are based on qualitative data, but the range of that qualitative data is wide. Face-to-face interviews are perhaps the most common way for social scientists to collect qualitative data that is aimed at exploring an individual’s experiences (May, 2011b: 163). In two chapters, the one by Brannen and others (Chapter 4) and the other by Brandth and Overrein (Chapter 5), in-depth interviews have been the method used to get into different generations of fathers’ life course events and life stories, and to fathers’ experiences of fatherhood and fathering. Also Gina Gaio Santos and Regina Leite (Chapter 2) employ in-depth interviews, first to reach academic women’s experiences of their careers and support received from their partners, and second, to identify different discourses. Anna-Lena Almqvist and Lars Dahlgren (Chapter 3) use semi-structured interviews with fathers, mothers and representatives of employers, municipalities and the Social Insurance Agency in order to grasp a broad view of fathers’ motives for taking (or not taking) parental leave. The first chapter of the book is based on Aino Luotonin’s study, where she applies group discussions to reveal the strategies women plan to use to balance family and work when returning to work life after a leave period. Johanna Mykkänen and Marja Leena
Böök (Chapter 6) are interested in how children view their everyday lives and they experimented with the method of participatory photo narrative to capture the children’s point of view. Katja Repo (Chapter 7) uses theme interviews to study how mothers define a child and childhood when they justify their choice to stay at home after the parental leave period to care for their small children at home. To study personal life we do not always need to turn to people, but we can, for example, use quantitative data or different kinds of textual material. Chapter 8 is based on Anna Maria Ifland’s study, where she uses German and Norwegian political documents to analyze political arguments about how early child care should be organized.

In the literature concerning family, intimate relationships and parenthood, the topical issue for quite some time has been the so-called work-life balance, and so it is in this book as well. However, we provide fresh perspectives and viewpoints in order to study personal life from the angle of the work-life balance. Although research on fatherhood, caring and men’s views on the work-life balance is constantly increasing, the rural setting is largely missing. In this book we provide an insight into farming men’s ways to combine work, family and care duties, and also to changes in farming men’s fathering practices (Chapter 5). Many studies on fatherhood have focused on short-term or current experiences, yet an intergenerational focus to study fatherhood (Chapters 4 and 5) provides a deeper understanding of contemporary fatherhood. A long-term perspective reveals complexity, contradiction, change and nuance, both in fathering practices and experiences and in fatherhood as a concept, and, furthermore, it locates fathers, fathering and fatherhood in their proper historical and social contexts. In research concerning families and family life, everyday activities and emotions tend to be understudied. Children’s activities, emotions and experiences of everyday life, in particular, remain marginal in the research. In this book, children are considered agents in their own right and narrators of their own everyday lives (Chapter 6). Perhaps the majority of the studies on family, intimate relationships and parenthood, as well as the work-life balance, concentrate largely on women and female perspectives. This book makes no exception, although we have aimed at revealing the true complexity of the personal lives of women (Chapters 1 and 2 and also 3, 4 and 5).
In this book, the relatedness of personal becomes apparent on multiple levels. It becomes evident how politics and political debates, public policies, production structures, labour markets and their changes create the frame within which we live our lives and make our choices. We provide empirical evidence on how ethnic origin, class, gender and age continue to influence the degree of freedom of choice and one’s chances in life, both positively and negatively. The relatedness of personal to other people becomes quite evident too. Spousal support, or the lack of it, may have a significant impact on career advancement or the division of care leaves, and thus on the gendered division of labour in families and partnerships. It is not only the nearest and dearest that have a huge impact on one’s life but also employers, colleagues and friends. How we live our personal lives and what kinds of choices and decisions we make are also related to the norms, values and attitudes that tend to be transmitted from one generation to another, and which each individual has to negotiate and reflect upon in their personal lives.

References


I

VARIOUS ROLES OF WOMEN
Chapter 1
Mothers’ return to work: contradictions, negotiations and strategies

Introduction
To be able to participate fully in the work, and in the family life, and in the couple relationship. To have all those spheres of life somehow balanced and to feel myself well enough to act fully in all these fields.

This is how a Finnish mother of two described her feelings concerning her return to work from family leave. The quotation indicates that the mother wishes to have the most significant parts of her life in balance, even after returning to work. The citation has also provided this chapter with an inspiration: since the balance between different spheres of life is the ultimate goal, how do women plan to aspire to this balance when they return to work?

The objective of this chapter is to explore mothers’ return to work from family leave. The aim is to illuminate the contradictory nature of the return to
work by examining the strategies that women plan in order to return to work while successfully reconciling work and family life. As such, the chapter asks: Do women have contradicting aspirations concerning their return to work? What kind of strategies do women plan to use to resolve these contradictions and to create a balance between family life and work when returning? How are these strategies negotiated?

The chapter is based on a recent qualitative study that used group discussions with Finnish mothers planning to return to work as the data. First, I will present the context of the study by discussing the women’s labour market position, family leave system and its use in Finland, as well as the various themes that are central in making the decision about the return. After that I will move on to introduce the theoretical concepts that will be used as tools to analyse the women’s strategies and negotiations, as well as the data and methods applied in the analysis. The findings reveal the strategies that women negotiate with the aim of making a balanced return to work.

Work and family leave in Finland

Mothers in Finland have a wide range of options concerning childcare and labour market participation. The Finnish welfare state has a strong tradition of supporting the work-life balance in different ways. A universal right to family leave is one example. Another essential fact is the subjective right to day-care: all children under school age are guaranteed public day-care offered by the municipality. Thus parents have many possible ways in which to organize their family life, childcare and employment.

Finnish women have a strong involvement in working life, the proportion of women and men in the labour market being more or less the same. The proportion of highly educated women is even higher than the proportion of men (Statistics Finland, 2010). There is, however, another side to this picture. Women are actively in the labour market, but, at the same time, their participation is connected to the age of their children; 90% of mothers who have school-age children were employed while only 8% of mothers whose youngest child was under one year old were working (Statistics Finland, 2012).
What happens when a working woman has a baby? The Finnish system of family leave gives parents the opportunity to take care of the child until he or she is three years old, without losing their job. Family leave consists of maternity leave, paternity leave, and parental and care leave for either parent. The maternity leave lasts for four months and usually starts 30 days before the estimated date of birth. After maternal leave, the parental leave lasts for about six months; this can be taken by the mother or the father or divided between them. Paternity leave is nine weeks, of which three weeks can be taken at the same time as the mother is on leave. Paternity leave can also be divided into shorter periods. The compensation is income-related until the end of the parental leave, with a minimum-level benefit provided to those without income.¹

How do mothers use their rights to family leave? The length of the family leave usually varies from ten months to three years. In 2005, almost 90% of mothers took the whole parental leave until the child was about 10 months old and 87% of families took a period of childcare allowance after that – usually this means that the mother stays at home. The proportion of women who take a long leave is significant: in 2005, one in five families took the maximum period of childcare allowance – that is, until the child turned three years old (Salmi et al., 2009). Although the men’s proportion of parents who take parental leave and periods of care leave has increased, a long period of family leave remains a matter that mostly concerns women (Lammi-Taskula, 2007; Salmi et al., 2009). To summarize, Finnish women take quite long family leaves but when the children get older their participation in the labour market is remarkably high.

Return to work: interplay between various spheres of life

When a mother considers the return to work and its timing, she must reflect on various matters in her different spheres of life. Studies have shown that expected difficulties in balancing family and work in everyday life play a significant role in women’s willingness to return to work (e.g. Luoto et al., 2011; Kupiainen et al., 2007; Heimo and Nätkin, 2007). A strong commitment to work is one of the

¹ For more information on the Finnish family leave system and related benefits see www.kela.fi.
central reasons for returning to work, along with the financial motives (Luotonen, forthcoming). Returning to employment happens after a relatively long absence, and this causes difficulties at work for the returnee. Salmi et al. (2009: 75) noticed in their study that one-fourth of the mothers experienced a weakening of their professional skills during the family leave. Changes at the workplace were also common: almost half of the mothers reported changes in the organisation and 37% changes in their own tasks (Salmi et al., 2009: 73).

In international studies, the return to work often appears in a somewhat different context due to differences in national family policies. What many of these studies share, however, is the finding of women’s multiple preferences that they try to balance in different ways when returning to work. Singley and Hynes (2005) interviewed new parents about their decisions regarding participation in the labour market and the care of their child and found that the arrangements were often based on the idea of greater flexibility in the woman’s career. Other studies have also shown that gendered conceptions about employment, career, care and parenthood are connected to the parents’ choices (Duncan et al., 2003; Fagan and Press, 2008; Lammi-Taskula, 2007; Repo, 2004).

Along with practical arrangements in balancing family and work, another crucial issue is finding a job. This is significant among mothers considering their return from family leave: of those mothers who received a parental allowance in 2005, only 44% had an employment contract at that moment (Statistics Finland, 2010). As Hakovirta and Salin (2006) point out, a large proportion of mothers of young children are not in a preferred position in the labour market.

In addition to the question of finding employment immediately after a period of family leave, motherhood, and, in consequence, family leave, also have negative effects on employability and career development in the long term. Motherhood also has negative effects on women’s wages (Napari, 2007) and women’s opportunities for career development can be complicated by the general image of the mother as the children’s main caregiver (Lammi- Taskula and Salmi, 2005). Even women themselves consider motherhood a risk to their employability and career; in a survey carried out by The Family Federation, 40% of highly educated women thought that having a child would pose difficulties for their career (Miettinen and Rotkirch, 2008). These worries can be seen in the pattern of family leave take-up: very long family leaves are less common among the highly educated, or among
those who have high income or the highest positions in working life (Salmi et al., 2009).

It has been argued that the insecure position in working life has more effect on the decisions of highly educated women, while for women with a low level of education the family is often such a strong priority that they are more willing to take the risk of having a child (Käyhkö, 2006; Niemelä, 2005). According to Skeggs (1997), the ideals of life paths and motherhood are tied to age and class, and having a child at a time of insecurity is more acceptable among the less educated women. In the Finnish context, long leaves are quite common among mothers at all educational levels, and taking care leave after parental leave is almost a standard. However, the educational level and labour market opportunities intertwine with considerations of how everyday life after returning to work would be organised in a balanced way. Weighing up the pros and cons of returning to work or staying at home longer is an interplay between these aspects, which materialize in different ways in each individual’s situation. This chapter contributes to the discussion concerning the work-life balance and mothers’ employment by highlighting the problems, contradictions and strategies at a time of change: in the transition phase between family and work.

Theoretical framework: engagements, negotiations and strategies

In order to explore the contradictory nature of the return to work and the strategies for coping with it, it is necessary to examine the mothers’ relationship with work and home. I approach the relationship with work by introducing the concept of work engagement. The relationship between work and home is another important aspect and is examined with Hochschild’s (1997) ideas of change in the characteristics that define these two spheres of life. I will also clarify the way in which the concept of strategy is used in the analysis.

Women’s relationship with their work is central when analyzing the motivation to return and the possible contradictions arising from the combination of work and family. This can be examined using the concept of work engagement. Schaufeli et al. define it as a work-related state of mind characterized by vigour, dedication and
absorption. Engagement means a positive and fulfilling state that is not focused on any particular event, object or individual but is more persistent. Vigour, on the other hand, consists of high levels of energy when working, willingness to invest effort into the work and persistence when facing difficulties. Dedication is characterized by a sense of significance, inspiration, enthusiasm, pride and challenge (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Hakanen, 2005).

The concept of work engagement functions as a theoretical point of view in my analysis of mothers’ motives for returning to employment. Do mothers on family leave have jobs that offer them positive experiences that can be defined as work engagement? While they are not working during the family leave, does their work appear to them as having this kind of attraction? How is the possible experience of work engagement connected to the strategies in returning to work?

Hochschild (1997) argues that the spheres of home and work are intertwined and the characteristics that have traditionally defined the sphere of home have passed on to work. Work gives people a sense of self-fulfilment, of being capable, and of enjoying what they do. The same pattern shows vice versa: in the sphere of home and family, people’s actions and thinking are regulated by the ideal of efficiency. People also feel that they are respected and appreciated more at work than at home (Hochschild, 1997: 198–212). Hochschild’s ideas help to examine further the way in which women relate to their work: do those who feel more or less work engagement experience it as a counterbalance to their family life?

On the other hand, work and family have multiple meanings and the return to work, as I have discussed above, can be a complex and contradictory situation. Therefore, women’s relationship with family life at home should also be examined by focusing on the positive elements of that sphere of life – which, I assume, will be found, given the choices of care and work that women make. In fact, I will look at women’s relationship with home using the concept of work engagement. Does home offer women positive experiences that are similar to the characteristics of work engagement? Is taking care of a child during family leave fulfilling and meaningful, and do women feel inspired and dedicated when doing that? In other words, my analysis also explores the possible home engagement among mothers.

The plans to return to work can be assessed through different strategies that are made in negotiations. A strategy is here understood as a way of relating to the interplay between work and family from the point of view of resolving anticipated
conflicts between them. Strategies can lead to various concrete practices in everyday life after the return to work. A strategy can also be more of a discursive practice – rather than a concrete way of action – specifically constructed in the group discussion context. In my analysis I will pay attention to these two aspects of strategy.

Work-life balancing strategies have also been classified in other studies. For example, Forsberg (2009) found three strategies in his ethnographic study with Swedish families: delegating, alternating and multitasking. Wallin (2007) has also defined strategies in her discourse analytic study among Finnish care workers. The strategies in my study are not based on findings in other studies of work-life balance but are strongly based on the data. Whereas Forsberg (2009) mostly analyzed the strategies within the household from the point of view of sharing specific tasks, my analysis focuses on women’s relationship with their work and the various negotiations that are used in order to reconcile the conflicts that arise from contradicting interests, especially in the transition phase when returning to work.

Collecting and analysing group discussion data

The data for the study consists of 12 group discussions that took place between February and September of 2009 in the Tampere region in southern Finland. The data was gathered as part of a research project by The Finnish Institute of Occupational Health and The UKK Institute for Health Promotion. Each group included 2 to 6 participants; thus the total number of participants was 45. The participants for the groups were selected and recruited from among the survey respondents.²

The design of the group discussion is based on Barbour’s (2007) idea of focus groups: the participants in a group have a common feature, the effect of which is also analyzed. All of the participants were on family leave at the time of the interview and they had been in full or part-time employment before having

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² The survey was part of the intervention study *Impact of lifestyle modification on pregnant women’s workability, sickness absence and return to employment*, which was carried out by The UKK Institute of Health Promotion in 2008–2011 and funded by The Academy of Finland.
the (youngest) child. The participants were divided into groups based on three different criteria: either educational level, more than 38 years of age or having received intensified counselling on diet and physical activity during pregnancy.

A short questionnaire was filled out by the participants before the group discussion. This additional data was gathered in order to get background information that would be impossible to ask for specifically in the group discussions. The women’s ages varied between 23 and 41, most women being in their late twenties or early thirties, and they had a child of 4 to 13 months of age at the time of the interview. Half of the women had one child; one-third had two children. Seven women had three or four children. The majority of families were heterosexual nuclear families formed of a mother and a father (married or cohabiting) and a child or children, but three women also had children not living with them and four women had children from a previous relationship. No single mothers participated.

The women in the study had different educational backgrounds and professional positions, but in most cases had a job to return to after family leave. Half of the women had had a lower or upper tertiary education in a university, polytechnic or vocational college. Nineteen of the women had had an upper secondary school education and possibly some vocational education in addition to that. Three of the women had only had the comprehensive schooling. The majority of the women held a permanent job and two of them had a fixed-term job to return to, while two women were self-employed. Four of the women did not have a job at the time of the interview since three of them had had a fixed-term contract before the maternity leave and one had resigned during pregnancy. Thus there were a significant number of women who had a (usually permanent) job waiting for them.

The participants were also asked about the take-up of family leave and the planned timing of their return to work. This gave a more detailed picture of the length of the women’s leave periods, which turned out to vary considerably. Nearly half of the mothers planned to return to work when their child had reached one year but not yet 18 months. Among the other half of the mothers the planned return to work was either before their child’s first birthday or at some point before the third birthday. These plans fit well with the Finnish family leave system, which allows staying on leave until the child is three years old. There was no clear
connection between the anticipated length of the family leave and the mother’s education, profession or labour market position.

The analysis is based on the basic constructionist idea that the knowledge and meanings of ‘reality’ are produced in interaction. Individual experiences are also produced in the specific context of social interaction (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000: 31–32). In this study it is within the context of the group discussion where the meanings and experiences are constructed in interaction between the participants and between them and the moderator. Analyzing the group discussion data means paying special attention to the process by which the opinions and views are produced (Barbour, 2007). The individuals’ accounts of their experiences are constructed in a group context and are interpreted in alternative ways by the other participants. The participants agree on each other’s opinions, question them, and develop the ideas presented by the others. By doing that, they form collective or more individual accounts. Barbour (2007) asserts that it is important to focus both on the process of forming opinions and views in the interaction and the outcome of the process, at the same time including the individual accounts in the analysis.

All of the group discussion data was transcribed. The analysis proceeded by classifying - in other words, coding - quotations that were relevant from the point of view of the research questions. Following the ideas of grounded theory (see Strauss and Corbin, 1998), most categories were based on the themes emerging from the data. In subsequent rounds of coding the codes were based more on theoretical concepts. This phase of the analysis was guided by Layder’s (1998) adaptive theory. As a result, the analysis proceeded to a more abstract level of categorization (see Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

The citations from the group discussion are used in two ways. Short citations are used in the text, and in this case no information on the participant is given. Longer excerpts from the discussions will give the reader a wider picture of the interaction (see Barbour, 2007: 153). In these cases, name, number of children and profession are mentioned after the excerpt. All names have been changed and sometimes the specific profession has been replaced by the professional field in order to secure the anonymity of the participants.
Negotiating the return to work: three strategies

Next I present three different strategies that evidence the ways in which the mothers in the study plan to balance their family life after returning to employment. A smooth return is a strategy that means making use of the available practices, such as flexible working hours or shorter hours. Change of attitude is a wide mental strategy that helps to deal with new contradictions between work and family at the moment of return and also in the long term. Return on child’s terms is an alternative strategy that appears as a radical change of job or career plans and thus clearly differs from more standard ways of returning. These strategies are investigated by focusing on the negotiating process: who are the strategies negotiated with, how are they negotiated and what is the result of the negotiation process?

“A smooth return to work”: negotiating with the employer

The most worrying aspect of returning to work concerned the amount of work the women expected to have and its consequences for family life. For some women, the typical working day is hectic and busy, which creates stress during the day. For others, worries concerning work follow them after the working day and they feel constantly stressed because of it. In both cases, work was seen as a threat to family life and time devoted to the children. Also, many concrete problems in everyday practices were anticipated, such as a rush to be on time at the day-care centre in the afternoon to pick up the children, or conflicts at work when a child is ill and needs to be taken care of.

In most group discussions the participants shared the wish to make the transition phase easier and less demanding. A mother in a managerial position in insurance said that “it would be good to start kind of smoothly”. An accountant considered it ideal “to be able to get used to it by having a smaller amount of work and try how it goes”. This kind of smooth return was planned to happen by limiting the amount of work, working occasional shifts during the family leave, or returning to work part-time at first.

Working occasionally before the return to work was seen positively from the point of view of maintaining professional skills, staying in touch with the employer, adding to the family income and getting a little change to life at
home. A quotation from Jenni’s and Tarja’s discussion shows an example of these arrangements:

Jenni: [...] I think when you’re used to the home circles then it might be even harder to let it go and go back there [to work].
Tarja: I said to my boss that I want to do a few shifts in the summer just to make the return to work a bit more balanced.
Jenni: Yeah me too, when I met my boss a while ago I said that, because there’s always a Friday night shift that nobody wants and then there are expositions on weekends, so I said that I’ll do it, I’m a volunteer.
Tarja: Yeah exactly.
Jenni: So you get, and it’s not the money, after taxes you get a few dozens of euros, but because you get a little something to do for your brain.
(Jenni, cleaner, 1 child; Tarja, waitress, 2 children)

Tarja pointed out that there is always a lack of professional staff in the summer season, and Jenni had offered to work the shifts that are unpopular among her colleagues. In many cases, working occasionally during the family leave was considered to benefit the employer as well, so the arrangement was easily negotiated. Of course, this was not possible for many women, especially the highly educated professionals or those working in managerial positions.

Negotiating a smooth return with the employer means negotiating flexibility, whether it is flexible working hours, occasional shifts, shorter hours or distance work. In the case of Tarja and Jenni, the waitress and cleaner quoted above, the flexibility was presented as a win-win situation for both the employer and the employee. For most women, negotiating flexibility was a much more complicated task. For example, working part-time was often mentioned as an ideal way to return to work and reach work-family balance in the long term, but, at the same time, it was discussed as being quite far from the reality in Finnish working life. The parents of a small child have a legal right to partial care leave, which means working 80% of the weekly hours. The employer cannot refuse this unless it is impossible to reorganise the tasks. This possibility was discussed in a group of women with academic master’s degrees as follows:

Eija: It won’t work for me. I’ve been working in a managerial position, so I can’t.
Mirva: Yeah, yeah in many jobs I suppose you can’t, but on the other hand, in most jobs I think you can.
Mari: I’m also a manager and I’ve actually been thinking that in the autumn maybe [...] I’d like to do six hours a day.

 [...] 

Anne: But then there’s always somebody coming like, could you just check this, you don’t have to leave yet, don’t go just yet, just quickly check this and then it will be done.

Mari: That’s maybe the thing in my situation, to be able to say no, that now the working day is over, that’s the challenge for me. Earlier I used to be there at whatever times but now I’ll have to try so that when I put my child to bed it’s not the only time I see her.

(Anne, project manager in the technical field, 2 children; Eija, manager in the public sector, 2 children; Mirva, researcher, 4 children; Mari, expert in the agricultural field, 1 child)

While some women consider working 80% of the regular time an option that can be negotiated, some women are rather sceptical about it. Eija does not give another explanation for it being impossible in the managerial position. Anne, on the other hand, gives an example of the consequences of working a shorter day: a rather chaotic situation with pressures from colleagues. Responding to Anne’s talk, Mari further reflects this situation and concludes that the real challenge is “to be able to say no” – this refers to what I call negotiating strategy with oneself and will discuss further in this chapter.

Distant work was discussed as a solution to a specific problem: carrying on the work while being at home taking care of a sick child. Even if the parents have a right to some days off in order to take care of a sick child, this leave was going to be replaced by official or unofficial distance work by many women. This is in clear contradiction to the way in which childcare was usually discussed in the group discussions: as a demanding task that needed dedication and did not allow pursuing one’s own activities. One mother reflects this line of thought as follows:

A special feature that I’ve noticed in our field is that when they’re at home with a sick child, people feel very, too guilty about it. It’s like, yeah I’m available you can call me, I’ve got my computer on I can take care of it at home, it’s like that. Basically, most of the tasks that I have can be done anywhere, so then they really are done anywhere.

(Ulla, IT professional, 1 child)
Altogether, distance work and other flexible working arrangements appeared in the mothers’ talk as available practices (for many women, not all), and the more extensive use of them as a negotiable possibility to make their daily life easier. At the same time, the use of these flexible practices has quite the opposite function, as becomes evident in Ulla’s quotation above. The ambivalent nature of flexibility and a constant lack of time have been noticed by Johansen (2012) in her study of freelance workers who had to work hard to balance family and work, even if they could indeed organize their work flexibly.

Negotiations are also described from the point view of flexibility as a reciprocal practice. Mervi and Päivi construct a shared understanding of this in the following:

Mervi: Yeah I have the same feeling, I think I’ve always done my job well and I leave the office when it’s time. And I am flexible, I’m not a women of principle that I don’t work overtime, I do work overtime when it’s needed, and I can and I want to. But there must be an end to working overtime, I don’t carry it onwards for years, it has to be like this week or next week it’s busy, that’s okay.
Päivi: But then it also works the other way round […]
Mervi: Yeah.
Päivi: […] That if you’re flexible, your boss will be flexible too.
(Mervi, engineer, 3 children; Päivi, factory worker, 4 children)

Here Mervi and Päivi develop a strategy based on a logic that can be defined as a psychological contract: the employee expects from the employer the equivalent in exchange for his or her input (see Kinnunen et al., 2011). In the talk of mothers returning to work, the equivalent often means understanding and flexibility concerning the needs of the family. The employer is flexible as long as the employee is also flexible when needed. This interdependence adds to the satisfaction and motivation of the employee; Parzefall and Hakanen (2010) state that psychological contract fulfilment is positively associated with the commitment to work.

At the same time, mothers often mention having a bad conscience or feeling guilty about the consequences the needs as a mother have on their own work and, therefore, also for their work organization. Borrill and Kidd (1994) found that women who had recently become mothers felt indebted to their employers for letting them return to work at least partly on the mothers’ own terms, such as working part-time. For this reason, they considered it difficult to mention to their boss the new needs and preferences they had after having become a parent.
The same kind of logic can be seen in the mothers’ talk in the group discussions when it comes to practices such as flexible daily working hours, distance work and working overtime. Salmi and Lammi-Taskula (2011) have maintained that the mere existence of flexible practices at the workplace is not of help for parents, but the crucial point is whether the parents have real options in using them in a way that benefits their families. My analysis raises the question of whether flexible working arrangements are negotiated not only with the aim of making work-life balance easier to reach in everyday life but also in order to live up to the employer’s expectations, and, if this is not reached, to deal with one’s own feelings of guilt.

To sum up, negotiating with the employer often has the objective of making use of statutory rights such as partial care leave or of flexible practices that are basically available to all employees. Sometimes it means negotiating extra flexibility because of the needs of the family. In this respect, what is negotiated with the employer is a strategy for a work-life balance in everyday life with the aim of a smooth return. Flexible arrangements end up having another function as well: they serve as a mental and, in the group context, discursive strategy that helps mothers to fulfil the idea of a good employee, even when their work is disrupted by family responsibilities.

**Change of attitude: negotiating with oneself**

For most women, the positive experiences that work offers are one of the most decisive reasons for returning to work. For a dance teacher, “it’s a profession that is important to me, and when you get the feedback, it’s an important part of life after all”. A painter with one child says that she experiences “moments of succeeding when you see the result of your work every day; it’s nice”. A specialist nurse says that “I’ve always thought that I’m quite good at it” and “I just miss the feeling of being able to get a job done properly”. Having both a professional role and the role of mother was mentioned in several group discussions and described in a positive light, as the next quotation shows:

Venla: It [work] is just so different, as soon as you get home there’s another thing going on, so it does give you some sort of strength.
Suvi: Yeah I myself anyway like it so much. I feel that I get some kind of strength from it because it’s so different.
(Venla, stock worker, 2 children; Suvi, accountant, 3 children)
Thus work is a sphere that is completely different from home and offers possibilities of self-expression that are not possible at home where one is occupied with the children. Here the positive sides of work are constructed as a counterbalance to family life. According to Hochschild (1997), life at home is now characterized by routine and efficiency, while work offers more joy, experiences of succeeding and opportunities for self-fulfilment. The talk about work in the data follows this line of thought: work is seen as a place and sphere where women feel they are capable of having a task done, enjoying it and being appreciated for it.

The positive elements of work are being longed for while on family leave, away from working life. This is pointed out by Elina, an engineer and mother of two, who says that “I noticed that during this year there’s an interesting assignment [...] in a way I feel sorry about it, I’m going to miss it and someone else will take over my field of expertise”. This kind of talk of being left aside cannot be interpreted as a consequence of social exclusion by colleagues and boss, as one might think. It is rather a consequence of personal attitude towards work, a strong attachment that comes close to Schaufeli’s et al.’s (2002) concept of work engagement. Experiencing work engagement means feeling high levels of energy while working, inspiration, challenge and having a positive and fulfilling state. These definitions characterize the relationship with work among many women in the data – even during family leave mothers miss their work for these reasons.

The majority of the participants did not find home as stressful as was mentioned by Hochschild’s interviewees, but work did offer many of them a different kind of opportunity for self-fulfilment. The positive (as well as negative) experiences and feelings deriving from work, or, on the other hand, from the family, are connected to two different roles. It is – at least to some extent – the fact of having both work and family that functions as a resource for both spheres of life and adds to the mothers’ overall well-being. In their study among Finnish dentists, Hakanen et al. (2011) found that those who experience work engagement also experience more enrichment from work to family. Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson (2001) studied Swedish working mothers and found that work supported the mother’s well-being and, therefore, also the bond between the mother and the child and the child’s well-being. In this study, many mothers related to their work in a way that follows the definition of work engagement, and for them work was a resource for family life – in one mother’s words, it gave strength.
For many women, work is inspiring, rewarding and enjoyable. At the same time, it is demanding and there is too much of it, which leads to negotiating strategies for work-life balance at the workplace. When work is so much longed for, how can the work-life balance problems after the return to work be resolved?

Many mothers expressed the wish, or rather a strong need, to adopt new ways of working. The motive to make this change was fuelled by a change of attitude towards work. Behind this there was a wider change in values, as becomes evident in the following quotation:

Elina: [...] I used to give too much of myself to work.
Vilma: Yeah yeah.
Marika: And I was working in my free time and stuff like that, and then it became a job between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. after I had children.
Vilma: Yeah yeah. On the other hand it has helped me a lot, it’s hard to say what it felt like, but it was like work had clear boundaries, that now I’m at work [...] 
Elina: And the values change, children are more important and the family [...].
Vilma: Yeah right, exactly.
Elina: [...] and the work comes second after all.
Marika: Exactly.
Vilma: And then the fact that I didn’t have to worry about how the children were doing, my child was doing just fine at the day-care. And when I knew that he was fine, I was able to dedicate those eight hours to work and then that was it.
(Vilma, social worker, 2 children; Elina, engineer, 2 children; Marika, sales manager, 2 children)

These women have prior experience of returning to work after the family leave when they had had their first child. The work becomes less important while children and the family are the first priority. Although this is a clear change for many women and the need to adopt new practices of work-family balance is recognized, it is not simple to live out these changes. Instead, the choices are made in everyday life when making decisions about work and family. As Marika later points out: “I haven’t found a happy medium with myself, how to make it work out best”. This can be interpreted as indicating a struggle between conflicting interests: the family is more important, but the work is attractive as well. For some mothers, the new relationship with work does not easily turn into concrete practices but needs constant processing. It turns into a struggle between work
engagement and home engagement. Both the sphere of home and the sphere of work offer enjoyment, fulfilment and inspiration, and are seen as important parts of life. The new practices in order to balance work and life are not negotiated at the workplace or in the family. It is rather a question about solving contradicting aspirations by negotiating with oneself.

Figuring out a change of attitude towards work and negotiating with oneself also becomes crucial when living out the strategies that are negotiated with the employer. This can be recognized in the words of Tuuli and Emilia, two primary school teachers, whose work can be considered quite flexible but also requiring flexibility. Their working hours consist of the teaching performed daily at school and other work – a combination of planning, preparation and contacting the parents – done at home in the evenings and at weekends.

Tuuli: [...] I feel sort of light, I’m just here and there’s no stress, no stress about work at all.
Emilia: Yeah right it’s the nature of that work that there are a million things all the time, and oh the tests [...] 
Tuuli: Yeah they all need to be done.
Emilia: [...] need to be corrected and there’s that parent to call, and then there are those quarrels and this and that, it’s so [...] 
Tuuli: Yeah and then it might be that there’s a parent harassing you, above all [...] 
Emilia: Yeah right even that.
Tuuli: [...] it’s so stressful to have that pressure there all the time.
(Tuuli, primary school teacher, 1 child; Emilia, primary school teacher, 1 child)

In a teacher’s work, the pressure is caused by the accumulation of unfinished tasks, which is described as being typical of this kind of work. Emilia and Tuuli both said that before having a child they worked several hours at home after the teaching hours, sometimes preparing the lessons or receiving phone calls from resentful parents late in the evening. This follows the results of the Finnish quality of work life survey: teachers are among those professions that feel the most pressure in their work (Lehto and Sutela, 2008: 72). These two teachers both saw this way of working as impossible now that they were mothers and felt a need to create a boundary between working time and family time in order to save some time just for the family. In this situation, autonomy and flexibility were not a benefit for the
women themselves but ended up blurring the boundaries between working time and free time. Therefore, the solution was not to be negotiated with the employer but only with oneself.

Negotiating with oneself is actually a prerequisite for successfully negotiating with the employer. Limiting the amount of work, for example, by refusing extra hours or unpaid work at home in the evenings is planned, but being able to negotiate it and integrate it into everyday practices needs a firm belief in it being the priority. Thus these matters need to be negotiated first with oneself, by figuring out one’s own contradictory aspirations or resolving a struggle between work engagement and home engagement.

*The return on the child’s terms: negotiating (almost) only with oneself*

The change in the relationship with work and a fundamental change in values can lead to considering the return to work from a completely new point of view. In several group discussions there was talk about alternative ways of returning to paid employment after family leave. In my analysis, these negotiations lead to strategies of returning on the child’s terms. It is not a pure category with the thought that the other strategies do not take the child’s benefit into account. Instead, it is a strategy that has as the guiding principle the ideal of the child’s home care, and leads to a salient change in the actual participation in the labour market.

For some women, the strategy of making a radical change to their plans about labour market participation and career was connected to experienced stress at work. The previous experience of working life was seen as a threat to the mother’s own and the child’s well-being, as is described by one mother as follows:

I think that, already during the pregnancy when I was so stressed out that often the work problems just whirled on my mind in the evening, that I don’t think I can carry on this when I have a child. The children don’t deserve such a stressed mother, so that’s why I’ll probably try to look for another job or study something, and I’ll go back to my job only if I don’t have a choice.

(Heidi, manager in insurance, 1 child)

Heidi describes her work as extremely stressful. It interferes with her family life in such a heavy way that she does not feel that she has much choice: returning
to her job would terribly shake up her work-family balance. In her position, the consequences are rather extreme. What is seen as a good strategy is to resign from a managerial position and a permanent job that matches her education. However, she is not the only case among mothers making this kind of decision.

Another example is given by Tanja, an electrician and mother of one child, who says that “working as a salesperson in a grocery shop, I’ve given it serious consideration” because “it would give us flexibility in terms of not having to put our son into day-care”. She continues that this option would allow her “to get away from home, but I wouldn’t have to do it at the expense of my child’s well-being”. For Tanja, giving up her full-time permanent job and looking for part-time job where she would not use her professional skills is a tempting option. Her priority is to care for her son at home longer, with help from her partner and a new working arrangement. In the Finnish context this thinking can be connected to a familistic ideology based on the ideal of the mother’s full-time care and good parenting, which became dominant themes in the public debate about parenthood and families at the turn of the 21st century (Jallinoja 2006). Repo et al. (2010) also argue that the positive aspects of home care are strongly promoted in Finnish society.

These strategies are not negotiated with the employer. In the mothers’ talk, the decision to give up a job and change profession or look for a part-time job was made by themselves. It was not a result of unsuccessfully negotiating a smooth return with the employer, for example. In fact, no negotiations were going to be made with the employer. The women who talked about returning on the child’s terms were quite determined and ready for solutions that might seem radical.

Return on the child’s the terms is also planned by Johanna, but with different concrete solutions. As a small entrepreneur she has “no other options than to return” and that “we’ll take turns [with her partner] so that one of us is always at home”. In her family the solution is that the parents of the child alternate working in her business so that the child will not need day-care outside the home (and, apparently, that the business will survive and a living for the family will be made). This kind of alternating is one of the strategies that Forsberg (2009) found in his study with Swedish families with children. Working at different times is one of the more extreme forms of alternating, while taking turns in taking the child...
to day-care or performing housework are more common solutions both in my analysis and Forsberg’s study.

What is noticeable in Johanna’s case is the sharing of the caring responsibility between the parents: she later says that her partner would actually prefer to work in another field but that for the time being this was the best solution for the whole family. According to Närvi’s (2012) study among Finnish parents with small children, this is one of the rare compromises that fathers are willing to make - to work in a non-preferred profession or workplace because it is considered to benefit the family in one way or another. For Johanna, the return to work on the child’s terms is negotiated not only with herself but with her partner. She has no employer to negotiate with, but neither can she just decide what to do by herself – her partner’s contribution is crucial. This differs from the general role that fathers have in the group discussion talk: fathers’ compromises are rarely mentioned in the data and seem to be marginal.

Hakovirta (2008) has studied the labour market participation by single mothers and states that the choices about work and the care of the children are made in the context of responsibility for the child; all decisions are made after considering their consequences for the child’s well-being. In the same way, many mothers in this study reflected their decisions about returning to work first and foremost by assessing what kind of consequences they would have on their child’s everyday life. In this line of thought, returning to work and enrolling the child in day-care outside the home are viewed as opposite to well-being. In Tanja’s words, returning to her own job would mean returning “at the child’s expense”.

Repo (2010) named a pro home care discourse and protest against working life discourse in her analysis of Finnish home care allowance users. In my analysis, the strategy of returning to work on the child’s terms has features of both discourses in Repo’s study, even if the mothers in my data combine child’s home care with their return to work through different arrangements. However, in many group discussions the women spoke about the conditions at the workplace and the labour market in a quite critical manner, and plans about resigning from a permanent job because of the estimated work-life balance problems can also be interpreted as a strong protest against working life. It seems evident that the women making these choices are not strongly attracted by their work nor are they satisfied with their employer. There is no psychological contract fulfilment to keep them motivated
and committed to their work (see Parzefall and Hakanen, 2010). Instead, returning to work on the same conditions would just mean personal sacrifices.

Compared to the other two strategies identified in the analysis, there are two major differences in the attitudes and actions involved. The women negotiating a smooth return and, especially, those negotiating a change of attitude talk about constantly creating boundaries between work and family, which were both considered attractive and meaningful spheres of life. On the contrary, those who plan to return on the child’s terms do not experience a strong work engagement. The child’s home care is the first priority for them and the return to work is mostly motivated by financial reasons. The way in which the women planning to return on the child’s terms relate to their work and family is quite the opposite to Hochschild’s (1997) idea of people who enjoy work enormously, more than caring for their children and running the home routines. Even if the priorities are clear for these women, there are difficult decisions to be made: giving up a permanent job or looking for a job which does not offer prospects of professional development are hardly simple choices to make. Mostly, they are choices that are negotiated with oneself. The employer is simply absent in the building of these strategies. This is the other difference compared to the other two strategies. Whereas a smooth return to work and change of attitude needed negotiating both with herself and the employer, a return on the child’s terms is decisively a strategy a mother builds by herself, or, in some cases, with the support of her partner.

Discussion

The objective of this chapter was to examine the strategies that women on family leave plan in order to successfully return to work. The strategies were analyzed by examining the negotiations through which they were constructed, on the one hand with the employer, on the other hand with oneself and, to lesser extent, with the partner. The strategies can be seen as attempts to resolve the contradictions emerging from the conflicting interests and aspirations that women have in different spheres of life when planning the return to work.

At first glance, negotiating a strategy for a smooth return with the employer aimed at gaining more flexibility in order to make combining work and family
responsibilities easier. However, there are considerable problems in negotiating a truly smooth return. I argue that these strategies are, eventually, also adopted for two other objectives. First, they can be adopted to satisfy the demands of the employer – whether unspoken or not – and act according to an interpretation of reciprocal flexibility. Second, they can be adopted to live up to personal expectations of work as a fulfilling and inspiring sphere of life, while at the same time recognising the need to change the ways of working. In the former case, flexible practices are more of a benefit for the employer than for the employee, which has also been noticed in other studies (Salmi and Lammi-Taskula, 2011). In the latter case, various interests are closely intertwined, and from this contradiction emerges a personal struggle – even a dilemma – between work engagement and home engagement. In ideal cases, negotiating a smooth return benefits both the employer and the employee, and, indeed, increases the work engagement that many mothers experience (see Parzefall and Hakanen, 2010).

For many women, work means self-fulfilment, enjoyment and positive experiences that give energy for other spheres of life. Thus they can be said to experience work engagement even on family leave. Regardless of work, after becoming a mother most of these women considered the family their first priority and expressed the need to devote less time and personal resources to work. Although this was recognised, it was necessary to build a strategy by negotiating with oneself. To some extent, this had to be done before negotiating the strategies for smooth return with the employer. Negotiating with oneself was by no means an easy task for those who experienced work engagement. Instead, it was a long process that meant constantly rethinking personal values, making choices in daily life, postponing professional ambitions and dealing with feelings of resentment and disappointment when the work was carried on by someone else or the career opportunities slipped by during or after family leave. In this position, negotiating with the employer was a secondary concern; first, it was pivotal to negotiate a strategy with oneself by resolving personal conflicting interests.

For those who did not feel such a strong attachment to their work, the question of the return appeared somewhat less complex. These women aimed to extend the child’s home care period as long as possible and were ready to reorganise their work completely, e.g. to resign from a permanent job or to change profession. What would seem to be a huge personal sacrifice for women experiencing work
engagement is not considered a sacrifice by women who plan these career changes. For them, the real compromise would be to put their child in day-care too early or for too long days – definitions of “too early” or “too long” being very subjective. Negotiations with oneself are not centred on the contradiction of being attracted by work and home simultaneously, as is the case among the more work-oriented mothers. The bottom line is the objective of the child’s care, and the negotiations with oneself concern the possible solutions and the costs and consequences of these sometimes radical choices.

Many of the strategies I have classified in the analysis have very concrete outcomes, such as not working overtime or looking for a new job. However, it is impossible to examine the possible outcomes of the negotiations because they are done in advance, before the actual return to work. I argue that the most decisive power of the strategies is on the mental and personal level. Negotiating strategies function as a way of preparing oneself for the future transition from family leave to work. For most mothers, the return is a change that needs to reflect personal aspirations and even means a change in values, and this is negotiated with oneself. Workplaces or employers seem to offer only limited help for those planning to return from family leave. Considering the quite extensive policies to support the work-life balance in Finland, this is an interesting finding. On the other hand, for the women in this study, the focus was on resolving contradictions stemming from individual circumstances and aspirations, which partly explains the centrality of negotiating with oneself.

Two questions should be considered concerning the findings presented in this chapter. First, how well does the analysis catch the thoughts, plans and aspirations of the women who participated in the study? And second, what does the chapter tell about women returning to work in general? To answer the first question, a few remarks on the methods should be made. Negotiations are constructed not only mentally but also at the discursive level to great extent. Strategies are produced in the interaction process: the participants in a group discussion share similar views and develop each other’s ideas. In this sense, what I call negotiations with oneself do not actually take place purely with oneself but are an integral part of a group interaction context. The collective discourse and individual strategies intertwine and the two cannot (and need not) be thoroughly distinguished. The second question can be answered by looking at the data and its limitations. It is
important to note that the women who participated in the study had all been employed before having a child and the great majority had a permanent job. Thus the findings reflect the realities of women who have a relatively stable position in the labour market. The strategies are also negotiated in the context of Finnish working life, the day-care system, and conceptions about motherhood and care. Nevertheless, this chapter reveals contradictions and various strategies that can tell us something about women’s considerations about returning to work in different material realities.

Whether the mothers’ dreams of a balanced life come true or not will hopefully be examined by further research. However, I argue that mothers pursue a balanced life for themselves and for their families on multiple levels and by constructing strategies in the most significant spheres of life, sometimes making radical changes in their lives.

References


Chapter 2
Portuguese academic women’s experiences of combining work and family: a focus on spousal sources of support

Introduction

This chapter offers a cross-sectional view of Portuguese academic women’s careers and spousal support in different phases of their lives. Using this research approach we intend to advance our understanding of women’s career and life patterns as far as spousal support is concerned. The narratives of several academic women at different stages in their familial and professional careers are presented to illustrate how spousal sources of support, or the lack of, influence the balance between academic women’s career and family spheres.

Research on careers has become more diverse and has witnessed increasing complexity over recent decades. Arthur (2008) recognizes the need to take a pluralistic and interdisciplinary approach to the concept of career. Classical career theories have been blamed for neglecting the interaction between the work and...
non-work related aspects (Arthur, 2008; Sonnenfeld and Kotter, 1982) and the complexity of women’s lives (Gallos, 1989). The idea of an orderly and generally upward career is “really a product of industrialization and urbanization, along with the concomitant development and bureaucratization of occupational lines” argue Moen and Sweet (2004: 212). They suggest that a new perspective should take the career experiences of men and women into consideration, and bring the family factors to light. Examining women’s (and men’s) career experiences requires that their family responsibilities and their partners’ career patterns are taken into account. This is particularly important since double career couples have emerged as the most common type of family structure over the last few decades.

Moen and colleagues (Moen and Han, 2001; Moen and Sweet, 2004) adopt a life course perspective regarding work and family relationships. The life course can be described as a series of transitions and trajectories of roles that constitute people’s biographies over time. Adopting a life course framework in the study of professional careers means that careers are not regarded as individual or linear but extend beyond the occupational sphere into other aspects of life, such as family. According to this point of view, careers not only result from the individuals’ ability to shape their own path and personal choice but also from their interpersonal relationships (husbands/partners’ career experiences and choices, extended family and community ties), the personal meanings and values (identity) conferred on work and family, and the wider context (economic, historic, social, cultural and organizational) and constraints (Eaton and Bailyn, 2000).

The concept of spousal support, or lack of, is central to a better understanding of women’s career choices, opportunities and constraints. Despite the abundant research on spousal support, there is little descriptive qualitative research devoted to the issue, specifically relating to career trajectories. Empirical studies reveal that support from relevant others, called social support, plays a critical role in the articulation of work and family lives, and the building of careers (Steffy and Jones, 1988).

Drawing on 34 in-depth interviews with Portuguese female academics, married or cohabiting with a partner, and with or without children, this study explores the patterns of interdependency between women’s career experiences and the perceived support provided by their partners/husbands. The study intends to clarify the way in which women’s career experiences in academia are
shaped by their spousal/partner attitudes toward their careers. By identifying discourses from the narratives of these academic women we can highlight the advantages of having a supportive spouse/partner and the hindrances for those for whom spousal support is lacking or sparse. The research findings show that these academic women are distinctively disadvantaged in terms of reconciling life decisions (marrying and having children) with the requirements of a competitive academic career that demands full personal commitment. Our goals are twofold: i) to show how women’s career progression is facilitated or hindered by their spouses’ attitudes concerning their academic careers - in this regard, we present an inductive typology illustrative of four different discourses identified in the academic women’s narratives concerning the types of emotional and instrumental spousal support that they enjoy (or not); ii) to demonstrate that the types of support (emotional and instrumental) provided by the academic’s spouses greatly vary along the life cycle.

Before presenting a discussion of the findings and conclusions derived from the data analysis, we present a brief overview of the concept of social support, emphasizing the types of support and some dynamics of spousal relationships, and describe the specific context of Portuguese academia as well as the study method and design.

(Un)supportiveness towards women’s careers

Little is known about the factors outside of work that support or hinder women’s career progression, especially the social support provided by spouses/partners (Ezzedeen and Ritchey, 2008). Social support is a critical coping resource, and “it refers to everyday actions that convey care and concern” (Ezzedeen and Ritchey, 2008: 1109). Role demands and tensions are less likely to translate into work-life conflicts for individuals with social support. Thus, according to Graham et al. (2000), the struggle to manage the demanding roles of caring for the children and the household is mitigated by social support and spousal adjustment. Spousal support includes the amount of appreciation for a spouse’s personal and relationship goals, the amount of practical and emotional support for childcare responsibilities and housework, and the spouse’s willingness to listen when the other needs to talk
about problems (Ezzedeen and Ritchey, 2008; Gordon and Whelan-Berry, 2005; Janning, 2006; Rosenbluth et al., 1998; Thorstad et al., 2006; Wiesmann et al., 2008). Hence social support can take various forms: emotional, instrumental (or material), informational and evaluative (House, 1981).

In this regard, Ezzedeen and Ritchey (2008) make a more clear distinction between forms and types of spousal support, distinguishing between help with the household, with family members, emotional support, and esteem support and career assistance for the executive women they interviewed. According to the authors (Ezzedeen and Ritchey, 2008; Thorstad et al., 2006), a clear distinction between emotional and instrumental (practical) sources of support should be established. Emotional support includes spouses’ positive attitudes toward women’s work, such as mutual respect, taking an active interest in their wives’ work and/or feeling proud of their career achievements. Within the context of instrumental support – defined as help concerning childcare and domestic chores – the study by Thorstad et al. (2006) shows that marital relationships remain less evenly balanced. The authors underline the ‘mental labour’ undertaken by academic women regarding the planning and managing of a diverse array of domestic and childcare chores. Nevertheless, spouses’ sharing of domestic labour tends to progressively increase over time and a more egalitarian division of housework develops later in life as men progressively perform a larger proportion of the tasks, evidencing greater flexibility in the sharing of ‘mental labour’.

Gordon and Whelan-Berry (2005) offer a typology of spousal support for a group of mid-life professional women: (i) the uninvolved husbands, who were low on managing and doing family activities; (ii) the helpmate husbands, who were low on managing but high on doing family activities; (iii) the egalitarian husbands, who equally shared the managing and doing of household tasks with their wives; (iv) and finally, the coordinator husbands, who assumed the primary responsibility for managing the family activities, relying on their wives’ help in doing the related activities. In this study, a considerable number of men acted as helpmates and egalitarians for mid-life professional women later in their marital relationship, thus facilitating their career progression.

Concerning emotional sources of support, dual-career couples that share the same profession or work in the same professional field tend to talk about work related problems more easily (Janning, 2006). There is a mutual understanding
of spouses’ career demands and work requirements. In this study, instrumental support also emerges as one of the sources of support provided to couples working in the same organization (or professional field). The spouses actively cooperate in work assignments and also provide some career advisement. The feeling of empathy for each other’s work demands is regarded as a crucial source of support. Empathy is defined as placing oneself in the shoes of the other and therefore understanding that person’s situation.

Nevertheless, existing research demonstrates the asymmetries concerning social support and the importance attributed to it. For example, the findings of Aryee and Luk (1996) suggest that men receive more support than women. Interestingly, the authors also conclude that women give less importance to it, probably because they have traditionally been the sources of social support rather than the recipients. Therefore, the support-gap is a reality for a large number of women who continue reporting lower levels of spousal support than men (Ezzedeen and Ritchey, 2008).

A study conducted by Grant (2000) reveals that a considerable number of executive women were divorced because their spouse’s felt threatened by their career successes and accomplishments. The husbands’ resentments concerning their wives’ career accomplishments were related to a number of different reasons, such as: i) jealousy about the more diversified network of acquaintances that women gained through their professional relationships and the expanded interests acquired through work interactions; ii) the earning of higher salaries, and the power imbalance generated in the marital relationship; iii) the spouses’ negative feelings concerning women’s reduced investment in the roles of wife and mother, and their greater involvement in the pursuit of a career; iv) and finally, women executives’ higher demands regarding their spouses’ sharing of the childcare and housework tasks.

The pursuit of an academic career, as well as a managerial one, means working long hours in a competitive work context. In both worlds, career achievements tend to assume highly individualistic and meritocratic features. Despite the general belief that academic women possess a more family-friendly working environment and more work schedule flexibility than executive women, some recent studies in academia (Nikunen, 2011; Santos, 2011) show that spatial and temporal work flexibility generates pressures on women to work overtime and take work home in
order to compensate for the flexibility around family and personal time. Moreover, academic women face organizational and cultural barriers regarding career advancement that can have a negative impact on their husbands’ career support and family life. Many women in academia, as in other highly competitive working environments, are confronted with a male career pattern that considers working long hours and “presenteeism” as signs of organizational commitment (Cross and Linehan, 2008; Linehan et al., 2010; Santos and Cabral-Cardoso, 2008). Within this line of reasoning, it seems logical to expect that women academics might enjoy less support from their husbands/partners than their male counterparts receive from their wives.

The existing literature points to the lack of husbands'/partners’ instrumental support regarding housework and domestic responsibilities. In this regard, the gender perspective argues that the division of paid and unpaid work is not determined by economic principles but has a symbolic meaning, reflecting the power imbalance (and struggle) between the couple (Coltrane, 1989; Doucet, 2001; Kroska, 2004; West and Zimmerman, 1987). In fact, “economic theories have failed to explain why the gender-based division of labor is so persistent, even when women have the same educational level and earning capacity as their spouses” (Wiesmann et al., 2008: 343). The gendered division of housework plays a fundamental role in the maintenance of gendered identities, reinforcing the identity of women as the family caregivers and men’s identity as the family economic providers. The studies conducted by Doucet (2001), Arrighi and Maume (2000), and Brines (1994), for instance, show that both men and women try to legitimize their identities by acting according to traditional gender roles. In the study conducted by Brines (1994), women’s reduced economic dependency through earning a higher salary than their husband meant doing a higher portion of the housework. According to Brines (1994), the doing of a lesser portion of housework by men, even when unemployed, is a way of compensating for their inability to act as the family’s economic provider and to symbolically reinforce their masculinity. Women and men perform different tasks because such practices affirm and reproduce gendered selves. Doing specific household tasks provides the opportunity to demonstrate to oneself and to others that one is a competent member of a sex category with the desire and capacity to conform to specific gender behaviours and beliefs.
Studies conducted with academics and other highly qualified professionals show that although dual-career couples share household work more equitably than other couples, the gender imbalance still persists, with women performing the lion’s share of the domestic labour (Gordon and Whelan-Berry, 2005; Hochschild, 1989; O’Laughlin and Bischoff, 2005; Probert, 2005; Santos, 2011; Wiesmann et al., 2008). When men contribute, they generally assume performing isolated tasks with no immediate urgency (e.g., mowing the lawn) rather than daily and unavoidable tasks such as cooking and cleaning (Hochschild, 1989).

According to Cunningham (2007), the gendered division of housework changes over the course of life. He provides several instances in which a couple’s patterns of household allocation are influenced by several dimensions of the woman’s employment, such as current employment status and hours, and relative income, as well as employment histories. The results indicate that, according to those dimensions, the husband’s participation in routine housework changes over the course of the marriage.

Research also shows that fathers tend to participate more in childcare than in domestic tasks, but the support gap also extends to parental responsibilities (Bo, 2008; O’Laughlin and Bischoff, 2005; Renk et al., 2003). Renk et al. (2003) found that despite the increasing level of fathers’ participation in childcare activities, the traditional model concerning the division of parental responsibilities still persists. According to these authors, most mothers and fathers continue to hold traditional role values and attitudes. Women usually take responsibility for the most important tasks whereas men feel free to decide which childcare activities they are willing to perform, and most of them are leisure-related (Bryant and Zick, 1996). As a result, research indicates that the arrival of a child magnifies marital inequality (Wiesmann et al., 2008). Domestic and emotional ineptitude is an argument often invoked by men to minimize their contributions to childcare activities.

In sum, previous studies show that women’s career development is largely influenced by the sources of support, whether emotional or instrumental, provided (or not) by their spouses.
Academic careers and family life in the Portuguese context

Until the 1960s, the overriding influences of Catholicism and conservative ideology in Portuguese society were responsible for restricting women's functions to the roles of mother and wife, and disapproving of their participation in public life (André, 1996). In those days, emigration and the colonial war made the greatest contributions towards integrating women in the labour market. The colonial war that broke out in 1961 and ended with a military coup in 1974 significantly contributed to the disruption of family life and dissolution of intimate relationships (Nogueira et al., 1995). As a matter of fact, many young men had to leave the country and their families and go to fight in the African colonies for many years. Some of them never returned and others came back seriously injured. Such social phenomena prompted a massive female participation in paid work, since they had to replace their husbands as the breadwinners (Nogueira et al., 1995). The male-dominated emigration also had an important impact on the rural areas and the women who stayed behind assumed complete responsibility for managing both the family and the farm (André, 1996).

Additionally, significant changes in Portuguese society during the 1970s promoted new values, such as social fairness and equality, and new anti-discrimination attitudes and behaviours. The military coup that took place on 25th April 1974 restored democracy after decades of a dictatorship (from 1926 to 1974). This political revolution by the armed forces was accompanied by a social revolution of unprecedented proportions. In 1976, a new Constitution promoting equal rights for all individuals regardless of their gender, race, credo and other individual attributes was ratified by the Portuguese government. Such changes significantly improved the conditions in the labour market for women as they gained access to more opportunities in qualified jobs (Nogueira et al., 1995). Specifically, the new Constitution set the basis for legal and juridical equality between men and women by eradicating numerous social inequalities concerning women’s employment and promoting social fairness. By this time, the traditional values had been replaced by new sociocultural beliefs and models of behaviour, such as female emancipation and the democratization of education. The welfare and socialist state made it easier for women to raise and meet their familial obligations through the provision of external assistance structures. After the revolution, the trade unions reappeared and prompted some positive (e.g.
improvement in working conditions) and negative (e.g. increased instability in female employment) effects on women's employment (André, 1996).

Female participation in the labour market grew steadily during the 1980s and Portugal is presently one of the European countries with the highest rates of working women (CIG, 2009). Women's participation in the workforce in Portugal has increased significantly in almost all sectors, occupations, ranks and age groups, though occupational segregation remains unchallenged to some extent. In 2005, 77 per cent of Portuguese women who were mothers of children under the age of twelve participated in the labour market, a figure that compared with just about 56 per cent in Spanish society (CIG, 2009). These figures are partially explained by low salaries, limited social assistance from the State, and the need to contribute to the family budget in dual-career households.

Many studies have pointed out the influence of childcare arrangements and services as an instrumental aid to women's participation in paid employment, underscoring the constraints posed by the lack of such facilities. According to Chevalier and Viitanen (2002), the absence of childcare facilities tends to limit women's participation in the labour market. According to OECD statistics (EUROSTAT, 2009), childcare can be divided into formal care and other types of arrangements. In Portugal, when it comes to formal care for children from birth up to 2 years of age, 33 per cent tend to stay at centre-based services and day-care centres, and 75 per cent of children between 3 and 6 years of age go to kindergarten and nursery schools. As far as other types of arrangements are concerned, 42 per cent of the youngest children (0–2 years old) are cared for by a professional childminder or by grandparents and other household members, such as other relatives, friends or neighbours. The percentage of children between 3 and 6 years that benefit from these informal care arrangements is 31 per cent. A national survey conducted in 2004 (Torres et al., 2004) shows that the mother is still the primary caretaker while working professionally. In this regard, 30 per cent of children between 0 and 2 and 26 per cent between 0 and 10 years of age are cared for by the mother. According to the authors, there are two possible explanations for these results: the children stay home alone or they go to the workplace with their mothers. This study concludes that familial solutions, namely help from grandparents, still play a major role in childcare in Portugal.
Academic careers in Portugal follow the European pattern with limited tenured positions and predefined salaries according to rank, at least in the public universities. As described by Santiago and Carvalho (2008: 210), “academic credentials determine the passage from one level to another. For instance, one can be promoted from ‘trainee assistant’ to ‘assistant’ by getting a master’s degree and from ‘assistant’ to ‘auxiliary professor’ with a PhD. The promotion from ‘auxiliary professor’ (a non-tenured position in most cases) to ‘associate professor’ or ‘full professor’ (tenured positions) is dependent on the existence of a vacancy. At all levels, the professional roles imply teaching and research activities, and in most cases also administrative duties.” In 2009 (Decree Law 207, nº168 reference?), significant changes were introduced in the university career paths with the abolishing of the ranks of ‘trainee assistant’ and ‘assistant’. Candidates now applying to a university vacancy have to hold a PhD and the career ladder is confined to three categories: auxiliary professor, associate professor and full professor, with women concentrated more heavily at the level of auxiliary professor (CIG, 2009). At least in the Portuguese context, a growing portion of full-time academics are currently employed in positions that do not lead to a long-term appointment, and the traditional full-time permanent academic professor is becoming the exception (Santiago and Carvalho, 2008). According to these authors, the new public management logic that is now pervading Portuguese higher education institutions is resulting in more precarious job opportunities and the proletarisation of the academic profession. Tenure is regarded as too expensive and new career pathways, more flexible in terms of length of appointment, are becoming the rule. This trend is expected to affect women more than men since the lower academic ranks are mostly occupied by women.

Overall, women constituted 43 per cent of all Portuguese academics at the university level for the period 2006–2007, and 48 per cent of all doctorates in 2007 were women (CIG, 2009). However, some gender segregation remains with women less represented in fields like engineering. Additionally, a smaller percentage of women than men go abroad for PhD completion, which may be an indicator of less geographic mobility and more family responsibilities (CIG, 2009). In a study conducted in the mid-1990s, Amâncio and Ávila (1995) found that female academics were less likely to move for career advancement, they were less geographically mobile and more likely to be single or divorced, and childless.
In Portugal, childcare and domestic work remains women’s work. Despite the progress at the workforce level, the man’s low participation in domestic chores and childcare remains the norm at home (Torres, 2004). Women bear the burden of family responsibilities without the support of dedicated partners and in the absence of an adequate social infrastructure. Women in academia are also more burdened with childcare and family chores compared to men (Linehan et al., 2010; Probert, 2005; Santos, 2011). The study conducted by Santos (2011) shows that time has a gendered meaning since work flexibility is used differently by men and women. In the case of male academics, the schedule flexibility is not used to do more family work but translates into extra time to devote to work, while their female spouses/partners take over the main responsibility for managing the family work. The female academics, on the other hand, do not benefit from their husbands’ support regarding household chores and use the schedule flexibility to do more housework and childcare tasks.

Portuguese women’s rates of labour market participation along the life cycle are greatly determined by the age factor and the level of educational qualifications (Lopes and Perista, 1996). Women with the highest levels of academic qualifications, as well as those in the youngest age cohorts, participate in the labour market (both for intrinsic motivations and economic need) more actively than older and less educated women. The age and number of children does not seem to reduce Portuguese women’s participation in the labour market. Women with better career prospects are less likely to consider taking parental leave for long periods of time or to put their career on hold until the children grow older. In Portugal, one strategy for a work-life balance often adopted by highly educated women, as in the case of academics, is to delay having their first child (Torres, 2004; Santos and Cabral-Cardoso, 2008).

On the other hand, Wall and Guerreiro (2005) underline the fact that in Portugal, dual career couples have become the dominant family model and today’s professional women manage to combine a career and children using several coping strategies, such as help from relatives with childcare and specific domestic chores or the hiring of a housekeeper who is responsible for running the household. Wall and Guerreiro (2005) argue that the articulation between work and family in Portugal is characterized by a high degree of plasticity along the time and family life cycle, with multiple changes occurring within the household: the entry and
exit of family members that occasionally, or on a more permanent basis, help with household chores (teenage children and other relatives); the outsourcing of domestic chores from time to time or on a more continuous basis; the desire of older women to retire from work and to move back into the domestic space, thus implementing a more gendered division of domestic labour than at the start of their marriages; and, finally, for the younger generation of women, the existence of marital relationships more open to negotiation for a more equitable and cooperative division of domestic and family chores. On the whole, these life cycle trends point to a diversified and changing set of work-life conciliation strategies developed by women over time.

**Study design and method**

Thirty-four middle-class and heterosexual Portuguese female academics were interviewed in an attempt to understand how they experience the sources of support in their marital relationships. Their ages varied from 26 to 55 years, although most of them were situated in the 26 to 35 age bracket (15 women). Table 1 shows the women’s distribution by age and academic rank. The participants belonged to public universities across Portugal (although the majority were located in the north of the country). They were recruited for interviews through university listings of faculty members. In addition, a modified snowball strategy was used, in which the participants provided names of acquaintances that also met the criteria (being married or in a relationship). The women interviewed belonged to different scientific fields, including education, psychology, economics and management, biology and engineering. They were distributed along three career ranks, with a significant number holding junior positions at the level of assistant and auxiliary professor.
Table 1 – Academic women interviewed, distribution by age cohort and academic rank

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Rank</th>
<th>Age Cohort</th>
<th>26–35</th>
<th>36–45</th>
<th>46–55</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assistant</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auxiliary Professor</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The questions in the interview guide addressed the academic women’s experiences of emotional and instrumental support in their marital relationships. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and the content analyzed following the analytic procedures proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1998). Thematic categories were generated from both the data analysis and the literature review. The central themes included sources of instrumental support; sources of emotional support; gender ideology and spouses’/partners’ attitudes toward the career; and spouses’/partners’ career constraints. In the final step we created a typology of discourses based on the similarity between the thematic categories presented by each of the academic women interviewed, allowing us to distinguish between four discourses: 1) the competitive discourse around time and resource allocation; 2) the collaboration discourse within similar career trajectories; 3) the mutual respect discourse; 4) the adaptability discourse.

According to the social constructionist perspective (Burr 1995: 48), “a discourse refers to a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events”. We believe that a multitude of alternative versions of events are available through language. Thus a variety of different discourses may emerge, each one depicting a particular story about that event. There are different ways of representing the world and no single version is better or truer than another; they are merely pieces of a reality that is socially constructed and interpreted by each individual. Moreover, the dynamics of spousal support are subjective and symbolic, (Ezzedeen and Ritchey, 2008); thus this qualitative design is intended to offer insights that will help with illuminating subjective experiences and meanings concerning spousal support (or lack of).

Table 2 offers a synthesis of each discourse and its thematic characterization.
Table 2 – Women academics’ discourses: thematic characterization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competitive discourse</th>
<th>Collaboration discourse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Career and family life cycle stages</strong></td>
<td><strong>Career and family life cycle stages</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 women aged 34–40, mothers of young children;</td>
<td>8 women aged 44–53 (most of them were associate professors) and with older and more independent children (aged 10–26);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 women, aged 48–50, with non-dependent children (aged 16–26)</td>
<td>3 women aged 31–39. Two were mothers’ of young children and 1 was childless. Five women in this group were married to other academics.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Attitude toward spouses’ career:**
- Competitive
- Confrontational
- Adversative

**Attitude toward spouses’ career:**
- Reciprocity
- Solidarity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources of (un)supportiveness</th>
<th>Sources of (un)supportiveness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instrumental</strong></td>
<td>** Emotional**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Uninvolvement in housework</td>
<td>• Lack of understanding of academic career demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of cooperation in caring for children</td>
<td>• Devaluation of women’s career accomplishments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Criticism about women’s lack of ability to cope with multiple roles and poor organizing skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources of (un)supportiveness</th>
<th>Sources of (un)supportiveness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emotional</strong></td>
<td>** Emotional**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Encouragement and motivation provided by emotional stability</td>
<td>• To talk about work related issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To be a friend and attentive listener, ‘companionship’</td>
<td>• To be a friend and attentive listener, ‘companionship’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To feel proud of women’s career accomplishments</td>
<td>• To feel proud of women’s career accomplishments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual Respect discourse</td>
<td>Adaptability Discourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Career and family life cycle stages</strong></td>
<td><strong>Career and family life cycle stages</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 women aged 26–45 and childless; 1 woman who was a mother of a 16-year-old.</td>
<td>8 women aged 31–39, mothers of very young children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Attitude toward spouses’ career:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Attitude toward spouses’ career:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Non-interference</td>
<td>• Some level of understanding for spouses' career demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mutual respect and autonomy</td>
<td>• Non-interference, but within boundaries</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Sources of (un)supportiveness</strong></th>
<th><strong>Sources of (un)supportiveness</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instrumental</strong></td>
<td><strong>Instrumental</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sharing of housework chores and housework management</td>
<td>• Help with housework and childcare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Help with work related tasks</td>
<td>• No help with work related tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emotional</strong></td>
<td><strong>Emotional</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sharing of work related problems</td>
<td>• Sharing of work related problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Providing encouragement</td>
<td>• Providing encouragement, but within certain boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Minimal spouse interference in wife’s career investments/decisions</td>
<td>• No help with work related tasks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Women’s discourses on spousal (un)supportiveness

This section explores the four discourses based on the women’s narratives in detail. They are open discourses (social realities) in the sense that these academic women can be seen as travellers crossing each discourse in life changing events. The first discourse is focused on spousal competition and confrontation regarding women’s career development. In the second discourse women academics seem to navigate in a more ‘peaceful sea’ where spousal cooperation and mutual help prevail. The third discourse is marked by notions of spouses’ autonomy, independence and sense of self-preservation regarding women’s career endeavours. Finally, the fourth discourse is characterized by some ambivalence regarding the husbands’ or partners’ support. This group of women appear to be in a transition phase since their marital relationships may assume either a competitive or a collaborative nature. All names have been changed in order to ensure the interviewees’ anonymity.

The competitive discourse

The adversity in spousal relationships is more common among younger academics at the stage of career (and family life) establishment. The adversity and competitiveness attitude manifests itself in many ways, the most common being the husband’s lack of availability to perform a larger portion of the household chores, and his failure to fully appreciate the demands of the academic career. Indeed, a frequent reason for lack of marital satisfaction is related to the desire that the spouses work fewer hours and have more time available for family activities.

Sara’s case is a good example of this kind of discourse. She is an auxiliary professor in engineering. Her husband is also an engineer, holding a management position in a private company. Sara is 41 years of age and the mother of 2 young girls (6 and 3 years). She describes her relationship with her husband as marked by a constant battle for bits of time and space. She confesses to being in a phase of terrible distress and wear in the marital relationship because of the overload of work she has to endure given that family care is almost exclusively left to her. Sara describes her marital relationship and her husband’s professional activity as:

He works a lot. Right now he even works on Saturdays. So he always arrives home later than I do. Many times he doesn’t even have dinner with us and at
weekends, Saturdays, he also goes to work. He is also not available to stay with the girls so that I can go and do something. [...] For example, my husband calls me and says: “look, I can’t make it for dinner, I’ll be late”, and that’s that. He needs to work late so he works late, whereas we – women – don’t have that possibility. It’s more complicated, isn’t it? I do it very seldom, and when I do, it’s considered to be almost like a favour! It’s almost a favour! [...] It might help a bit if I had more support from him. If I could tell him, once in a while: “look, today I have to work late. I’ll have dinner here and then work until ten or eleven p.m.” I don’t get much support like that from him. On the other hand, I would feel kind of bad for not being able to be with them [the daughters] [...] I mean, I go abroad and I have to leave a kind of will [laughter] with all that has to be done, what the children must wear this day and that, and that. And a list of what has to go in each one’s backpack. [...] He didn’t want me to go abroad [for a month] for my PhD. And I was like “It has to be done and end of discussion!” I mean, there was a bit of a fight for me to be able to go. But ok, it was also a bit complicated because my younger daughter was six months old at the time. And Ok, I understand that it was a bit complicated for him. But it was very difficult to convince him that I really had to go. It was very difficult.

In spite of wishing for more active participation from her husband in sharing the care for the girls, some ambivalence can be observed in Sara’s discourse. She feels she does not get the kind of support she needs or desires from her husband in order to be able to go on with her work. However, she justifies that lack of support with the type of work her husband has, which is very demanding in terms of schedules, and his inability to alter the situation. By doing so, Sara excuses her husband’s lack of support with the household and childcare chores. Sara describes her spouse’s job as a much more demanding activity, or more susceptible to creating difficulties, than academic work. It seems that both Sara and her husband implicitly agree that his profession takes precedence over hers. Throughout this comparative process she ends up devaluing and depreciating her own professional career, even if not intentionally or consciously. At the same time, the lack of support in practical terms is intensified by constant criticism from her husband regarding Sara’s lack of time management skills in order to make herself more available for the family. Here’s how Sara describes the lack of emotional support:

He always says: “that’s not ok, the day should be enough for you to work”. He says that I shouldn’t take my work home with me. And I tell him: “well, you were working all day, you left late; you had more time to work than I did! I
had to take the children to kindergarten and had to pick them up”. “If there’s a problem with them, I have to take them to the doctor; I have to take care of them. I have to pick them up much earlier than you do”. So I’m not working those hours, right? And I need to work. I have things to do”. But he answers: “you should manage your time better! [laughter] That kind of thing, right? I don’t know, maybe I can’t manage time very well, I have no idea, I don’t know, compared to other people, I don’t know. I’m the kind of person that when I have a lot of things to do I get kind of stressed and have trouble managing things.

Sara’s discourse is therefore sprinkled with a feeling of powerlessness to change the unevenness she feels exists in the relationship with her spouse and her conviction that change and improving her objective condition depends solely on her. The solution to the power struggle between a couple is always outside the family nucleus and usually includes hiring a housemaid and/or getting some help from the extended family. However, by doing so, there is no real change to the practices of inequality between the couple.

Thus, in the discourse regarding the spousal competition for time and resource allocation there are frequent disputes about the heavy professional investment that is being made by one of them, and which career should take precedence. Sara’s narrative is consistent with the traditional attitude toward career precedence (Gordon and Whelan-Berry, 2005) since her husband’s career takes precedence over hers. She speaks of the absence of emotional support and overt conflict regarding the division of housework.

For the younger generation of women academics the division of domestic work is very problematic and a source of strain for the couple. Husbands often adopt reactive strategies to avoid doing more domestic work, arguing their ‘lack of natural aptitude’ for cooking or cleaning, while the partner, solely because she is a woman, has a ‘natural gift’ for that sort of work. Another common strategy described by the women is their husbands’ systematic lack of initiative to do housework. This means that they have to be constantly reminded of the work left undone, and do not voluntarily take responsibility for what needs to be done. The strategies of housework avoidance enacted by men are not new and can be found in other studies (Hochschild, 1989; Wiesmann et al., 2008) that also underline a husband’s lack of involvement in family activities. Such situations can act as a stressor for women, who get tired of always asking for help from their husbands.
This can be particularly significant since other studies demonstrate that women are more pleased with spousal support when there’s no need to ask for it (Ezzedeen and Ritchey, 2008).

The collaboration discourse
This kind of discourse is commonly found in women in a more advanced career stage (maintenance), mostly associate professors holding tenured positions or a few younger women whose spouses also work in academia or have equivalent professions. These couples tend to exhibit very similar career demands that seem to allow a better understanding of each others’ situations. Women in this group present a discourse marked by a certain tranquillity concerning the gender division of household and family-related chores. Interpretations thereof can be diverse. First, these women are at a stage of their life cycle where their children are older and therefore demand less care, so there are fewer family chores to perform. Second, these academics have developed a good organizational system for the home and family-related chores. Almost all have a housemaid every day, either full or part-time. At the same time, their husbands seem to perform a more significant portion of domestic chores than they used to at the beginning of the marriage. For the younger women in this group, the fact that their husband also works in academia seems to be a source of support in itself.

Caroline, 48 years of age, is an auxiliary professor (holding a tenured position) and the mother of two boys aged 10 and 15, whose husband works abroad in a European public organization. She describes a marital relationship in which the support blossomed with the career opportunities and constraints the couple faced over time. Here’s how Carolina describes a marital relationship that she believes to be characterized by reciprocity and mutual help:

I don’t think it was very difficult for my husband to accept my career. First, because it was something that was born with our marriage, as a couple, not after the ceremony. Second, maybe because of adequate management of our prerogatives and professional and marital strategies. We both strongly supported each other. I received a PhD, but we both did it. I had a lot of support from my husband. […] And later he had the opportunity to do research at his work but he had to take a PhD. Then we had to decide if it was worth it for both of us to have a PhD. It was obviously his choice because it was his PhD,
his career. However, it was somehow clear that it would be very difficult for both of us to be doing a PhD. It would be better if he chose another path in his career, and that’s what happened. I honestly don’t think it was a bad choice. I believe that the fact that I had a PhD was stimulating for my husband. [...] But now, the support is clear when he comes back from a conference and says that he met someone and told him or her that his wife is studying the literature of [name of the country] and people think it is rare and interesting. And he is not embarrassed by it. He is pleased to talk about it. So it is a point of contact with others for him. And I have also profited from it because I have had access to material that he would bring me. And at times he has stopped what he was doing to come and help me. At times that meant moving from one country to another because he was in a different country from the one in which I was working on my PhD. And that happened more than once.

Despite the solidarity that currently exists in Carolina’s spousal relationship, it is clear that she was concerned that her professional career did not overlap her husbands’ professional career in terms of social prestige or financial reward, fearing that it might shatter the balance achieved or fearing to break the social norm. In her story we can see that the support given to her career is the result of a progressive understanding with her husband. The growing of her professional identity was a gradual process in the relationship with her husband and marked by mutual concessions that took place over a period of time. In fact, Carolina ends up admitting that divorce was a hypothesis right after the marriage because she travelled abroad in order to follow her academic training and initially her husband did not react favourably:

I felt that there is no such thing, that archetype of the husband that holds everything together while the wife is abroad! I mean, in my husband’s case it was not just caring for the home while the wife went shopping. I was taking my PhD. It really was upholding our married life. He stayed in our home, in the apartment that we set up together to get married. And that situation, of the young professional in his early twenties, very much alone, and the story of the wife that is abroad studying creates a cynical and opportunistic solidarity that part of the population wants to console [laughter], and that’s when conflict begins. It’s a feeling of ill being. We almost divorced because those things got in the way. [...] But people measure their degree of social acceptance and male dominance in financial terms in societies, in jobs, in families, right? We did not have that kind of conflict in our relationship because he always earned more than me. But from the moment I became more senior in the university,
I knew it could become a problem. I never felt very encouraged to glorify my career. I always spoke of a job. I never spoke of an academic career, precisely so as not to create an element of differentiation that might change the more conventional way of looking at couples.

Carolina’s story reveals the importance of looking at careers from a life cycle perspective because relationships do evolve and change shape. Choosing a perspective of analysis along the life cycle (Moen and Han, 2001) allows us to understand how negotiation of the professional and family demands over time moulds the types of support received in marital relationships, as in this particular case. Carolina’s husband is currently the only parent taking care of the children because their careers do not allow them to share the same geographic space (they live in different countries). Even though the separation from the children is not being experienced peacefully, Carolina recognizes that her husband also has the right to share their children’s everyday lives, a thing that never happened before because they always lived with her on a permanent basis. Here’s how Carolina describes her husband’s participation in the care of their children:

There is always a phone call to mum during meals, when we talk about what we are eating, about work, about the children’s problems at school and preferences before they go to bed. With the whole living situation my husband is now assuming, he is aware that he is entitled to a mum diploma. All the responsibility that now lies on his shoulders for raising them alone entails a reshaping of his professional situation.

When asked about the process of dividing household and parenting tasks, this group of women typically stated that the daily dividing up of tasks evolved over time, sometimes through conflict and adjustment with their spouses. Several women were able to provide concrete examples of their husbands’ involvement in domestic tasks. Some stated that the task sharing was established after years of negotiating over the chores and overcoming gender stereotypes. Many husbands were involved in the cooking, grocery shopping and finances. The husbands’ willingness to participate was dependent on the timing of their respective career opportunities, constraints and choices, and changed depending on the circumstances at different phases of their lives. But it is emotional support that is most valued by these academic women.
These findings resemble the investigations into types of spousal support by Gordon and Whelan-Berry (2005), Janning (2006) and Thorstad et al. (2006). In these studies women also talked about their spouses’ flexibility evolving over time throughout the course of their marriages, with their husbands having to learn role flexibility since the way they were brought up was so different. An interesting finding in the research by Thorstad et al. (2006) was that women often described the evolution of this flexibility as requiring their husbands to move toward involvement in childcare and household tasks, as well as their flexibility in relinquishing control over these same issues. This seems to be the case in our study as well, as Carolina’s narrative demonstrates her willingness to put the parenting role on hold for a while. Thus the couple moved away from the traditional view that the household and childcare is solely the woman’s responsibility and the husband became willing to play an active role in the relationship.

Moreover, the small group of women whose husbands also worked in academia (in the same or a different institution) benefited from the close understanding of each other’s work. Therefore, much of the work regarding duties and activities did not need to be explained to spouses who were deeply entangled in that world. Besides understanding the demands and the tensions associated with academic work, there were significant professional synergies, such as the sharing of work-related information, cooperation in performing work assignments (in some circumstances substituting for the spouse in classes or writing an academic paper together) and helping with specific tasks. The following quote from an interview with a female assistant aged 31 years, married to another academic and mother of two young children is illustrative of this:

My husband has the same career as me, which allows us to understand each other’s difficulties very well. We know that the job demands can easily slip into the family time. And we are at ease with that. I imagine that if my husband had another profession, it would be more difficult to accept the fact that I always bring the books back with me when I come home from the university. [...] I was pregnant last year and my pregnancy required me to get bed rest for a couple of months, so I couldn’t teach the second term and my husband substituted for me. [...] And now, this year, I’m compensating him for that, so I’m teaching some of his classes this term, and I’m doing it on an informal basis [...]
Nevertheless, even in the case of collaborative couples, men do not spend a lot of time managing the household, they act more as helpmate husbands (Gordon and Whelan-Berry, 2005: 914), helping by “either doing the chores men typically do or by willingly doing whatever their wives ask them to do.”

The mutual respect discourse
The discourse marked by mutual respect mostly refers to married women with no children (and a young woman aged 32, who was the mother of a teenage girl), in a stage of career establishment (mostly in the lower ranks and non-tenured positions). For this small group of women the idea of having children (or a second child in the case of the woman who was already a mother) has been subordinated to career progression, namely finishing their PhD. Their marital relationship is therefore marked by a total respect for each other’s professional spaces, with as little interference as possible. Unlike the other groups of women, there is more independence and autonomy in the marital relationship in this group and the professional project is not negotiated within the couple but is thought out autonomously. That doesn’t mean that there are no forms of instrumental and emotional support in the relationship. There is, however, some detachment in the type of support provided, which is reflected, for example, in the effort to keep work and family separate. This means focusing and investing harder in their individual professional projects separately.

The account by Adriana, a 40-year-old assistant professor with no children, married to a military officer, illustrates this discourse:

My husband is a person very much interested in his own schooling. He has just enlisted in a master’s degree programme in the town in which he is working and has a post-graduate and even a second degree. He has two degrees. He is very interested in learning, so he likes to read. It’s not a problem for him to come with me and do something while I work. For example, he will go on-line to do some research or spend a whole afternoon in a bookstore. On that level, my interest in research or studying is not so much of a problem for him because he also likes to read. So he is not constantly demanding that I do very active things. But there have been other times, when I was doing my PhD, when it was more difficult because I was totally involved in my PhD, even on weekends, and we could do nothing during that period of time. […] Right now he also has to work a lot with information from the Internet and has to gather
information regarding the theatres of operations [military] that also takes up much of his time. Sometimes he brings work home on weekends too.

This is the group of women where it is possible to have more shared responsibilities concerning the doing and managing of housework chores, with husbands resembling the egalitarian ones described in the study by Gordon and Whelan-Berry (2005).

The adaptability discourse
This group comprises eight young women between the ages of 31 and 39 who, in most cases, have recently become mothers. Probably, as time unfolds, some of these women will be found in a competing or collaborating marital relationship, depending on the couples’ negotiations over which career should assume priority or which spouse should take more family and childcare responsibilities. The academics in this group are mothers of very young children and are, in some cases, adjusting to maternity. One important aspect is that these women are more heterogeneous concerning the types of emotional support they receive from their husbands than women in a situation of mutual respect and independence. Nevertheless, few of the women benefited from instrumental support regarding the management of domestic tasks. The discussion between the couple concerning the division of domestic and childcare tasks might present a rupture in the relationship in the near future. Overall, the marital relationship is characterized by emotional support and some level of understanding concerning the women’s career demands. Nevertheless, the spouse/partner non-interference in the women’s career investment is affected by some boundaries and restrictions due to the scarce instrumental support that is provided. The marital relationship is going through a metamorphosis process with adjustments to work and family investments by both spouses and attempts at mutual adaptability.

The experience portrayed by Sofia, 35 years of age, married to a lawyer and mother of a newborn daughter, is illustrative of the process of adaptability in the marital relationship. She describes her husband’s attitude toward her career as very supportive; nevertheless, she is the one that is scaling back on working hours in spite of feeling pressured to finish her PhD and secure her job at the university:
Sometimes there are conflicts with my husband because I feel tired and distressed with his inability to make our daughter sleep. And then she cries and I have to go and calm her and see that she sleeps. [...] It’s just that I’m feeling tired and sometimes I say to him: ‘I don’t understand why she only cries with you but not with me. So, it’s always me who has to go and take care of her!’ And that’s it! [...] Because I have the type of work where I have more schedule flexibility and I’m more available than my husband. He comes home every night around 9.30pm, so it’s not up to him to cook dinner! It wouldn’t be right to expect him to come home that late and still cook dinner for us, right? But my husband is perfectly autonomous! And I appreciate that very much. He is perfectly able to take care of himself. [...] If my husband was also a university professor, I think it would be easier for him to take care of my daughter. If that was the case, I think it would be easier for him to pick her up from kindergarten and bath her afterwards. But the way our lives are now organized, I think it would be unfair to ask more from him. Because I think he shares things with me and he still has to drive 50 kilometres back and forth to work every day and often there are traffic jams, and his work is much more demanding than mine. If I have a bad night of sleep, I can work less the next day; I can have an extra hour of sleep. I can leave work at the university and go home to get some sleep. And he cannot do that, right? Sometimes he also wakes up at night because my daughter is crying and the next day he leaves early for work. So, I find it fair for me to be the primary caregiver. But if I think too much about it, sometimes I do find it hard and unfair, to always be me, and I find myself thinking: ‘I wish I didn’t have to take care of her today and give her her daily bath [...]’, but then I realize that there is no other choice. I don’t have another option.

Discussion and conclusions

This study offers clear evidence supporting the fact that women’s career advancement is seriously hindered by their husbands’/partners’ negative attitudes concerning their wives’ careers. This is of particular importance for Portuguese women working in academia, where employment is becoming precarious as professionals are increasingly being employed under non-tenured contracts, and where the managerialist logic of increased academic performance heavily depends on research outcomes (publication outputs) as a requirement for holding a tenure-track position (Santiago and Carvalho, 2008). Most of our interviewees showing
discourses of competition or adaptability are not tenured-tracked academics and occupy relatively precarious employment contracts that might put them in a fragile situation.

Until recently, an academic career in Portugal had a prestigious and favourable status when compared to other careers in the public sector. Pursuing a job in academia meant stability and the possibility of spending the entire professional life within the same organization. The classic idea of the faculty member who holds a job for life is collapsing in the face of few full-time and permanent positions. In recent years we have been witnessing a “reduction of the terms and conditions of employment, as public higher education institutions are increasingly adopting a model of economic rationalism, ‘product-oriented’, individual productivity [... ] and flexibility resulting in loss of job security” (Santiago and Carvalho, 2008: 208).

Given our findings, academic women are possibly at a great disadvantage, despite the rhetoric of merit that now pervades Portuguese academia. Compared to men, women academics do not have the same sources of emotional and instrumental support for investing in their careers and combining professional and familial roles. As Nikunen (2011: 3) states, the “degree of support one receives from home and intimate relationships is also gendered [... ] and while the ideal of meritocracy rests on the idea that everyone is equal, in reality people do not have the same obligations or starting points”. In Nikunen’s study (2011), some of the women felt that reconciling work and family was a difficult endeavour and they seemed to be delaying their career aspirations in favour of their children. The same holds true for some of the academic women in our study, specifically those women with a competitive discourse who felt more hampered by the lack of any spousal support. For the time being, we can only anticipate how this will affect their future chances of getting a tenure-track position.

In the case of the women academics presenting a competitive discourse, hindrance relates to the lack of instrumental support concerning childcare and household tasks, but more importantly to the lack of emotional support. Both types of unsupportive behaviours seem to go hand in hand. For instance, the constant criticism from the husbands regarding their wives’ poor organizing skills relates to the fact that they are still responsible for the majority of the family work and do feel burdened and unable to respond to all role demands, as Sara’s discourse clearly illustrates. It is evident that these women do not have the same
ment and physical stamina to invest in their careers as their husbands do. Their career investments are curtailed by less time and less space available to devote to work tasks (less opportunity to travel and attend conferences and/or to work after hours). Furthermore, and most importantly, these women seem to be particularly dissatisfied and disenchanted with their husbands’ devaluation and lack of understanding for their career demands.

Thus women have to search for other sources of support, and they do it by relying on grandparents and other relatives for childcare and housekeeping schemes. In Portugal, among middle-class women, hiring a housekeeper or a cleaner is the most common solution to the lack of men’s involvement in non-paid work (Wall et al., 2001). Other studies also highlight the assistance from the extended family or outside care in childcare and household chores (Thornstad et al., 2006).

Overall, women academics in a competitive marital relationship tend to feel overwhelmed and look for a way out of the work-life conflict by: i) progressively investing less in their academic career, giving their husbands the career prominence; ii) pondering the option of marital breakup or divorce, refusing to stay in a relationship that only works out for one of the parties involved. In both cases, the woman’s career progression is delayed due to the emotional instability pervading the marital relationship.

In the collaboration discourse, the type of support most valued by these women is the emotional one. Their husband’s availability to listen to work problems and be a real companion, of feeling proud of his wife’s career successes, were types of support referred to by many academics belonging to this group. This kind of emotional support appears to be crucial for balancing the professional and family domains. Also relevant is the instrumental support concerning work tasks, especially for the minority of women academics whose husbands worked in academia and at the same workplace. Their spouses’ practical (instrumental) support in terms of offering technical assistance and giving professional advice was much appreciated by this group of academics. The emotional support (attentive listening and a supportive stance during stressful episodes) and esteem support (feeling proud of his wife’s accomplishments and showing appreciation for her work) were the behaviours most frequently alluded to by the women academics benefiting from spousal reciprocity and solidarity. In this regard, Carolina’s
accounts are very illustrative of the significant role played by her husband’s companionship and feelings of pride about her work. This is the kind of spousal relationship that provides women academics with a support system that enables them to maximize their professional goals and opportunities, and facilitates the articulation between the daily demands of the professional and family spheres.

Nevertheless, we must note that, for older academics, the marital relationship was not always a collaborative one and that some types of instrumental support (help with children and housework) had to be negotiated over time. Some older women recalled that even when their husbands helped at the beginning of the marriage, they acted as if they were helping their wives perform their jobs, rather than viewing housework as a joint responsibility. Thus the solidarity and companionship that characterizes these marriages had to be conquered through time and effort, and it seems that the husbands’ collaborative attitude grew progressively. This finding corroborates Cunningham’s (2007) results by confirming that couples make adjustments concerning the division of family activities in response to changes in the family and work circumstances over time.

The third discourse relates to marital relationships marked by mutual respect. These are the most egalitarian relationships concerning the sharing of doing and managing housework tasks (Gordon and Whelan-Berry, 2005). But emotional support also plays an important role in the relationship. Encouragement, the sharing of work-related problems and help with occasional work tasks are welcomed forms of support mentioned by the women in this group. A question remains concerning this group of women: will the supportive relationship change with the appearance of children and/or will the women remain childless as a lifestyle option?

Finally, in the adaptability discourse that characterizes mostly young women, the marriage/partnership may switch and assume a competitive or a collaborative nature over time. The mothers of young children in this group already seem to resent their husbands’ lesser involvement with the children and housework. Thus, in some cases, the attitude of non-interference is being interpreted as excessive detachment and lack of involvement on their husbands’ part. In most cases, the women do the majority of the domestic tasks (with the hiring of occasional help), and this poses a problem, especially for the mothers of very young children that feel overloaded and overwhelmed by pressure and time constraints.
This study goes beyond previous work on the interdependence of women’s career and sources of spousal support by focusing on different moments in these women’s lives. The career and life patterns described by the women interviewed are strongly influenced by the type and amount of support provided by their husbands/partners, and the husbands’ (un)supportive attitudes and behaviours that also vary in the different phases of the women’s family and career lives. Through the identified discourses it is possible to grasp the importance of spousal support and the interrelatedness of emotional and instrumental sources of support. The most striking finding of the study is that it provides evidence that the inequality in marital relationships strongly persists, and it does not seem to be diminishing across different generations of academic women.

This finding resembles the study by Wiesmann et al. (2008) that concludes that even couples who prefer to divide the work equally often end up following traditional patterns, which was also displayed by our study in the adaptability discourse that characterized academic women who had recently become mothers. If we compare the findings in our study with the broader picture of women, work and family in Europe (Drew et al., 1998), we not only find similarities but also differences between the Portuguese reality and other European countries regarding the strategies for reconciling family and career. As Mahon (1998) depicts for Irish women, in the higher grades of the Civil Service occupational structure it was common to delegate childcare to home helps or childminders who came to their homes to look after the children. Additionally, these women did not feel obligated to do domestic work because they hired external help. In our study, academic women also benefited from the help from a housekeeper to do the housework and their relatives to care for the children. Thus, in both countries, highly educated women are building their career advancement on external help, benefiting from the higher salaries that allow them to purchase domestic help. Paradoxically, this contributes to the reproduction of gender and class inequalities by ensuring that both social structures remain untouched (Drew et al., 1998). At the same time, Portuguese women do not consider the option of working part-time when their children are young, as happens with Dutch women (Veenis, 1998). At least for Portuguese academic women, the option of working less when children arrive is not seriously considered. Instead, as strategies for reconciliation between family and career, highly educated women consider postponing having children,
or having a single child, or even remaining childless, which helps to explain why Portugal today presents one of the lowest birth rates in all European countries (CIG, 2009). Studies conducted in Europe (Drew et al., 1998) seem to converge in one central point: the caring and family tasks are primarily seen as being the responsibility of the mothers, and for the fathers the priority is given to work and career. And this seems to hold true in the present times, at least in the Portuguese context.

Hence the younger generation of women academics do not enjoy more egalitarian marital relationships, as could be expected. In fact, the most egalitarian and collaborative relationships were found amongst the older academics, or amongst the small group of women who were childless and had less need for instrumental support concerning non-paid work. They were also the women that benefited more from diverse forms of emotional support. A significant number of academic women of the younger generation that displayed competitive discourses and adaptability discourses still endured unsupportive attitudes and behaviours in their marital relationships, to a large extent lacking any type of instrumental or emotional support from their husbands, both in the family and the professional sphere. These women still live in a world where marital relationships are not partnerships of true equals, making the reconciling of family and working life a demanding enterprise.

References


II

MEN IN TRANSITION
Chapter 3
Swedish fathers’ motives for parental leave take-up in different scenarios

Introduction

The Swedish paid parental leave is one of the most generous in the world, particularly in supporting fathers’ leave take-up (Haas, 2003). However, in spite of this policy, it is often considered more advantageous for the family if the mother takes the majority of the leave. Thus, in practice, the care of small children is still largely the woman’s task. Even if fathers have increased their use of parental leave, their take-up is slightly less than one-fourth of the total annual number of parental leave days (Swedish Social Insurance Agency, 2012a). Couples often refer to problematic employers as well as difficult family economics when discussing...
why the father has a low parental leave take-up (Almqvist, 2008; Seward et al., 2006).

Motives tend to be generated by opinions anchored in moral as well as traditional values, which makes it relevant to study changes in the norms and values in society. Other influencing factors are related to practical circumstances, like work situations. More specifically, the aim is to probe men’s and women’s patterns of behaviour and decisions in connection with the taking of paid parental leave. The intention is also to study influencing factors in the negotiations on parental leave between men and women. The research questions are: 1) What different and similar motives are there between fathers with a low and fathers with a high take-up of paid parental leave?, and 2) What are the parents’ opinions on parental leave? Since it has been hard to find studies that explore the differences in motives related to the lengths of parental leave, our aim is to contribute to the knowledge related to this variation. In this chapter we will give a brief outline of the Swedish parental leave policy and related research. After that follows a description of our study design, including the data collection and the interplay between the data and the theory in the form of an analytic frame. The chapter ends with the findings and a discussion.

Fathers and parental leave

Policies affect fathers’ decisions concerning childcare, but the reasons why fathers do or do not choose to stay at home are also related to a number of individual and structural factors. Common motives are fathers’ working careers, household economics, mother’s preference and various practical arguments, like breast-feeding, as well as how men and care is viewed by significant others. The use of parental leave has been widely researched from various angles of gender equality and masculinities (see e.g. Almqvist, 2008; Haas and Hwang, 2009; Kaufman et al., 2010; O’Brien, 2009; Pleck, 2010).

Doucet (2006: 152–153) found that men’s friendships with other men are not as extensive as women’s are, which created reluctance to stay at home on leave. Studies from the UK (Plantin et al., 2003; Sunderland, 2000, 2006) indicated that mothers were primarily seen as the main parent and the father more of a
part-time helper in the background. In another UK study, Miller (2010) found that fathers experienced a duality: they were expected to be the main providers but, at the same time, they were aware of the new policies in terms of parental leave possibilities and the discourse on involved fatherhood. Canadian-Belgian research indicated that the most frequent motives for stay-at-home fathers were the partner’s financially and/or professionally rewarding employment position and the partner’s encouragement in sharing the domestic work (Doucet and Merla, 2007). The importance of the mother’s view was also found in an American study: fathers were more likely to take leave when they or their partner had egalitarian gender beliefs and mothers thought that work and children could be equally important for women as for men (Seward et. al., 2006). These findings were supported by Finnish research (Lammi-Taskula, 2007) showing that mothers with a higher education more strongly emphasized the importance of sharing the childcare responsibility between the parents, and, in addition, their partners more often used parental leave. Bygren and Duvander (2006) found in a Swedish study that the father’s work place situation was more important than the mother’s for the division of parental leave.

Looking more closely at the Nordic countries, a father may share a certain period of parental leave with the child’s mother in all of them (Lammi-Taskula, 2007). Findings from these countries show the importance of stable Welfare State regulations to sustain the work-life balance (Leitner and Wroblewski, 2006). In the 1980s, the emphasis on men in the work for gender equality became much stronger in the Nordic countries (Lammi-Taskula, 2007). In 1993, Norway was the first country in the world to introduce the father’s quota. But even so, there might be ambivalences in policy directions. Politics has not stressed the importance of mothers being gainfully employed as well as the importance of early childhood education to the same extent as has been the case in Sweden and Denmark. Norwegian parental leave is more traditionally divided into short leave for fathers and long leave for mothers. This creates doubts as to whether it really is promoting gender equality (Brandth and Kvande, 2009). In Denmark the father’s quota was implemented in 1998, but the two weeks were abolished in 2002 with the argument that it was the parents and not the State that should decide about the leave use (Eydal and Rostgaard, 2011). The focus on men in the Nordic gender equality discourse was one of the reasons for the introduction of parental leave in
Iceland. In 2000 there was an implementation of 3 months for each parent and three months to share, a total of 9 months. As a result, Icelandic men have the longest father’s leave quota in the world (Einarsdóttir and Pétursdóttir, 2009). In Finland, a bonus leave was implemented in 2003. In 2007, this bonus period (2 + 2 weeks) – now called “father’s month” – was made more flexible and with a higher economic incentive (Lammi-Taskula and Takala, 2009). Further, in Finland generally, the dual earner family is highly supported by both men and women, but there is a stronger determination towards father care in Sweden, Norway and Iceland (Lammi-Taskula, 2007). Fathers in these countries use a larger share of the total days of parental benefit than fathers in Denmark and Finland (Eydal and Rostgaard, 2011).

Earlier research found patriarchal patterns embedded in legislation for leave of absence due to childcare in the Nordic countries (Kaul, 1991). Later findings from Norway indicated that since the 1980s, at least the representation of the father has changed from being more focused on mothers’ primacy to the father as someone who is supposed to take parental leave and participate in the daily care of the child (Annfelt, 2008). Even if gender equality has become more prominent on the political agenda, it does not comprise the whole picture. Research on the political debate about Norwegian father’s quota and breast-feeding exemplifies that mothers’ primacy is still strongly argued for (Brandth and Kvande, 2009; Ellingsæter, 2012). Finnish research showed that motherhood in the expert discourse is perceived as more of a duty, while fatherhood is something personal that he may choose, and the mother should not really steer these decisions in any particular direction (Vuori, 2009).

In Sweden, several policy measures have been implemented to enable parents to reconcile work and family, and to encourage gender equality in the care of young children. Opportunities to work part-time until the child is eight years old and expanded child care possibilities are examples of these policy measures. It is primarily the parental leave system that allows parents to combine child care with paid work when it concerns very young children up to the age of one year, when they have the right to start preschool. The Swedish parental leave system stands out as generous and flexible, and as one that acknowledges the fathers’ role as caregivers (Ray et al., 2010).
The policy logic is that the responsibility for care and work should be shared equally. On many occasions in the 1990s and early 2000s, father’s leave has been promoted through national as well as regional information campaigns to encourage shared responsibility for the children (Almqvist et al., 2011; Johansson and Klinth, 2008). Thus there is a fairly strong discourse of gender equality in official policy, meaning that policy implementations encourage women and men to both participate in gainful employment and share in the housework and care of the children (Klinth and Johansson, 2010). Both parents are entitled to paid parental leave and to work part-time, but how they share the parental leave is up to them to decide. After the child is born, the fathers are entitled to 10 days of temporary parental benefit – paternity leave – to be used while the mother is at home. It is taken up by the majority of fathers. There is also temporary parental benefit, which can be used when children aged 12 or under are ill.

This study focuses on the parental benefit, which includes 480 days of paid parental leave. It may be used either part-time or full-time until the child is 8 years old. The majority of days are used during the child’s first two years. As the first country in the world, Swedish paid parental leave became shareable between the parents in 1974. The earnings-related benefit was 90% of previous income, a level that decreased to the present level of 80% in the 1990s. The first non-transferable month was introduced in 1995, followed by a second in 2002, with the purpose of putting pressure on employers and to encourage fathers to take leave. The so-called father’s quota is lost if not used; the two months cannot be transferred to the mother. In other words, if the family decides not to use the non-transferable months, it also loses a relatively long period of paid parental leave. By 2011, fathers’ take-up had increased to 23.7% of the total number of days used, compared with 12.4% in 2000 (Swedish Social Insurance Agency, 2010; 2012a).

From 2002, benefits during 390 of the 480 days are income-related. Lost income is compensated at the rate of 80% for 390 days, applying a ceiling of SEK 440,000, slightly more than € 52,000, to yearly income in 2012. The remaining 90 days are paid at a minimum level of SEK 180, around € 21 per day (currency calculated 30 September, 2012; Swedish Social Insurance Agency, 2012b).
Data and method

The data comprises 32 semi-structured interviews with cohabiting or married heterosexual fathers and mothers. The role of the mothers is to exemplify both their own choices as well as their opinions about the way the fathers have or have not used the leave. In addition, 20 interviews were carried out with key respondents, such as Human Resource (HR) managers at companies with male-dominated staff and professionals working within the municipalities, as well as representatives from the Swedish Social Insurance Agency and staff working with maternity health care. The key respondents’ interviews contribute to a broader view on fathers’ parental leave as they have a wider perspective in terms of both time and experience of encounters with parents.

The data collection took place in two counties, Västerbotten and Skåne. Västerbotten, in northern Sweden, represents the county with the highest figure for the total number of parental leave days (24.3%) used for fathers. Skåne, in southern Sweden, represents the opposite with the lowest number of parental leave days used by fathers (18.7%). These levels have remained relatively stable over the last decade. A municipality in which fathers had used comparatively few days and one in which fathers had used a lot of days were chosen in each county. In Västerbotten, the municipalities were Lycksele and Umeå, and in Skåne, Tomelilla and Lund (Swedish Social Insurance Agency, 2010). Lycksele and Tomelilla are fairly small rural municipalities with around 12,000 inhabitants while Umeå and Lund are larger, urban municipalities with around 110,000 inhabitants. The bigger municipalities have a younger and more educated population than the smaller ones (Statistics Sweden, 2008a, 2008b, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2010d).

In 2008, 32 parents were interviewed – 4 cohabiting or married couples in each municipality. Amongst the chosen couples in each municipality there were two couples at the lower income level – one where the father had a low parental leave take-up, less than 30 days, and one with a high take-up, more than 100 days. This was mirrored by two couples at the higher income level. We wanted to look for other motives for the division of parental leave than the often argued household economy. Therefore, parents with a similar intra-couple income were chosen. We chose first-time fathers as they would not have made their leave decision based on previous experiences. Furthermore, the empirical material consisted of 20 key respondents, who were interviewed during the same period. Mothers varied
from 25 to 40 years of age and fathers from 25 to 38 years of age. An educational level of three or more years at university was the case amongst 15 of the 32 respondents. They were working in such professions as teachers, civil servants, carpenters, salespersons and nurses. High levels of education were dominant in the big municipalities, with its highest level in Lund in Skåne. Men’s high take of parental leave varied from 103 to 242 days and men’s low take varied from 10 to 35 days. Five interviews with key respondents consisting of HR representatives in companies and the municipalities, staff in maternity care and employees from the Swedish Social Insurance Agency were also made in each municipality.

The interviews were semi-structured and lasted about an hour. The couples were interviewed separately, usually in their homes. The interviews with the key respondents were intended to reflect their views on changes in parental leave take-up amongst fathers over time and regulations and norms at the work place concerning this when relevant. Transcriptions were made verbatim afterwards.3

In our analysis we have chosen the classic pentad of Burke (1945) to structure our presentation of findings. After that we have performed a more theoretical coding of data guided by a frame presented by Shweder (2003). This implies dialectic moves between theoretical pre-understanding and openness in the interpretations and analysis, a methodology that has become more and more common, especially within grounded theory (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2006; Clarke, 2005). In this study we have set out from a semantic research programme, which is characterized by attempts to construct concepts and theoretical ideas that help to understand what’s going on in people’s everyday lives (Abbott 2004). An early predecessor for this line of thinking was Burke (1945, 1962), who described motives for human behaviour with help of his so-called “pentad”. Burke presented

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3 This study’s trustworthiness is based on the qualitative criteria of credibility, transferability and dependability (Dahlgren et al., 2007). Credibility has been improved through crystallization, where different theoretical and empirical perspectives have been mirrored (Richardson, 2003), as well as by peer debriefing, when colleagues have been invited to comment on our text. The first author’s prolonged engagement in the field has been an advantage in this respect. Primarily, the first author has worked with the coding and the second author has read and discussed the findings. Transferability has been enhanced through analytic generalization, attempting to generate concepts and hypothetical reasoning, typical for grounded theory. Dependability is difficult to guarantee in a qualitative study, but we have followed Geertz’ advice (1973) to improve it by presenting thick descriptions of the methods used.
five aspects of relevance for motivation; the scene, the act, the purpose, the agency and the actors. For Burke, norms are crucial and his dramaturgic view gives space to vivid descriptions and analysis. As was mentioned above, we will use Burke’s analytic frame to structure the presentation of the findings that will follow.

In the second stage, our analysis has been guided by Shweder’s (2003) comparisons between three types of ethics: autonomy, community and divinity (see also Vaisey, 2009). Ethics of autonomy relies on regulative concepts like harm, rights and justice. This entails distribution of rewards and privileges as well as punishment. Moreover, this type of ethics relates to a person’s rights and entitlements. Ethics of community, by contrast, aims to protect the moral integrity of the various roles that constitute a society. It relies on concepts such as duty, hierarchy and interdependency, and refers to role obligations within the family and society. Ethics of divinity relies on concepts like sacred order, sanctity and tradition, as well as on issues about not violating the “natural” order and religious authority. Culture and customs are important aspects here. Related to our data, autonomy is about personally evaluated consequences of parental leave choices – in our case, for example, feelings of justice and gender equality. Community is about response and influence from significant others in the social environment; supportive or critical of fathers’ take-up of parental leave. Divinity is characterized by traditional norms prescribing that childcare is more or less a mission for women; the natural order, possibly given by God. We have looked for changes in motives related to these ethics concerning issues of parental leave for fathers.

To sum up, the data was coded in two steps following grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1979). First, it was coded openly and then systematically with the purpose of finding categories that could help us explain and deepen the understanding of parental leave. Three generated categories were used to structure the findings and all three proved to be very well adapted to three of Burke’s aspects of relevance for motivation. We compared the statements throughout the analysis to find patterns and variations. We also bore in mind the analytic frame when coding the material. Thus our categories were both theoretically and empirically generated.
Fathers’ motivational aspects on parental leave

In the following we will focus on the motives as to why the couples have divided the parental leave in the way they have. As was mentioned above, the findings are structured in accordance with Burke’s pentad. On a time axis, the open coding of the data comes first and the interpretation with help from this choice of analytic frame comes next. We are using three of Burke’s motivational aspects – the purpose, the actors and the scene – primarily with the aim of identifying the motives for choices and actions, given the specific situation. The first relates to our empirically generated category; the choice to stay at home on leave with the child. This category primarily connects to the aspect Burke labels “the purpose” and tries to answer the question “why” from the parental perspective. The first aspect helps us understand the data indicating the parents’ motive images. Burke’s second motivational aspect relates to our category the importance of the social environment, focusing on important “actors” for fathers as well as mothers when deciding about the leave take-up. This aspect guides our interpretations of the interplay between the relevant actors and their influence on the decisions regarding parental leave. The key respondents’ statements have been used to elaborate on this aspect to give both a deeper and a broader perspective. Burke’s third aspect relates to our category the general situation, focusing on situations regarding “the scene”. This reflects the parents’ thoughts on how the parental leave has worked out, and what they think about the leave and the social norms related to it. This is vital for future decisions about leave take-up. Differences and similarities within and between the cases are taken into account. There proved to be a wide variation in motives, but even if it is a complex matter, there are visible patterns.

The choice to stay at home on leave with the child – “the purpose”

The fathers’ motives for why they remained on a long leave were found on a spectrum from fathers not really expressing their own purpose for using the leave to fathers saying that it was self-evident that they should share the parental leave and that they had really been looking forward to it. This first position could be exemplified by a father from Tomelilla in Skåne, who expressed, although pretty vaguely, that it was because his daughter should get the same contact with him as with her mother. He said: “It was the contact. We found it important that she
should learn to know me as much [as her mother]”. In this case, the mother was really emphasizing that the father should use the long leave, largely based on her professional experience as preschool teacher:

Partly it was that we felt and I wanted that he should be on leave because I work [in this field] myself and I see that in certain families the father seems to know nothing [about the child], and she is as much his child as she is mine.

After having given the motives for his use of the leave, she continued with her arguments for starting work: “I started to feel lonely, I didn’t meet people. From having had a fairly social job where I met parents, I didn’t have a driving licence and we lived a bit outside the village. I needed the social activities.” Thus it could be interpreted that he had been acting primarily based on the ethics of community, being concerned about what was expected from him by the mother in terms of role obligations. Her statement could be interpreted as an expression of the ethics of autonomy, referring to gender equality. At the other end of the spectrum was a man from Lund, who was in his forties when becoming a first-time father. He reported: “For me, it has always been self-evident to share it [the parental leave] and I believe this has been the case for Karin [the mother] as well. Karin has been more eager than me to make a career […] For me, work goes without saying, it’s no one else who pays for my living”. This latter position could be interpreted as the ethics of autonomy, expressing a wish to stay on leave. The ethics of autonomy was a more visible pattern in urban than rural municipalities.

The fathers primarily expressed their own interests and development when explaining why they had used a long leave. One father from Västerbotten, where men have a high take-up, mentioned that he primarily choose a long leave for his own development. He said: “We have friends who have chosen both ways, when the father hasn’t stayed at home at all and when the father has shared it. Then I felt that I’m a person that wants to share it, and I wanted to test this. I personally feel that there are different father roles to take here. So I can’t say that it has really anything to do with Sara [his daughter]”, thus also relating to the ethics of autonomy, focusing on his own entitlements. This type of autonomy was most frequent among Västerbotten respondents compared with Skåne ones. A difference is noticed when talking about experiences from the leave. To a much higher extent after than before the leave, the fathers referred to how the child now has a good relationship with both parents and can call for the father as well
as the mother, which is not always the case with their friends’ children, where the mother has been the one using the parental leave.

The importance of the social environment – “the actors”

One major pattern was the importance of the men’s social network. An Umeå father with a high take-up said: “The employer is positive and all dads use a lot [of parental leave] around here.” Apart from the employer, he refers to a network of men in the neighbourhood who also use the parental leave. He thus refers to external factors, not really expressing his own wish. When using Shweder’s typology, this could relate to the ethics of community, being influenced by how the men in the neighbourhood were acting in terms of leave take-up. Fathers who had been on leave also expressed the importance of meeting other men in the same situation, and this had not always been the case. There was a clear difference between men and women in how they experienced the access to a network for everyday support in being home with children. The lack of this support was more clearly expressed in the low take-up municipalities of Lycksele and Tomelilla. The fathers felt that the mothers had many more friends and significant others around in the caring situation, while they themselves tended to be pretty much on their own with the child.

Another major pattern was that regardless of whether the father had a high or low take-up of leave, the mother was in most cases the primary concern in the decision-making process. In no couple had the father strongly argued for staying at home or used the time more or less against the mother’s wishes, thus creating a conflict. Some mothers even explicitly expressed this wish, like in this Umeå couple where the father had stayed at home for a longer period of time. The mother reported: “Eleven months [her take-up] is quite ideal and then I wanted Per [the father] to stay at home”, thus indicating that the mother still had a strong decision-making power when it comes to parental leave (see also Doucet and Merla, 2007). One interpretation is that they followed the traditional pattern of mothers being seen as the primary caregiver (see e.g. Doucet, 2006). In terms of ethics, this could relate to a divine aspect, being the natural order. Furthermore, community ethics is also an aspect, with men assuming the roles they are expected to take. Breastfeeding was an important practical as well as an emotional argument reported by
both fathers and mothers as to why the mother had stayed at home during the first period, at least six months in most cases. Some mothers perceived it as “natural” and “self-evident” to stay at home for all or at least the majority of the parental leave period. The ethics of divinity could be one interpretation. This was a more visible pattern in families where the father had a low take-up.

Other reasons that mothers gave for fathers not staying at home was that he had important business contacts that he could not be away from. One woman in Tomelilla, in Skåne, where the men had used little leave reported: “He surely would have liked to stay at home, but his job [...]”. She referred to him having difficulties being away from work. He never mentioned a preference for using the leave, with the argument that he would be restless. He prioritized workmates not staying at home with children, thus possibly acting from the ethics of autonomy. Her statement could be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, she was aware of the idea of gender equality related to fathers’ leave take-up. She wanted to justify that they had not really lived according to this. Secondly, she justified herself using most of the leave, possibly being aware of the gender equality discourse in this case too. These interpretations could relate to the ethics of community in that her reasoning is related to societal expectations versus the choices they had made as a couple. The notion of the mother as the primary caregiver was expressed in another way by this mother in Lycksele, where the fathers had a high take-up: “I admit that I have to work, otherwise I will climb up the walls [...]. But of course, it’s really nice to stay at home as well, as long as you feel that you can give everything”. It seemed as though the mothers who still used the majority of the leave excused themselves when explaining their wish to work. In other words, there seems to be a discrepancy between the ethics of divinity and autonomy. This is not at all to the same extent for the fathers; even if they had used very few days of leave, hardly anyone excused their choice, only referring to difficulties being away from work. A strong tendency amongst the fathers who had stayed at home for a longer period of time was that the mothers highly valued working or studying. This was often mentioned by both in the couple. All the men who had a high take-up had had the women’s support. This was similar in Västerbotten and Skåne. In terms of ethics, this could relate to community from the fathers’ point of view, making a role adaptation. For the mothers, the ethics of autonomy might be a manifestation of their work ethics.
The important factors in the fathers’ decisions about leave-taking were not just the networks and the mothers. The employment situation was of great significance, and this worked in two ways. The fathers were influenced by the employers’ and workmates’ attitudes to leave-taking. But even in cases when significant others at work were positive, the fathers could feel a very strong loyalty towards their colleagues, which prevented them from using the leave or at least being away for a longer period of time. The fathers had met differing attitudes when discussing parental leave with the employers. Men working for employers with an explicit gender equality goal met positive attitudes. The least positive attitudes were met by fathers working in particularly male-dominated areas, such as technology and the construction industry. A strong pattern amongst fathers with a high take-up was a positive, or at least accepting, employer. Amongst all but one of the men who had stayed at home for a long leave, the employers had had a positive attitude.

Loyalty towards the employer was, not surprisingly, most strongly expressed by the fathers who used a short leave. It was often reported in terms of the father having the right to the leave, as expressed by the employers, but it was not really encouraged. As one father who had been on a short leave in Tomelilla in Skåne, where men has a low take-up, expressed: “You could maybe feel that you’re not always that popular when you come and ask for parental leave, it depends on how much we have to do at work [...]”. For all fathers, regardless of leave take-up, this loyalty seemed to be fairly important. On the question about shortening the working days due to long travel hours, the previously quoted father continued: “Yes, but he [the employer] wants us to be there eight hours per day”, thus expressing how the employer’s preference is more highly valued than his own entitlements, which could be interpreted as a sign of community ethics – the father is responding to the hierarchy at the work place. Fathers, to a much higher extent than mothers, mentioned various sorts of work-related aspects as to why they had chosen the parental leave in the way they had (Bygren and Duvander, 2006). In this respect, the fathers seemed to be more affected by the ethics of community, in terms of more or less manifest work-related expectations from employers as well as colleagues, than the mothers. Factors mentioned were practical difficulties within the team, where they were only two and there was a need to socialize with colleagues. This loyalty was reported by another Tomelilla man with a low take-up:
since I’m the head of the working team, I’m thinking a lot about that. When Sandra was born, I stayed at home for one week, and then, five or six weeks later, was on leave for one week, since I didn’t have the peace of mind to stay away from the work place for a fortnight, that was too long.

The importance of not letting colleagues down by staying at home was an important factor, as can be seen in the above quotation. To broaden the parents’ views, we will follow with findings from the interviews with different key respondents. There has been an increase in men’s use of paid parental leave during the last five years at the two companies in Tomelilla. Most fathers use the 10 days of paternity leave, and they also use some days during their vacation time, in the summer in particular. It is a little complicated if someone has to be replaced at one of the companies in Umeå since the work is organized in three shifts. A request to work for 75% of the time is also somewhat complicated since it is expensive to bring in extra staff for the production line and hardly anyone works part-time. Although parental leave might formally be an accepted policy at the company, the key respondent reported that the staff might feel a fairly strong loyalty, knowing the complications with leave, both financially as well as the difficulties finding suitable persons, which was also mentioned by fathers using little leave. Thus this is not encouraging as regards men’s leave taking. At the other Umeå company the administrators were taking longer periods – up to six months. The employees involved in the direct production took longer holidays in the form of a few weeks of parental leave. The key respondent had noticed a slight increase in fathers’ outtake each year; there are more days used and more consecutive days. He noted:

It’s not a macho culture anymore; the lights aren’t on as long as they used to be in the offices [...] more executives are taking leave, which may be because they are younger.

The key respondents’ statements indicated that fathers taking parental leave was generally accepted, but not really encouraged. It was rare that someone was denied parental leave if the application had arrived in time; this means at least two months in advance. But formal policy and attitudes do not always go together. Men working in the public sector stated that they had met a positive attitude from the employer about leave taking to a higher extent than men in the private sector. One father from Umeå with a high take-up, working as a civil servant, referred to a municipal policy including support for men’s parental leave use. Several of our
key respondents stated that fathers employed by the State, the municipality or the county council, as well as by large companies, had a situation where it was easier to take parental leave. It was more difficult in smaller companies, for example those with only one or two employees. It may also be difficult to be away for a long period, such as six months. Another problem was that it was more difficult to be replaced higher up in the work hierarchy and replacements were not normally made in those cases.

In one of the larger municipalities, Lund, the key respondent from the municipality reported that the authority never argued about parental leave, but fathers’ take-up was not really encouraged. On the other hand, in Tomelilla in Skåne, one of the smaller municipalities with a low leave take-up, where fathers use little leave, the municipal key respondent reported that it was not altogether accepted for fathers to be on parental leave. It became difficult to find a replacement in areas with only one person. Other colleagues might not always be so positive since they would then need to do more work. Older male colleagues seemed to have more difficulties in understanding the younger ones’ wish to take leave. Overall, it was stated that there is an acceptance from the employer and colleagues to be able to reconcile work and family. A plausible explanation is that there are many women employed in the municipal care sector. Studies have indicated that it is common to refer the distribution of parental leave to the financial power resources in the family (Swedish Social Insurance Board, 2003); the man works since he earns the most and the woman stays at home and uses the major part of the parental leave. Amongst these couples, the individual earnings did not seem to play a vital role when it came to dividing the parental leave. The primary reason for this is probably the fact that the couples were chosen based on an equal salary.

The general situation – “the scene”

The couples were asked how they would organize parental leave for a possible future child. Since the men were first-time fathers, the decision about parental leave was not grounded in previous personal experiences. A very clear pattern was that both mothers and fathers expressed strong satisfaction with how they had initially divided the leave, regardless of whether they had used a short or long leave. A wish for change was more strongly expressed by the women, who would like
to start work earlier next time. Women further expressed that the father should stay at home for a longer period. There were no particular differences between either Västerbotten or Skåne, or the rural and urban municipalities in relation to this issue. Apart from the importance of the mother, the work place, friends and family, the fathers’ attitudes to parental leave is relevant for future choices. In terms of opinions about the parental benefit, the results indicated a relatively large coherence between the couples in the four municipalities. A pattern amongst our respondents was that they spontaneously expressed dissatisfaction, thinking that the replacement rate was too low. But when they looked more closely at the issue, they realised that the replacement rate and duration were very advantageous from a European and, even more so, an international perspective.

The respondents in Lund and Umeå had a more positive view on the parental benefit compared with those in Tomelilla and Lycksele. A father from Lund, having used a long leave, said: “[...] I think it’s very luxurious and the replacement rate is super, it surely is.” This could be further exemplified by a Lycksele couple where the man, who had been on leave for a longer period of time, reported: “[...] I could think of fewer days and a higher replacement rate.” The woman responded to the question about the design of the parental leave:

Yes, it’s still too little money in the cash box, that’s what you are thinking most of [...]. That’s the biggest reason why they [the men] choose not to stay at home, when you talk with people around, ‘No, we can’t afford it’ [him staying at home]. But if you look sharply at it, we maybe couldn’t afford it either, but we chose to do like this, and lived on what we had.

Neither mothers nor fathers showed any significant county differences in their attitudes to parental leave. Amongst those couples where the man had used a long parental leave it could be assumed that the attitudes were more positive, compared with where this had not been the case. Moreover, the parental leave design could have been part of the reason why the man had not used parental leave to a great extent, but it turned out not to be this way. Negative opinions were shown amongst both those who had used many days and those who had used a few days for parental leave. The same variation could be noticed amongst those who considered the leave to be advantageous.
Discussion

In this chapter we have investigated the motives for fathers taking a low compared with a high take-up of paid parental leave and the parents’ opinions on it. To shed light on these issues we have related our findings to Shweder’s typology of ethics. In this encounter between his analytic frame and empirically grounded data we have primarily searched for variations and differences, but have also identified similarities and general patterns. Let us start with the first research question: What different and similar motives are there between fathers with a low and fathers with a high take-up of paid parental leave?

As was mentioned previously, Shweder distinguishes between three types of ethics – autonomy, community and divinity – which, for individuals, imply motives on different levels. The ethics of autonomy are the most personal, which means that the motives are perceived to come from inside, while the ethics of community originate from, for example, the social networks of people in the surrounding neighbourhood. The ethics of divinity relate to the norm systems that structure people’s thinking and behaviour. All these three aspects are present in our findings, but the most frequent and most significant is ethics of community. The parental leave policy with the father’s leave quota has supported the fathers’ take-up and opened up new ideas and choices regarding childcare. The desires and open, as well as hidden, motives have been subject to negotiations both within and outside the family. Our respondents describe very little resistance from employers, workmates and friends. Negative attitudes seem to have been less pronounced or even marginalized.

We would like to highlight two findings in particular. Firstly, the importance of men’s networks and social contacts for their parental leave motives (Doucet, 2006). A strong pattern was that fathers who had used few and those who had used many days of parental leave both mentioned a lack of male networks among other fathers in the same situation. This was particularly the case in the low take-up municipalities. It refers to men’s lack of friends and others who are staying at home on leave and with whom they could socialize. It also refers to men’s reluctance to be away from the networks that they already have, particularly in the work situation. There seems to be another situation for women, who refer to more friends privately and do not consider being away from the work teams to be a problem to the same extent as the men do. Secondly, the mothers still have the last
say in how the parental leave should be organized. The ethics of divinity tended to be the most common discourse when women were considered the primary caregiver, both by themselves as well as by the men. In all couples where the man had used a long parental leave he was supported by an encouraging woman, who was often strongly work-oriented (Doucet and Merla, 2007; Lammi-Taskula, 2007). The employers generally had a supportive attitude to fathers’ leave-taking. The previous norm that childcare is primarily a responsibility for the women, seems to have changed in favour of the idea that the fathers are also needed during childhood and are competent enough to care for young children. This is supported by Norwegian research that found that the representation of the father had changed in this direction since the 1980s (Annfelt, 2008), a pattern less salient in UK research (Sunderland, 2000; Plantin et al., 2003). Ethics of autonomy was found amongst fathers who had a low take-up (reluctance to stay at home) as well as a high take-up (strong wish to stay at home and create a good relationship with the child), although this was expressed and acted upon in different ways.

In our interviews, positive codes like justice, gender equality and networks are frequently mentioned, along with negative ones like harm, solitude and restlessness. Positive experiences and feelings dominate the image, which is the general pattern. There are, however, variations as well. Geographically, ethics of autonomy was more pronounced in urban than in rural settings, as well as more in Västerbotten compared with Skåne. Fathers with a low take-up tend to follow the ethics of community more than those with a high take-up. In these relationships, gender equality is also less the case, with mother’s primacy in childcare fairly uncontested (Magnusson, 2008; Sunderland, 2000, 2006). This exemplifies a development towards the fathers’ active participation in childcare. But the mothers still have the last say, which differs from the discourse on the macro level.

Continuing to the second question – What are the parents’ opinions on parental leave? The parents are satisfied with how they have divided parental leave, regardless of whether the fathers had a high or low take-up. When wishes for change are expressed, it is the mothers who most strongly articulate them. They want to end the parental leave period earlier and want the fathers to stay at home for a longer period. No clear differences are indicated between the municipalities. The respondents’ view of the parental benefit is positive, particularly when
compared with the conditions in other countries. A more positive attitude to the parental benefit is found in urban than rural municipalities.

In conclusion, although there is a trend that fathers should have a higher parental leave take-up than is the case today, Swedish mothers still need to let go of days and fathers still need to face their responsibility and argue for an equal share in an area marked by a traditional division of labour between men and women. Further, more extensive support from both employers and staff at the maternity care agencies are examples of possible positive measures to increase the men’s networks.

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Chapter 4
Changing fatherhood through an intergenerational lens: the UK case

This chapter applies an intergenerational lens to the study of fatherhood. The design of the study\(^1\) included three generations of males: grandfathers, sons and their sons from particular groups of families, including those whose experiences had been disrupted by migration.

The chapter will examine change and continuity in the practice of fatherhood across family generations and the processes of transmission involved. Firstly, it will discuss the concept of transmission. Secondly, it will compare two generations of fathers – fathers of Irish origin and white British fathers. It will focus in particular on two chains of fathers and sons: a father of Irish origin and his son, and a white British father and his son, and trace patterns of continuity and change across the generations. Thereby it will suggest the conditions and processes that lead to intergenerational change. Before doing so, it is necessary to set out our theoretical approach concerning transmission across family generations.

\(^1\) This project has been funded by the Economic and Social research Council from 2009–2012.
Transmission

While family generations coexist and are linked by intergenerational transmission, they are separated by historical generation (Mannheim, 1952). Generations hold ‘divided memories’ (Giesen, 2004: 22), which shape individuals’ accounts and discourses in the present. Family generations need to be understood as continuous contractual relationships across time, in which the emotional dynamics are transmitted through the ‘symbolic coinage’ of family stories. Indeed, family stories are themselves a form of intergenerational transmission. “Such stories are not only remembered fragments of a real past, not only clues to collective consciousness and personal identity, but also a past that is still active in the present: signposts” (Thompson, 1995: 14). Family stories suggest motifs, patterns and difficulties that are often repeated while the ‘very phases echo down generations’ (Thompson, 1993; 2005). It is only possible to study concurrent generations retrospectively, notably through oral history and life story methods.

The dynamism of transmission is evident only in the sense that an offer of transmission turns into transmission – that is, when it is accepted (Bertaux-Wiame, 2005). However, acceptance does not mean recognition that transmission has taken place, nor does it entail reproduction since each new generation puts its own mark upon that which is passed on (Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame, 1997), producing both continuity and change across generations.

Transmission is intrinsic to the creation of family cultures. Following Finch (1989), cultures do not determine transfers; they are created and recreated in the processes of giving and receiving resources and as a consequence of a variety of conditions and considerations relating to meanings, relationships and rationalities. Rather, culture is the bundle of meanings that are part of practices and are transmitted over time as families hold on to, enhance and deplete resources. Cultural transmission reproduces and transmits family identities while cultures also change as family members and different generations differentiate themselves from one another. As Giesen (2004) suggests, new generations, especially the younger generation, may devalue what they see as tradition and seek to invent a new collective identity for their generation, even if, from the perspective of the outsider, the newly discovered repeats some well known pattern.

However, what passes on, or is passed on, is not always articulated by research participants in interviews, for transmission is embedded in everyday practices
and relationships. The processes involved do not necessarily represent conscious projects or calculations in which individuals and families engage, for the cultural transmission of class and family cultures can be implicit as well as explicit (Bernstein, 1996). This idea is also captured in the concept of ‘family habitus’ (Bourdieu, 1990). Habitus denotes a set of ‘dispositions related to particular practices’, which are not necessarily calculative or instrumental and may lead to regularities in patterns of transmission across family generations (ibid.). Habitus may involve ‘reasonable or commonsense behaviour’ – forms of ‘spontaneity without consciousness’. In the sense that habitus involves ‘producing history on the basis of history’, the dispositions of individuals and groups are cumulative (ibid.: 56). From an observer perspective, they may, however, become evident in a study that focuses on intergenerational relations.

Intergenerational transmission covers a variety of aspects, including values, status inheritance, social learning and parent-child relationships (Bengston et al., 2002) that are structured by the parents’ socio-economic status and gender. The processes by which this occurs is through the internalization of a parent’s outlook on and interests in life; through communication practices (Bernstein, 2000); and through investments in children’s human capital (Bourdieu, 1986; 1990; Vincent and Ball, 2006). Children’s inheritance occurs as children model themselves or seek to identify with (or differentiate themselves from) their mothers and fathers through habitual, bodily and visual forms of (dis)identification (Mason, 2008). Issues of gender identification are especially pertinent and may affect the emotional quality of parent-child relationships at particular points in the life course.

The conditions for transmission across generations vary according to the field in which the generational process occurs (Kohli, 1999), and they vary in relation to the context in which the idea of a ‘generation’ becomes meaningful (Bourdieu, 1990). Thus intergenerational family ambivalences may be stronger in relation to education or the disciplining of children while values about religion and morality may be less subject to generational ambivalence.
The study: its approaches and methods

The study upon which this chapter draws was carried out in the UK. Its focus was fatherhood; what fatherhood involves, how it is transmitted and how it has changed. The study included two groups where male family members had migrated to the UK, a country with a long history of in-migration, as well as a group of white British fathers. It included the Irish who migrated in the mid 20th century and the Poles who migrated at the beginning of the 21st century. The study adopted a case study design; it included 30 three-generational groups of men and their sons; eight chains of first-generation Polish (migrant) fathers, their fathers (living in Poland), and their sons (plus two chains of second-generation Polish fathers); ten chains of second-generation Irish fathers, their fathers (born in Ireland) and their sons; ten chains of white British fathers, their fathers (born in the UK) and their sons. The youngest generation (sons) were aged from 5 to 18 years. Thirty grandfathers, 30 fathers and 29 sons were interviewed (N= 89 interviewees). With the exception of the Polish fathers living in Poland, most were recruited in London and Southern England (Wigfall et al., in press).

The focus on two migrant groups and the difficulties of identifying them limited us to relatively few cases and influenced our recruitment methods (Wigfall et al., in press). The intention was not to generalize in a statistical sense but to understand specificities while setting the cases in wider social contexts (Brannen and Nilsen, 2011). The cases are not representative or typical but do indicate the particular conditions within, and opportunities with, which individuals exercise agency.

We employed an interview method that focused on the events of the life course and elicited stories of the interviewees’ lives (Wengraf, 2001). In the first part of the interview, the adult research participants were invited to recount their lives with a minimum of guidance and intervention from the interviewer. In the second part of the interview, the interviewers invited them to elaborate on salient events and experiences that figured in their initial narratives, in the order of telling. In the third part of the interview (which, in some cases, took place at a

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2 With the older children (grandsons), aged 12 and above, we used a semi-structured interview approach. With the younger children we used a variety of research tools – a mix of questions with drawings, stickers and visual materials; they worked well and the children seemed to enjoy them.
The interview consisted of questions relating to the specific foci of the study, if they had not already been covered in sufficient detail. Following the interview, the researchers wrote extensive field notes about the research context, the interview encounter and the particular themes covered. The summary was further extended after the interview had been transcribed professionally.

The first phase of the analysis involved an intensive analysis of the field notes/interview summary and the transcript in which the life history – events, phases and timings – were identified and sequentially ordered. The individual’s interpretive accounts relating to the main themes of the study were separately analyzed under a number of headings: migration, growing up, employment career, being a father, transmission, and new themes not anticipated in the design. The second phase involved analyzing the interviews of each ethnic group on comparable themes, bringing together the life history and the interpretive account. The third phase involved selecting and comparing intergenerational chains across the ethnic groups.

A crucial aspect of the analysis was the initial separation of the life history/life course trajectory from the interpretive narratives. This strategy focused attention on the shape of the biographies, irrespective of how the individuals interpreted them. It thus enabled the analyst to be open to other life course directions the informants might have followed and the choices they might have made; for life stories are not histories, they are interpreted with hindsight and recounted in the present. Evaluations of past experiences are made with reference to present time frames, even though the informants seek to recall the past and how they thought and felt at that time. “It is, in practice, impossible for the raconteur to stand outside the present when considering the past” (Brannen et al., 2004: 84).

Accounts are inevitably incomplete and partial, and are shaped by the researcher’s interests and in the research encounter itself. Because of the intergenerational focus on accounts of fatherhood and father–son relationships, they were compared from multiple perspectives, providing corroborating, complementary, and often conflicting, evidence. In interpreting the interview material, we did so both in relation to their biographies and in terms of what we have termed elsewhere as the silent discourses of historical and social context.

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3 For example, we created comparable charts of the life histories of the grandfathers and fathers for each group.
(Brannen and Nilsen, 2002). Together, the life course and narrative-interpretive approaches we adopted suggest a complex interplay between the way in which the men spoke and the structures against which such talk is contextualized (McCleod and Thomson, 2009).

Given the focus here upon fathers of Irish origin, we next provide a brief account of the UK context and Irish migration.

The UK context and Irish migration

Ireland was a colony of Britain until 1922, when all but its six northern counties achieved independence as the Irish Free State, which went on to re-name itself Ireland in 1937 and declared itself a republic in 1949. For most of its modern history Ireland was poor and rural, with a strong pattern of out-migration. In the aftermath of independence it withdrew into itself both economically and culturally, and, post-independence, failed to develop, accelerating rather than stemming this migration pattern (Garvin, 2004). Although Ireland was Britain’s main source of reserve labour from the 1860s (Ryan, 2004),4 the 1950s and 1960s saw the largest outflow of people from Ireland to the UK (Garvey, 1985).5 Moreover, through Ireland’s history of close contact with the modern industrial economies of the United States and Britain, migration became part of Irish culture and a growing consciousness of alternative futures. In the West of Ireland, where the land was poor and migration heaviest, people lost confidence in their own culture and were increasingly influenced by the market and material cultures of the large capitalist economies (Brody, 1973). As well as seeking work, Irish migrants were attracted by the bright lights of the big cities (Walter, 1999). Most Irish migrants came from the countryside and lacked education and skills. In the years following independence, most Irish children had no secondary education and left (primary) school at 14 years of age; secondary education was not free until the late 1960s (Garvin, 2004).

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4 This was the second main migration wave; the first occurred in the 1840s following the Potato Famine (Salt, 2009: 56).

5 Inflows into Britain were among younger people, with the exception of the 1950s when the numbers were split between the 25–34 and 15–24 age groups (Barrett, 1999). In the 1960s the age range in migration widened.
By contrast, in the years following the Second World War, Britain was establishing a welfare state. In the post war years up to the 1970s, Britain, unlike Ireland, was marked by high levels of employment, which provided low status jobs for new migrants and better jobs, especially in the growing public sector, for the indigenous population. Free primary and secondary education and other universal welfare benefits were introduced, including state pensions and access to medical care. The first decades of the post-war period were marked by considerable upward mobility of a structural nature (Heath and Payne, 2000) for the generation of white British born around WWII (our grandfathers), while the 1960s heralded the cultural revolution called the Swinging Sixties. However, by the late 1970s (the period into which the sons were born), social mobility flattened, despite the expansion of higher education.

Change and continuity among the Irish fathers and grandfathers

The Irish grandfathers in the study migrated from Ireland around the 1960s. They came to Britain as young single men and suffered considerable disadvantage. In Ireland they entered adulthood early, without educational qualifications and little material support from their families. Following migration, they found employment in Britain, typically in the construction industry (much of which was casualized and unregulated with high accident rates), and sent money back to their families in Ireland. Many suffered racist discrimination. It was typically their sons who talked about this, not the older generation.

Most of the grandfathers married Irish women, whom they met on visits home or in Irish dance halls. Since marriage was followed by the birth of children within a year, they found it difficult to find and afford suitable housing for their families. As migrants and main breadwinners in their households, they needed to work hard: “We needed the money sort of thing, so I used to work as much overtime as I could. Things were hard bringing a family up when you don’t have

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6 Up to the 1960s the percentage of the Irish population who were single in all the younger age groups was the highest recorded in any developed country, particularly among men (Hannan, 2008). Many Irish migrants never married.

7 All were brought up in the Catholic Church, which forbade the use of birth control.
much money.” (Irish grandfather). As fathers, the men of this generation were unable to play much of a part at home because of their long hours and, because of their own lack of schooling, were unable to help very much with their children’s schoolwork. Instead, they looked to their wives, Catholic schools and religion to help bring up their children.

However, Irish grandfathers did not pass on their own disadvantages to their sons, but gave them stable, if not materially well-off, childhoods. They transmitted a strong work ethic, as a result of which many of the next generation did well in education in England, with several going to university. In their employment careers, the sons enjoyed upward social mobility, moving into management and the professions. The sons credited their fathers with this inheritance, which they also sought to impart to their own children.

However, because of their high commitment to their careers, the second-generation Irish sons, like their own fathers, were limited in the time they could devote to their children. One Irish origin father who was a manager in the voluntary sector, while prioritizing the work ethic, blamed and regretted the pressures of his job, which, he said, made him an ‘unrelaxed father’ and prevented him from spending time with his children. As his account also suggests, he recognized the influence of his own background on his strong work ethic:

> And I think one of the key things for me, having come from a working class Irish background, is I enjoy working hard, you know I’m very motivated, I want to do my best. I want my kids to get on in life, I want them to work hard [pause] you know and again probably I want them to have more opportunities than I do, and I probably want them to do better than I’ve done professionally […] I probably wish that sometimes I could be probably more relaxed with them.

On the other hand, like other fathers in the study, Irish fathers considered themselves different from their own fathers, even though their strong work ethic was undiminished. Mike is a more extreme example of this. Despite being the sole breadwinner in the family, he distanced himself as belonging to ‘another

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8 In England, all young people had the opportunity to take the General Certificate of Education at the age of 16, and the numbers going to university were rising.

9 The Longitudinal Study data of 1971–81–91 (Walter, 1999) shows unusually high rates of upward mobility for the second-generation Irish, especially for those with two Irish-born parents.
generation’, describing his parents as deferential, lacking in confidence and inarticulate on account of their background. Mike saw himself as much more involved than his father with his only son:

Well, I think I’m very involved in his parenting. As much as I take him to school every day and we spend some time doing something together most nights.

For the Irish men in the study the picture is therefore one of change and continuity; transformation in terms of socio-economic status for the second-generation Irish but continuity through the transmission of a strong work ethic via their fathers. This, in turn, influenced the time they spent with their children. However, it did not determine their subjectivities as fathers and the discourses of fatherhood to which they subscribed, in which most regarded themselves as different from their fathers and more involved with their children, even if they were constrained in the amount of their involvement by their employment. The differentiated intergenerational story is born out in more detail in the experiences of Seamas and his son Willie.

**Seamas and Willie**

Like many Irishmen, Seamas left Ireland between the 1940s and 1960s, especially those who left the rural West of Ireland, where the land was poor, families were large and the economy and communities were failing. Seamas was born in the 1940s on a small farm in the West of Ireland, the second of six children. The family lived in a two-roomed cottage but had the use of only one room. Seamas’ parents had worked in England but returned to Ireland during World War II. Seamas was seven when his mother died, leaving his father to raise six children, including two toddlers and a baby. An unmarried relative was asked to return from England to care for them. Seamas’ father left for England to work when Seamas was nine, returning for visits once or twice a year.

His transition to adulthood came early in the life course. When Seamas was 13 his older brother left for England to find work, and a year later, when he was 14, Seamas left school. He helped run the farm, but also dug turf and delivered milk to local farms. Aged 17 (1958), Seamas went to England with a friend to look for work. He rented digs in an Irish part of London along with other Irishmen.
He worked on various large construction projects around the country but based himself in London. Some years later he bought a road making machine and became self-employed. Intending initially to return to Ireland, he got used to the ‘good money’. Moreover, his family back in Ireland depended on his remittances.

Marriage and parenthood followed within a few years. Aged 23, he married an Irish girl he met at an Irish dance hall in London. First the couple lived in one room, sharing the house with several Irish families. Seamas was 24 when their first child was born. A second child followed and, after five years when Seamas’ wife was working part-time, the couple had saved enough money to put down a deposit on a large run-down property. His wife was business minded and unusually set up her own construction business. As his son Willie said, both parents had to work for economic reasons. They refurbished the property with help from family and friends over several years. Seamas worked long hours, often seven days a week, with periods away from home.

Compare this life course trajectory with that of Seamas’ son, Willie. Willie, the second of two children, was born in the 1970s. He attended the local Catholic primary school along with many other children of Irish origin. On advice from a friend of his mother, he went to a ‘good’ Catholic secondary school and studied subjects compatible with his career choice in banking. Unlike his father, Willie enjoyed a ‘long period of youth’ (Nilsen et al., 2002). At 18, Willie went to university, which provided him with a route into banking, which was booming at the time (the 1990s), and a position in management. He made use of social capital linked to his Irish heritage, joining an Irish bank, where he met his wife, also of Irish origin.

Aged 29, Willie got married, and two years later his son was born (he was 8 at the time of the interview). Two more children followed. Willie became a father later in life than his father, and under more favourable material conditions. As a two-income couple employed in a well-paid industry, they were able to buy a house. Also, like his father, his life was driven by work. Willie worked very long hours and was often away from home. Like his father, he lacked time for his three young children. His wife gave up work when she was made redundant after the third birth. Then, aged 37, Willie was also made redundant, but soon found a new job, which was a bit less stressful but involved only slightly shorter hours. However, despite his income and social status being higher than that of his
parents, Willie continued to live within a stone’s throw of his parents in the same, now considerably gentrified, area in which Willie had grown up. Willie also sent his children to the local Catholic primary school that he had attended as a child.

The life course of father and son is therefore suggestive of considerable intergenerational change. However, there are still markers of continuity evidenced in the generations’ residential proximity, their commitment to long working hours and working away from home, and their religious and ethnic allegiances.

The accounts of the intergenerational relationships between father and son are remarkably complementary. Just as Seamas could think of nothing his father had passed on to him, so Seamas could not think how he had influenced his son. In talking about fatherhood, Seamas explained how he was always working, yet did not want his son to follow him into his line of (hard manual) work: “I didn’t want him to go out working like [inaudible] you know what I mean working. It was great, he had school, he had a good childhood, you know what I mean.” It was his wife who had influenced the children’s aspirations and the school; his role had been to provide the material means for his son to take advantage of the educational opportunities. Willie also recalled not having spent much time with his father as a child: “he was never there”; and that his mother was the driving force in his life: “Dad didn’t have a clue the school even existed”. In the context of Seamas’ absence and his wife’s centrality in the family life, both men reflected that communication between them when Willie was a child was limited. As Willie said, they stuck to “nice easy soft subjects, which remains the case now”.

Both father and son described living in different worlds on account of their work and interests, actually using the same words:

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\ldots\text{ it was totally different to the world they came from – so they’re [parents] both in construction. I went into the financial industry and um, I’m sure no more than I didn’t know what they did, to a technical level they don’t have a clue what I do. (Willie).}
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\[
\ldots\text{ we’re in different worlds kind of thing. (Seamas)}
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In relation to fathering, Willie suggests subscribing to a different discourse of fatherhood from his own father: “I honestly think there’s more of a conscious effort for the father [today] to have more one-to-one time with the children than previously, and probably get more engaged in what the children are up to and how they’re developing”. On the other hand, he also added that while changes in
fatherhood have taken place in the importance of fathers in children’s lives, not every father enjoys this. Yet Willie believed that in spite of his long working hours he was probably “slightly more engaged” with his first-born son than his father was with him at the same age – particularly, he said, in terms of knowledge about his son’s school, friends, etc. He also reflected that he has been a stricter father than his own father and is more ambitious, both for himself and for his family. At the same time, he suggested that the traditional gendered segregation of marital roles was still there, as they were for his mother and father. Moreover, his involvement with his children was also circumscribed in terms of gender:

Football or physical activities. Football, swimming, park. Maybe on a Saturday going down to the river or something like that – and it’s terrible, ‘cos this is normally so [wife] can catch up with ironing, cleaning – those sort of tasks.

Despite the intergenerational discontinuities, Seamas was keen to point to aspects of identification across the generations, in particular claiming his son and his daughter and their families as Irish: “They’re all Irish, they’ve always you know [pause] they’ve always been round with Irish, and their friends here are Irish or of Irish descent”. Seamas also claimed that he and Willie shared the same tastes; he related how he and his son both enjoyed a pint together, and watched Gaelic football. The two households remained geographically close, with Willie continuing to live in the same community in which he had grown up and where Seamas and his wife still live, although neither mentioned this as keeping them socially or emotionally close. Indeed, Willie had never lived far from his parents except when he was at university. Likewise, Willie too suggested identification with his ethnic origins. He holds an Irish passport and counted himself as Irish: “Depends if it’s convenient to be one or t’other. Um, yeah I would see myself as Irish. But it depends on who it’s going to annoy most typically”. He has remained a Catholic and a church goer, if an infrequent one, and sent his children to the same Catholic primary school that he went to.

Despite the discontinuities with his parents’ lives, Willie gave a rich account of the cultural capital his parents had passed on to him and which he wanted to pass on to his children. He referred to their strong work ethic in particular. Like his father, he referred to family resemblances (Mason, 2008), noting his delight at having been stopped in the street by someone remarking on his own son’s resemblance to his grandfather. He also felt that he himself had inherited
his father’s social skills (‘social demeanour’): “Dad will talk to anyone, much more than I will, but you know I’m not bad at it. Keep conversations nice and easy without being controversial or tackling certain issues I suspect [...] I’m sure most of my social demeanour I think is very very similar to dad’s”. He also identified with his father’s equal treatment of other people: “I don’t give two hoots if you earn two grand a year or two million quid a year. I will treat you exactly the same. I think that’s a big thing I’ve probably got from him [pause] and then to a degree socialising in places that serve alcohol is probably another major thing”.

Willie considered both his parents to be role models for him and said that his own children had a wide range of role models. While Willie set greater store by his children’s education than his father had for him, he said he had no fixed ambitions for his children, except, like his father had said, to give them ‘financial stability’. To some extent, his easygoing attitude resembled his father’s demeanour:

My level of empathy is you know short of having a limb hanging off, you know, I’m not really worried about what happens to you, because it’ll be all right tomorrow [...] [wife] thinks I’m an emotional retard.

At the end of his interview, Willie attested to a generational leap in terms of the historical and material contexts in which his life and his father’s life have unfolded, a leap which he considers far greater than is likely to occur in the next generation:

To my mind, I was brought up in a totally different economic environment to my parents. I could not dream of leaving home at 13, by myself, going to a foreign country, finding work maybe through friends and neighbours, full-time working, living in a room with two or three others who I may or may not know, and knowing that there’s no cheap Ryanair flight home [...] and like, my brothers or sisters have gone to America and the likelihood is at 13 I’ll probably never see them again. You know I think it’s you know [pause] it’s a totally, totally different world, you know. I think for both of them there was a lack of education, formal education [...] from like the ages of 12, 13 onwards [...] I just don’t see that same leap happening between the childhood I had and the childhood my kids are having.
Change and continuity among the white British

Among the white British there is a more variegated picture of intergenerational change and continuity than in the Irish cases. Reflecting the national pattern (Heath and Payne, 2000), intergenerational occupational mobility was less marked among the white British cases; only two chains of downward mobility from skilled to semi-skilled occupations and one case of upward mobility (a grandfather who was a farm labourer had a son who became a manager of a landscape gardening firm). On the other hand, the white British fathers were somewhat better educated than their fathers, which, in turn, is likely to have influenced their later transition to fatherhood (compared with their own fathers).

In terms of a commitment to breadwinning and a work ethic, the pattern among the British grandfathers and fathers is mixed. On the one hand, both generations occupied the main provider role, as in the case of the Irish, and invested their identities in their work. Fraser, a father with three children aged between 7 and 12, is typical of the work-focused white British fathers. He held a senior position in a charity and pointed to the conflicts between his career ambitions and his desire to be a good father: “I don’t like admitting it, but I think there is a challenge between the fact that I’m hugely ambitious – which demands an enormous amount of my time and energy – and I want to be a great father. And those two do pull in different directions [...] you certainly can’t spend unlimited periods of time with them in their free time”. Hugh, a white British father with three children aged between 8 and 17, made a similar point when he reflected on the long hours he had to put in to reach his prestigious position in the law. While he said he was trying to find a better work-life balance, he was averaging a 10-hour day and had a long commute. He admired fathers “who seem to have [an] endless amount of time to play with their [pause] to do things with their children. And I’ve always felt that I haven’t done it, and I probably have done it more than I feel, but I’ve always felt that”.

On the other hand, there were three white British fathers who were as equally involved with their children’s care as their partners. Two fathers were shift workers, which enabled them to be flexible and hence to take responsibility for childcare. One had taken on childcare on a full-time basis and resigned from his job. These men were quite unlike their own fathers, whose work was central to their identities. In two cases the option to be a ‘hands on’ father was made possible
not only by the way employers organized the work but also because the fathers were not career minded, at least at the time. What is also striking about these households is that the mothers tended to be in higher status full-time occupations and hence were in effect the higher earners and main breadwinners. Thus the price the fathers paid for being highly involved in childcare was that the men put their careers on hold, at least temporarily, or worked in occupations where flexible hours (shift working) were possible. In these three cases the grandfathers were particularly vocal in talking about the generational change they saw in their sons.

While most of the white British were constrained by work and prioritized work, like several of the Irish fathers they rejected the idea of the traditional father – seen as authoritarian, disinterested, absent, emotionally distant – in favour of the ‘good father’ who is ‘close’ to his children, defined as caring, nurturing and emotionally involved (Mooney et al., forthcoming; Burgess, 1997; Craig, 2007; Dermott, 2008). They emphasized the importance of the relational aspects of fathering – showing affection, being open, talking to the children and praising them. They spoke about the importance of spending time with their children (although clearly this was difficult to achieve); they alluded to the activities they did with their sons (many related to sport) and the performative aspects of fathering, such as hugging them. These they contrasted with their own fathering in childhood, which they characterized as more traditional and emotionally distant. In contrast, the white British grandfathers stressed the importance of ‘being there’ and providing ‘support’ for their children, and did not expand a great deal on what they meant by this, perhaps suggesting the importance of how they viewed and felt about fatherhood as much as how they performed it. In the next case, Adam represents one of the ‘new fathers’ in the study, whose own father, Geoff, represents a more traditional model.

**Geoff and Adam**

Geoff (the grandfather generation) was born in the south east of England in the 1940s and was the third of nine children and of working class origins. His father was in the armed forces and largely absent until Geoff was three. Until Geoff was seven, his family lived in a small two bed-roomed house with his maternal grandparents, who were the tenants. Overcrowding forced the family to move;
they were eventually allocated public housing not far from his grandparents. With a large family and only his father working, time and money were in short supply. From his current perspective, Geoff considered the early years of his childhood to be formative, and set the tone for his relationship with his father, which was not good:

Cos 1941 was war years, so my father was away at the war – in fact, he never saw me until I was about 3 years of age. So I never had a close tie – I have to be honest – with my father at that time, and even, as I’ll explain to you, in later life.

Like other working class young men, Geoff’s transition to adulthood came early in the life course (as was the case with Seamas). Although he won a scholarship to do art at college, he left school and started work at 16, in the year his eighth and youngest sibling was born, fulfilling his parent’s wish that he contribute to the family income. Geoff worked in a supermarket and by the age of 19 became the manager. But, with the urge to “move around a bit”, he got a job as a driver and then moved into wholesale distribution, eventually managing a large warehouse. Looking back to the era of Britain in the “swinging sixties”, he suggested that earning good money and living the good life were uppermost in his mind at the time.

At 27 he met a girl at work, whom he married a year later. The transition to parenthood came after four years, when he was 32, and when he felt the time was “right” (they had had enough time to get ‘to know each other’). Just as his parents had lived with his maternal grandparents, so Geoff and his wife started married life living with her mother. Several job and housing moves later, they bought a newly built three bed-roomed house before the birth of their son, Adam. A second son followed two years later and a third when Geoff was 39. Job and housing moves continued with Geoff often working long hours, either because of the job demands or long commutes.

Geoff’s son, Adam, followed a similar working class life course trajectory in terms of his transition to adulthood. Because of his father’s job changes, he moved schools at least five times. He did not enjoy school and left at 16 with few qualifications. There followed several jobs, mainly in sales, at one time working on a construction site, which paid “good money”. He left home when he was 17, returning to the family home at weekends. He then went back to live there again
at 21. With his mother’s help, Adam found a job as a healthcare assistant in the local hospital, where four years later he met his wife, who was Irish born and working as a healthcare assistant to gain experience following university. Adam married a couple of years earlier in the life course than his father (at the age of 26) and moved to Ireland with his wife, where they bought a house. There he went back to sales, changing jobs a couple of times and becoming a store manager. At 28 he had his first child, a son, but because he was working up to 90 hours a week he saw little of him.

The couple returned to England, living with his parents for a while. Following further jobs in sales, where the culture of long working hours, including weekends, was the norm, Adam returned to the National Health Service as a health care assistant and his wife went back to her profession, also in the public sector. The couple bought a small house. After their second child was born his wife began studying for a higher degree and was away several nights a week because of this. Adam’s shift pattern allowed him to work flexibly, which was underpinned by the National Health Service’s work-life policy for “Improving Working Lives”.

The accounts of father and son tally with one another on Geoff’s fathering, with both anxious to point out that Geoff did not neglect his children even though Geoff, as the sole breadwinner, did long hours. Looking back, Geoff regretted this, “because there were times when I felt I missed out [...] because a lovely time is putting the kids to bed, and sometimes I got home after they were in bed”. But when he was around, Geoff saw himself as playing his part in his children’s lives. Adam too was at pains to point this out: “But when he was at home, I remember him doing it [pause] he did spend time with us, definitely. Definitely spent a lot of time with us – making things with us, doing things with us”. However, Adam’s overarching memory is of his father working all the time and of not seeing much of him: “I was brought up by my mum”.

Adam, on the other hand, has a wife in a professional occupation who has always worked and who is, and always likely to be, the higher earner. This encouraged Adam to move back from the long hours culture of sales into nursing and the more regulated public sector. His shift pattern also meant he could look after the children three days a week, particularly when his wife was away studying for a higher degree.

Adam described himself as a ‘hands-on’ dad, a view shared by his father, who considered Adam the better father: “time is the most important commodity you’re
ever going to have. And if you do not utilize that time and do not spend time with your children, you’re wasting a lot of your life. And Adam is able to spend a lot more time”. Adam considered the time he spent with his family his ‘best times’ of the day. Thus while both Geoff and Adam saw time with their children as the most precious aspect of parenting, only Adam was able to put these ideals into practice.

Unsurprisingly, both Geoff and Adam considered that the role and expectations of fathers have changed over the two generations. Geoff pointed to the normativity of the father being the main breadwinner when he was bringing up children, while, from a present day perspective, Adam (with a higher earning wife) rejected the idea that breadwinning should curtail men’s involvement with their children:

I think it’s more expected the father to be involved now bringing them up – then it was just like dad goes to work, mum’s at home with the kid, bringing up the kid. Dad sees the kid when he comes home. [...] I wouldn’t want it that way [...] I love spending time with them.

On the other hand, some values about parenting are transmitted across the generations. Both father and son shared a similar view about influencing the children through advice rather than pushing them: “not telling them what to do – it’s up to them if they take it [advice]. I still feel that we make our own mistakes as we go along, and we learn by them, or we should” (Geoff). Yet the two men’s aspirations for their children clearly differed. While Geoff accepted Adam’s ‘choice’ about what he chose to do on leaving school, Adam described feeling neither encouraged nor motivated to do better for himself when he was young, so much so that he was determined to ensure that his son does not repeat his mistakes:

[...] and the biggest thing I want to get across to him is ‘Don’t leave school at 16’. But he’s not going to, he’s a very intelligent little boy. [...] And you know he’s got (pause) we’re not going to force it on him, but as much as we can we’re going to make sure he goes to university and beyond, because you know the sky’s the limit with his intelligence. [...] I don’t want him to make the mistakes that I did, and I don’t think he will – we won’t allow him to.

Other cultural capital is also transmitted; the importance of moral standards, forms of masculinity, and the importance of family all feature strongly in Geoff’s
account and are taken on board by Adam. Geoff talked about wanting his children to be respectful of people, “do unto others as you would do unto yourself”, and particularly to respect women, especially one’s wife; he is proud of passing this on to Adam: “[...] over the years I look and think to myself well I’ve left something behind, the way he treats his wife and his kids is how we taught them, and I think that’s lovely. I can safely say you’re leaving that behind to follow on, you know”. Adam replied to a question about what his father had passed on to him in similar fashion:

Um [pause] morals, beliefs, the way you treat people, right beliefs, being a good person, being nice, generous, fair person. [...] Treat people the way they expect to be treated – that kind of thing. [...] I try and look after my family as much as possible in terms of finances and emotions, and it’s exactly the same as him. And I treat my family the right way – my wife, I treat her the right way you know. Sounds like you know the old cave man thing, but I do think you should look after women. And I think that’s what he brought onto me, and that’s what I brought onto [my son], you know ‘Look after [...]’ you know ‘Look after girls’.

In his narrative, Adam too referred to masculinity in his account of fatherhood. He said early on in his interview that he had always ‘wanted a little boy’, but when asked could not say why, though later he suggested it was because he wanted a mirror image of himself. Geoff was more explicit in terms of the importance of transmitting masculinity: “Fathers will always be rough and tough with their sons. The boys are more gentle with their mother than they would ever be with me. But that’s good, that’s what I like. [...] whether it’s right or wrong I’m not saying, but that’s how I believe it should be, that the father is that masculine side”. Yet in response to being asked what he found most difficult about bringing up his son, Adam explained how he sometimes was a bit too tough on him: “Emotionally, sometimes he can be a bit you know tearful at times. And it’s like ‘Oh [son], come on’ you know’. Sometimes, the emotional side of it. I went through a spell when he was about 5 or 6 I found a really tough time. I just didn’t seem to get on with him. No, that’s wrong [...] just found it difficult to deal with his emotions”. He explained that his wife, who works with children, recommended a book about raising boys, which he found helpful. Here implicitly, the influence of Adam’s wife on Adam’s fathering is suggested, something that Adam explicitly refers to at other times in the interview.
In contrast, Geoff’s negative memories of being fathered, particularly his father not being there for him, strongly shaped the way he sought to father differently, albeit he worked long hours and did not take on the day-to-day care. Rejecting his father as a role model – “I thought to myself ‘I’m not going to be like my father, I’m going to be different’” – and, looking back, Geoff considered he took the responsibilities of fatherhood seriously and believed he passed this to his son: “But I think Adam knows the responsibility of being a father, and he owns that”. And indeed, in Adam’s account of being a father, Adam acknowledges the responsibilities it brings as well as the fun and joy of it.

As with both the white British and Irish cases, sport is a theme running across the male generations in this family in their engagement with sons. Geoff believes he has inherited his love of sport and sporting talent from his own father, who was a “fine cricketer”, but notes that his father was never on the touch line to support him when he played football at school. Thus Geoff sought to share his son’s enthusiasm for football and trained his son’s team. So too, Adam is now the manager of his son’s football team. Geoff, his son and grandson all support the same team, as Adam explained: “I obviously follow football, and he supports the same team as me, he’s never had a choice now, as my dad never gave me a choice”.

Comparing across and between generations

It is possible to make comparisons across the generations, within the generations and between the intergenerational chains of fathers and sons.

Comparing men in the same grandfather generation (Seamas and Geoff), Seamas started out from a position of greater disadvantage; he left school at 14 and migrated to Britain without qualifications, financial or social support at a time when the Irish were still the focus of discrimination. On the other hand, he was not dissimilar to Geoff in that both had disadvantaged working class beginnings. Geoff went straight into the labour market at 16, even though he left school with some qualifications and gained entry to art college; for he (like Seamas) came from a large family which was not well off and Geoff had to contribute to the family income. Geoff’s work career had a number of peaks and troughs with spells of unemployment. Seamas, for his part, stayed in the construction industry, eventually becoming self-employed.
The transitions to fatherhood differ for Seamas and Geoff, with Seamas having a more compressed pattern – early marriage followed by parenthood – compared with Geoff’s more staggered transition pattern (later marriage and a longer period between marriage and parenthood). In both cases they were men of their generation; main breadwinners when their children were young, both working long hours. However, Seamas’ life was marked by less movement in both jobs and housing, reinforced by his wife building up a local business of her own and the family’s roots in the local London Irish community; this, in turn, provided stability for Willie’s education. By contrast, Geoff’s pathway as a father was marked by job changes and housing moves, making for less stability in Adam’s life, with the result that Adam changed schools at least five times and left school with few qualifications.

Comparing men in the current father generation, the life course of Willie and Adam diverges much more than that of their fathers. In the Irish case, the effects of migration and the early hardship experienced by Willie’s father and mother are mitigated for Willie through his extended period of youth (late school leaving and university education), a well-paid high status job in banking leading to mobility into the middle classes. In contrast, Adam’s adult life course follows a similar pattern to that of his working class father with a short period of youth (early school leaving), a similar occupational status thus far, and a considerable number of job and housing moves.

In Willie’s Irish origin family, the experience of migration resulted in a strong commitment early in the life course to ‘making good’ what the first generation was deprived of - that is, education. In Willie’s case this was reinforced through attendance at local Catholic schools and, through advice from a family friend, the choice of a ‘good’ secondary school. For Adam’s family, by contrast, their class position was normative within a society at a given time and was not subjected to the ambition to do better for themselves and their families, unlike many new migrants when they arrive in a new society.

If we compare the current fathers with the older generation in terms of their subjectivities as fathers, some similarities emerge. As a father, Willie differs from his father since he sees himself as more involved with his children, while Adam foregrounds fatherhood in his self identity.
However, the two men differ considerably in the practice of fatherhood. Willie is not a “new father”. Like his father, he is the main breadwinner and (as a banker) works very long hours, bringing in a generous income; he also exhibited a very strong work ethic like his father. Interestingly, he was also ambivalent about men being too highly involved in children’s care. Moreover, even though he had a demanding job, he did not complain greatly about the constraints of this on his fathering; rather, it was his eight-year-old son who did so in his interview.

Adam, on the other hand, is a “hand-on” father, unlike his own father, Geoff. Because of his shift pattern and job in a family friendly organization, he was able to take on the sole charge of two young children three days a week, and was involved in all aspects of care and his children’s lives. The critical turning point in Adam’s pathway to new fatherhood was meeting his Irish origin wife, whose ways of “doing gender” extended beyond paid work to parenting practices. His wife influenced Adam by encouraging him to do nursing; by providing him with a role model in relation to career advancement (Adam was studying at the time of the interview); and, most significantly, requiring him to take major childcare responsibility and influencing him on aspects of parenting. It is striking that the conduit for upward occupational mobility in this family is the mother’s education and occupation (she happens to be the daughter of an Irish migrant). Moreover, these impact on the opportunities for the family as a whole and provide Adam’s wife with considerable power in the household in determining the equitable sharing of caring responsibilities.

Comparing the two intergenerational chains, the continuities between father and son are striking in the Irish origin family, particularly in the men’s working patterns and fathering practices, while discontinuities in terms of work and fathering are equally striking in the other case. However, in both chains there are points of commonality between fathers and sons in terms of what is transmitted intergenerationally. In the Irish chain it can be seen how, in one domain, namely class mobility, migration is the salient turning point, which, in turn, shapes fatherhood. In the white British chain there were no such disruptions. Adam’s life course takes a different direction from that of his father, through a “cross-class marriage” and the father’s move into an occupation that permits family friendly shift work. In both cases we may identify not only influences of intergenerational transmission but also the ways in which each new generation makes its own mark.
upon that which is passed on, drawing on the resources available to them at particular times and in particular places.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have sought to demonstrate how a focus on generation, both in an historical and a family sense, can contribute to understanding fatherhood in the contemporary period. The research literature is conflicted regarding the extent to which fatherhood is changing. Some researchers maintain there has been little change in fathering (e.g. Jarvis, 1999; Speakman and Marchinton, 1999) while others argue that men are becoming more involved (e.g. O’Brien and Shemilt, 2003; Dermott, 2003). Change is, of course, difficult to determine since normative discourses and practices do not necessarily change at the same pace. Moreover, it is difficult methodologically to investigate family practices, many of which are embedded in the routine and hence may not always be open to reflection. Moreover, in the context of social desirability, people may not own up to what they understand to be unacceptable in a given society or period. In addition, there is the conceptual problem that the lenses through which we as researchers define, judge and evaluate fatherhood change over time – as do the meanings we attribute to concepts of parenting and childcare in a particular historical period (Featherstone, 2003; Brannen and Nilsen, 2006). There is also the question of whether we judge fatherhood by the same criteria as we judge motherhood and how parenting differs according to the gender of the child.

In understanding fatherhood there are a number of benefits to an intergenerational focus, especially when we examine the accounts and experiences of men in the same families. Firstly, it extends our understanding of fatherhood, providing the interviewee and hence the researcher with a lifetime perspective. Asking men to reflect upon fatherhood in this context meant that men reflected upon their own upbringing, their relationships with their fathers as they unfolded over time, and gave them pause for thought about fathering their own children. Thus, for example, attention to the constraints of men’s employment upon their experience of fatherhood was embedded in longer term perspectives, which allowed for a narrative of complexity, contradiction, change and nuance. Many studies of
fatherhood have hitherto focused on short-term and/or current experiences of fatherhood, such as the transition to fatherhood or particular everyday current practices.

Secondly, a focus upon intergenerational chains draws attention to the processes of the complex and variegated aspects of fatherhood as a concept. Thus we have shown how there is no one-to-one correspondence between men’s subjectivities as fathers and their involvement in their children’s lives on a practical level. While increasing insecurity of employment and the long hours culture among many professional and managerial jobs (Lewis et al., 2009) continue to limit men’s involvement in childcare, men today suggest they are more expressive and demonstrative towards their children compared with their own fathers. At the same time, fatherhood is an embodied experience involving interests and activities that they share with their sons, many of which are strongly gendered (Doucet, 2006).

Thirdly, and relatedly, the current generation of fathers have inherited much from their fathers. As both of the generational chains discussed here show, different forms of transmission take place between fathers and sons, which, in turn, shape the way the younger generation enacts fatherhood. In particular, we have shown that what men may pass on to their sons covers a variety of gendered cultural capital, including a strong work ethic, passing on the family name, forms of embodied masculinity, and gendered interests and activities.

Fourthly, taking an intergenerational view enables us to locate cases in their social and historical contexts. In the two chains presented we have shown how social class shapes fatherhood in particular times and places, especially with regard to the older generation. In plotting change over time, we have seen how in one family, upward mobility in the context of migration reinforced a more traditional practice of fatherhood through the second-generation father’s strong work ethic, leading to the pursuit of having pursued educational aspirations and a middle-class occupation in the private finance sector. By contrast, the turning point towards a more involved practice of fatherhood is achieved in the other chain through a different route, which is also historically located, namely via the equitable sharing of both breadwinning and parenthood. In this family, the instigator of such change is the woman, who has achieved higher qualifications and is a higher earner than her partner.
Studying change in fatherhood underlines the difficulty of capturing fatherhood as a concept. As much of the literature suggests, the focus is often on fathers’ ‘involvement’, a concept significantly not applied to mothers and which implies men’s lesser importance in children’s lives. Increasingly, however, the focus is on the expressive and demonstrative aspects of how men ‘are’ with their children, while research on fathers and sons, as in this study, underlines the ways in which men identify with their sons through gendered activities. A further difficulty lies in only focusing on macro social trends – notably, increasing gender equality and the rise in mothers’ employment. What are often omitted are intra-familial influences and the importance of intergenerational transmission. The study of fathers and sons, and the two cases we have discussed, suggests the multi-faceted nature of fatherhood, the complexities and unevenness of what is passed on across generations, and the historically located social conditions under which innovation and change in fatherhood take place.

References


Chapter 5
Farming fathers between work and care in Norway – an intergenerational study

Introduction
This chapter deals with Norwegian farmers and their practices as fathers. We are interested in how their care practices have changed over the last generation, and whether they have been part of the general change in fatherhood and fathering. Despite an abundance of literature on fathers and a growing international research interest in men’s combination of work and family, there has been little research on how rurality and agricultural work influence men’s fathering practices (Peter, Bell, Jarnagin and Bauer, 2005). To date, no study with an explicit focus on contemporary farming fathers has been conducted in Norway. A common perception is that farmers are present and available to their children during the working day as work and family are not separated but take place on the same site. On the other hand, work in agriculture, forestry and fisheries is culturally coded as masculine, and rural men are defined as tough, strong and enduring (Liepins, 1998; Campbell and Bell, 2000; Brandth and Haugen, 2005; Pini, 2008) –
images that give off associations other than childcare. Besides, rural men have been thought to lag behind when it comes to gender equality (Brandth, 2002; Pini, 2008). In studying farmers, we are interested in how their care practices have changed over the last generation, and whether they have been part of the general change in fatherhood and fathering that has taken place in the Nordic countries (Brandth and Kvande, 2003b; Hobson, 2002; Holter, 2007; Aarseth, 2008).

Theoretically, the study draws on the concept of ‘father practices’ developed from David Morgan’s ‘family practice’ (1996, 2011). The concept of ‘practices’ directs attention away from viewing fatherhood as a static category when society is fluid, complex and constantly changing. Practices convey a sense of doing and action in the everyday world, and capture the idea that fathers are what fathers do, and they allow for fathers doing it in different ways. Practices change over time, but the conceptual idea of fathers and fathering remains.

Practices are everyday doings that are repeated and convey a sense of regularity. In Morgan’s words: ‘Practices are often little fragments of daily life which are part of the normal taken-for-granted existence of the practitioners. Their significance derives from their location in wider systems of meaning’ (1996: 190). And, by being repeated day after day, they form patterns that may be read as father practices or gender practices. Although regularity of practices creates a degree of structure and solidity, they also have to do with a sense of activity and movement.

Father practices are situated (Marsiglio et al., 2005). They are formed in relation to contexts where labour market, working life and welfare state policies are influential, and where there have been significant changes over recent decades. In locating the two generations of fathers that form the basis of this study in the context of their historical periods, the approach in this chapter combines individual and structural aspects.

The aim of the chapter is to answer the question of how farmer’s fathering practices change, not only over generations but also with the changing needs and capacities of children. We are particularly interested in how work influences the father practices. We start the analyses with a focus on the father practices in the two generations when the children are infants and thereafter, when the children have become somewhat older. Before doing so, we set out the institutional and methodological context of the study.
Farm family context

The fathers in this study are situated in different historical contexts. From the 1960s and 70s, when the older generation were young fathers and until their sons became fathers about 25–30 years later, Norwegian society has changed considerably in ways that are important to the understanding of fathering practices. One of the most marked changes concerns the gender division of labour. Until the 1970s there was a clear segregation of labour, where the mother was the centre of the family and the father was absent in the family, except as a provider (Lorentzsen, 2012). With gender equality high on the agenda, women entered working life and became involved in the economic provision for their families. The expansion of the welfare state led to a growth in the rural labour market as well, something that meant employment for women away from the farm. Not only were women thus relieved of the economic dependency on their husbands as men were no longer the only bread-winners in the family, but the basis for fatherhood as an institution of economic provision faltered.

Welfare state measures have had a considerable impact on the dual-earner family model and have encouraged the combining of work and care for the parents (Brandth and Kvande, 2003a, b; Ellingsæter and Leira, 2004, 2006). In particular, the introduction of parental leave for fathers has promoted an understanding of fathers as important people in the care for children. The ideal of the father-provider and the mother-carer has practically disappeared in the course of just a few decades and been replaced by a gender-equal family norm where both economic provision and childcare are shared (Ellingsæter and Leira, 2004), and where the fathers are expected to be involved in the nurturing and have close contact with their children (Brandth and Kvande, 2003b). While these moral obligations of fathering have been central for society at large, we still have sparse knowledge of how they have impacted on the culture and practice of agricultural parenting. This chapter is a contribution to this issue.

Family farming is the dominant social form in Norwegian as well as in most Western agriculture and refers to the family living and working on the farm holding. The distinction between work and family is blurred. Farming has undergone many changes over the last few decades, and the fathers in this study will not only have experienced general changes in the norms of childrearing but also a changing economic framework for their farm work. Compared with the 1970s, there are
fewer family farms and the number of farmers has consistently declined from 23.5 per cent of the work force in 1950 to 2.1 per cent in 2009 (Ladstein and Skoglund, 2008; SSB, 2010). At the same time, the remaining farmers are more dependent on income from work outside the farm. There are fewer farms where husbands and wives both have their income from the farm work. Although it is quite common for three generations to live together in the same farmyard, Norwegian farmers work alone on the farm for the most part (Melberg, 2005). Moreover, today’s pre-school children spend their days in kindergartens, something that was not common 30- 40 years ago when children stayed at home on the farm until they started school. For these reasons, the content of the working days for farmers and everyday life in farming families are shaped in new ways compared to just a few decades ago.

Additional changes in farming concern the increased use of technology, expansion in output, specialization, scale enlargement and increased global competition. Considering the changes in agricultural production, Norwegian family farming offers a compelling case for studying changing fathering practices.

Changing fathering practices

The changing nature of fatherhood and fathering has been the subject of much research during the last few decades (Lupton and Barclay, 1997; Hobson, 2002; Brandth and Kvande, 2003a, b; O’Brien, 2005; Doucet, 2006; O’Brien et al., 2007; Aarseth, 2008). This research has shown that the transformation of the traditional gender division of labour has provided opportunities for more nurturing relationships between fathers and children – a positive potential that has brought the term ‘new’ fathers. In addition to caring about their children through economic provision, fathers are now also expected to care for their children (Edwards et al., 2009).

Thinking in modern terms of progress, ‘traditional’ fathers may easily be regarded as poorer fathers than the ‘new’ fathers. This may, however, be based on a limited understanding of what fathers did earlier and a too positive understanding of what fathers actually do today – and it may represent an exaggerated view of the scope of the changes in fathering (Brandth and Kvande, 2003b). Historical
research warns against making generalizations about fatherhood in the past. In earlier times there might also have been fathers who had close relationships with their children and were caring in ways similar to those in which the ‘new’ fathers are expected to be today. An alternative perspective is to see fathering as open and dynamic. Brandth and Kvande (2003b) describe contemporary fathers as ‘the flexible fathers’ and stress that there is no standard model of fatherhood that is generally adopted and practised. Fathering is done in various ways, and there are many practices that are considered acceptable depending on the context or situation (Marsiglio et al., 2005). In this study the focus is on how the rural and agricultural context creates a special scope of action for fathers.

In their book Working and Caring over the Twentieth Century: Change and Continuity in Four Generation Families, Brannen et al. (2004) present their study of British parents over three generations. Mothers and fathers are interviewed about their life course trajectory with a focus on parenting and employment in various social and cultural contexts. Although parenting is largely mediated by the mothers, continuities across generations are less common than discontinuities in the families studied (Brannen and Nilsen, 2006). The authors developed three models of fathering practices based on the link between the fathers’ involvements in the working life and childcare. Fathers in all generations could fit into the model called ‘work-focused fathers’, who were fathers with a primary focus on work and little involvement in childcare. The second model, ‘family men’, included fathers who were the main providers but participated in childcare to some extent. This model was found in the two older generations. The third model, ‘hands-on fathers’, included current fathers who had a weak relationship with working life and were heavily involved in childcare. One main result in their study is that the change in fathering practices is not linear. There are considerable variations within generations. Fathers may be work-oriented or care-oriented regardless of whether they belong to the current or earlier generations of fathers of small children. Some of the current fathers in the study could be more work-focused than their own fathers, despite the contemporary ideology of ‘new’ and nurturing fathers. According to Brannen and Nilsen (2006), this is not surprising considering the recent trends towards longer hours in parts of working life.

Similar findings are reported in Mosegaard’s study (2007; 2008) of three generations of fathers in Denmark. It is not necessarily an innovation that fathers
spend time with their children, change diapers, bathe them, etc. One example is a farmer who had his first child in 1967. He was in charge of the daily care for his baby while he worked on the farm and his wife returned to work. This father therefore had spent more time with his children than most of the ‘new’ fathers in the youngest generation in her study, and conducted care tasks that are associated with current fathering. One change that Mosegaard (2007) finds is that ‘presence’ has entered the debate as a norm for the father-child relationship and that this has become a term that younger fathers use themselves when talking about their relationship with their children. To be ‘present’ fathers has become a primary aim for fathers today, while older generations rarely use ‘presence’ to describe their relationship with their children. The normative vocabulary different generations draw upon differs (Brannen, 2004).

Changes caused by women’s employment and the fact that that marriage has become a weaker guarantee for long-lasting relationships may have given fathers new opportunities when designing their fathering practices. Such social changes have made it difficult for fathers to copy their own fathers and their parents’ division of care tasks and responsibilities. Their own fathers may, however, serve as points of reference. It is possible to do what they did or to disapprove of it. It is also possible to choose some elements and reject others (Daly, 1995).

Processes of individualization have been claimed to result in fragile family relations (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). An increased likelihood for divorce makes it difficult to take it for granted that marriage will last. Consequently, the relationships between parents and children, and particularly fathers and children, have assumed greater importance as stable relationships (Aarseth, 2008). The relationships between fathers and their children may have become more central when fathers are no longer guaranteed access to their children through the marriage relationship. Fathers, being in a different position to their children than the mothers, need to invest in the relationship in terms of time and care, not only breadwinning. Generally speaking, children have assumed a new value for parents, more emotional than economic value (Jensen and McKee, 2003).

The meaning of childhood changes over time. The ways in which adults construe the meaning of children and childhood are also variable and different. Several authors (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Hays, 1996; Frønes, 2011) describe how children have turned into an important project for parents, and
to follow up on their children has assumed the character of a contemporary imperative. The term ‘intensive parenting’ describes a high degree of parental involvement and child-centeredness today. Similarly, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) term this phenomenon ‘parenting mania’, which they claim starts even before the child is born. The expectation is that the parents should give of themselves and their resources unconditionally, including, but not limited to, time, money, emotional support and love, in order to optimize their child’s future life chances (Hays, 1996; Cheal, 2002). This intensive approach to childrearing – that children’s life prospects can always be improved by better parenting – is an international ideology. Both mothers and fathers are influenced by the dynamics of children and childhood (Brannen et al., 2004; Aarseth, 2008). Moreover, parenting changes concurrently with the demands for competence in a society where children have to learn new skills in order to be fit for later life.

As mentioned, research on fathers in a rural context is scarce. Over the years there has, however, been abundant scholarship on family farming and its patriarchal character depicting women (and children) as undervalued and dependent on men (Sachs, 1983; Alston, 1995; O’Hara, 1998; Shortall, 1999; Brandth, 2002). The fact that farms have traditionally been passed down from father to son has given a special meaning to the interaction between fathers and their children (Peter et al., 2005). Socialization to farming often happens through participation in work on the farm in a person’s younger years (Haugen, 1993), and father-child interaction may mean that care and skill acquisitions for working life happens through fathering practices in the everyday world. Social research in agriculture has described a segmentation of work between the ‘outdoors’ and ‘indoors’ – a division that also represent men’s and women’s areas of work (Haugen, 1993; Thorsen, 1993). Peter et al. (2005) point out that these aspects of the rural/agricultural context have great influence on fathering and the interaction between fathers and their children.

Rural men are culturally represented as tough, strong and robust (Brandth, 1995; Campbell et al., 2006), and are seen to have a long way to go to reach gender equality (Brandth, 2002). A key focus in the literature on men and masculinity in a rural context has been to show how their identities are shaped by the discourses of rurality (Campbell et al., 2006; Pini, 2008). Reviewing the literature on men and masculinity in the farming sector, Pini (2008: 23) makes a list of all the
subject areas that are covered by this research. Fatherhood and fathering are not on the list! One of the reasons may be that fathers’ economic provision has been studied as work, and that childcare is not what is associated with men in the rural/agricultural context, although this does not necessarily imply that farmers have not been carers. Rather, it might mean that children and childcare has become a rather invisible practice for men in the countryside. Throughout history, rurality has been associated with masculinities in many ways that contribute to shaping a stereotypical and uniform picture of men who live and work in rural areas today (Lobao, 2006). Our study of rural men and fathers may contribute to varying the notions we have of rural men and their family practices.

Method

Our study is based on interviews with two generations of farming fathers in one agricultural community in mid-Norway. The oldest generation was born in the 1940s, and they were between 68 and 63 years of age at the time of the interviews in 2010. The youngest generation, their sons, were born in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Five fathers in each generation were interviewed about their work and experiences as fathers.

We clearly defined the sampling criteria before choosing the interviewees. The criteria were: men who had one or several children 10 years of age or younger, who were active farmers on a full or part-time basis, and who had fathers who had also been active farmers. The final sample met all our criteria. The fathers in the older generation had been full-time farmers all of their working lives. Their wives also worked on the farm. The younger generation of fathers had been occupied off the farm before taking over. At the time of the interview, two of them were part-time farmers and their wives worked full or part-time off the farm.

The sample was drawn strategically to capture how farming fathers form their fathering projects in two different time contexts – our interest being the relationship between work and childcare for farmers. Their particular work situation when it comes to working hours, the merging of home and work place, and the traditional participation of family members in the farm work are important aspects of the context. By interviewing two generations of fathers we
expected to get information about how the fathering practices may remain stable or change over time. Because of the sample size we were interested in comparing the two generations of farming fathers rather than focusing on the differences within each generation.

Two semi-structured interview guides were composed, one for each generation. We were interested in their answers to our prepared questions, but at the same time we wanted the interviews to be explorative and open for initiatives from the interviewees. The interviews lasted between 1.5 and 2.5 hours and took place in their homes. They were recorded and later transcribed; the total number of pages ranges from 46 to 20. The ethical demands for anonymity have been met and the fathers have been given fictitious names.

A note was made of themes that reappeared during the interviews, and a thematic search for issues dealing with generational differences in fathering practices continued after the interview period was over. The thematic content analysis is adapted from Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) ‘open coding’. All the interviews have been used in the analysis, but are not equally represented in the quotations.

The older generation of fathers talked retrospectively. It is a methodological challenge that accounts from the past are vulnerable when it comes to mistakes in memory. According to Dex (2003), such mistakes may be of two sorts: the interviewees may not remember at all, or they may remember occurrences incompletely or differently to the way in which they actually happened. Some of the fathers in the older generation had difficulty remembering what kind of care work and activities they did together with their children. This may be due to the fact that they did not participate in the childcare very much – something they emphasize themselves by saying that all work indoors was the responsibility of their wives while their own responsibility was work outdoors. Dex (2003: 377) points out that not all memories in life diminish equally quickly; areas experienced as important or positive are more easily recalled than others. We noticed for instance that a person who had weak recollections of care work could remember in detail how the outdoors work was done. This gives an indication that one remembers that which was important to oneself. Generally speaking, our experience is that they mainly remembered relatively well, even if details may have been lost, and what is remembered or not gives a lot of information in itself.
Fathering, particularly in the older generation, is examined retrospectively. To ask about practices that happened in a time context different from the one at the time of the interview represents further methodological challenges. As the past is recalled and interpreted in light of the present, it is important to be aware of how current discourses shape stories of the past (Brannen et al., 2004: 210).

The changing farm father practices

In the next section we will focus on our empirical study of rural men and their family practices. First, we will compare the stories of the fathers from the two generations when it comes to the early stages of fatherhood. What did becoming a father mean in terms of everyday life changes? After describing the change in fathering practices with the very small children, we will move on to ask what the picture looks like when the children have become somewhat older. What sort of fathering practices will farm work allow during the day? Are farmers more active fathers for children past the toddler stage?

The change to fatherhood – small consequences for fathering

Carl, a father in the older generation, said:

I still had to do the regular working tasks of course. But I popped inside to check on them, and I participated when there was something extra [...] when people came to visit [...] Beyond that, I can’t say that it [becoming a father] represented much change.

Carl’s narrative of how becoming a father influenced his everyday life is similar to the answers from the other fathers in this generation. The child’s birth did not lead to very many changes. They continued doing their farm work as usual.

To check on the situation indoors and help out when friends and family came to visit the newborn was possible because work and home was located at the same site, and he could spend his breaks indoors. For this reason, he was able to see and caress the baby during the day, and he had the possibility to witness the child’s early development more closely than fathers whose work is not co-located with the home.
The change the fathers did notice was that their wives stopped doing farm work. Children meant more care work for the mothers and, consequently, more farm work for the men. Edward explains:

[...] when you get a baby in the family there will be a lot more work for the wife to do indoors. When the children were small she stopped participating in the farm work. It was her job to be a housewife and take care of the children – as was common in those days.

Childcare was defined as indoor work, and indoor work was women’s work on the farm. Because the division of work and care was strongly gender divided, the fathers’ involvement in childcare became a ‘silent’ field. The fathers’ care work was neither spoken about nor remembered, but that does not necessarily mean that they did nothing at all. Carl says:

In those days it wasn’t like it is now – that men are in on caring – it was almost never [...] I almost never changed diapers and stuff. It must have been in a case of emergency. It was my wife, and sometimes my mother stepped in.

The fathers’ outdoor work duties released them from care work, but they could sometimes assist if the baby needed to be picked up and rocked. It was the mother who took care of the changing, feeding, bathing and rocking of the small children. The division of work was rather fixed: ‘I had my job outdoors’ is their explanation for why they participated so little. On the other hand, this also had to do with female dignity in the gender-segregated work sphere on the farm: “On a farm, it has always been that I would not have been anything of a farm wife if I had demanded that he come inside to work,” Astrid said.

In sum, what we see is that even if the fathers in the older generation worked at home on the farm and were near to the mother and child practically the whole day, they were not active in childcare. They were no more active than other fathers at that time; rather, as the data seems to indicate, they might even have been less active than fathers in other occupations due to the culture of farming and the cementation of the indoor – outdoor dichotomy.
The change to fatherhood – ‘a hell of a transition’

The younger generation describes what becoming a father meant in terms of everyday life changes quite differently. Didrik felt his life was “turned upside down.” Christer describes it as “a hell of a transition!” and continues “You know, being yourself and doing what you like [...] suddenly there is someone else to care for. I felt that I was no longer number one in my own life.” Didrik, who had not yet taken over the farm and was employed off the farm when his first child was born, said:

Being away the whole afternoon did not matter when it was just the two of us, but when we became three it mattered, because then I wanted to go home and had to go home to relieve my wife. So it was a completely different life after the baby.

To have become a father is experienced as a pronounced shift, and the baby seems to steal the fathers’ focus. As Anders said, “Someone else set the schedule for me”. The child’s continuous need for food, sleep and nursing has consequences for the fathers’ daily activities, and the freedom they experienced before is now changed by the baby setting the agenda.

When these younger fathers talk about a ‘completely different daily life’, it is because they were more involved in care work from the very start. Anders, who was one of the most involved fathers, describes his practice when his children were infants some 10 years ago:

[The children] slept in the cradle beside me [...] as in a gender-equal society it is the father who should mind them at night. [...] With the first one I woke up every night just to check on his breathing – one is scared of cot death, right? [...] Number two, he would never take the comforter, so when he wasn’t breastfed anymore he woke at three o’clock every night and cried, and I got up many a night for that reason. He continued like this for a long period of time, and I pushed the pram up and down the hallway just to keep him quiet.

Anders’ memories are detailed and show a fathering practice where involvement in care is a distinct element. The children slept on his side of the bed, and he has experienced lying there worrying and listening to their breathing, comforting them during the night as a regular matter.

There is a distinct contrast between how the fathers in the two generations experienced having a child and how they practised care in the first few years.
The older generation did not involve themselves directly in the daily care of the babies, something the younger generation did. They felt it was expected of them, something that is an indication that fathering among farmers has changed in content and meaning over the generations due to new moralities. Anders refers to the norms of ‘gender equality’. Since the 1960s there has been a pronounced change in the normative climate concerning gender and parenting in society in general, and this also seems to have affected farmers. The parental leave period reserved for fathers that was introduced in the 1990s (father’s quota) is a strong signal that fathers are expected to take responsibility for childcare (Brandth and Kvande 2003b). Holter (2007) describes this fathering ideal as the new ‘daddy track’. And the new track for farming fathers is linked to the changes for women in agriculture, who, since the 1970s, have increasingly taken employment off the farm. These movements among farming fathers mean that baby care is not incompatible with rural masculinity as it was for the older generation when childcare was referred to as women’s work and not for men.

However, although it is possible to identify changes towards more involvement in care work by farming fathers from the very start, let us look closer at how mothers and fathers shared the work in this period. Evan says: “I think I have changed diapers as much as my wife, yes I think so. [...] But it is she who has put them to bed the most, and she has bathed them more than me [...] She has done the most!” Anders says that he participated, but the tasks he was involved in were primarily changing diapers and getting the baby to sleep. According to Didrik, “It is my wife who prepares the baby’s food. I don’t fix porridge or dinner for the baby, no. And, likewise, well [...] I put their clothes on, but she has to decide which clothes and find them for me.”

“She has done the most, but I participated” sums up how they describe the division of care work in this generation. The fathers are supporting players in the daily care routines. Changing diapers seems to be a particular marker of their involvement. We also notice that the father’s practices are dependent on the mother’s organization and management, her orchestration being necessary in order for the father to take an active part. This has been called ‘the third shift’ (Hochschild, 1997). The third shift is invisible work, but very important for the family’s everyday life.
The differences between the two generations when it comes to fathering must be seen in connection with the structural and normative changes in the period between the two generations. This includes changes in welfare state policies, women’s employment and gender equality.

**Agricultural work and fathering practices: children joining fathers at work**

The fathers in the older generation all give the same answers to the question of what they did together with their children when the first few years had passed: the children often came with them when they worked – where they worked; “From the day they could walk they joined me in the barn. Played with their small cars under the heating lamp in the pig pen”, says Asbjørn. And according to Dag, “When they were old enough to play outdoors, they came with me to the barn. It was no problem [...] They rode their tricycles over the bunk feeder and all around the cowshed.”

It seems like the farm site, and particularly the barn, is a place where children played, and where fathers and children spent time together during the day. The fathers interacted with the children during work. They talked together, looked after them and saw to it that the children did not get hurt or disturb the animals more than necessary. It also seemed that the tractor and harvester offered room for company during work. Dag explains:

> I had a tractor that was a bit wide, so there was plenty of room by the driver’s seat. It was a John Deere, and I put a pillow in the space beside me for them to sit on. But, they often fell asleep right away – with their heads towards the window. [...] It was ok – they wanted to come along, and it was safer to have them inside the tractor than running around outside it. It was a popular thing to ride on the tractor.

Work and childcare seem to merge and the borders are blurred. Interestingly, we note that it is the children who come outdoors to their fathers, to where the fathers are working, and not the fathers who come indoors to be with the children in the physical spaces of the home. It is the children who enter the spaces of work where their fathers are. Mosegaard (2008) reminds us that ‘physical presence’ and ‘being present’ are two different things. Even if the fathers are physically present, being
together may not be the main purpose. She claims that this is a characteristic of fathering culture in the 1960s and 70s, when the idea of ‘being close’ had not yet entered the vocabulary of fatherhood. In our cases, the fathers and the children are together, but it is the situation of work that shapes their being together, and it is rarely being together that is the primary objective. A close father-child relationship has come into Scandinavian fathering ideology over the last 10-20 years (Mosegaard, 2008).

In the older generation the fathers were concerned that the children should learn practical work on the farm. Carl says:

They have tried out many things, something that has been valuable for them – tried out tinkering, fixing things, a bit of carpentry […] They have become quite independent and clever, the kids, I think! And if they hadn’t had the opportunity to come along, they wouldn’t have learned it – at home anyway. They have grasped a lot when it comes to practical work, all three of them.

Having the children come along to work is seen as preparation for becoming a farmer when they grow up. In addition, they regard learning ‘practical work’ as valuable in itself. Being good at practical work holds status in rural areas and the intergenerational transfer of skills is important to these fathers. There is reason to believe that there is a difference between sons and daughters in this respect – that sons are more active with their fathers at work. In their study in the U.S.A., Elder and Conger (2000) found that boys spent more time working with their fathers than girls did, and that this apprenticeship was valued as preparation for the day they would move into farming themselves. In a study of women farmers in Norway, however, the women who had taken over the farm similarly referred to their fathers as being significant to their interest and skills in farming. He taught them much of what they knew because he was the one they spent time with during their childhood (Brandth, 1994).

**Fathers joining children**

What then about the fathering practices in the second generation? What do their daily care practices look like and how does farm work affect the practices? Evan, who is a full-time dairy farmer with a wife who works full-time off the farm, says:
We did not send them to kindergarten every day. I had them at home a couple of days a week. I knew, of course, that I would not get much done on those days. The main objective was to mind the kids. But I managed to do some carpentry with the kids around me. I renovated the attic, and I took care of the kids!

Evan tried to take advantage of the overlap between farm and home to combine work with childcare for the two children. Winter is the season when most farmers have less work than the rest of the year because the fields are frozen and covered with snow. Evan spent the hours between dairying tasks in the morning and evening to mind the children and fix the house. He emphasizes that the children’s needs were his primary task. Since the mother was away at work, the father was ‘home alone’ with the children (cf. Brandth and Kvande, 2003a), and this made him form a more direct and independent relationship with them. The mother was not there to organize or translate the children’s needs for him.

In this way, the wife’s off-farm employment influenced Evan’s care practices. He states the following about how he combined dairying and care work on the days the children were in kindergarten:

Particularly those days when she worked longer, [...] I fed the animals before I went to fetch the children from the kindergarten. Coming home it was time to feed the children, and after that they came with me to the barn while I milked the cows. This is the kind of adjustment one has to make – both areas have to comply.

When the mother is away at work and the father is working at the farm/home, it is the fathers who have to mind the children in the mornings and afternoons. A common working day for the farming fathers consists of pockets of time for care work in between their work tasks. They are able to synchronize their hours with the needs of childcare.

When it comes to bringing the children to work with him in the barn, Didrik explains that it is theoretically possible to bring them along. However, reflecting on the differences between himself and his father’s situation in this respect, he claims that:

[...] their [the children’s] interest in coming with me to the barn or tractor is variable. [...] My impression is that I went to work with my father much more than my children do. They sometimes come to ride on the tractor, but
it seems like they have other interesting things they prefer to do – football or Playstation or whatever.

From their descriptions it seems that the farm as a ‘playground’ for children is in the process of becoming much less important as a site for being together. Children come along once in a while, but they lack ‘the feeling’ for the work, as one of the fathers expressed it. The children of today are described as having a more distant relationship with farming, something which is due to the fact that they do not come along and help their father as much as in earlier times. This generation of children have their own interest and activities, and, according to the fathers, it impinges on their socialization with farming and practical work. Thus the fathers in the current generation practise less training for future farm work than the fathers in the older generation.

**Farming, fathering and the characteristics of modern childhood**

Structural changes in agriculture are part of the explanation for why fathers and children are less together at work, even if work and home is close. First of all, the opportunities for children to come along seem to be weakened by changes in the agricultural labour processes. Anders explains:

> There are fewer tasks in which they can participate. [...] Removing rocks for instance; this was a task children did before that has now completely come to an end. To walk behind and throw rocks onto the trailer is out of the question today!

Technological development, improved efficiency and rationalization of farm operations have made children redundant at farm work in the sense that easy, slow-going tasks that do not demand machinery and technical know-how have disappeared (Thorsen, 1993). Farmers today are busy at work; they must produce increased volumes with better quality, something which is incompatible with minding children during work. “It is nice to have the children come along, but it slows down the work,” Brage explains. “The way machines are today – large and brutal [...] and since everything has to be done so quickly, you can’t have children getting in your way,” Anders says. Big machines and a high pace of work increases...
the risk of accidents. Agriculture is well known for being an industry where serious accidents happen relatively often. Both children and adults are vulnerable in this respect.

Another aspect of the differences we find between the two generations has to do with changes in childhood. To be a child today means something different to that of a generation ago. While the fathers of the younger generation helped their fathers at work, their own children of a similar age are understood to be too young to be involved in work on the farm. “He [the son] is not of much use now being 9 years old [...] he he [...] But he comes along for company sometimes,” Brage says. Just the thought that a nine-year-old could be of any use on the farm brings about laughter.

Cultural understandings of what children can manage to do, and what they ought to be exposed to, have changed over time (Hays, 1996; Frønes, 2011). The norm seems to be that children should play or do homework and not engage in physically demanding farm work. In other words, fathering practices in the various generations are influenced by how children and childhood are understood. Today, when children sometimes accompany their fathers to work on the farm, it is not so much to help out or learn how to do farm work as to keep their fathers company. ‘Children should be children’ even if they live on a farm, seems to be the attitude of fathers in the youngest generation:

I think that I have a different relationship with my children than my father had with us. I don’t regard my children as a labour resource [...] I have been very aware that they should be allowed to be children [...] to live like most children and participate in various leisure activities! It is not their fault that they live on a farm. (Evan)

Evan describes how he himself has experienced agricultural change and how this influences his fathering practices. In the 1960s and 70s it may have seemed sensible to bring children to work on the farm. Employment in farming was going down during this period, but to be an heir to a farm (allodium) still had an important cultural and material meaning. Children had to be socialized into farm work with a view to the future of the farm besides being of use during harvest time. The last few years have seen a decline in the situation for farmers, and the cultural meaning of the alodial child may have faded accordingly.
Comparing their fathering practices with their own fathers, several of the younger fathers point out that their priorities are different. They may feel that their work prevents them from spending time with their children, but this can be solved to some extent. Didrik says:

I try to organize my work to prevent it governing their whole childhood, so that they won’t say: ‘no, he can’t do it because he has to go to the barn!’ [...] that their childhood will not be marked by me working all the time! Because I remember well my own father; when I had football or shooting practice, I always heard that it was time for him to go to the barn! He rarely had time to come along to my activities. It wouldn’t have been any harder than finishing milking and feeding the cows a bit earlier in the evening to be able to come along.

In Didrik’s story he gives priority to his children’s activities, something he contrasts with his father who prioritized work. Work is important also for Didrik; feeding and milking must be done on a regular time schedule every day, but he is concerned not to let it replace time he would rather spend (and is expected to spend) with his children in the afternoons. So he tries to adapt his work to his time preference by employing the flexibility of farm work. Work and care are combined differently in the two generations. Evan says: “Work and moose hunting; that was all my father cared about. He was a real toiler, my father.”

Today there is a different moral obligation where fathers are expected to be together with their children, not vice versa. The children do not ‘go out’ to their fathers whose main focus is on work, as it was with the older generation. Rather, it is the fathers who ‘go out’ to their children and their activities.

The tendency to appreciate different time priorities must be seen in connection with the changes in the understanding of modern childhood and what is considered best for children (Frønes, 2011). We find that children’s spare time, play and games have assumed importance in the relationship between fathers and children. Ideologically, childhood is considered to be a happy and carefree stage of life, and this influences fathering practices. Evan, who compares himself with his father, says:

I have more fun together with my kids! [...] Whenever I was with my dad as a kid, I had to work. As a father I have arranged for more time to be with my children, more fun and games! [...] I probably spent just as many hours
together with my dad, but it was work. With my kids, it is leisure time! We go skiing, swimming and those kinds of things.

This illustrates a pronounced shift in fathering practices. The current generation of fathers are involved in many activities that are not farm related together with their children, and it is the children who often show the way – who are social actors who negotiate the content of their own lives. Anders says: “I do more things with my kids outside the farm than my father did […]. I spend an awful lot of time accompanying them to football and skiing practice.” Leisure activities have increased in rural as well as in urban areas. Generally speaking, such organized activities barely existed until the end of the 1980s (Frønes, 2011). That the activities are organized makes children’s leisure time very different to when the younger generation of fathers grew up themselves. Evan points out that he is “[…] involved in driving them to practice, participating in their practice, and coming along to watch. And, it is fun! And, I get to spend time with them. I think this is being a good father.”

Increased possibilities and choices for children means new obligations for parents, and this is claimed to form the content of parenting over the last few decades (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). ‘Intensive’ ways to parent – by using relatively large resources (money, time and interests) are mostly connected to middle-class parents in urban areas (Aarseth, 2008; Vincent and Ball, 2007). However, according to Hays (1996), intensive parenting transcends class boundaries, and the fact that we find it in agricultural districts as well indicates that it also transcends the rural-urban dimension in that intensive parenting contains an expectation directed toward rural fathers and their ‘equal’ participation in child-rearing tasks. Still, there might be local versions of intensive parenting based on place and cultural traditions.

Conclusions

This study has explored changes in fathering practices among farmers who have fathered in two different historical periods. The non-static concept of ‘fathering practices’ has been employed as an approach to studying this change in the dual location of home and work that characterizes farming. The perspective has helped
examine how farming men do fathering in response to the norms and discourses of their time, assisted (or resisted) by the claims of their work.

Our sample is too small to analyze variations within generations, and since the fathers interviewed all come from the same area, variations within generations are probably less than they otherwise might have been. The analysis has, however, also grasped within-generation dynamics of fathering over part of their life course as their children have grown. Thus the study has employed both a generational and a life-course perspective.

From one generation to the other we have seen a pronounced shift in fathering practices. The older generation stressed their obligations to take care of the farm, leaving infant childcare to mothers in accordance with the gender norms at the time. When their children grew a bit older, the fathers and children spent time together; the children joining their fathers at work in the barn or on the tractor. Fathering thus consisted of doing joint farm-related activities across generations. The children were expected to participate in the farm work, and it was important to the fathers to pass on qualifications that would be useful in later life, expected as the children were to take over the farm in the future. Elder and Conger (2000) call this an ‘apprenticeship model of fathering’, a model that is based on the prominent role of the father in farming families.

The current generation of fathers described their transition to fatherhood as a big change in their lives. They were involved in childcare from the start, and they took the role of mother’s helper indoors, being sensitive to the norms of gender equality. Moreover, their wives’ employment outside the farm demanded greater participation by the fathers. Modern farmers seem able to take advantage of the ultimate proximity of work and home in a different way than earlier as they use the relatively flexible time boundaries of farm work to cover the care needs.

With regard to spatiality, we have noted that one difference in fathering practices between the generations is that the fathering does not necessarily take place in the domestic location of indoors. In the older generation the physical spaces of fathering were the spaces of work and the outdoors, and fathering is prescribed through the spatial as well as the normative demands of farming. The younger generation seem more liberated from these conventions and use the indoors spaces to a larger extent in their fathering. They employ the spaces defined by childcare and the children’s own activities to a much larger extent.
One process behind this change can be related to the different meanings of childhood in the two generations. Farm work no longer seems to be central in the lives of children growing up on farms. Rather, according to the fathers’ accounts, their children should be allowed to escape the bindings of the farm and to have their leisure activities outside the farm. Since there are relatively fewer children growing up on farms today, it is more difficult for farming parents to ‘demand’ that their children participate in the farm work when their friends do not. Contemporary rural fathers seem to be caught up in the norms of intensive parenting, investing time and energy in activities that are not farm related but are thought to improve their children’s chances in a late modern capitalist society.

The changes in fathering practices must be understood in response to several societal changes. For one, there are the changes in agricultural production that have contributed to a hurried pace of work and made children obsolete as a workforce. Employment for women due to the opportunities in rural labour markets, where welfare state jobs have been available, has put pressure on men to contribute to house and childcare. The fathers in the current generation have adapted to the situation where the wife is employed off the farm and there is no longer anyone ‘indoors’ to look after the children during the day. Moreover, there are the changes towards greater gender equality in Norwegian society in general since the 1970s. The introduction of the father’s quota and constant discussion about the father’s role in Norwegian society have put a lot of attention on ‘new’ fathering and fatherhood.

Particular emphasis must be put on the changes in the farming women’s employment situation. The mothers in the older generation continued to work at home and help out on the farm when the children reached school age, while the mothers in the younger generation returned to studies or paid employment after one year when their parental leave period was over. The mothers’ employment practices off the farm influences the fathering practices and the strategies for work-family reconciliation differently than it does when work and home are in the same place for both mothers and fathers. In the earlier situation the doorstep was a marker between women’s and men’s work.

It has been suggested that men’s orientation towards childcare can be understood in terms of a new child-oriented masculinity (Bekkengen, 2002; Aarseth, 2008). This discourse of masculinity connects to the structural changes
in farm production, welfare state policies and general gender equality discourses, plus the growth of child-centeredness in today’s society. It has thus influenced rural men and affected rural masculinity practices. There is no indication in the data that a new child-oriented masculinity cannot be combined with what constitutes rural masculinity.

References


Women, Men and Children in Families


III

DIVERSE CHILDHOODS
Chapter 6
Photographing as a research method – Finnish children’s views of everyday life

Introduction: everyday life as a challenging phenomenon

Everyday life seems to be everywhere, but nonetheless nowhere. People use the term ‘everyday’ or ‘daily’ life in an easy, self-evident and mundane way, as if it is in some way unchallenged. Albeit that everyday life consists of humdrum ‘day-to-day’ practices, where familiarity is one of the essential elements, it is also full of different emotions, rhythms and actions. It lies between private and public, where domestic duties, work and travel are situated (Bennett and Watson, 2002; Felski, 2000). Jokinen (2005: 11–12, 158), and shows how everyday life is often regarded as being so customary that the person who is living it fails to see through the mist, but the ‘outsider’ sees through it.

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2 We use the terms “everyday” and “daily” as meaning the same.
Albeit the life of every family has its common traditions and routines, unique connectedness and shared memories, each family member – a child or an adult – generates a different kind of agency in his or her actions, emotions and speech. Everyday life is also continuously in flux. It varies, for example, in the point of time and in the size of the family (Felski, 2000; Rönkä and Korvela, 2009; Rönkä et al., 2009). Unfortunately, activities and emotions in family life are understudied. The shortage of research especially concerns the experiences of the children.

Given the familiarity of daily life, researching the experiences of the daily lives of family members can be a challenge for researchers: how to get unique viewpoints from the participants concerning their family lives and how to make the familiar ‘strange’ (Mannay, 2010: 94). A camera provides one possible answer to this dilemma. Photornarrative research (see Kaplan et al., 2007: 24) gains insight into people's lives and reality as they reflect on their subjective situation from a different point of view, through the lens of the camera. The participants may become researchers of their own culture, lives and homes as they take photos for the photo interview and speak about it in their own words (Kolb, 2008). Using photography as a research tool is a quick, easy and useful way to obtain family members', especially children’s, perspectives on their lives. Photography does not require an ability to read or write, and can be seen as a suitable research method, especially for children (Cook and Hess, 2011; Punch, 2002).

This chapter approaches everyday life from the children’s point of view and employs photography as a way for the children to reflect on their daily lives. The aim of the chapter is two-fold. First, it will discuss the use of cameras and photographs as a research method and asks: what is the usefulness of cameras and photographs as a research method for analyzing daily life? Second, it will describe everyday family life and the emotions involved in it through photographs taken by children. In this respect, the chapter asks: what kinds of photographs of everyday family life have been taken by children and what kinds of emotions and actions can be seen within the photographs?

The analysis presented in the chapter is based on the qualitative method: content analysis and precisely compositional interpretation (see Rose, 2012: 58). The structure in this chapter is as follows. First we will consider emotions and actions in everyday life and how to begin to research this common phenomenon, especially from the point of view of children. Then comes the data and analysis
demonstration; how did we use the cameras and photographs to reach the children’s voice? In the results we show the contents of children’s photographs and, finally, discuss the usefulness of the ‘photonarrative’ method.

Emotions and actions in everyday life

Rönkä and Korvela (2009) see everyday life as having three dimensions: actions, emotions and temporality. The actions of family members can be studied from the microsociological approach, which has been evolving in family sociology. The researchers have noted that the aim is not just to define the family (or family life) but rather to study how the family or (family life) is constructed through the everyday actions of its members. This means, for instance, how the responsibilities and rights are divided and negotiated, and in what way the practices and routines are created (Rönkä and Korvela, 2009; Gubrium and Holstein, 1990; Morgan, 1996, 1999). The children’s point of view in particular has recently been studied more and more. For example, Dencik (2002) noted that the child rearing culture has changed and become more child centred over the past few decades. Children are seen as subjects and it has been noticed that each child has her/his own rights and responsibilities – in society and everyday life at home.

Family life encompasses many different family relationships and agencies that are established through routine practices and shared experiences. Everyday life is something that family members are constantly creating with their individual and collaborative actions and emotions in time and space (Rönkä and Korvela, 2009). Through these activities, family members create both individual and shared memories, which can serve to keep the family together (Bietti, 2010). Everyday social moments, often unmarked and unnoticed, are meaningful in affording family members an opportunity to feel connected to one another and create a sense of well-being (Kremek-Sadlik and Paugh, 2007).

Daly (2003) has argued that emotions have been overshadowed in the family realm. One reason for this is the difficulty in creating theories that capture the way in which families live their everyday lives. Emotions are also hard to track because they often involve expressions that are inconsistent with other attitudes. Everyday life is full of emotions in constant shift from positive to negative and vice
versa (Rönkä et al., 2009). Why are emotions important to research in the first place? The emotional work that family members do (recognising others’ needs and taking responsibility for them) is critical for a smooth-running everyday life. Individuals’ emotions in the family are important because they tend to spread to other members of the family and influence the collective atmosphere (Daly, 2003; Larson, 2005). The negative emotions in particular tend to spill over more than the positive emotions (Larson, 2005). The plurality of daily moments has been described by Rönkä et al. (2009) in terms of two dimensions: emotional tone and intensity of experience.

Emotions are often seen as natural and physical, unintended and uncontrollable, and consequently dangerous, rendering people vulnerable. Emotions can be covert or subconscious, and commonly said to be irrational. It has been documented that emotions and rationality are not necessarily each other’s counterpoints; they can work together too, as when emotions provide information that the rational mind alone cannot (Damasio, 2000: 42–47; Greenspan, 2000). Turner and Stets (2005: 2–4, 11) argue that along with emotions’ biological processes, they emerge from situations that are deeply social. What people feel is conditioned by socialization into culture and by participation in social structures. Emotions are an active response to a relational context (Burkitt, 2002: 152). Hochschild (1983: 56–58) says that every culture has its own “emotional vocabularies” and rules for what and how feelings can be shown. Boys and girls learn which emotions are acceptable and which are not.

**Photonarrative as a tool for researching children’s everyday lives**

What family members do, feel and think on a daily basis is shaped by inherited practices, codes, beliefs and traditions that are often hidden from view. Researching everyday family life is shaped by the complex intersection between many forces and concerns: material, health-related, moral, temporal, spatial and relationship (Daly, 2003). As Roy (2007) argues, we are trying to understand the everyday as a site other than that of the mundane or the taken-for-granted.
Scholars of everyday family life must be particularly wary of preconceived understandings. As social constructionism presupposes, all knowledge is historically and culturally constructed, as are the things we know about daily life. However, it does not afford us automatic access to the ‘real world’ (Felski, 2000). Everyday life has been described as “a lived process of routinisation that all individuals experience”. Hence we are not interested in truth or falsehood as such, but in what has been said and what it reveals about the collective and individual context and experiences (Felski, 2000).

The researcher is inevitably a part of the data. As Pink (2001: 19) noted, the researcher’s presence may affect the reality observed and the data collected, although reality is subjective and is known only as it is experienced by the individuals (Pink, 2001: 20). The researcher can never be apart from the knowledge production and data collection, but a researcher can seek a method that allows them to create windows into the inner lives of the informants. Recently, this position has been called into question and poststructuralists have suggested that there are no objective observations, only observations that are socially situated in the worlds of the two subjects (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 21; McLeod and Thomson, 2009: 7). The interpretation of images can have more than one potential meaning. For example, photographs are not only visual records of reality – each individual produces photographic meanings by relating the image to his or her existing personal experience, knowledge and the wider cultural discourses (Pink, 2001: 23, 68; Rose, 2012: 2). As Berger (1972: 9) has stated, we never look at just one thing, we always look at the relationship between things and ourselves.

Researching everyday life is challenging in the sense that hierarchical relations exist between the researcher and the examinee. For example, relationships in a research interview can be considered unequal for the reason that ultimately the researcher has the power to direct the interview (Helavirta, 2007). Children as individuals and as a social group are often powerless in relation to adults; thus this study chose to concentrate on the quality of the children’s participation.

Since the late 1980s, there has been increasing interest in listening to children’s experiences and viewpoints. This movement has been called “new social studies of childhood” (e.g. Alanen, 1988), which means a move away from seeing children as passive recipients of adult socialization to recognizing that children are social actors in their own right (O’Kane, 2000: 136). This has inspired the children’s
rights discourse; children are viewed as social actors in their own lives. Rutanen (2011) noted that the social and cultural construction on children’s age and the ‘best interests of the child’ doesn’t always come true (see also Vuorisalo, 2010). It must be noted that children are more vulnerable than adults in the unequal relationship with the researchers – but, at the same time, they are agents and experts in their own lives. This new child-centeredness approach has meant a methodological shift involving the emergence of “new” participatory research methodologies and the development of multi-method approaches (Punch, 2002.) These participatory methods respect children’s agency as social actors, empowering children and eliciting their own opinions, seeing them as active participants in the creation of their own meanings in their daily family life (see Strandell, 2010: 92–102).

Here we use “photonarrative” to give the voice to children. This means that children take photos and talk about them afterwards. In this way we can hand power to the children over the content and direction of a research project, encouraging a relationship of trust between researcher and participant. In addition, photographs can capture moments and introduce content that might be considered irrelevant by an adult researcher (White et al., 2010: 148). Photographs have been used as a research tool in many scientific fields, for example in anthropology, sociology, nursing and health (see Lassetter et al., 2007). Childhood, youth and family researchers have also found photographing to be a useful method (see Autonen-Vaaraniemi, 2009; Cook and Hess, 2007; Einarsdóttir, 2005; Epstein-Stevens et al. 2006; Janhonen- Abruguah, 2010; Jorgenson and Sullivan, 2010; Luttrel, 2010; Strack et al., 2004; Warne et al., 2012; Zartler and Richter, 2012). The participatory photo interview method – sometimes referred to as “photovoice”, “photonovella”, “photo-elicitation interview” or “photonarrative” (Kaplan et al., 2007: 24; Rose, 2012: 311) – invites the participant to answer a research question by taking photos and explaining their photos to the researcher. This stage is vital in clarifying what the photos taken by the interviewees mean to them. The photo interview respondents are not “research subjects” but rather active participants (Kolb, 2008).

When the responsibility for taking photographs is in the hands of the informants and the researcher is not present during the photography, the balance of power between the researcher and informants is very much tipped toward the
informants. When children take photographs that are later to be looked at and discussed in interviews, the data gathering is in the hands of the informants, who thus provide evidence of their own making rather than being directed by the researchers. The use of the informants’ photographs means that the focus is on their individual perspectives as family members (Einarsdottir, 2005: 527; Punch, 2002). Through photographs, people can produce narratives that mirror their biographies and thus pick up eloquent and insightful accounts of their lives that might not otherwise come to mind (Autonen-Vaaraniemi, 2009: 60–62; Rose, 2012: 312). As Clark (2010) shows, this has been documented to work with children too. However, photographs of daily life cannot be seen as absolute descriptions of existing situations but as an attempt to capture lived family realities.

In summary, the photographs represent a “document of everyday family life” that is generated for this specific research project. We have taken account of the fact that the photographs and the narratives afterwards are only one piece of the whole picture, they are not an absolute representation of a given state but a tool to help develop our understanding (Cook and Hess, 2007).

Data and analysis: photographs and children’s individual interviews

This chapter concentrates on the children’s photographs (91 items) and interviews with 6 children. Each child was individually interviewed twice. The first two participant families were found by the researcher’s own contacts (friends’ friends and acquaintances) and a small snowball effect brought in the other three families. Altogether, we interviewed five girls and one boy. All children came from the same middle-sized city in central Finland.

The children’s ages varied from 4 to 15 years. The interviews were conducted after the school day and the parents were at home (in another room) during most of the interview situations. An exception was the youngest participant, a 4-year-old,

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In our wider research project the data consists of both photographs and narrative interviews with mothers, fathers and children (totally 34 interviews with five families; 5 mothers, 5 fathers and 6 children, and 236 photographs). The parents’ ages varied between 28 and 44 years, and the children’s ages between 4 and 15 years.
whose father was in the same room most of the time – except when the father was doing housework in another room or was smoking outside. The first interviews lasted for about 20 to 40 minutes per interviewee. This first home visit can be equated with Kolb’s (2008) first category of the four photo interview phases: “opening phase”, where the researcher and the informant got acquainted with each other, got some background information on the informants (for example, age and hobbies) and the informed content was asked for the first time. It has been said that the best way to act with children is to adopt the “least adult role” (Warming, 2011). Here, this meant that board games were played with pre-school-aged children and books were read with them before the actual interview. This time the informants were given disposable cameras (with 24 to 27 colour exposures), so the children got their own cameras, which meant that having a camera was a big responsibility; the children had to take ownership, care and control of the camera (see Luttrell, 2010). The children were asked to take photographs of things, situations, persons, feelings and objects belonging to their everyday family life during one week. Suggestions or specific instructions and adult guidance on the types of photographs were avoided. There was one child who didn’t want to get involved at first, but took the camera and was eager to participate the next time because she wanted see the pictures she had taken.

After a few weeks the researchers picked up the cameras and took them to Commission Art (double photos, so the children got their own). The second interview took place after the photography week (which was Kolb’s ‘photo shooting phase’) and was carried out as a narrative interview. This home visit can be referred to as the ‘decoding phase’, the third phase of Kolb’s categorization. The interview sessions with the children lasted from about 15 to 35 minutes. The photographs built up an interview framework so that the interviews and the situations varied from one family to another. At the beginning of the second interview all of

Kolb (2008) distinguishes four different phases of the photo interview: In the first or opening phase, the researchers invite the photo interview respondents to consider a general research question and consider how to take photos that reflect the viewpoint of the question. In the second active photo shooting phase, the participants implement their reflections by taking photos of specific subjects – e.g. people, toys, things, buildings and so on. In the third or decoding phase, the participants consider their photos and verbalize their thinking in an interview with the researcher. The final analytical scientific interpretation phase involves researchers analyzing the data – photos, interview transcripts – generated by the first three phases of the photo interview.
the photos were spread out together, normally on the floor, where you could see them all at once. The starting point for the second interview was to create a situation where the interpretation of the photographs came from the informant - formulating the first question as an invitation to talk (see Chase, 2005: 4). This was formulated here as something like: “Tell me about these photos. Why did you choose these ones and what is in there?” If necessary, the researcher asked follow-up probes, such as why certain photos had been taken, why a particular photograph described typical daily life, whether something was missing from the photographs, and why. The researchers asked the interviewee to pick the 5 most important pictures and start to talk about them. As Cook and Hess (2007) have noted, photographs provide an opportunity to talk around visual prompts, which can be easier than trying to talk about something in the abstract. This also stimulated the children. At the end of the interview the researcher asked them to talk about something that was not in the photographs, something that was perhaps missing, or that was not taken into account while photographing. All members of the same family were interviewed during the same day – the children were usually the first ones in line. This method can be referred to as “dental visit”, where everyone was ‘called in’ separately – the others waiting their turn.

In this study, informed consent was given freely. The participation by the informants was voluntary and they were free to withdraw at any time. In addition to the permission of the parent(s), assent to participate in the study was obtained from each child. Each child was also told that we were interested in her/his family life and were gathering this information for a scientific study. One child declined to participate. In this case, the data was gathered from the parents. Einarsdóttir (2007: 205) has noted that when children agree to participate in a study that evolves over a period of time, their consent should be treated as an ongoing process and be open for review during the course of the study. This came about in the second interview, when the informed consent was updated, especially with the photographs. The researchers went through every photo with each child, each of whom made the decision to accept or not accept the photo in question. The permissions were documented by use of a written consent document, signed and dated by the children and their parents. There was one child who did not want to give permission to use two pictures. The reason for this was his concern in addressing a picture in which his father pulls a face. This can be interpreted as
embarrassment at the father’s playfulness, or an attempt to protect his father – and himself. After the interviews the data was transcribed and each participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect confidentiality. Permission to use the photos in this publication has been obtained from the participants (from both the one who has taken the picture and the one who is in the picture).

The reviewing and analyzing of the photographs and interview transcripts has been done using the qualitative method, more accurately called “compositional interpretation” (Rose, 2012: 51–58), which means coding by content, emotions and context (indoors/outdoors, which rooms were photographed, which not). In the first phase of the analysis the photographs were analyzed by the researchers separately, using the question “what does the image show; who, where and what is in the photo?” The photographs were openly coded: grouping similar ones in the same category, such as different actions like playing, cooking and resting. After the separate analysis we constructed mutual classification and understanding. This kind of research triangulation may increase the validity of the research (Mathison, 1988).

Emotions portrayed in the photographs were also considered, classifying them as, for example, smiling and being serious pictures. This might be called “expressive content”, which, according to Rose (2012: 74), means finding the ‘mood’ or ‘atmosphere’ (affective characteristics) of a photo. By including the children’s interviews in the analysis, we wanted to capture the children’s views and meanings of everyday life. The children’s own words and meanings are shown in the citations. In the second phase of the analysis the researchers constructed a common classification from the separate codings. No theory directed the method of analysis and at this point the analysis can be seen as inductive. We also quantified the coding, which is presented as percentages. It also must be noted that each child picked out 5 to 7 photos concerning their daily life that they wanted to tell us more about. This means that the interview data (only) focused on a limited number of photographs; we didn’t have stories with all of the photos.
Snapshots of the children’s daily lives

This section describes the content of the children’s photographs. Roughly speaking, there were five bigger themes: people, things, activities, places and emotions. It was noted that every family and every individual had its unique daily life, which consisted of many different and similar activities and emotions. The differences that emerged were seen in the themes the participants photographed, in the objects photographed (people, things, animals, scenery) and in the places where the photographs were taken (outside/inside, which rooms were documented, which not). The photography method generated a total of 91 photographs taken by the children.

People, activities, objects and places of daily life

Over half of the pictures (65%) described people (most of them family members), 26% were of everyday objects (e.g. computer, telephone, television) and 98% of the pictures were taken at home, indoors. Most of the people in the photos were the children’s parents or siblings. The children emphasized relationships – intergenerational ties and connection to home, which has been documented elsewhere (see Luttrell, 2010). The parents seemed to have a quite gendered role in the photographs. The mothers were the householders doing dishes, watering plants and cooking (see Zartler and Richter, 2012). The fathers were reading magazines and doing something alone or with the children at home. Things that both parents did were resting and watching television, or sitting at the computer - where fathers were said to be playing, but the mother’s actions were not elaborated on. However, the image of the parents was constructed contradictorily in the children’s narratives regarding the photos. The ideal of co-parenting was seen in the children’s narratives: both the mother and the father were said to cook, play with the children, read bedtime stories, take the children to bed and to their hobbies – and most of all, share emotional investment and commitment with the children (Ehrenberg et al., 2001). Even when the interviewer tried to lead the conversation about the photo in a particular direction, a 7-year-old girl corrected her and said how her parents “take turns” in the everyday practices in the family:

I: And your daddy is usually with you when you are going to sleep?
G: Yes, but so is mother. They always take turns.
The context of the daily activities seems to be most often the kitchen or living room. There were also photographs of the children’s own rooms, hallways, toilets and parent’s bedroom. What was not photographed were saunas, even though the sauna is considered a quintessential part of Finnish daily life and culture. Like Zartler and Richter (2012) in their research on children’s photographs, we noticed that the photographs stimulated the children to talk about things that were not represented in the picture (see also Setälä, 2012: 78–79). For example, one 4-year-old girl told a story about her ‘black picture’ that was unsuccessful in the eyes of the researchers:

In the evening we always play so that we girls just run around, we go here and there and here and there […] We just run all the time, we go to different places. Together with Iiris, we laugh, we laugh so hard that we almost fall [laughing hard while talking].

From the children’s point of view (both in the photos and in the interviews) everyday family life seems to consist of various actions: keeping company and playing with mates and siblings, being at the computer, cooking, doing household duties, getting into hobbies, ‘comings and goings’, resting and eating. The different activities didn’t create a picture of chaos or a hectic day. No one seemed to be in a hurry in the photos or stories. Consequently, the daily activities appeared to be rather peaceful, in order and following each other. The children also seemed to have a ‘natural’ way to tell a story, with a beginning, a middle and an end. Constructing the narrative with a plot, constructs order and coherence in our behaviour and daily life, and the interpersonal understanding with an interviewer (Bruner, 2001; Elliot, 2005: 3–12). For instance, one 15-year-old girl described the order of her everyday life:

That is quite a normal morning, Mikko has woken up and then mother has gone to work and I and Piia are eating something, and then we will soon go to school. In general, we eat that kind of bread and something like that.

There were also pictures that can be interpreted as showing individual hobbies, such as books, piano and ice hockey. Almost as many photographs were taken of having dinner / breakfast or cooking. For example, there’s one picture (photo 1 below) of some sisters cooking together. One of the sisters (14 years old) talked about the intensive relationship with her 15-year-old sister:
I: [Looking at the photo] Is this what it looks like, as you see it, your everyday life?
Girl: Yeah
I: What makes it everyday?
Girl: Well [...] kind of, Tiina [friend] is always in our place and then also that I always go to my dancing lessons on Fridays and [...] here we are cooking something together with Maija (sister). And then I am with Maija a lot, as you can see in these photos.

Picture 1 – Sisters cooking

The children’s photographs also described family members taking time for resting, going to sleep, sitting or sleeping on a sofa, relaxing in a swing-seat, etc. For example, photo 2 (below) shows a snapshot from a ‘normal evening’, and the 10-year-old girl said: “[...] here I guess, those [parents] are watching television [...] and I’ve come to take a photo.”
There were also pictures that can be interpreted as describing various ‘comings and goings’, such as the whole family with towels possibly going to sauna, a father walking outside with a Finnish zither and a child going to school. All the photos were taken at home, even though the informants had the possibility to take photographs outside the home. It seems that the camera’s place was at home; there were pictures of leaving home or coming home, but not being somewhere other than home. There are many explanations for this. It might be that the children were so conscientious and maybe afraid to carry the camera with them (afraid to lose it or break it). Or maybe it was too difficult to carry the camera with them, their parents didn’t let them to carry it, or this option simply didn’t come to the child’s mind. In summarizing, it seems that the constructed image of these children’s daily lives is quite ‘home-centred’ and familistic. This was noticed by one of our informants (a girl aged 7 years) too: “I really am at home [...] you can notice from these photos that I’m quite much at home.” The age of the children might also have affected the children’s mobility – for example, the 4-year-old has not got so much independence as a 14-year-old usually has.
The children’s daily lives seemed to be ‘decent’: home-made food, mealtimes, relationships, sleeping and amusement, tooth-brushing, etc. The actions in their daily lives seem to consist of obligations or possibilities to take part in household duties. However, there were photographs that described more individualistic options, like hobbies (ice-hockey, dancing), playing, toys and friends. For example, one 4-year-old girl (Anna) spoke about her toys (picture 3 below):

I: What is this [pointing at the photo]?
Girl: Those are my toys, Iiris’s and my toys. That is a cupboard and there are my [...] jigsaw puzzles and Iiris’s baby games and my things and also Iiris’s things and my father’s and also mother’s in this cupboard, in this cupboard there are all kinds of things.
I: What is here in this toy box that [...] [Anna interrupts]
Girl: That red bunny is Iiris’s and the bigger one with long ears is my bunny.

Although the content of the photographs varied slightly, there were also some similarities. Every child took pictures about technology and social media (television, telephones and computers). It can come as no surprise to witness the presence of different kinds of technologies in daily life. Technology powerfully
affects our daily life (Felski, 2000: 22). Bennett and Silva (2004: 13) noted that technologies are embedded in the ways home relationships and spaces are produced. Although there were various ‘technology photos’, only a few mentioned them; the children didn’t choose those photos to talk about. Perhaps computers and television are such a close and fixed part of daily life that there seems not be anything special to ‘share’ with the researcher in the interview situation. Another interpretation is that the children didn’t want to stress the importance of the technology, knowing that its image in the adult mind is not so healthy – so they chose not to talk about them. It must also be noted that the photos here were mainly taken by girls (only one boy) and it has been documented that boys spend more leisure time on ‘technology’ activities than girls do (Cherney et al., 2006).

**Emotions**

It was quite difficult to name the atmosphere or emotions in the photos. In fact, it was impossible without the researchers’ own memories of the interview situation and interpretations of earlier experiences of the same kinds of expressions, gestures and situations. Despite this, the informants and the interviewers belong to the same culture – and in this sense share the same context and mutual ‘emotional rules’.

As Gabhainn and Sixsmith (2006) noted in their data on children’s photographs, the children viewed their everyday life as broadly positive, where the relationships and activities were at the heart of the photos (see also Smith et al., 2012). In this study, one 10-year-old girl took a photo of “having fun” with the camera: her father was taking a photo of her photographing her father (picture 4). Spontaneous images of an event occurring at the moment of photographing were more likely to be captured. This may lead to an overemphasis of the importance of the event (Punch, 2002: 333). The informants may also take what they consider to be ‘good’ photographs. But what is the age at which you start to try please the interviewer or take socially appropriate, ‘good’ pictures? One 4-year-old girl was very proud of a “vitamin-picture” where she had photographed her mother’s medicine cabinet. In another interview, a 7-year-old girl was very worried that she didn’t remember to take pictures of her friends or loving grandmother, and often sought reassurance from the researcher saying “I hope it is alright”: 
I: You don’t have anybody you would liked to take a photo of, I mean a photo of a person who is part of your normal week?

Girl: Well, eh, I hope it is alright, I mean that [...] it would have been fun to take, and I tried to take photos of my friends but I hope it is alright, well luckily there is that photo of Kiira [...] she is like all friends.

I: It is alright, and I did not mean... that for any other reason. I mean that here are photos of those you wanted to take a photo of, that is most important. These are fabulous photos, that here are well [...] 

Girl: Well, perhaps granny is missing. I mean I spend a lot of time with my granny.

I: Well, yeah

Girl: But I hope it is alright [...] 

I: Don’t worry, this is alright [...] 

Picture 4 – Father photographing

It is essential that the researchers ascertain the informants’ own reasons for taking photographs, rather than researchers giving their own interpretations and assumptions of the pictures. The researchers’ own interpretations can be inaccurate adult sensibilities and preconceptions, which can silence or misrepresent the voices
of children (Barker and Weller, 2003). The importance of asking the informants to provide a context for their photographs is exemplified by a photograph that the researcher initially interpreted as concerning household cleaning duties. The girl (aged 7) who had taken this photo informed the researcher that in fact this picture described her very joyful memory of her favourite hiding place when playing with friends:

I: What is this then, did you take this photo on the same day?
Girl: No [...] this is a different day. Here you can see, well, this is [...] there was a basket about this size down there, and here is a blanket, and we are playing hide and seek and we [...] and that is my favourite hiding place.
I: Oh, really? Now you told me about it.
Girl: Yeah, I always hide under here when somebody comes. Normally they do not find me.
I: So these are photos of your play, like this one and of the ways in which you play indoors.
Girl: Yeah
H: Great. Well, are these, you in fact [...] are there other photos of your play, are these photos of your play indoors or [...]?

Expressions and gestures were very personal and context-bound. For example, a person can be very happy even though he/she never laughs in photos. Some others show his/her joy and happiness with his/her whole body. Hence the thousand-dollar question: “Can you distinguish the ‘right’ (as the photographer meant to) emotions at all without the story behind the picture?” In our experience, no, you can’t. Smith et al. (2012), researching 14 to 15-year-old students, noticed that without the ‘story’ there’s only little meaning for the researcher. In our data there was a photo of a girl eating a banana. After the interview, we knew that the girl in the picture was quite angry and tired. This emotion couldn’t be discovered without the narration on the photo:

I: What would you say, is it possible to see a special mood in these photos, I mean are you in a bad mood in some photos or are you tired or...
Girl: Here I am in a bad mood.
I: Well tell me about it
Girl: I am tired. Well sometimes I get, I am annoyed by everything and terribly tired and so. Here is a photo of that kind of mood.
I: What are you doing in that photo?
Girl: I am eating a banana
I: What do you do when you feel annoyed and tired?
Girl: Well sometimes when I, then I sleep or then I am just and then sometimes when I am really annoyed I clean up [...] or all of a sudden I just start cleaning up my room. But I don’t clean up any other places. I don’t like to clean up other places, just my own room.

We sorted out various (in our data mostly neutral or positive) facial expressions, gestures and narratives from the photos. It seemed that there were hardly any that particularly stressed a negative emotion - not seen from the photos or told in the interviews. Only a few negative emotions were told, e.g. the girl eating the banana, when a 10-year-old girl talked about her mother’s shift work and, in another interview, where a girl (15 years) didn’t feel up to going to school. Analyzing the photos only as pictures constructed a quite harmonious image of their everyday emotions. The narratives behind the images brought new dimensions to this image, as our interpretation of the data showed.

Discussion: the usefulness of photographing

One purpose of this chapter was to consider the way in which the participatory photo interview is a suitable (if at all) research method with children. Does it reach the children’s meanings of their everyday lives?

Our informants (n=6) were from four families. In other words, three children were members of the same family. This may have had an impact on the content of the photographs. We have also taken into consideration the age of the children, which varied quite a lot: from 4 to 15 years. It can be assumed that the older children have more technical and cognitive skills and are in many ways more capable of taking photos. For instance, the youngest informant succeeded in having four pictures ‘right’, while her other 23 snaps were all black. However, this doesn’t mean that the photos of the younger children are more devalued. The age, experience and personality of the children may affect what he/she has photographed and how the meaning of the object has been explained (Setälä, 2012: 14).

Our disposable cameras can be seen as old-fashioned compared to digital cameras, although it was both novel and nostalgic for the informants. For example, the children had never seen this kind of camera and were quite eager to try it. By using disposable cameras the informants were unable to see the pictures
immediately, nor delete (in their opinion) ‘bad’ or ‘failed’ pictures. Also the number of photos remained quite the same and ‘manageable’. However, disposable cameras were welcomed. As it was impossible to rework, delete or retake pictures afterwards, this may have reduced the participants’ stress about ‘perfect pictures’.

Photographing also seemed to be a fun and exciting mode of self-expression (Punch, 2002). For example, one of our child informants (aged 10 years) commented that: “It was nice how when you couldn’t see the pictures that got taken, you got quite a surprise when you saw all the stuff that came out of it […].” This feeling became evident during the second interview: the researchers opened the envelope of pictures and both the informant and the researcher saw the pictures for the first time – the atmosphere was full of curiosity. The researcher was almost embarrassed by the intimacy of the situation.

In our study there was a child who didn’t take the photos, instead it was his mother who took them. Not using the camera may well be a sign of children withdrawing their informed consent to participate (Barker and Weller, 2003: 42). It can be assumed that this child didn’t remember or didn’t bother to take the photographs or didn’t want to take part in the research – although he was eager to view the photos and take part in the interview. However, not all children will engage with photographing in the same way. Some children will enjoy the activity, while others may lose the camera or struggle to find inspiration (Fargas-Malet et al., 2010).

The season, in this case autumn, could well have influenced the photography. Most of the photographs were taken indoors. This is because the daytime in the autumn is quite short in Finland. Social codes and norms can also influence what is allowed to be photographed. There were relatively few photographs of parents’ bedrooms and none of saunas. There may, for example, have been ‘gatekeepers’, including parents, children, siblings, etc., who directed what is photographed. After the second interview the participants kept the photographs as their own – and it seemed that everyone liked to have them. This was especially important for one little girl, who put them away right after the interview in her ‘secret place’, where her sister couldn’t have them and sabotage them. This can be seen as an identity project, where a child can construct her/his own life and identity.

It was noted that each photo carried a story. Even when an attempt was made to analyse photographs ‘alone’, isolated from their narratives, the story ‘behind’
a picture inevitably emerged. In one picture, in which a father is sitting in front of his daughter’s computer, we see only a father and a computer. The informant’s explanation to the researcher, however, described how happy she was as her father loaded an anticipated program onto her computer.

It has been documented that families derive a sense of togetherness from their everyday routines, such as when a parent and a child have the opportunity to share time together (Kremer-Sadlik and Paugh, 2007). In this data there were pictures of leisure time (on the sofa, coffee time), which can emphasise how relaxed time spent together develops families’ togetherness (Rönkä, Laitinen and Malinen, 2009: 220). Innanen (2001) has also shown that children value ordinary things with family members, such as how they love to sit next to a parent whilst driving to the shops. As Luttrell (2010) asks: What version of self, relationships, family and community life did the children seek to portray? There are always cultural ideological conventions that might interfere with children’s stories, such as showing their family happiness (see also Harrison, 2004).

Although there were many photos from the sofas, it doesn’t imply that the sofa pictures are some kind of typical situation in everyday life, that family members were lazy or vice versa. Those photos can, for instance, show that when you have a moment to breathe, you remember or have time to think about the photographing. Is it that the everyday life is so busy that you have time to take photos only then, when you have time to rest?

The research context might affect what children will talk about. A difficulty in many settings in conducting research with young children is negotiating privacy and keeping confidentiality. In our research, the problem of confidentiality actualized when one father would have liked to know what his children said about his fathering. Using the participant’s own home as a location can be probably more time-consuming and costly: the researcher has to travel to the respondent’s home and negotiate her social position as a guest. Finding a private and quiet space can be problematic due to child protection issues. If the parents wish to be present, how might that influence the children’s responses? (Fargas-Malet et al., 2010). In a few interviews, the child was eager to close the door every time it was opened. Perhaps this entailed the importance that the child had the same rights as the adults. In our research, all the interviews were conducted at home. And all the photos of children were taken at home, although the children could have taken
them somewhere else. This home-centeredness may be reflected in the content of the interview. Children seem to be loyal to their parents; negative things were not photographed or talked about. In addition, our loose instructions may have caused ‘home-centeredness’ in the photos. Do children remember their ‘task’ of photographing at home more easily than, for instance, their hobbies or school?

White et al. (2010) argues that photographs are shaped and arranged in deliberate ways to produce certain meanings and interpretations. Our research can be seen to have three levels of interpretations. At the first level, the informants decide where to take photos and where not. At the second level of interpretation, the informants decide what to say about these photos. This interpretation level can be seen as a co-constructive level: the informants and the researchers go through these photos together in narrative interview situations. The final level of interpretation actualizes when the researchers analyze the whole data (photographs and narrative interviews) and decide what and how to report on the research. Furthermore, we have to remember that photographs emphasize what is present and visible. Luttrell (2010) has stressed that the more transparent and reflective we are about our research, the more we will be able to reorient adult-child conversations and what we are able to see and hear. Daily family life or the children’s world can consist of many things that can’t be traced by the camera and seen as concrete. On the other hand, one picture can be worth a thousand words.

References

Women, Men and Children in Families

Photographing as a research method


Chapter 7
The child in the context of home care
– Finnish mothers’ assessments

Introduction

I do want that the care my children receive is more individual than they can offer at the childcare centre.

This is how a Finnish mother of three reasoned her decision to stay at home in order to take care of her under-school-age children. Despite Finnish families having a social right to municipal childcare services after the parental leave, the mother had chosen home care. She is not alone with her solution.

Caring for small children at home has gained strong popularity among Finnish families. In recent years, the majority of small children have been cared for at home, mostly by their mothers (Finnish Social Insurance Institution, 2012). The situation is compelling in a country where all children under school age have a legally guaranteed place in municipal day care. The main explanatory factor for the phenomenon is the cash-for-care benefit; that of the child home care allowance.
The benefit, introduced in the 1980s, encourages home care arrangements since parents are entitled to receive monetary support if their under-three-years-old child is not using municipal childcare services.

Although home care is popular, we know little about the parents’ perceptions of the child in the context of home care. This chapter investigates how mothers construct their view of the child while they reason their home care choices. The discussion of the issue is based on interviews with 17 mothers with home care arrangements. The interviews were conducted as part of the research project *Contradictory Reality of the Child Home Care Allowance* funded by the *Academy of Finland*.

This chapter pays attention to the contradictory nature of the Finnish childcare policies and takes into account that the growing importance of childhood as a social category influences our understanding of child. The chapter highlights and evaluates three culturally important constructions through which mothers make sense of their understanding of the child: a free and unhurried child, a child as a time investment and a child as a source of pleasure. These constructions challenge the prevailing – politically widely accepted – understanding of the child as an active participant in society and as a target of social investment.

The chapter begins with a discussion on the contemporary images of the child. It continues by examining the social political context in which parents make their childcare choices; the Finnish home care policies. Thereafter, the data will be presented. Finally, in the empirical part, the results of the analysis are opened up.

**The modern child: active and dependent**

Children are one of most treasured beings of our time. Parents are expected to love their children as well as nurture and take good care of them, and societal actors, in their turn, try to generate effective ways to protect and educate children. It has been argued that in modern times, children have become emotionally ‘priceless’ as they are able to give meaning and fulfilment to their parents’ lives (Zelitzer, 1985). Furthermore, being emotionally recognized, children are also valued as future citizen-workers since western societies are keen on investing in them in order ensure economic growth and national competitiveness. In addition to that,
the children are granted new rights and parents are more and more aware of the suitable care arrangements, especially in situations where they cannot look after their children themselves (Wyness, 2006).

Childhood as a social category has gained growing importance. Although children’s needs and their rights have been increasingly recognized, contemporary images of children are still contradictory. Roughly speaking, there are two broad frameworks with which to approach children. Children can be seen as dependents who need care and protection or as young citizens who are entitled to respect and participation (Neale, 2004). We often want to protect children from the harsh realities of life, but, at the same time, we are eager to integrate them into society to make sure that their educational needs are met in order that they may develop into responsible citizens. This implies, in effect, that on the one hand children are discussed in terms of social participation but on the other hand in terms of the increasing risks children face while growing up.

Our understanding of the child is multiple and changes according to time and place. As Jenks (2004: 78) argues, the assessments of the child are socially constructed and understood contextually, resulting in the child being presented through a variety of forms of discourse and social constructions. Discourses and cultural constructions, in their turn, present the child in a light of multiple realities. As such, modern childhood is not simple and unified.

In spite of the variety of discourses concerning the child, it has been argued that the discourse on the participant child has become increasingly dominant (Kjørhold and Liden, 2004). This viewpoint especially concerns political argumentation and the institutions of early childhood education. In fact, at the political level, childhood is increasingly defined in terms of social investment as the concept of human capital has been seen as an important resource for ensuring economic growth and national development (Esping-Andersen, 2002; Kjørhold, 2012). Accordingly, within this framework, childhood education is maintained to be an investment in a knowledge-based economy and a means to ensure lifelong learning. Early childhood education is assessed as ‘a public good’ and access to early childhood education is seen as providing young children, especially those from low-income families and second-language groups, with ‘a good start in life’ (OECD, 2001, 2006: 12).
Children are thus assessed as learning subjects (Kryder, 2004). As the life chances and social inclusion of the individual are seen to increasingly depend on the cultural, social and cognitive capital, it is important to educate and empower society’s future workers (Esping-Andersen, 2002; Lister, 2003; Strandell, 2012). The institutionalism that is related to the need for a workforce is one of most common characteristic features of contemporary childhood. Furthermore, these institutions are seen as serving the best interests of the child as they are considered a proper place for growing up and ensuring children a safe and qualitatively rich environment for learning and development in their early years (Kjørhold, 2012).

Children are thus increasingly regarded as a participants in and active members of society. Especially within the new childhood research, children are perceived as active actors in a given society and well capable of analyzing the world around them. As Jenks claims: “Children are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live. Children are not just passive subjects of social structures and processes” (2004: 78). Similarly, The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child stresses children’s activity and provides children with the right to participate in society.

Beside such an approach, there is also a tendency to understand children in terms of risks and protection. A fear of cultural disorder accompanying rapid social change is seen to be projected onto children and childhood in the form of protection. This protection serves as a means to legitimate increased control and discipline of children that is spread across all sectors of children’s lives (Strandell, 2012; Wyness, 2006). As Wyness (2006: 53–54) puts it, adults’ feelings of insecurity are projected onto their children through the mechanisms for controlling them. In a social and moral flux, childhood is formed of moral rescue, a means by which adults try and recapture a sense of purpose and belonging. According to Jenks (1996: 19) the child has become a kind of longing for times past. The trust that has been previously anticipated from marriage, partnership, friendship or class solidarity is now invested more generally in the child.

To sum up, the contemporary relationships between adults and children are dualistic as they can be viewed as reflecting elements of nostalgia as well as futurity. Within the realm of nostalgia, parents try to hold on to a romantic conception of childhood and want to protect the purity of child. Futurity, in its turn, represents...
more of a conception of an active and participant child. The services for early childhood education comprise an important form of this futuristic thinking (Wyness, 2006).

Home care policies: the Finnish context

Childcare is one of the most significant elements of family policies in western welfare states. Publicly funded childcare services have been seen as serving various policy aims. First of all, they are assessed as a social policy instrument for increasing employment, especially that of the mother, and as an institutional means for increasing gender equality. Secondly, childcare services are seen as providing children with pedagogical stimulation and care in a safe environment (Ellingsæter and Gulbrandsen, 2007; Leira and Saraceno, 2008; Kjørholt, 2012).

The Nordic welfare states have a long history of state intervention in and responsibility for childcare. As such, the Nordic countries can be labelled social service states in which childcare services are universally provided and available for all, and can be used without stigma or loss of status (Anttonen and Sipilä, 1994; Eydal and Rostgaard, 2011). In addition, many Nordic welfare states also provide parents with cash-for-care benefits that enable them to rely on informal care solutions. Such benefits may offer more flexibility in reconciling work and family responsibilities, provide alternatives for the use of services and may provide families with more time with their children. Governments, too, perceive advantages in home care allowances. The cost containment favours home care, assuming that it will compensate for the more expensive institutional care (Repo et al., 2010).

Finnish childcare policies consist of a mix of different kinds of public support. The municipal childcare is a social right for Finnish families having a child under school age. All children under seven years are legally guaranteed a place in municipal day care. The municipal day care is not, however, the only childcare choice Finnish parents can make after the parental leave. Due to a political compromise in 1984, Finnish parents gained the right to monetary compensation if they wanted to rely on informal childcare solutions. The parents were thus entitled to the child home care allowance that enables them to take care of their children by themselves if
their under-three-year-old child does not use public childcare services (Anttonen, 2009; Kröger et al., 2003).

The child home care allowance can be characterized as a monetary compensation for not relaying on municipal childcare arrangements. In practical terms, it is the allowance that is available for parents after the parental leave when the child in question is approximately 9 months old. As a monetary benefit, the child home care allowance is divided into two different parts, and includes a care allowance and a care supplement. The care allowance is paid separately for every eligible child. In 2013, the monthly amount of the care allowance is €336.67 for one child under 3 years of age, €100.79 for each additional child under 3 years of age and €64.77 for a child over 3 years of age but under school age. The allowance is also paid for siblings if they are cared for in the same way. The care supplement, in its turn, depends on the size and gross income of the family. The maximum amount of the care supplement is €180.17 per month (Finnish Social Insurance Institution, 2013). Many Finnish municipalities also pay their own municipal supplements.

Since the 1990s, more half of the total number of children under three years of age have been cared for at home with the allowance. In the year 2011, the figure was an even 50 per cent. Since the benefit is also available for older siblings, in 2011, 26 per cent of children aged from 9 months to 6 years were cared for at home with the allowance (Finnish Social Insurance Institution, 2012). The popularity of the benefit indicates that it also functions as a kind of measure to extend the parental leave. Concurrently, the popularity of home care means that the enrolment in publicly funded child day care is relatively low in Finland. This particularly concerns children under the age of three years. The situation changes when the children get older and around 70 per cent of Finnish children between three and five years of age take part in publicly funded day care. Even so, the enrolment figures are lower in Finland than in the other Nordic countries (see Table 1).
Table 1 – Children enrolled in publicly financed day care institutions by age as percentages of the respective age groups 2000 and 2009.

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<td>3–5 years</td>
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<td>2009</td>
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Although Finland has introduced the strongest rights for public childcare within the Nordic welfare regime on the practical level, small children are cared for on a full-time basis at home in Finland for the longest time. As such, the main feature of the Finnish policies on childcare as a whole can be characterized by dualism. This is to say that the Finnish childcare policies have both promoted gender equality and cemented the gender division of care (Rantalaiho, 2009). This dualistic nature also reflects the ambivalence concerning the proper place for children: are children best cared for at home by their mothers or do they benefit from institutional care? In this respect, the situation has become challenging. Strandell (2012: 228–229) even argues that “a heavy reliance on home care is gradually becoming a paradox in a system that in other respects is giving increasing weigh to expert knowledge and increased professional intervention in childhood”.

Data

The aim of this chapter is to capture the social meanings the mothers attach to the ‘home cared child’. These social meanings offer us a venue to make sense of our social reality. As such, the set of meanings brings different aspects into focus, raises different issues for consideration, and, most importantly, they have different implications for what we do or are supposed to do (Burr, 1995). This implies that the ways in which we assess a child are in effect intertwined with and influence on the social practices and institutions concerning childhood.
The earlier literature on childcare choices states that Finnish parents of small children often think that the care they have chosen and the care they rely on in their daily lives is also the best arrangement for their children. Thus parents who have chosen home care see home care as in the best interests of their child. The themes parents relate to home care include, for example, security, stability and peacefulness. Conversely, the parents who rely on public services emphasize the positive and socialization sides of the institutions of early childhood education (Alasuutari, 2003; Kilpeläinen, 2009; Takala, 2000).

It can be argued that the parents’ argumentation concerning childcare stem from different rationalities of daily life. Duncan et al. (2004: 263) have maintained that with regard to this, the childcare choices the families make are related to the parents’ value systems and are thus most often a complex result of “moral and emotional processes in assessing both children’s needs, and the mother’s own, and the balance between the two”. The constructions of the child play an important role in this decision making, implying that the ways through which children’s needs and the nature of childhood is understood influences and are entwined with the care solutions.

The data analyzed in this chapter consists of 17 interviews with mothers who have received the child home care allowance (CHCA) and who have taken care of their children at home after the parental leave. When the interviews took place in 2006 and 2007, ten interviewees were receiving the CHCA and the other seven mothers were in the labour market or studying, but had received the CHCA and recently been at home.

The interviewed mothers do not form a homogenous group. Their socioeconomic background is heterogeneous. There are low-income families, but also families whose annual income rose to over 100,000 euro. Similarly, the educational background of the interviewed mothers varies. There are both academically educated mothers as well as mothers with vocational training. The size of the family also varies between one to four children.

The data used for analysis was obtained through theme interviews. A theme interview gave the mothers room to express their ideas freely and openly. The purpose of the analysis is to locate the main constructions of the child the mothers rely on when assessing home care. The data was first ordered according to repeated themes, which were used as a basis for distinguishing three broader constructions
of the ‘home cared child’. As such, the analysis was conducted using the tools of discourse analysis. The social meanings are here referred to by different names, such as construction, assessment, understanding or image.

The constructions of the ‘home cared child’

How do the users of the child home care allowance construct the child while they reason their childcare choices? I will answer the question next. The data reveals that the constructions of the child in the context of home care involve the child as protected, invested and emotionally valued.

A free and unhurried child

Not surprisingly, the ‘home cared child’ is assessed as free and unhurried. Mothers relying on the home care solution emphasize that home care arrangements make it possible to avoid the harsh realities of institutionalism in their children’s lives as well as the rush that modern lifestyles generate for families. In this respect it is reasonable to think that the underlying principle behind the mothers’ argumentation is the idea that children ought to have a right to live without the sense of a hurried and scheduled life. Home care as a care arrangement functions as a kind of means to prolong or preserve this kind of carefree and unstructured childhood.

It can be argued that the mothers’ reasoning originates from the notion that the child has to be protected from the rough world “out there”. In the same vein, the Norwegian researchers Stefansen and Farstad (2010) found that families preferring the home care solution are keen on assessing the child as a vulnerable being who needs to develop at his or her own pace in a safe environment until ready for the complex and stressful world. They conclude that the ideas of sheltering, protecting and loving that are often related to home care arrangements correspond with a notion of the world as a complex and harsh place.

The above-mentioned argumentation on the child’s need for an unhurried life is vividly present in the analyzed data. A mother of three argued that children need to be able to live in a relaxed way:
The reason why I stayed at home [...] has been that I think children are small for such short a time and I wanted them to able to enjoy not having to hurry in their first years.

The interviewed mothers maintained the importance of an unstressed and unscheduled childhood. The argument was made even more legitimate by making contradictions. The mothers juxtaposed a peaceful and restful life at home with the institutionalized childhood, with the timetables and the sense of work it entails. The mother of two favoured and preferred home care for these reasons:

To be at home means that there is a kind of peace and no routines or schedules. In their future life they [children] have to wake up early, they ought to be at school or at work from eight to four. So I prefer that while they are small their life is not regular, routinized and scheduled.

A mother expecting her third child shared the above-mentioned idea. Here is how she described her feelings about home care:

I do enjoy being at home and I do want them [children] being able to grow up in peace. There will be time anyway when they have to take part in a strictly scheduled life in a day care centre or in school.

A free and unhurried child is seen as being able to live her or his daily life without the schedules and routines the modern educational institutions and work-related responsibilities create for families. In that sense, the construction of the free and unhurried child corresponds with the quite generally accepted idea that the children’s lack of responsibilities means that children do not work. Contrary to having work-like responsibilities, children are expected and even obligated to play and to be happy (Wyness, 2006: 9).

A child as time investment

The topic of the child as a social investment has been raised to the political agenda. International organizations like the European Union and the OECD argue for universal educational systems that would include education at an early age for children (Anttonen and Sointu, 2006). Nowadays, there are many economical as well as social political considerations that stand for the establishment of care services for small children. The institutional upbringing is seen as increasingly
necessary since children are seen as benefiting from professional care and the elements of social capital it generates (Strandell, 2012).

Despite there being increasing emphasis on the educational needs of the children, the ‘home cared child’ is not, at least to that extent, seen as a target of educational intervention or social investment. In contrast, the mothers relying on home care arrangements characterized children rather as the consumers of time and primarily perceived them as the targets of the time investment by their parents. In the home care context, the emphasis is put on the family time. With regard to this, it can be argued that the main difference distinguishing the general idea of the need for social investment from the parental time investment promoted by the mothers is the availability of the presence of the parents.

Thus the mothers interviewed underscored the value and importance of the time parents are able to devote to their children. The family time and the parent’s volition to allocate their time for their children were seen as essential by claiming that it positively influences the children’s development and their future lives. In that way, the home care was seen as a means to ease the social problems for the children as well as the families. A mother of two assessed the time investment as follows:

Interviewer: You said that being at home is an investment in the future. What do you mean by this?

Mother: I think that in this way children will grow up as well-balanced. They get a nice start for their lives. Such as an unhurried and peaceful life at their own home. And lot of presence from their parents.

A mother of two commented on the idea in the following passage:

There has been a lot of discussion about the social problems of children. It may be related to the busyness of the parents. Parents do not have time and willingness to invest in their children. I do not mean that they should take their children to amusement parks and so on, but what I mean is that they should just spend more time with kids and they should just live ordinary life with them. [...] I mean time for those small children.

Today there is a lot of discussion about the quality of the time parents are able to spend with their children. In the home care context, the issue is not only the quality of the time but also the flexibility of the time. The mothers at home argued
that home gave them an opportunity to spend adjustable time with their child. This is how the mother of two evaluated her mornings:

We have our peaceful mornings. Although we have kind of woken up, we still lay in bed and she [child] comes next to me with a book. Then we read together and get up when we want to.

As such, the time investment generated by home care was seen as a possibility to be flexible for the child’s initiatives for doing things together. Once again, this can be juxtaposed with the cultural expectation of the everyday realities of working mothers. ‘Peaceful mornings’ or ‘a possibility to stay in bed with a child as long as wanted’ hardly belong to the commonly shared images of the practices of reconciling work and family.

If the ‘home care time’ is assumed to be flexible enough, it can also be assessed in psychological terms. As such, the psychological knowledge about child development produced by professionals frames our understanding of the child and the child’s daily life. The positive aspects of home care are often linked to attachment theories, which define the best interests of children as having a stable and secure care relationship. In that way, the time devoted to the child is seen as a kind of precondition for creating a good psychological relationship between the child and the parent. A mother of two emphasized that aspect and reasoned as following:

I think that there is no need to rush back to work, because the more time you devote to your children the better you get to know them and the more time is devoted to care the better the relationship you have with your children.

A mother of three, in her turn, stressed the importance of professional knowledge on the developmental stages of the child and the need for parental care it entails:

I have read and listened to the experts in education and have on the basis of their views and of course also on the basis of my own common sense reached the conclusion that the first three years are the most important for self-development and that, thus, for that time it is also best that one of the parents is the primary carer in order to create attachment.
A child as a source of pleasure

It has been argued that in these modern times and in contemporary societies individuals possess more freedom to choose their way of life since the traditional social structures have lost much of their influence. Simultaneously, this tendency has meant that each individual must construct their own life trajectory, resulting in more pressures for self-reflections and evaluations. In effect, in cultural terms, individuals are even expected to assess their life choices and to interweave the different kinds of structural premises of life, such as social benefits, into their life stories (Saaristo and Jokinen, 2004).

As such, modern mothers at home not only take into account the best interests of the child but also pay attention to their own life path and well-being. This explains why the arguments for home care often involve elements of the pleasure the home care generates for the carer. As argued by Repo (2009) elsewhere, the discussions on home care often comprise an idea of individual familism that seeks to describe childcare arrangements as a field of individual choices and gaining individual pleasure. According to such a view, through home care, mothers get a chance to enjoy their children, and their children get a chance to enjoy the presence of their mother.

In this framework, the child is constructed as a source of pleasure and joy. Despite approaching the child as an object of educational needs, attention is paid to the satisfaction the company of child brings forth and the happiness that monitoring the children’s development produces. The enjoyment of being there with a child can be a central motive for choosing home care, as the following quotation shows:

Interviewer: Could you be more precise and explain why you thought that being at home was such a self-evident solution?

Mother: It was just because I wanted to be together with my “star” and with my “treasure” at home as long as possible. I wanted to enjoy my child.

In the same vein, a mother of three stressed her ability to receive some rewards while being at home with her kids:

I feel that it [being at home] is most the valuable thing I can even do, but it’s also the best that I can get. I do not believe that I can receive something more valuable or better while being at working life.
Home care solutions are often reasoned as the mothers’ own choices. This implies that the mothers at home seldom perceive themselves as victims of gendered care structures but emphasise their own agency as a carer and their chance to spend relaxed time with their child. Home care is assessed as a kind of common interest for mothers and children. However, what is interesting here is that this common interest quite often reproduces the traditional gendered care practices (Repo, 2012).

**Discussion**

Strandell (2012) argues that in modern times the relationship between the child and the interests of the State has become more direct and intertwined. Simultaneously, this means that the best interests of the child is less mediated by family concerns. There are growing demands for expert knowledge and an institutional upbringing is seen as necessary for child’s basic individuation process. This, in its turn, suggests that public day care with professional personnel is more than a mere supplement to home care. As such, within this framework, home care cannot compensate for the professional education.

The above-mentioned ideas challenge us to consider the role of public support for prolonged home care and the implications that long home care periods may have for the child’s development. We can ask: Is the State support for home care actually in conflict with the best interests of the child, especially when it is also created to be an alternative for not using childcare services? Is the ‘home cared child’ a disadvantaged child in a society that emphasizes increased educational intervention and intrusion into the child’s life?

When it comes to the opinions of the mothers at home, the answer to these questions is “no”. According to the interviewed mothers, the ‘home cared child’ is doing fine. She or he enjoys the lack of responsibilities related to the institutionalized childhood, as well as the rush of the modern lifestyles of working parents. The child cared for at home is, in effect, very advantaged due to possessing a lot of family time and emotional attention. And most importantly, the child is generating pleasure and happiness for her or his carer.
The image of the ‘home cared child’ produced by the interviewed mothers is overwhelmingly positive. Although the mothers also highlighted the demanding aspects of home care, such as monotonous tasks, the need for constant surveillance of the child, as well as the lack of adult company, they assessed the home care arrangement as being beneficial for the child on the whole. In the long run, the ‘home cared child’ will grow up as a well-balanced adult.

There are huge gaps how a good childhood can be interpreted in a modern society. The differences in interpretation can be explained by the use of cultural frameworks, within which the best interests of the child are articulated. The ‘home cared child’ is predominately assessed through the discourses that stress the aspects of developmental psychology, the value of family time and the risks children face while growing up. The child is seen as a protected and dependent being. In the context of early childhood education, the child is reflected in futuristic terms within the framework of participant and learning subjects. As the study by Stefansen and Farstad (2010) shows, the parents preferring institutional care wanted to equip their children with skills and experiences that they could use and take advantage of later on. With regard to this, cultivating and teaching was seen as presenting a kind of necessary precondition if the child is to make use of the possibilities and challenges she or he will be offered “out there” later in life.

It seems that a discourse that favours home care intensifies a cultural idea of children as developing and vulnerable, and is thus the opposite of an assertion of the idea of an active child that represents children as competent and autonomic beings with participation rights. In real life, these cultural constructions overlap and cannot been presented in their pure forms. The parents and pedagogies have to take into account both elements of the children’s lives and they have to make a balance between respect and protection. Having said this, it is still important to assess how social political structures influence the constructions of the child and the daily life choices of families with children. There is thus a need to consider how the Finnish cash-for-childcare schemes could be developed in a direction that would more explicitly realize children’s rights to be cared for with protection and to participate with respect (Repo et al., 2010).

The dualistic nature of the Finnish childcare policies implies that the quality standards of care and the principles of early childhood education mainly concern children attending regulated public services, but seldom for children cared for
informally at home. This is why Karila (2009) claims that the Finnish childcare policies are actually creating different childhoods and educational polarization among children. The children’s own views are also often excluded from the considerations of the care. In the future, it would be important to know what meanings the children themselves attach to the care they take part in.

References


Chapter 8
Political discourses on childcare in Germany and Norway: outside or within the family?

Introduction

“European societies have very different ideas about how and by whom children are cared for in the preschool age” (Veil, 2003: 12). Despite there being different alternatives in arranging the care of young children, the political arguments for institutional childcare have become more and more influential in Europe. This chapter explores the political discourses on childcare for children under the age of three years by comparing Germany and Norway from an analytical child-oriented perspective, and assesses how children and childhood are constructed in the political discourses on childcare in these two welfare states.

Today, the upbringing of children is no longer just a family matter, it is also a central topic of politics in modern welfare states. The background to that is the need for a quantitative and qualitative reproduction of the population, as well as improvement in the compatibility of working life and family life. From a European perspective, it appears that children visit early childcare facilities in...
addition to the traditional care within the family. Hence it can be regarded as a “normalization of early childcare facilities as the first public care and education facility in the life of children” (Karner and Cloos, 2010: 2). This is especially true for those over three years of age. For children under three years there is considerable disagreement about whether the first three years of a child’s life should be spent in early childcare facilities or in intra-familial circumstances where the parents raise the children – or if these two areas can be considered equally good and valuable alternatives for taking care of children.

The chapter starts from the perception that two principal, contrasting extremes in the context of early childcare and education are being discussed in political discourses about the care of children under the age of three: institutional childcare (early childcare facilities) and care within the family (cash-for-care). These political discourses will be analyzed in terms of how the social constructions of children and childhood are seen in light of increasing political concern about the modes of childcare. The two welfare states of Germany and Norway have been chosen because there have been similar discussions at different times about the political measures regarding early childcare facilities and cash-for-care in both of those welfare states. In Norway there was discussion as early as 1998 regarding cash-for-care with the legal right for children under the age of three to be placed in an early childcare facility. In the case of Germany, this topic is the subject of current debate because both measures are expected to be introduced in 2013.

The first section in this chapter will discuss the theoretical and methodological background to the empirical study. The second part contains aspects on the welfare states’ increasing interest in (institutional) childcare: How to explore the increase in early childcare facilities in modern welfare states like Germany and Norway? In the third part, the political aspects of the early childcare policy in Germany and Norway are introduced on a descriptive level. This is the background to the analysis of social constructions of children and childhood in both national discourses. The results from the empirical study are explored in the next section, which is in two parts: the results from the German and the Norwegian discourse. The chapter ends with a comparative discussion.

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1 The terms ‘early childcare facilities’ and ‘cash-for-care’ are used to distinguish between care within the family and institutional childcare. Both measures are part of early childcare and education and family policy.

2 In German: “Betreuungsgeld” and in Norwegian: “kontantstøtte”
Analyzing political discourses on childcare

Research on children and childhood is a relatively new phenomenon in social research. It is only since the 1980s that children and childhood have appeared in focus – the research approach called “new social childhood studies” was established (see e.g. James and James, 2004; James and Prout, 2002; Jenks, 1996; Qvortrup et al., 1994). This shift in research can be understood as a reaction to critique on adult-centred frameworks and a relative absence of “real” children and childhood in social research. A central theoretical position of this new perspective is the view of children as capable social actors and as “human beings” rather than as “human becomings” (Qvortrup, 1994: 4). The new perspective understands children and childhood as socially constructed and not as natural categories. Following this social-constructivist perspective, the child itself and the concept of childhood do not exist because children and childhood do not exist in natural ways (see e.g. James and James, 2004; James and Prout, 2002). Children and childhood are concepts that are formed by cultures and human beings in society. Such social constructions of children and childhood are associations and images from adults about children and childhood and explain which tasks and functions they are meant to fulfil in society (Scholz, 1994). Therefore, social constructions of children and childhood differ in different cultures, societies and between different welfare states, such as Germany and Norway. The analysis of political discourses on childcare in Germany and Norway focuses on social constructions of children and childhood, not on a single child or living conditions of children.

The research on social constructions of children and childhood in political discourses is based on the assumption that the designs of modern welfare states have a bearing on the social constructions of children and childhood, and that the social constructions of children and childhood influence political acts (Korvold, 2008; Mierendorff and Olk, 2003). This means that the political field influences (dominant) social constructions of children and childhood and that these constructions also affect and influence decisions at the government level: government interventions that directly affect the living conditions of children, as well as the basic conditions of childhood, are always influenced by the culturally and socially prevailing construction of children and childhood. At the same time, governmental interventions lead to development, legitimation and consolidation of new and existing social constructions of children and childhood. The way
in which political discourses about children and childhood are carried out has fundamental influences on both the living phase of childhood and each individual child. Discourses are understood as the social practice of sequential articulation from which knowledge, meaning and social practice originate (Nonhoff, 2006: 18, 32; Scott, 1988: 35). Discourses represent a specific form of reality that expresses itself in the form of texts, organizations and institutions themselves (Keller, 1998: 33–34; Kolbe, 2002: 16).

Political texts provide information on the social constructions of children and childhood at the national level. Therefore, the data is comprised of political documents: firstly, this study focuses on written documents from the German and Norwegian Parliaments and Governments, such as stenographic records, governmental reports and laws, and secondly, the empirical material is from the highest political level. The documents deal with political arguments about a child’s right to a place in an early childcare facility and about cash-for-care. The research period is derived from the period in which the two main political measures – a child’s right to a place in an early childcare facility and cash-for-care – were negotiated at the highest political level in each welfare state. In Germany the political aspects related to early childcare facilities and cash-for-care have been discussed continuously since 2005. For Norway, three main periods can be observed: around 1987/87, 1996–1999 and 2009.

The German and Norwegian political discourses are analyzed from a comparative perspective. As Kolbe describes in her international study, a comparative perspective is productive for qualitative research: “The comparison of two national contexts serves to alienate familiar and normal social developments in the native country, because they are being “looked at from a distance” – i.e. externally – and because they are being confronted with different social developments in the country of comparison” (Kolbe, 2002: 19). Based on this distancing effect, the results of any national discourse are no longer considered

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3 Policy documents of the federal states (“Bundesländer”) in Germany will not be considered.
4 The documents are analysed by using Strauss and Corbin’s Grounded Theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1996). The key points of this methodology are open, substantive and selective coding. In this way, the written text is analyzed, interpreted, and abstracted. For the coding steps and the analytic process, the MAXQDA software is used. MAXQDA is a computer programme for professional text analysis which helps to systematically evaluate and interpret texts (Kuckartz, 2010).
normal and unchallengeable because they can be confronted with the results of the country being compared (Kolbe, 2002: 19.) That means that a particular aspect could be observed as either familiar or quite unique if it were analyzed in different ways. Indeed, it may not be able to be analyzed at all in the country of comparison (Allemann-Ghionda, 2004: 77). By referring to what could not be analyzed in a discourse, a comparative perspective offers a possibility of making some sense of what cannot be expressed. With the distancing effect, distinctions can be visualized.

**Welfare states’ increasing interest in childcare**

Traditionally, care of children has been a family matter and the development of increased institutional childcare is a relatively new phenomenon in Europe (Tietze and Paterak, 1993: 273). An extensive expansion of early childcare facilities, as well as extensive support by the State through broad financing of these institutions, has only taken place since the 1960s (see e.g. Kolbe, 2002: 14; Tietze and Paterak, 1993: 280–281). There are basically two explanations for welfare states’ increasing interest in supporting early childcare facilities.

The first explanation follows an economic perspective, which focuses on the employment of mothers (Mahon, 2002: 345). This perspective includes the assumption that there are basic financial advantages to the welfare state if some mothers are not gainfully employed. Mothers do “unpaid domestic labour“ (Pierson, 1998: 73), for example, by caring for their children. In this way, mothers undertake work that can also be done by the welfare state but without costs to the State. Traditionally, mothers who have not been working due to the responsibilities of childcare, and, therefore, have not been earning an income for the family, have been (and still are) financially provided for by their husbands. The State does not have additional costs in a dual sense: firstly, childcare is possible without the financial support of the welfare state, and secondly, family income is ensured due to the employment of the husband (Pierson, 1998: 73–76). Based on an increasing plurality in lifestyles, the welfare state’s costs are ever-increasing because not all non-working mothers have a partner who can provide for them. Non-working, single mothers in particular are a financial burden for the welfare
state because they depend on the financial support of the State (Schultheis, 1999: 16). Evidence from an economic perspective on care within the family in association with parents’ employment has proven that for modern welfare states it is economically best to make a high employment rate possible, especially for mothers. This, in turn, leads to an expansion of early childcare facilities in order to support the employment of parents.

The welfare state’s interest in institutional childcare can also be justified from a social-investive perspective. As industrialized countries are part of the globalized, knowledge-based economy and are being transformed into a knowledge society, education is seen as the most important factor: “the only real asset that most advanced nations hold is the equality and skills of their people” (Esping-Andersen, 2002: 28; see also Wingen, 2007: 302). In this context, a “child-centred social investment strategy” (Esping-Andersen, 2002) has been gaining more and more influence in modern welfare states. This has been true for German family policy for more than ten years (Leitner et al., 2008). In Norway, this way of thinking has been gaining influence in family policy since the early 1980s (Hjelmtveit, 2005: 43–45; Satka and Eydal, 2004: 40–41).

The strategy of social investment has far-reaching consequences for children and political measures regarding childcare in the welfare state because investment in children’s human capital plays an important – if not the most important – role in the social investment state. The reason is that it promises the best possible advantage in the future. Child population has become the most important social political target group in the process of restructuring modern welfare states because children represent the highest potential of efficiency (Olk, 2007: 46; Lister, 2008: 383; Satka and Eydal, 2004: 40–41). If the aim is a productive and socially integrated future society, the welfare state should centre on today’s children (Esping-Andersen, 2002: 51). According to the argument by Esping-Andersen, under the conditions of a globalized economy and continuously sinking birth rates, no modern welfare state can afford parts of the population not doing justice to the standards of a knowledge-based economy. Following Esping-Andersen and his strategy, the capability of learning and thereby amassing social capital depends on cognitive abilities that are developed in early childhood. Esping-Andersen points out that the ability of children to amass social capital depends on the social capital of their parents (Esping-Andersen, 2002: 26–30; Wingen, 2007: 304).
This seems problematic as the development of cognitive abilities in children can be limited by a lack of cultural capital in their parents, a lack of economic resources in the household and pathologies like parents’ alcoholism and drug habits. The first two dangers can be averted by political measures of “conventional welfare states”, but, as Esping-Andersen says: “We cannot pass laws that force parents to read to their children, but we can compensate. One option [...] is to ensure that parents of small children are given the possibility of low-stress employment and adequate time with their children. A second, perhaps more effective option, is to promote universal, high-quality day care” (Esping-Andersen, 2002: 49). He emphasizes that the first step in amassing human capital is to ensure access to good quality early childcare facilities for all children (Esping-Andersen, 2002).

A social-investive perspective is closely connected to the quantitative reproduction of the population (demographic motive, see Gerlach, 2010: 43). If there is a population decrease, the human resource decreases as well, and, as a consequence, this evokes economic losses. For a long-term increase in the economy of a State, not only a higher birth rate itself is determining but also the future human resources of society (Wingen, 2007). Against the background of an imminent shortage of qualified manpower, a quantitative decrease in population leads to severe problems in the job market, as well in the social fallback system (Ott, 2002: 11). Equally, family policy, in conjunction with early childcare policy, is faced with the task of considering the political aspects of population change, which develops as an increase in the birth rate (Gerlach, 2010: 43–44; Haavet, 1999a: 48; Ott, 2002: 12). Thus, a social-investive perspective is only complete if aspects of quantity and quality of human resources are seen as a whole.

A welfare state policy that insists on early childcare facilities, and, therefore, combines both the aforementioned perspectives (economic and social-investive), is “obviously a ‘win-win’ approach because, on the one hand, this policy contributes to raising the rate of female employment and to reducing alternative costs for women with children. On the other hand, it can help by compensating inequalities in cognitive skills of children” (Esping-Andersen, 2004: 513, original emphasis). Basically, it can be assumed that the protection of society is the leading motive for the State acting in the way it does (Gerlach, 2010: 133). Beneath this ranks the

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5 Cultural capital encloses education (for a comprehensive definition see Bourdieu, 1983: 185–190).
quantitative reproduction of society as well as the qualitative aspects (Gerlach, 2010: 43).

To sum up, intervention by the welfare state in the field of early childcare policy can be described as “family public relations” (Hernes, 1982: 28). This public relations approach to childcare is a sign of a collective responsibility for childcare (Leira, 1996: 214), which is not only the function of parents. That means that the upbringing of children is not only a private issue reserved for the family, it is also a task for society as a whole and the welfare state (Huinink, 2008: 14). As Durkheim states: “The further we travel historically, the stronger become state interventions in matters of detail in family life” (Durkheim, 1975 missing as quoted in Schultheis, 1999: 14) – and thus in the field of early childcare policy.

Institutional frame: early childcare policies in Germany and Norway

To be able to anchor the analysis of the social constructions of children and childhood in their respective national discourse, the political aspects of early childcare policy in Germany and Norway are introduced in the following section.

Germany: towards universal childcare policies

Early childcare policy has been marked by far-reaching changes in Germany over the last twenty years. These changes, as well as the actual situation, will not be clear without an understanding of the history of the development of the eastern part – the former GDR – and the western part of Germany before the reunification in 1989/90. In the former West Germany there was a negative attitude towards institutional childcare outside the family. Social services for childcare were underdeveloped and not supported by the State. Instead, benefits for families had the aim of supporting motherhood within the family. In this context, childhood was understood as a family childhood and family was characterized by the male breadwinner model with the wife and children at home. In contrast, in the former East Germany, early childcare facilities were comprehensive, (a) because the majority of mothers were working and (b) because the political education
of preschool children was regarded as important, so that the “GDR [...] [was] in 1989 the country with the quantitatively best developed early childcare system in the world” (BMFSFJ, 2005: 249). In East Germany, a typical family was characterized by the two-breadwinner model, with the child being looked after in an early childcare facility.

Both of these contrasting policies were given consideration in the course of the reunification period during 1989/90, with the aim of extending early childcare facilities throughout the whole of Germany. A quantitative expansion of early childcare facilities took place during the 1990s, primarily aimed at solving the problem of combining work and family, and also to increase the fertility rate (Honig, 2007). As Hagemann pointed out, there is still a “dramatic decrease in the German birth rate” (Hagemann, 2006: 218). Another reason for an expansion of early childcare facilities is mentioned in the context of the “discovery” of the economic value of family work – particularly the production of human capital – which was emphasized for the first time as part of the pattern for families and children in Germany’s Fifth Family Report (BMFuS, 1994; Jurczyk et al., 2004). Following this assumption, the new social-political approach to social investment was introduced to political discourses. At least since 2002, within the concept of “sustainable family policy”, this political strategy of investing in children also became a relevant blueprint for the German Government (Ristau, 2005). In this context we have been witnessing an increasing qualitative as well as quantitative expansion of early childcare facilities for some years. In attempting to realise this political aim of early investment in the human capital formation of its citizens, the German Federal Government faces at least two problems. International school achievement tests such as PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) found that German pupils rank very low in comparison to other countries (“PISA-shock”) and that there is a strong connection between family background and educational success. Both problems are not new in Germany. However, what is new is the attempt to try to solve these problems by improving children’s access to early childcare facilities (see e.g. Hagemann, 2006; Hübenthal and Ifland, 2011). This new policy is based on the assumption that school interventions come too late to compensate for the fact that more and more parents

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are not able to support their children in building up human capital adequately for the demands of a knowledge-based society (Hübenthal and Ifland, 2011).

In connection with a quantitative and qualitative expansion of early childcare facilities, the German welfare state is confronted with the problem that, traditionally, early childcare policy – and therefore most of the early childcare facilities – has not really focused on children’s education but more on the care of children. In this respect it has to be mentioned that early childcare in Germany is part of the social welfare system and not part of the educational system (as, since 2006, in Norway). Additionally, in trying to realise children’s access to early childcare facilities, the German Government is confronted with the challenge that the provision rate, especially for children under the age of three, is very low compared to other European Countries: the Federal Government intends to increase the provision rate for children under the age of three from 13.6% currently (Riedel, 2008: 18) to 35% throughout the whole of Germany by 2013 (BT-PP16-100_2007, 10175) to fulfil the EU benchmark of 33%. Beyond that, in 2013 all children between the ages of one and three will be entitled to a place in an early childcare facility – in addition to the current right (since 1996) for children between the ages of three and six (KiföG, 2008 § 24, 2 and 3).

Parallel to a child’s right to a place in an early childcare facility, which focuses on institutional childcare, the political measure known as cash-for-care is to be introduced in 2013; this focuses on care for children within the family. The cash benefit was initiated by the Christian Social Union (CSU) – with resistance from the other parties. The cash benefit should amount to 150 euros per month. Until now, support for parents by means of cash-for-care is still not fixed by law. However, in the current government coalition agreement between the Conservative Alliance (CDU/CSU) and the Free Democratic Party (FDP) it is formulated that cash-for-care reform is to be introduced (CDU/CSU/FDP, 2009: 68). In addition, cash-for-care is formulated as a declaration of intent in the “Legislation aimed at supporting Children” (KiföG-Kinderförderungsgesetz). This law states that: “From 2013 onwards, those parents who do not want or are not able to let their children under the age of three be cared for in early childcare facilities will receive a monthly allowance (i.e. cash-for-care)” (KiföG, 2008 § 16, 4). This statement implies that the government is acting on the assumption that, on the one hand, parents are desirous of not having their children cared for in an
early childcare facility, and, on the other hand, the government is referring to the fact that there will not be enough places in early childcare facilities for children under the age of three. This means that, due to these structural shortcomings, not every child can realise his right to be able to attend an early childcare facility. In contrast to the cash-for-care-model in Norway, there are no plans to combine diminished care benefit with a diminished claim of a place in an early childcare facility.

**Norway: dualistic childcare policies**

In the Norwegian welfare state, the family was traditionally regarded as the ideal and only place for children, particularly during a child’s early life (Leira et al., 2003). The ideal model was a family supported by the husband’s income. The mother’s work at home was recognised as “her own work” (Haavet, 1999a: 60) and esteemed as such. The ideal model of motherhood was the mother at home (Haavet, 1999b: 80). In this context, childhood was primarily understood as a family childhood. A significant shift from a negative attitude towards governmental childcare to an acceptance of early childcare facilities on a political level could be observed in 1975. At that time, the Norwegian Government passed the first “day-care law” (barnehageloven, LOV-2005-06-17-64). Under this law, the function of early childcare facilities is described as a universal offer for those families that want such a choice for the care of their children. This marks a turning point in early childcare policy as early childcare facilities were originally and primarily offered to a select group of children, e.g. children with a disability (Ellingsæter and Gulbrandsen, 2003: 78; Korsvold, 2007).

On the political level, there were different reasons why the day-care law was passed and why the expansion of early childcare facilities needed to be accelerated. There was wide political agreement regarding the plain fact of the necessity for such a law. Only the Progress Party (Fremskrittspartiet, FrP) was against the introduction of such a law and the associated expansion of early childcare facilities. This party was of the opinion that the market (as opposed to the State) should have the responsibility for expanding early childcare facilities. The social-democratic parties supported the day-care law and set a high value on equal treatment of the genders and the economic benefit for society through the
employment of the women. In order to reach these objectives, the expansion of early childcare facilities was deemed necessary. The conservative parties refrained from using early childcare facilities as a means of equality of treatment as well as a policy of the job market. Nevertheless, these parties also demanded a greater expansion of early childcare facilities. This demand, however, was not motivated by societal need for manpower but for the well-being of the child (“barnets beste”) (Bay, 1988: 31–33). This implies an explicit child-related, pedagogic orientation of early childcare facilities: “Historically, Norwegian childcare services have been legitimized by a social, pedagogical, child perspective” (Ellingsæter and Gulbrandsen, 2007: 653).

Even though the day-care law was introduced to meet the needs of children as well as to support the employment of mothers (Bay, 1988: 31), there has been resistance to institutionalized childhood, especially for children under the age of three, among the population and the political domain for a long time. This made the process of de-familialization of childhood very slow and hesitant in comparison to other Scandinavian countries (see e.g. Korsvold, 1991, 2006; Qvortrup, 1996). In Denmark, for example, 24% of children up to two years of age already used early childcare facilities in 1978. In Norway, for the same period and same age group, it was only 4%. Fifteen years later, in Denmark, 47% of children under the age of three were cared for in institutional childcare. In Norway, it was only 19% at that time (Qvortrup, 1996: 62).

Just like the German early childcare policy, political measures aimed at investing in human capital were implemented in Norway with regard to increasing international competition and economic globalization (Hjelmtveit, 2005: 50). As early as 1976, it was stated in the Official Report of Norway (NOU – Norges offentlige utredninger7) that participation in different areas of society, and, thus, access to education, should be guaranteed by all-embracing rights in order to allow for the possibility of being able to invest in individual resources as well as in human capital (NOU 1976: 28, 125–136). This idea was transferred to official early childcare policy (NOU 2003: 16, 11). The background to this policy is the assumption that the population’s knowledge level is the most important capital of a country and that, with a growing, globalized, competitive economy, increasingly

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7 The NOU is a report by the government or departments in which certain areas, aspects, etc., of the society are examined. It should support political decisions.
greater demands are made on the competitiveness of one’s own country. In this context, early childcare facilities were also regarded as a first step in the education process and as a universal offer (Ellingsæter and Gulbrandsen, 2003: 16) in order to start investing in human capital as early as possible (Korsvold, 2004: 35).

Even though a continuous expansion of early childcare facilities aiming at a fulfilment of demand was expedited, this target was only met in 2009, while the provision rate for children up to five years of age was 88.5% (Statistiks sentralbyrå, 2010). For the age group under three years, the provision was 61.8% in 2006 (Ot.prp.nr. 52 (2007–2008), 7). In the year in which fulfilment of demand was reached (2009), the legal right for children aged one year to be placed in an early childcare facility was added to the day-care law (LOV-2005-06-17-64, §12a). As early as 1987/88, the suggestion for introducing such a law was introduced into the political discourse. The precondition, however, was linked to the fact that fulfilment of demand for early childcare facilities was already provided in early childcare facilities (Innst.S.nr. 157 (1987–88), 9; Ot.prp.nr. 52 (2007–2008)) in order to have this demand enshrined in law at a later date. This precondition was only met twenty years later, as mentioned in the statistics already quoted.

In addition to a step-by-step improvement in early childcare facilities, and after controversial political debates that began in 1988 (St.meld.nr. 8 (1987–88), 16–17), Norway introduced a cash-for-care scheme in 1998 (LOV 1998-06-26 nr 41) with the focus on care for children within the family. This family policy measure ensures that parents with children aged one or two years are offered a cash-for-care benefit if they do not make use of a place in a public, subsidized, early childcare facility. This cash benefit is equal to the average amount that the State spends on subsidizing a place at early childcare facilities. One of the political aims was to give parents an opportunity to make a real choice between caring for their own children and using early childcare facilities (Bungum, 2005). Another aim was to equalize public support for early childcare, irrespective of which type of care the parents preferred to use. Parents can combine cash-for-care with using childcare facilities. Under those circumstances, parents get reduced cash-for-care (Innst.S.nr. 200 (1997–98); Rantalaiho, 2009).

In 1999, 73% of parents opted for cash-for-care (Hirsch, 2010) but the reform had had little effect on the employment of mothers: the reduction in a mother’s working hours outside her family was minimal (Baklien et al., 2001). Ten years
later, only 27% of parents opted for cash-for-care (Hirsch, 2010). One reason for this could be the fulfilment of demand for places in early childcare facilities so that cash-for-care does not need to be used as a “substitute”. Media-based debates and political discourse are currently concentrated on the elimination and reduction of cash-for-care (see e.g. Aftenposten, 30.10.2007; Barne-, likestillings- og inkluderingsdepartementet, 2011; Barstad, 2011; Dagbladet, 20.07.2009; NAV, 2012).

Children and childhood in political discourse

A child oriented-analysis of political documents on the early childcare policy of the German and Norwegian welfare states is carried out in this section. The focus is on documents about a child’s right to a place in an early childcare facility and about cash-for-care. This means that the analysis focuses on political measures about childcare for children under the age of three in institutional childcare and care within the family. The aim is to answer the question of how children and childhood are constructed in political arguments concerning early childcare.

Germany: from private issue to ideas of social investment

The analysis of the German political discourse on early childcare facilities and cash-for-care shows that the previously marginalized (and politically almost unimportant) early childcare system is facing a significant functional expansion related to education: “The desired expansion of early childcare facilities should be seen with regard to a fundamental revaluation of education policy matters connected with early preschool fostering” (BT-Drs.16-7114_2007, 1). The focus on early education and care is taking place from a social-investive perspective with the aim of securing the future of the welfare state. The social-investive approach includes the assumption that human capital is seen as the most important factor in a globalized, knowledge-based economy. This investment in human capital has far-reaching consequences for children as a whole because it promises the best possible advantage in the future (for theoretical discussion, see Esping-Andersen, 2002; Olk, 2007: 46; Satka and Eydal, 2004: 40–41).
Early education is considered to be essential for the aim of securing the future of the German welfare state for two central reasons. First, reference is made to the country’s geographic circumstances, where Germany is in the political discourse described as a “country poor in natural resources” (BT-Drs.16-1673_2006, 2). Thus, in order to secure the future of the welfare state one cannot rely on natural resources but must instead rely on (other resources like human capital) human resources. The second, central, reason arising out of the data explicitly refers to the investment in human capital and makes a comment that “one has to invest particularly in the education of young people” (BT-Drs.16-1673_2006, 2) in order to keep up with international competition (BT-PP16-100_2007, 10178). It is pointed out that stimulation of children does not just start at school age and a focus has to be “particularly on stimulation in the first years of life” (BT-Drs.16-1673_2006, 2) in order to ensure the future viability of the welfare state. Adopting priorities related to the early stimulation of children is accompanied by the risk that stimulation possibly comes too late “since what is mismanaged at this early age is hardly able to be corrected later” (BT-PP16-98_2007, 10071). The consequence of this is loss of potential. This, in turn, has a negative effect on the future viability of the welfare state.

In political discourse it is stated that all children benefit from high-quality care and education in early childcare facilities: for children with “advantageous familial preconditions” (BT-Drs.16-7114_2007, 2), early childcare facilities can be considered important since the children receive additional education. Thus the education of children can be improved by attending early childcare facilities. For children within dysfunctional families (e.g. children with a migration background), early childcare facilities can be seen as a place for levelling their deficiencies (BT-Drs.16-7114_2007, 1–2).

When talking about care for children within the family (cash-for-care), it is often implied that children are excluded from important public learning opportunities. The cash-for-care system is judged in political discourse as an incentive for parents to rob their children of opportunities. “From the point of view of education policy, cash-for-care [...] pursues faulty incentives” (BT-Drs.16-7114_2007, 1; see also BT-Drs.17-1579_2010, 28). The rationale as to why this incentive can be seen as faulty is based on a perspective related to education policy: following this rationale, all children should be cared for in early childcare.
facilities since all children can benefit from (education in) early childcare facilities. Attending early childcare facilities can be advantageous compared to parents caring for their children at home. That said, in this discourse, cash-for-care can be seen as an “educational policy-related catastrophe” which aims at a “totally wrong direction” (BT-Drs.16-7114_2007, 1).

In order to try to minimize the “educational policy-related catastrophe” (BT-Drs.16-7114_2007, 1), cash-for-care is to be introduced by means of vouchers. The voucher (150 euros per month) can be used in public learning institutions like music schools. “What is necessary is the introduction of vouchers for education and care so that all children have equal opportunities to benefit from education and care” (BT-Drs.16-10381_2008, 3). By giving away vouchers it is ensured that children who do not attend early childcare facilities can also participate in institutional early childhood education. It is argued that the introduction of cash-for-care by means of vouchers would also reach educationally-deprived parents who would never demand those offers with money.

From an analytical child-oriented perspective in the German discourse on early childcare facilities and cash-for-care under the focus on education, we can see that childhood is turning more and more into an external learning experience. The child is constructed as someone who has to learn and who has the ability to learn (the learning child) – preferably outside the family. This is true for all children in general and for children with a migration background and “other deficits” in particular. In addition, children are constructed as the future of the country – as bearers of hope (BT-PP16-98_2007, 10072).

For different reasons, the employment of parents plays an essential role alongside the focus of education. Against the background of increasing child poverty, the employment of parents, especially full-time employment, seems to be a way of maintaining sustainable poverty reduction (BT-PP16-180_2008, 19240). “Poverty of families and parents can be avoided best of all by giving parents a chance to be employed” (BT-PP16-100_2007, 10183). Thus, longer-term positive effects for the family are to be expected if the parents are employed. Eventually, these effects will benefit the welfare state. Families that do not live in poverty because they are in employment do not depend on financial transfers from the welfare state. Furthermore, the State profits from tax revenues due to the employment of parents (Bd.reg._Artikel_2007-06-04). The employment of both
parents or of a single parent can only be realized by an appropriate supply of early childcare facilities. Consequently, the focus is on the full-time employment of both parents and, thus, on all-day care of the children in early childcare facilities (BT-PP16-180_2008, 19240).

Based on empirical material, it could be that couples have a desire to have children and a desire to get a job at the same time (see e.g. BR-Drs.295_2008, 15, 21; BT-Drs.16-9299_2008, 10; BT-Drs.16-1673_2006, 2). A couple’s desire to have children and to gain employment is considered to be so strong that the fulfilment of the desire to have children is not feasible as long as the desire to get a job is unrealizable. Obviously, couples wish to have a family because they conceive of “the family as a place of happiness, security and love” (BT-PP16-100_2007, 10187). This need is not met if couples have to decide against their wishes and not start a family. Non-fulfilment of family plans in terms of the two features explained here is a result of unemployment: “Many parents do not realize their desire to have children because they do not think that it is possible to combine their professional efforts with domestic tasks” (BT-Drs.16-10173_2008, 1). According to this statement, the fruition of a couples’ professional career plans has priority over the need to start a family (BR-Drs.295_2008, 21; see also Esping-Andersen, 2004: 512–513). So, hope for an increase in the birth rate due to the employment of parents is connected to the provision of early childcare facilities.

The employment of parents is not only becoming relevant as part of the orientation of the welfare state toward the increase in the birth rate but also towards a basic need for manpower. A dependence by the welfare state on employment of its citizens in general could be detected in the political discourse (BT-Drs.16-10357_2008, 23). This is particularly relevant in the need for skilled (female) professionals, which is gaining decisive significance against the background of national and international competition. Due to the political discourse discovery that the growing up of children is not compatible with conditions in the job market in all Federal States of Germany, “nationwide employers cannot expect to have recourse to potential, qualified female workers because missing local and regional care-facilities prevent their employment” (BR-Drs.295_2008, 20). This has “immediate results for the recruitment of certified manpower and, thus, for the competitiveness of this region” (BR-Drs.295_2008, 20).
The low employment rate of the parents has a negative effect on national competitiveness alone. From an international perspective, negative forecasts for Germany as a business location are being recognized under these circumstances. Apparently, Germany is only able to cope with global competition if highly qualified employees are constantly at the labour market’s disposal (BT-Drs.16-9299_2008, 12). This demand cannot be met if highly qualified manpower is not available over a period of years because family life and work are not compatible. The national and international competitiveness that is classified as endangered is narrowing in consideration of a feared future shortage of manpower (BT-PP16-100_2007, 10175; Bd.reg._Artikel_2007-06-04).

To summarize, it can be concluded that an increase in employment as well as an increase in the birth rate have a positive effect in guaranteeing the security of the present and future of the welfare state. “A higher birth rate mitigates against the aging process of society because it leads to more employment potential. If family and work are more compatible, the labour market is strengthened. This, in turn, has a positive effect on companies because they get better-qualified manpower. Employees get larger salaries and the State gets higher tax revenues” (Bd.reg._Artikel_2007-06-04).

Since children prevent parents working and, consequently, interfere with employment – particularly full-time employment – they are constructed as a disturbing factor in relation to the verified need of manpower for the future viability of the welfare state. This especially applies if there are not enough early childcare facilities. On an individual level, this can have the implication that the parents’ professional career plans cannot be fulfilled. As already mentioned, realization of professional career plans comes before realization of plans for a family. Therefore, it is apparent that parents renounce children in favour of employment: “The relatively high employment rate amongst women has the price of childlessness. In Germany, children are still a barrier to the labour market” (Bd.reg._Artikel_2007-06-04). From the perspective of society as a whole, one can see that the unemployment of parents has negative effects in guaranteeing the security of the present and future welfare state, as already mentioned.

Against this background, the social construction of children already noted as disturbing factors creates an ambivalent situation, given that the presence of children is inevitable for fulfilling the needs of the parents’ family lives as well as
answering the needs of the welfare state by guaranteeing its present and future security. This is why political action is not focused on parents who decide not to have children in order to reduce the “disturbing factor” on the labour market. Rather, the point is that children are no longer seen as a disturbing factor. As mentioned above, that aspect can be neutralized by political action that concentrates on satisfying both family and employment needs. Thus children per se do not represent a disturbing factor for parents’ employment. This is only the case when the circumstances of their upbringing are not compatible with the labour market. That means that children are only a disturbing factor if there are not enough all-day early childcare facilities available. The daily routine of children under the age of three is being adjusted to the daily structure of a working adult with full-time employment. So this means that children spend as much time in an early childcare facility as an adult would at his or her workplace. That implies that, from an analytical child-oriented perspective, childhood is constructed as an adaptable stage in life.

To sum up, Figure 1 shows an overview of the results from the empirical study (social constructions of children and childhood and localization of childcare) in connection with the theoretical background (education and compatibility of family and employment in welfare states).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compatibility of family and employment</td>
<td></td>
<td>• the child as a disturbing factor</td>
<td>• externally the family (all-day early childcare facilities)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• childhood as an adaptable stage in life</td>
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**Figure 1** – The German discourse
Norway: learning, social risks and family time

In the political discourse in Norway, early childcare facilities are seen as important institutions linked to education: “The early childcare facility is to be a part of laying the foundation for learning throughout life and acquiring a sense of values; it is designed to help enable children to engage with a society that is rapidly changing and continuously making new demands of those growing up” (St.meld.nr. 27 (1999–2000), 9). With the coming of international competition and financial globalization, social-political actions were implemented with the objective of investing in human capital. This was based on the assumption that the level of education of a country’s population is its most important capital and that the increased, globalized, competitive economy puts even bigger demands on the competitive position of a country. Therefore, the main reason for the objective of investing more in human capital was to keep pace with international competition. This required an upgrading of early childcare facilities in such a massive way that it became a major public assignment that led to an extensive increase in public expenditure (for theoretical discussion see Hjelmtveit, 2005). In the context of these educational efforts, early childcare facilities are understood as the first step in the education system. In the Norwegian political discourse, the education of children is considered a future investment (St.tid._1988-04-21, 3036). From the perspective of society as a whole, some benefit is expected from this education, whilst Norway as a knowledge society profits by this investment (Ot.prp.nr. 52 (2007–2008), 6).

In that political discourse, the political instrument of cash-for-care acquires a negative aspect when seen from an education angle. It is assumed that certain groups of children, particularly children with a migrant background, would benefit from care and education in an early childcare facility. It is recognized as a risk that these children may not attend an early childcare facility due to the cash-for-care alternative. They are taken care of at home by their parents instead. From this point of view, those involved in the political discourse are sceptical that those children, in particular, get sufficient education incentives in the context of care within the family (St.meld.nr. 8 (1987-88), 6; St.prp.nr 53 (1997-98)). Detailed reports and statistics concerning these problems point out that, compared with other groups, children with a migration background did, indeed, make use of cash-for-care and therefore attended early childcare facilities to a lesser extent (Baklien et al., 2001:...
51–55). However, those statistics do not show any evidence that such children suffered educational disadvantage by staying at home.

The social construction of children that can be gleaned from this analysis is that of a learning child. Similarly, that model could be worked out in the political discourse in Germany. Once again, the focus is on institutional childcare.

Throughout the political discourse about early childcare facilities in Norway, the compatibility of family and employment is being regarded from the perspective of gender equality. The wages of both parents lead to an economic independence amongst the genders. The occupation of both parents can only be provided for by sufficient early childcare facilities. According to the discourse, this is particularly relevant for mothers since it is mainly women who give up their employment due to childbirth and, therefore, are dependent on their partner’s income. Only with self-employment can a mother be financially independent from her partner and maintain her individual freedom (Innst.S.nr. 200 (1997–98), 24). In the political discourse, the equality-oriented perspective is linked with a rights-oriented perspective, which emphasizes the right of mothers to a workplace-related apprenticeship as well as the right to an income (St.meld.nr. 8 (1987–88), 8; St.tid._1996-12-18, 1812). Since the welfare state, or, rather, society itself, is basically dependent on the employment of both parents, it is in the welfare state’s interests to make employment possible (St.meld.nr. 8 (1987–88), 9; St.tid._1988-04-21, 3035). This is manifest as a dependence on the (additional) employment of mothers, which attracts special attention at two levels. In the first year of cash-for-care (1998) there was a striking shortage of employees in pink-collar jobs, such as those in the health and nursing sector (St.tid._1998-06-10, 3430). Against this background, the welfare state cannot allow women with small children not to be working, otherwise a decrease in staff in this sector will occur (St.tid._1998-06-10, 3430): “Women like men – including mothers – are part of working life and want to be there, and we need them to be able to maintain the welfare state we have, not least because of the challenges we face in the care sector in the future” (St.tid._1996-12-18, 1813). There is not only a need for female employees in traditional pink-collar jobs but also in traditional male professions. From an individual perspective, women want to work in these male professions and, from the perspective of society as a whole, are positively needed there (St.meld. nr. 8 (1987–88), 9). Basically, this change is catered for by women who complete
an apprenticeship that qualifies them to work in traditional male professions (Innst.S.nr. 87 (1996–97), 3).

In the political discourse in Norway, concentration on the employment of both parents does not necessarily mean full-time employment, as was shown in the discourse in Germany. That is a plausible situation, given the fact that parents not only wish to have a work place but also have “the desire or the need for more time with the children” (Innst.S.nr. 200 (1997–98), 9; see also St.tid._1988-04-21, 3057). In addition, the daily routine of children under the age of three is seen as incompatible with the daily structure of a working adult in full-time employment. This is connected to the social construction of childhood as a partly-adaptable stage in life. According to the Norwegian Government, the cash-for-care reform would give parents an opportunity to spend more time together with their children (Innst.S.nr. 200 (1997–98); LOV 1998-06-26 nr 41). To realize this aim, parents are allowed to combine cash benefit with attendance at an early childcare facility. In that case, parents get a reduced cash benefit (see e.g. St.tid._1998-06-10, 3422; St.prp.nr. 53 (1997–98)).

The possibility that parents can and will spend more time with their children is closely connected to the social construction of children and childhood. From an analytical child-oriented perspective, the following analysis focuses on the political aim of allowing parents to spend more time with their children. Which arguments and social constructions of children and childhood can be analyzed in this context? “The Government wishes to make clear that the intention of this reform is to enable families with small children to spend more time at home and, as a result of this, to create a less stressful daily life for both children and parents. This would also be in the best interests of the children” (Innst.S.nr. 200 (1997–98), 7). The Norwegian government notes that constant time pressure can be observed in current society. This is seen as a particularly stressful situation for families with young children. For young children, this can be regarded as especially stressful since the government acts on the assumption that children need to spend time with their parents as well as their need for a calm and stress-free everyday life (Innst.S.nr. 200 (1997–98), 19; St.tid._1998-06-10, 3421). It is argued that children spend too little time with their parents if they are in early childcare facilities outside the family for the whole day (eight hours). In addition to this, attending an early childcare facility can be regarded as being too stressful...
for young children. Based on this statement, it is concluded in political discourse that the government itself has to set the general framework to allow the parents to spend more time with their children. As an important condition of this policy, the economic freedom of parents will be protected. From an economic perspective, parents should not be forced to have a (full-time) job to ensure the financial stability of the family. Thus they would be forced to have their children attend early childcare facilities. The government is of the opinion that the economic situation of families is being unburdened inasmuch as the family is not dependent on the income of both parents. Thus the care of children can be realized by parents within the family, supported by cash-for-care (Ifland, 2010).

In the Norwegian discourse on cash-for-care in 1998 – there the debate is not exclusively about early childcare facilities – a traditional social construction of childhood embedded in a traditional social construction of family is being expressed. In propagating that it is “in the best interest of the child” to be with their parents at home (Innst.S.nr. 200 (1997–98), 7), children are being constructed as human beings who need protection and for whom the best solution is to be in the “protective fold of the family”. This view also includes the understanding that stress should be avoided for children because children need rest, stable surroundings and stable caregivers. Children are also seen as vulnerable objects that must be kept away from the ‘real world’ and from stress.

In summary, Figure 2 shows an overview of the results from the empirical study in connection with the theoretical background.

<table>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compatibility of family and employment</td>
<td>• the child to be protected, childhood as a partly-adaptable stage in life</td>
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**Figure 2** – The Norwegian discourse
Discourses on childcare – shared ideas and different approaches

The analysis of political discourses on early childcare facilities and cash-for-care in Germany and Norway has shown that political instruments are connected with the question of how care for children should be organized and located, and that there are similarities and differences between these discourses in terms of the social constructions of children and childhood. With reference to both Germany and Norway, it can be stated that early childcare facilities supported by the State were set up to promote the education of children as well as to encourage mothers to enter employment.

As illustrated in the context of education, early childcare facilities play a crucial role in policy decisions for family and children in Germany and Norway. The importance of institutional childcare and the construction of a childhood based on learning become explicit from a social-investive perspective. Currently, early childcare facilities are an accepted measure in family policy in both welfare states. Against this background, childhood is increasingly understood as a public responsibility and the child is constructed as a learning child. In addition, early childcare facilities are understood as important learning areas for young children. Here, the dominant social construction of the child is that of someone who has to learn and who has the capability of learning. Early childcare facilities are considered good facilities in both countries, including those for children under the age of three.

In the German discourse, care for children within the family is seen as a critical part of education because it is feared that children receive inadequate education through their parents. All children should participate in institutional childcare outside the family as early and as intensively as possible. It is expected that all children attend early childcare facilities, with the aim to improve education and level deficits. For the Norwegian discourse, this statement is true for children with special needs – e.g. children with a migration background and handicapped children.

Focusing on compatibility of family and employment, the German discourse aspires to give both parents the opportunity to participate in the labour market full-time. As a consequence, their child needs to spend the whole day in early
childcare facilities. On the contrary, in the Norwegian discourse the focus is on mothers’ part-time employment because full-time employment is seen as a particularly stressful situation for families with children under the age of three. In addition, children should spend a lot of time with their parents. This is connected with the assumption that care for children under three years within the family (cash-for-care) is good childcare. Children should spend time with their parents, far away from distracting and stressful influences. From the child-oriented perspective, these differences are based on two different social constructions of children and childhood: in Germany, childhood is constructed as an adaptable stage of life, whereas in Norway, childhood is constructed as a partly-adaptable stage of life.

To sum up, two social constructions of children can be distinguished in the Norwegian political discourse: the learning child outside the family and the child who must be protected within the family. With the possibility of a combination of cash-for-care and legal entitlement to a place in an early childcare facility, it is possible to reach the aim of investment in human capital by education in early childcare facilities – as well as the aim of children spending more time with their parents. Only by a combination of both political instruments can both social constructions of children and childhood be fulfilled. Concentrating on education and the compatibility of family and employment in the German political discourse, the child is constructed as a learning child outside the family in early childcare facilities throughout the entire day. The analysis in this chapter has shown that the same political measures (the child’s right to a place in an early childcare facility and cash-for-care) with nearly the same political aims are connected with (partly) different social constructions of children and childhood.

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Family is a fruitful object with which to study how social structures, changes and events are interrelated with people’s personal lives. In this book, this relatedness of personal and public becomes apparent on multiple levels. It becomes evident how politics, public policies, production structures, labour markets and their changes create the frame within which women, men and children in families live their lives, as well as how personal choices influence these structures.

The articles of this book comprise a valuable contribution to the discussions concerning the changing roles of women, men and children, as well as different transitions within the framework of generations, gender roles and work-life balance. In addition, they entail interesting data and methodological innovations.

This book will be of interest to students and researchers in social sciences, education sciences and gender studies. Politicians, professionals and administrators interested in family and gender issues may find this book a valuable source of information.