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# WHAT'S NEW?

## NORDIC-BALTIC PERSPECTIVES ON CHILDHOOD AND FAMILIES



edited by Forsberg, Hannele & Lahikainen, Anja Riitta



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Edited by Hannele Forsberg and Anja Riitta Lahikainen

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## **Preface**

***Hannele Forsberg & Anja Riitta Lahikainen***

The aim of this publication is to shed light on current trends within childhood, family, and social problems research in the Nordic and Baltic countries. The publication is originated from a seminar “What’s new? Family, Childhood and Social Problems” organised by Perla (Childhood and Family Research Unit) in November 2003 at the University of Tampere<sup>1</sup>. The rationale behind this seminar with researchers from our neighbouring countries was the growing public concern over the ‘crisis’ of contemporary childhood, parenthood, and family-life. Especially in Finland, the ill-being of children and young people and the hectic lifestyle of parents have received a great deal of public attention recently. It seemed important to know what kinds of issues are raised topically within the current social scientific research in the Nordic-Baltic countries and how, if at all, the research is linked to the crisis argument. Especially new perspectives and discoveries were emphasised.

On one hand, one can claim that at least in public discourse family and childhood have been in crisis as long as we have had concepts for them. In this sense, we could argue that the public crisis talk as such is not a new phenomenon. On the other hand, we cannot deny that there are broad transformations in the context of childhood and family-life which may create ground even for a crisis. Increasing discontinuities and risks are implicit in the processes of change in general. The rise of new economy, network society and the upside-down turning population pyramid, just to mention some issues, seem to need new kinds of individuals and families. Although there are many successful elements in the new information societies, it appears though that especially children and families are facing problems of a new kind. Just as childhood and familial relations had become an anomaly for information societies attached to development and progress. These developments leave us with a lot of ambivalent questions. What kinds of trends in family, childhood, and social problems could the researchers identify and how are they emphasised in different neighbouring countries? We strongly believe that both family and childhood ‘as social problems’ and the social problems of children and families are tied to societal and local interpretations side by side with global ties.

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<sup>1</sup> We are grateful for the funding of the seminar to the Academy of Finland and the Foundation “Tukisäätiö” of the University of Tampere. This seminar was the first international seminar of the unit of Childhood and Family research. Other involved parties were NFRN (Nordic Family Research Network, an unofficial organ for collaboration between family researchers in the Nordic and Baltic countries) and the nation-wide Graduate School for Family Studies (the coordinating university being the University of Jyväskylä).

In one sense the seminar and this publication arose from an increasing challenge to conduct international comparative research. We welcome the importance of this kind of research but, at the same time, we are aware that it is the Anglo-American research that dominates the field. By focusing on the Nordic-Baltic perspectives we wanted to balance the one-sidedness of the current comparative research and to search for new openings. Increasing cultural variety in comparative studies of childhood and family will surely provide a wider understanding of these issues. Nevertheless, we have to resign ourselves to the domination of the English language, being aware that our ability to express ourselves is somewhat limited. We have not been able to use the services of language consultants and every writer is responsible for his/her own English.

Arranging a seminar with a certain basic question – what’s new? – resembles qualitative research data gathering and the results of the seminar empirical findings. Results and research knowledge are always limited and positioned. Readers of this publication are able to evaluate in what sense answers are given to our starting point of new perspectives and in what sense there is still room for new research.

The publication consists of nine contributions, which were originally presented at the “What’s new?” seminar. We are grateful to the contributors for elaborating their presentations into written form and submitting the papers for this publication. We would also like to thank you, Mira Roine and Marjo Pennonen, for practical help in the course of this publication process.

The chapters included bring together empirical results of children’s and adults’ experiences in varying living contexts and in different life events; from moment to moment social interaction episodes, concerning families in different countries and in different phases of societal and cultural contexts from Norway to Sweden, Finland, Estonia, and Lithuania - giving space especially for children's own voices and the increasing transparency of childhood. At the same time, childhood will be highlighted through differences in neighbouring countries deriving from different stages of the societies.

The first part of the publication consists of the papers given at the seminar as main lectures. The first paper, “Norwegian children’s perception of divorce – One or more phenomenon?” is a contribution by Professor *Irene Levin* from Oslo University College. In her paper, Irene Levin focuses on divorce, especially children’s views on divorce. Divorce is a widely spread phenomenon

in Western countries, especially in the Nordic ones. When it is a question of children, divorce is typically approached as a moral issue. Irene Levin's contribution to the raised question what's new? – is to understand divorce as a phenomenon that is connected to the vastly increased lifespan in contemporary western societies. It is argued that the phenomenon of divorce cannot be understood solely by examining its moral aspects. On the basis of this approach, she is emphasizing divorces instead of a divorce, when focusing on children's perspectives on divorce. Besides the concept divorces, she address the differences between diverse phenomena called divorce. Both the process of divorce and divorce as a life stage will be illuminated in the paper.

The second paper "Family and parenthood in late modern society. A Swedish Perspective" is written by Professor *Margareta Bäck-Wiklund* from the University of Göteborg. Her contribution to this publication is very acute when considering the issue of individualism, often connected to the decline of fertility rates, in the context of the Swedish welfare state. By analysing young adults' transition to parenthood and young parents' ways of forming their parenthood, she argues that it is rather individualization than individualism that shape people's family life projects. Both of the men and women studied underline family life and children's welfare as their individual and parallel project but, in concrete everyday practices, men and women seem to have gender specific routines and, as a result, lacking mutuality in their family projects. Individual autonomy seems to be hard to achieve especially for (working) mothers. These observations may be embarrassing because public policy is so strongly committed to the equality of individuals.

The third paper "Changes in the safety of children in transforming Estonia" by the research group *Merle Taimalu, Inger Kraav and Anja Riitta Lahikainen* describes changes in 5-6-year old children's insecurity profiles by comparing results of two replicate cross-sectional studies from 1994 and 2002 and illuminates the Estonian societal contextual changes relevant to children's lives. Children's self-reported fears and parent-reported psychosomatic symptoms are used as indicators of insecurity. The results with Finnish children of the same age in 1993 provide comparative perspective. Their paper gives clear answers to the "what's new" question by highlighting the enormous changes that the Estonian society and the living conditions of children are going through and especially raising the growth of the role of media and children's nightmares for our puzzle to be resolved.

Finally, Professor Tarja Pösö finishes the first part with her paper "Families difficult to speak about. Some remarks from the Finnish youth residential care". With her paper, she contributes to the

“what’s new” –topic at least in three senses. First, it can be argued that until recently young people have not been in the heart of family research. At least in Finnish discussion on adolescence as a stage of life it has been associated with autonomy and independence and positioned mostly to peer-relationships. Secondly, it can be argued that social problems concerning children and young people do not fit in well with the general reflections on trends in families and close relationships. Or, if mentioned, they are generally viewed as a residual category in family studies. Tarja Pösö argues against both of these lacks. Thirdly, family seems to be an issue of scarce words in the Finnish reform schools. This is a new phenomenon compared to Tarja Pösö’s earlier study of the same institutions. Something has changed because also as helping professionals’ interpretation recourse family is now missing. Indeed, young people seem to miss family relations on which to lean. Nevertheless, parents may have died, or so filled with social problems that it is difficult to lean on family relations as a source of resources.

The second part of the publication consists of shorter working papers, selected from the group sessions of the seminar with the idea that they managed to raise some promising and, in some sense, new perspectives on the issues at hand.

The first paper “Research on family in Lithuania: topics and methods since 1990” is written by a sociologist, Associate Professor Irena Juozeliniene from the University of Vilnius, Lithuania. She is describing the focus of family studies in her own country after the independence of Lithuania in 1990. According to her description, almost everything seems changed being new and ‘in crisis’, compared to the former Soviet time. Nevertheless, if we read the paper carefully, there are hints that might also be interpreted as continuities and personal local characteristics of the family.

The second paper “Constructing troublesome family in Estonian child protection practice” by Judith Strömpl and Marju Selg, both of whom are social work researchers and teachers from the University of Tartu, raises an interesting question: how do Estonian child care professionals describe family in general and, more specifically, as the object of child protection work. Interestingly there seems to be almost nothing new in the general family views of the professionals; they are very familiar to all of us. However, one could ask would there be room for something new when considering professionals’ ways to describe child protection clients’ families?

The third paper “Love, companionship, care, trouble? Remarriage of widows and widowers in Finland” written by Kirsi Pankarinkangas, who is a PhD-student of psychology at the University of

Joensuu. Her opening is very welcome and new from the perspective of Finnish family research because there is a sore need of research on family relations of older people. Until recently old persons have been studied mostly from the perspective of their sicknesses and need of care.

The fourth paper “Living with children: a dialogical perspective on the drama of Finnish everyday life” is contributed by Assistant Professor Eero Suoninen from the University of Tampere. He argues for dialogical and every day practice bounded perspective for researching current families. At the same time he is searching for a totally new and promising situation sensitive methodology for family studies.

Hanna Hopia, PhD-student of public health from the University of Tampere, finishes the second part of the publication with her paper developed together with her colleagues Professors Eija Paavilainen and Päivi Åsted-Kurki “Health promotion of families with children – action research in a Finnish paediatric ward”. The paper starts with the same topic of professionals’ family views raised in Marju Selg’s and Judith Ströpl’s paper and goes on to develop a promising method of action to research the topic at hand. We remain to look forward to see what’s new with the research which will be finished within the upcoming two years.

The papers included in this publication describe together the similarities with the current trends concerning childhood, family, and social problems between different countries but they also bring up great societal and cultural differences between neighbours. What is more, the papers manage to highlight the meaning of chosen approaches to the knowledge on the topics of childhood, family, and social problems.

## I PLENARY SPEECHES

### **Norwegian Children's Perception of Divorce – One or more Phenomenon?**

*Irene Levin*

#### ***Introduction***

Divorce statistics are inversely proportional to mortality rates in Norway. I am *not* proposing any causal relationship but the fact that divorce and mortality rates are inversely proportional *does* seem to require an explanation of sorts or at the very least a sociological interpretation. The fall in mortality rates is striking throughout the 19th century and for the early years of the 20th century. The law regulating divorce was very restrictive in the 19th century and in 1915 a more liberal law was passed by the Norwegian parliament. Divorce rates only modestly grew from 1915 to 1970. After 1970 divorce rates seemed to sky-rocket. The statistics for Norway mirror the same tendency throughout the western world. Life expectancy for women born in 1997 is 81.0 years. Life expectancy for women born in 1896-1900 was 55.2 years. The comparable statistics for men are 75.5 years and 51.5 years. The death of a spouse has always been the primary reason for the dissolution of marriage, but divorce is well on its way to becoming its replacement. This tendency is particularly true if we include the break-ups that occur when other couples who live together without being married dissolve their relationships and separate.

The high mortality rates that existed throughout the 19th century had a marked impact upon the rates for remarriage. In the middle of the 19th century, for example, about 20 % of all marriages involved the remarriage of one or both of the parties (Sundt 1876 (1865)). Going even further back in time, the rates for remarriage were even higher (Sogner and Dupaquier, 1981). In many cases, the widow or widower who remarried had children to care for and support from the previous marriage. Many children were reared by a parent and a step-parent. Today, many children live in single-parent families or together with one parent and a step-parent. The big difference is that the absent parent isn't dead. He or she is simply divorced and living somewhere else. Historically speaking, the big difference in families then and now is the phenomenon of divorce.

There are many differences between a marriage that has been terminated by the death of one party and a marriage that has been terminated by divorce. Divorce is the chosen option for at least one party, but the death of a spouse is not chosen. Divorce is ordinarily accompanied by resentment and

former mates are often *blamed* for the dissolution of the marriage. A dead spouse is seldom blamed for the dissolution of the marriage. If we look at the situation structurally we are unable to avoid recognising the vast differences.

The dead spouse is no longer present and can only exist in memories and in the remaining emotional ties. Formerly, when a widow or widower remarried, and this was frequently the case, the new family closely resembled the nuclear family unit because the step-parent *replaced* the dead one. Contemporary step-parents are *an addition* to the parents the child already has. Structurally, step-families involve lots of people. Seen from the outside, the situation can seem to be a very complex one with far too many complications. The expression "*my children, your children and our children*" is used to underscore and point to the complexities that exist in many contemporary family relationships.

The *willed* dissolution of marriage by means of divorce has led to a continuing debate about family life within and outside the field of family research. The consequences of divorce for the children involved, especially when they are minors and still living at home, has been the focus of attention in this ongoing debate. The debate has often been a rather heated one, with values pitted against one another. This is especially true whenever the mass media gets involved, but the debate can sometimes get overheated in research papers and at research forums too. I have often wondered why positions become so hardened, why there seems to be so little room for nuanced contributions in the ongoing discussions and why people are pressured to be *for* or *against* one point of view or another. When I have participated in discussions about divorce and about the consequences of divorce for the children involved, at family research forums, I found it very difficult to keep the discussion focussed upon the data and open to differing interpretations. At one such meeting, I was challenged to clearly and unequivocally declare whether I was *for* or *against* divorce!

### ***The concept of divorce***

The term <sup>2</sup> divorce is used about different phenomena. Divorce is the collective term for the entire process that begins when one or both spouses begins to think about terminating the marriage, through the point where one spouse moves out of the formerly common household and finally to the

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<sup>2</sup> A distinction is being made between the term divorce and the concept of divorce. The term refers to the word itself while the concept refers to the phenomenon being designated. As a consequence, a concept can have many terms, or as in the case here, a term can be used to designate several concepts.

stage at which both are established in different households. This is known as divorce and the word is used in the singular even though many different processes may be involved. We don't really know what part of the *process* of divorce is being referred to when the word divorce is used. Do we mean the moment when one of the parents moves out of the formerly common household, or when the divorce papers have officially been delivered, or when the parties have emotionally accepted the dissolution of the marriage ?

In addition, the term divorce is used to refer to the lifestage that follows – *being divorced*. The term *child of divorce* gives expression to the fact that one's parents were divorced without any information being given about when that event took place. You can be referred to as a child of divorce if your parents divorced a week ago or fifteen years ago. The term is the same but the reality being referred to can vary considerably. Since the term divorce refers to the process of divorce and to the lifestage that follows, I argue in this article that a discussion of divorce as a social phenomenon, and a discussion of its meaning for the individuals that are involved is a difficult one to have, because what is being referred to is generally unclear.

The term divorce does not only refer to the process of divorce, i.e. the period of time when a marriage is dissolved, but is also used to refer to the relatively permanent lifestage occurring after the dissolution of the marriage. The divorce process refers to the separation, when one or both of the spouses decides to separate and divorce. This process continues beyond the separation itself for an undetermined period of time. The period of time may be short and last only a few weeks after the date of separation. For others, the period of time can be rather long, especially when the courts are required to determine who will get custody of the children or how to fix a long-term financial settlement. At some point in time, all of the matters in dispute are finally resolved and the situation becomes stabilized. At that point, the process of divorce has terminated. When the process of divorce reaches termination a new phase begins, divorce as a lifestage. Divorce as a lifestage may last for the rest of one's life, and in any case this is true for the children. The children never escape from this lifestage. They are, until their dying day, children of divorce. It is important to point out that the lifestage referred to by divorce is also in fact a process. The process is usually a slow-moving one and for that reason it is understood as being a lifestage, and like all other stages of life, it incorporates the expectation of slow change.

For adults, being divorced is a civil state that terminates when one remarries or when one lives together with another partner in a marriage-like arrangement. As a lifestage, it may seem that being

divorced is no longer the case. On the other hand, as a lifestage, it is still true that one continues to be divorced from a former spouse and the children continue to be children of divorce. Even if one remarries, one remains divorced from a previous spouse and when there are common children, the divorce, in practice, is never complete and total. Later on in life, if and when grandchildren are born, one discovers new matters of importance and concern that are common for the divorced grandparents.

In 1970, Bohannan deconstructed the concept of divorce and distinguished between the process of divorce and divorce as a relatively stable lifestage. He made the distinction in order to clarify variations in the phenomenon of divorce. Bohannan identified six stages in the process of divorce. The first stage encompasses what he called an *emotional divorce*. The good feelings that the spouses once felt for one another are diminished and they begin to grow apart. One's life outside of the marriage becomes more important than the life one lives within the marriage. The second stage in the process of divorce is called the *legal divorce* and this term refers to the juridical dissolution of the marriage. The third stage is called the *economic divorce* and this stage is usually closely connected to the second stage. The consequences of the economic divorce are often very serious for one of the parties. Bohannan names the fourth stage *coparental divorce*. The children no longer have both of their parents in a common household and visiting the parent without custody is a new issue and challenge. The fifth stage is called the *community divorce*. Bohannan points out that in this stage the former spouses are forced to recognise that divorce has damaged their relationships to friends and acquaintances. It is often too difficult for friends and acquaintances to continue their relationships to both of the parties after their split-up. The sixth stage is called the *psychic divorce*. Bohannan maintains that this stage is the most difficult one of all. "*Each partner ...must turn himself or herself again into an autonomous social individual*" (p.31,1970). The psychic divorce refers to being emotionally independent of the other party.

The stages are not seen as being linear. One stage does not necessarily precede another. The stages are often entwined and this points to the fact that many matters need to be unravelled and tackled by those who are undergoing a divorce. Bohannan's six stages cast light upon the complexities in the phenomenon of divorce. All of these six stages occur within the first period of time, what I have called *the process of divorce*. Following Bohannan's thinking, but applying my own terminology, one might propose that there are six different divorce processes, not just one. Alternatively, one might say that there are six sub-stages and not just one. The reader will note that in this article I use the term *stage* in a different way than Bohannan does. In my terminology, divorce as a *life stage* is a

period of time that begins when the legal, economic, social and emotional processes of divorce have stabilised for the adult parties that are involved.

In this article, I deal with *the process of divorce* – the period of time when separate households are established – and *divorce as a life stage* that follows the establishment of separate households. I will attempt to look at the situation from the perspective of the children involved and in light of their abilities to willfully and intentionally act. How do children understand divorce and the fact that their parents no longer live together? Before I further introduce my own study, I will turn to the earlier research in order to see what kind of help I can find, in my quest to understand the children of divorced parents.

### ***Previous research***

Much of the debate and research on divorce has been concerned with what is deemed to be in the best interests of the children that are involved. It is surprising that research on this matter has seldom been based upon questioning the children themselves. Most of the information that has been accumulated about children and divorce is based upon studies of adults and promotes adult viewpoints. Sviggum has pointed out that most of these studies speak *about* children but not *with* children (Sviggum, 1999). The social reality of adults has a monopoly upon the models that are used to understand the world of children (Bråten, 1973). The child is treated as if he or she were a *static object* and researchers want to know how the child is and how childhood *should be* (Andenæs, 1996). The child almost becomes a diagnosis (Sviggum, 1999). Childhood is seen as being the lifestage that anticipates the one that really counts, adulthood and the world of adults.

Divorce is not the only theme that lacks input from the children themselves. Tiller (1990) has been a spokesman for the idea that social researchers must begin to listen to children. Our culture is very concerned about children and we like to tell ourselves that we are very fond of them. At the same time, we have an inbuilt scepticism to anything and everything that children say. There is a popular adage that proclaims "You only hear the truth from children and drunks". Sometimes it is repeated when a child says something that is acutely revealing and embarrassing. Even so, adults readily explain away those embarrassing truths. Social research is no exception. Gullestad (1996) believes that our culture romanticises childhood and by so doing distances itself from children. We need to change our view of children and childhood in order to take them seriously.

In the anthology entitled “Making Sense” and subtitled “The Child’s Construction of the World”, the authors take exception to Piaget’s view of children. Cultural and historical elements are given greater significance in the understanding of children, and this view is in contrast to the usual one we have received from developmental psychologists (Bruner and Haste, 1987).

Our understanding of children is based upon the premiss that children should first and foremost learn from adults and we have neglected to concern ourselves with what adults can learn from children (Levin,1994). Aspects of our society that remain invisible to us can be made visible when children are seen as being valid informants for social research and when they are seen as being active decision-makers in their own rights (Tiller,1990).

The Norwegian daily newspaper Aftenposten, on the 15th of May, 1999, reviewed a doctoral dissertation in education that was submitted to the faculty of the University College of Southern – Trondelag in Norway. The dissertation’s author, Synnøve Matre, studied children conversing with one another. She found that children engaged in investigative and scientific thinking and communication. When adults actively engaged themselves in conversations between children, the effect was to dampen the children’s linguistic expression (Aftenposten, 1999).

There are many reasons why adults might believe that they know what they need to know about the world of children. The dominating view begins with the notion that since all adults once were children they already know what children think (Levin, 1989b). This is a viewpoint that is very unhelpful for any attempt to secure information from children. It is true that every adult once was a child, but societies and social situations continuously change and vary and children today grow up in a completely different world than the one that existed for the adult that claims to know how today’s children think and feel. In addition, our conceptions of our own childhoods change and develop as the years pass. Human life does not leave indelible imprints like those that are found every year marking the growth of a tree-trunk. In human life, early experiences are shaped and changed by the experiences that occur later.

Another reason why adults may not want to address the child directly, in order to better understand the child’s own conceptions of reality, is that adults really do not know how to go about doing so. This is particularly true when social researchers address the youngest children. Questionnaires are inappropriate. There is resistance to the idea that qualitative research be undertaken with children as informants. Several studies have raised this particular issue and criticised others for their resistance

(see Lastein Hansen, 1998, and Aalandli, 1995) but their calls for a changed research practice have had little impact and this is particularly true for the use of very young children as informants. There have been exceptions (see Andenæs, 1996 and Levin, 1994). I have already noted that I believe that the resistance primarily stems from the fact that adults have a problem of method that they are having difficulty tackling (Levin, 1989a, 1994).

What does the research tell us *about* children and divorce? Does divorce damage the children involved? Social research done in the 1950's and 1960's, in the USA, points out that a large percentage of court-labelled criminals were the offspring of divorced parents. It is doubtful that these studies have very much to tell us about divorce in our contemporary society. The studies were done at a time when divorce was a different phenomenon than it is today. Divorces in the 50's and 60's were much less frequent and far more stigmatised than they are now.

In the book entitled "Skilte foreldre" (Divorced Parents) by Tor-Johan Ekeland (1994), children and divorce are studied without using the world of adults as a starting point for understanding the world of children. Ekeland writes, "*Children more readily manage some kinds of crises than adults. The child has its own presuppositions for adjustment. The younger the child is, the greater his or her reactions are dependent upon how the adults are managing*" (Ekeland, p.112). When studying *children in crisis situations*, one can well use the same models used for adults .." *but the reaction pattern is less typical than for adults.*" (Ekeland, p.112). In any case, one can expect great variations in relationship to the child's age, but also within age groups. "*Divorce is a decision that adults make, not children. They are the victims of what divorce can bring – in the short and long term*" Ekeland uses the word *can* .."*because it is not as dangerous to assume that children are damaged by divorce than it is to minimise their possibilities for being damaged* (Ekeland, 1994, p.115).

Studies show that divorce itself is not a problem for children, but the consequences of divorce can be. The consequences can be having to move, having parents who live far away from one another, poor household economy, and too little contact with the parent that does not have custody (Aharons and Rodgers, 1987). Many of the problems that these children face can appear long before the parents divorce (Cherlin, et.al., 1991). Kari Moxnes published a study in 1990 that points out that it is primarily those parents who have serious conflicts when divorcing who are the ones who have children that suffer from the consequences of divorce. In her opinion, it is not divorce per se that is the problem but the conflicts that sometimes accompany divorce that are damaging for the children.

Parents that are in conflict with one another use up their energy and resources fighting one another and easily lose sight of their own children's needs (Isaacs, et.al., 1986).

The best known study of divorce and its effects upon children was made by Judith Wallerstein and Joan Kelley. Their report is entitled "Surviving the Break-up" and it was published in 1980. Sixty households were incorporated into the study and together these households had 131 children. All of the children were interviewed one year, five years and ten years after the initial separation. They were all recruited from a particular office providing family counselling in California. The author's report that after the first year more than half of the children were doing very well, even though there had been initial reactions that were rather worrisome.

Kelley left the study and in 1989, Wallerstein and Blakeslee published a follow-up study entitled "Second Chance: Men, Women, and Children a Decade After Divorce". Their findings were far less optimistic. After 5 years, 25% of the children were angry and sad and suffered from low self-esteem. After 10 years, these children were still marked by the divorce. This particular study has been highly profiled by the mass media because it draws a clear picture of divorce as a problematic social phenomenon in our day. The study has also been critically attacked by other social researchers. One third of the parents in the study were diagnosed as suffering from neurotic disorders. All were recruited from a clinic that specialised in treating people who were having problems coping with their divorces. All of the households were categorised as being upper-middle class Californians. According to Cherlin and his colleagues, the study is of limited importance (Cherlin, et.al.,1991). They point to the skewed population that was studied and discourage any generalisation to other contexts or to any other geographical area.

Wallerstein and Blakeslee have been lionised by the press. Divorce has become *the* reason for all of the problems that these children have experienced. "*Every age chooses its own explanations. In previous days, we discovered poverty, divorce or alcohol. Today, sexual abuse has become the preferred explanation*" according to Liv Finstad (Finstad, 1991, p.32). Divorce has been a popular causal explanation for many years now, but its popularity continues to rise and fall. It is all too often enough to point out that the child's parents are divorced. Nothing else need be said.

## **Method**

In qualitative studies like this one, the aim of the research is to make visible the variations that exist in a complex social reality. Matters of proportion are not in question. In order to achieve a high degree of variation, I have tried to construct a strategic sample (see Trost, 1986, and Fog, 1982) by choosing theoretically interesting variables, including gender, household type, and age.

Since we already know that girls and boys often experience social reality differently, that they have learned to obey different forms of rationality and that they behave differently in social situations; both genders are represented in the sample.

Another variable is the type of household in which the child lives. The sample includes single parent families headed by mothers as well as by fathers. In addition, children will be included who live in families where one or both of the parents are established in step-families, i.e. where the child or children have or will be able to have step or half-siblings. Finally, children who have one or more of their parents in *living apart together* relationships are included.

When using the concept child/children, it should be noted that the concept can refer to a category within a population, a generation, a relation or an age group (Tiller, 1990). Here the concept refers to an age group. There is reason to believe that social reality is experienced differently by children relative to the difference in their ages. For this reason the sample includes children of varying ages.

In all cases, parents initially gave their approval for the participation of their children in this study. In some cases, parents reneged. The reasons varied. For some, participation had ceased to be practically feasible. A rather long time period elapsed between the completion of the questionnaire and the point at which interviews were to be conducted. Much in their lives could have changed during that interval. Some of the families had moved away. In other cases, the children themselves did not want to be interviewed. This was particularly true for older children who, for one reason or another, did not want to invest the time needed to complete the interview.

## **The actual sample**

The analysis is based upon 36 interviews. All of the interviews were used in the analysis, but the interviews with the most detailed information were the ones that I undertook. Names have been

changed and other small changes have been made in the data in the interests of preserving anonymity.

The informants are made up of 14 boys and 22 girls. The average age and the mean age for informants are 10 years. The median age for boys is 12 years and for girls 9 years. Half of the children live together solely with their mothers. Step-families are homes for 15 informants and 3 informants live with the custodial parent who is in a living apart together relationship. Most of the children who live together with their mothers have fathers who have established themselves in new families. These children also have experiences living in step-families whenever they visit their fathers.

The interviews, for the most part, were undertaken in the child's home. Sometimes interviews were made in the home of the parent that does not have daily custody of the child. For practical reasons, a few interviews were made in cafes. No tape-recordings were made in the interviews conducted in cafes. The interviewer noted down the informants responses as they were made in those instances.

There are great variations in occupation for parents, ranging from unemployed people to people with higher educations and upper-middle class jobs.

## ***Results***

The results show that children in all age categories distinguish between the process of divorce (i.e. when one parent moved out of their common household) and divorce as a lifestage. The children that I interviewed gave me very detailed descriptions of their lives during the break-up period. I felt that I could almost see the situation as a film in front of my eyes. A similar experience occurred when they told me about their present lives. Their stories about the process of divorce and divorce as a lifestage were very different. When analyzing their stories, I found that they spoke about the process of divorce in a completely different way than when they spoke about divorce as a lifestage. The two situations were completely different for these children. Their lives were different and the emotions they expressed when telling their stories were also very different.

The separation itself was always at the core of the child's story when speaking about the process of divorce. The child's mother or father had moved out of the house. Moving out (flytting), was the

concrete moment of change for these children. The scene itself, when the separation was actualised, had become the most important experience, a break-up leading to all the changes that followed in its wake.

Gay Becker (1997) has studied various break-downs that can occur in the course of a human life. When the children in my study spoke about the process of divorce, they spoke about it as a break-down, a rupture in their lives. The unique element in these break-downs is not the catastrophe itself, but what the children *do* to make sure that the two broken parts, that once were a unit, can now continue to exist as two more or less equal units. The interviews focussed upon how the children themselves *handled* the breakdowns. These children do not report that they suffered from a deep sorrow or that they were unable to do anything for long periods of time, as a result of the fact that one parent moved away from the other. This does not mean that they did not suffer deeply or that they actively and competently handled the breakdown. Their parents may well have told a completely different story. But judging by the narratives the children themselves tell, they were most of all concerned about how they were to understand what had happened and what they themselves could do to create continuity after the breakdown.

The break-up has a practical and an emotional aspect. These two aspects can be separate but they aren't always so. The practical changes concern the routines of daily life that are changed. Everyday life is composed of a large number of routines and that which Dorothy Smith has referred to as "*sameness*". Everyday life is replete with repetitive behaviour. Children wake-up, eat breakfast, go to school, return home, do their homework, meet their friends, etc. These activities provide their lives with a special structure and logic. Activities that are undertaken in a routine way are often seen as being boring and unimportant (Levin,1999) Mother and father are participants in many of the child's everyday life routines. Mother is often the one who organises the child's routines (Andenæs,1996), but the modern father is also an active participant. Even when the father is not present, he is an important part of the household's daily routines. When one of the parents has travelled away on a business trip, for example, they are still a part of the household and contribute to the social order that is created and recreated in the course of daily life (Smith,1987). Tiller (1958) has shown that children of seamen actively keep their fathers in mind and they are present and important in the child's consciousness. This was often given expression in the child's drawings.

Smith's concept everyday/everynight life encompasses the external routines and the ordinary way in which we use the term *routine*. However, there are routinised elements of everyday/everynight life

that are also closely connected to our feelings and to inner processes. Mother and father need to be present so that all of the other social situations in which children partake can be given meaning.

Whenever there is a break-down caused by separation, all of the involved parties will try to reconstruct an order so that the daily routines of everyday/everynight life can resume. This is true for children as well as for adults. Included in the reconstruction of order will be a meaningful interpretation of the events that have disrupted the previous order. Do the children blame themselves in their own interpretations of events ? If so, one might well imagine that their behaviours would be different than they might have been with an understanding that *my parents separated because they don't get-along well together*.

The difference between the former order and the break-down of that order can also be said to be the difference between the known and the unknown. Order in our western world is seen as being good. As a consequence, chaos is seen as being bad, simply because it is the opposite of order (Becker,1997). The process of divorce creates a break-down of the established order in everyday/everynight life. As such, it represents a potential for chaos in the lives of the involved children. What do the children themselves say about the process of divorce ?

### **When mother or father moved-out - The Process of Divorce**

In the sample almost every child who remembered anything at all about the process of divorce said that it was a happening that they themselves didn't want to occur. In their lives and in their worlds *everything* would be much better if their parents continued to live together. This is almost a universal statement from all children who were old enough to remember the process of divorce. Still, the stories they tell about that period of time are very different.

Kristian is a good example of a child who remembers quite a bit from the process of divorce. He was eight years old at the time of the interview. He was surprised to find out that his mother and father were considering moving apart from one another. He was only five years old at the time. He hadn't heard his parents arguing *because he had been watching TV* and as a result, he didn't hear them raise their voices. The interviewer had difficulty visualising the situation from Kristian's viewpoint when his father moved out of the household. This was not because Kristian was unwilling to remember those times or unwilling to talk about the process of divorce but rather

because he found it difficult to understand just why it was important. After a series of follow-up questions, Kristian did say how the experience had been for him. *I was a little.....well, a little sad when my mother told me that there was going to be a divorce....* After that, he became a bit more concrete when discussing his father's moving away from their household. *Dad was supposed to move to Nedreasen and Mom was going to live here. I was very surprised when Dad moved back home and Mom and Dad began to argue again, because Mom wanted to live here. Then, suddenly, Mom moved to Nedreasen.*

Whenever Kristian spoke about the process of divorce his words referred to concrete events, in much the same way that it is common for children to do. The concrete event he remembered best and spoke about most was a parent's *moving (flytting)*. He said that it was unclear for him which of his parents was to move away and where that parent was going to live. *Moving* has elements of security (a place to live) and insecurity (are we going to move to another home?) build into the concept. For many children, moving is synonymous with the process of divorce. When the interviewer asked questions about *divorce* some of the children responded by asking "do you mean *moving*?"

Kristian was one of the children who remembered and spoke about feeling sad during the process of divorce. The interviewer wanted him to elaborate upon this feeling of sadness. Did he weep, for example? Kristian said that he was sad *inside himself*. He made the matter more concrete by saying that *his head was hanging down and his arms just drooped down. It's the same as screaming. When you scream you feel bad inside too, like the way I felt.*

According to Kristian, his parents did not sit down together with him and explain how his everyday life would be for him and for his sister Kari, who is two years younger. That doesn't necessarily mean that his parents did not do so. But, when thinking about that period of time today, he had no memory of his parents explaining the situation as it was and as it would soon be. What he remembers is that *they were going to move and take the old sofa that they had at the time with them.*

The sad feelings didn't last very long, Kristian assured his interviewer. "One day, I wouldn't go to bed because they were going to move apart and divorce. I told them not to get divorced but it didn't help any because by then they weren't friends any longer."

"Did you tell any of your friends?", the interviewer asked. Kristian said "No. I didn't want any of my friends to be unhappy because I was going to move". In this way, Kristian took responsibility for his friends and made sure that they didn't get unhappy. He took what George Herbert Mead called *the role of the other*, (1934, 1965) and as Paul Light (1987) writes, "this is also something that children do".

The interviewer wondered what Kristian felt was the worst consequence of divorce. To this query Kristian answered that his worst fear was that *he would lose all of his friends*. Now he knew that that wouldn't happen. His sadness had primarily been based upon that fear.

Some of the children did not know what the word *divorce* meant when they were told that their parents were going to divorce. Grete is an example. She was 14 years old when she was interviewed and about six years of age when her father moved away. She doesn't remember very much about the process of divorce and when her parents told her that they were going to divorce she didn't really understand what they were talking about. "*It was a bit strange. We (she and her two sisters) didn't understand what was happening. They said that they argued a lot but I hadn't really noticed.*" She simply did not understand, but she remembered *not* understanding. The situation had no meaning for her. People divorced when they argued and stopped being friends, but her parents *were* friends or at least that was how she perceived them. "*They told us that they were unhappy being together with one another. We spoke a little about that a few times, but not really very much.*"

For Grete, the word divorce was connected to a situation that she had not recognised. The term was not in accordance with her understanding of what was about to happen. The term divorce had a negative *sound* to it. It seemed to her that naming the situation *divorce* was inappropriate and it didn't help to prepare her for what was about to happen. That the process of divorce could vary, that parents could cooperate and still want to divorce one another was unknown to her. Her confusion should not be surprising. Most of the literature about divorce does not discuss divorce as if it were a phenomenon that varied. The concept of divorce doesn't really seem to include all of the different aspects of divorce as varying phenomena.

In time, smaller and greater events transpired that affected Grete including the fact that her father had moved out of their household. Getting a divorce had not been a visualised possibility within her imagination. Even though she had friends with divorced parents, it wasn't something that she could imagine. It was difficult for her to imagine herself living a different life in a different situation.

How, indeed, can one truly imagine a situation in life that one has never before experienced? What would be the consequences for her after her father moved out?

When the situation arose and her father moved away, she experienced it as being *"exciting ...that we would occasionally be staying with Dad at his office...almost as if her parents weren't divorced."* Staying with her father was *"cosier.....because he spoiled us a little."* First and foremost, the situation had changed. She was not sure whether or not the situation had become more difficult for her than it had been before the divorce. She didn't understand that the change in the situation was due to the fact that her parents had divorced. She and her sisters did the same things and engaged in the same activities as before. She continued to take ballet lessons and had a host of school activities in which she was engaged. Her days passed in much the same way that they did before. The difference was simply that her father did not come home to her in the evenings. When she wanted to talk to him, she had to call him on the telephone.

The interviewer asked whether or not Grete thought more about her father during the week. *"Yes, sometimes that might be true, but not so very much. We have a lot to do, lot's of activities. Our parents are a lot kinder to us now that they are divorced. We are allowed to do more, visit friends, and such ...."*

Just like Grete, Truls didn't really understand what was meant by the term divorce when his parents brought the matter to his attention. He was 12 years old at the time of the interview and eight years old when his parents separated. He remembered that his mother suddenly started to carry things out of their home. He asked her what she was doing and she replied *"...We are going to divorce.....my parents had said that word before but I really didn't understand what they were referring to.....I was so young and I was concerned about other things, like my playmates and what we planned to do together."*

Truls continued by explaining that he and his mother moved in with his grandmother. His sister remained living with his father. The new situation had positive and negative elements for Truls. Truls enjoyed being the only child for awhile, but he missed his father. He sometimes cried at night and his mother would come into his bedroom to comfort him. He never felt that he had lost his father because of the divorce, since they lived nearby one another. It only took him two minutes to bicycle to his father's home.

Older children and teenagers in particular, related to the process of divorce with very different reflections. Morten was 16 years old at the time of his interview. When his parents separated he was ten years old. He easily remembers the more traumatic events when asked about the process of divorce. The difficulties he experienced during the process of divorce have fastened themselves to his memory and in particular he remembers all the arguing. Today, he laughs a little when remembering how his parents *"tried to explain to a ten year old what wasn't working in their relationship and why his father had to move out."* He hurries to add that he can also remember nice walks in the woods and more enjoyable happenings from that period of his life.

The events that occurred during the process of divorce have been collected into a narrative about the situation and about his parents as husband and wife and this narrative has been given a meaningful interpretation. *"No, when I think about those times I realise that the two of them are so very different, and I have no trouble understanding why their relationship fell apart. I know them both much better now too, and I know how some of their personality traits can be irritating for others."* Morten has provided the situation with a meaningful interpretation ... *"they didn't fit very well together any longer."* It was not only that these two had agreed that they didn't fit well together any more, but that Morten himself had experienced this to be true. He concurred in his parents evaluation of the situation. The fact that Morten and his parents had similar interpretations of the situation made it easier for Morten to accept the situation as it was. Everything was out in the open and no one had tried to keep the matter hidden from him.

There were aspects of the divorce that Morten found difficult. Both of his parents were concerned to keep him out of the difficulties that continued to exist between them. They saw themselves as being *progressive* people and each of them had very clear ideas about what was good for or harmful to children. Morten couldn't help but notice that his mother was disappointed when his father neglected to fulfil aspects of the custody agreement. Morten's father agreed to visit Trondheim (and Morten) two or three times a month, but this did not happen. Morten also understood that his mother experienced economic difficulties, while his father was able to buy a new house and establish himself in a new family. Morten identified himself with his mother's situation, even though he tried to balance his feelings in relation to his father. *"Mom is always saying that she doesn't want me to be mixed into her disputes with Dad and I am always saying that that is impossible, that I am concerned about their relationship to one another."* Morten had been angry with his father for a long time because of the way that his father treated his mother, but those feelings had long since passed.

He is still angry about the way his father *used him* to inform his mother that he was having another child. *"He spoke in an equivocating way and I was never quite sure whether or not I was given the job to inform my mother about the impending birth. When I mentioned the matter to my mother, it was the first she had heard of it, so I figure that that had been my father's plan."* Morten had been afraid of his mother's reaction to the news and he constantly worried about what would happen when he told her. He put off the communication for several months and avoided the matter as long as he could. He had to experience his mother's reaction and he still feels badly used by his father because of it.

The older children, the teenagers, more readily and more clearly give expression to their own opinions about the process of divorce. They take a standpoint and make it clear that they understood what was happening. They explicitly communicate their understanding of the situation and the reasons for divorce. They are not as dependent upon their parents or their decisions and realise that they soon will be moving out of the household to lead autonomous lives.

Sunniva is an example of a teenager who has experienced the process of divorce. She was 16 years old at the time of the interview and 12 years old when her parents separated. She wasn't at all surprised when they separated because they had so many arguments. Once, she even suggested that the two of them should divorce. When they separated, *"I was relieved. I had been able to escape from the terrible mood that their arguing created."* She is glad that they divorced and she never thinks that it would have been better for her if they had stayed together.

At the outset, her mother and brother moved out and she continued living with her father at home. She visited her mother almost every day, because her mother had moved in with her grandmother and they lived near-by. She often had her dinner there too. In Sunniva's interpretation of the situation, her parents took her advice and divorced. The separation was not a negative experience for her. On the contrary, living in a household that was dominated by arguing parents was the negative experience for her and fortunately for her that situation had changed.

What children remember varies quite considerably when regarding the events that lead up to and include the separation of their parents. Some remember a lot about the concrete events that occurred and how they as children acted and reacted to those events. Others seem to remember their feelings more clearly than the events that transpired. Most of all, children remember their own actions, their

own feelings, their own thoughts. Their thoughts are an interaction with themselves and their feelings are also an activity (Levin and Trost, 1996). What their parents did is usually forgotten. Children do remember their parents actions when those actions are connected to the child's own meaningful interpretation of events. The child's understanding of events and the meaning of those events are mixed together with the feelings the child had as those events transpired and this mixture becomes the social object of their attention and memory. This part of the stories provided by children remind me of John Dewey's conceptualisation of the terms *stimulus* and *effect*. Dewey (1896) pointed out that no stimulus exists before it is received. In similar fashion, the actions of parents don't exist in the child's consciousness until they are perceived. As time passes, the child gets a better understanding of how his or her everyday/everynight life will be, how often he or she will be meeting with the non-custodial parent, and so on. When this happens, the child's situation changes. The process of divorce has ended and everyday/everynight life resumes, with its many greater and lesser burdens and joys.

### **The Situation Today - Divorce As A Life Stage**

At the time of the interview, two to six years had passed since one of the child's parents moved out. The children in the sample had all experienced living in a nuclear family. They all experienced the breakdown of that nuclear family too. After the breakdown, some children lived solely with their mother or father, while others were integrated into step-families. The parent without custody often lived in different circumstances than the parent retaining custody. Sometimes siblings were separated from one another and each parent assumed custody of one or more of the children. There were also examples where one of the parents entered into a living apart together relationship. Some of the interviews were made in the home of the parent with custody and others were made in the home of the parent without custody.

Even though only a few years had passed since parents separated, all the children spoke about their contemporary situations in vastly different ways than when describing their lives during the process of divorce. Sadness and confusion were overcome and their situations had become stabilised. Many of the children could not remember the process of divorce. Some were too young at the time to be able to remember the events in the process of divorce. Others could not remember those former events for different reasons. They report that *so many good things have happened since then* and it is understood that later and positive events have simply over-shadowed the earlier and more

difficult ones. Their contemporary lives are good and that is what is important for them now. *The situation today* focuses upon what the child has done to create a sense of order in life. The breakdown, which represented the unknown and chaos for the child, is a phase of life they have finished. Everyday/everynight life is now all about creating new continuities. Life has been reorganised and divorce as a phenomenon has become something quite different from what it once was.

In the following pages we will re-acquaint ourselves with Kristian, Grethe, Truls, Morten and Sunniva, the same children who told us about their memories of the process of divorce. They will now tell us about their situations today.

Kristian was one of the children who expressed sadness when remembering the separation of his parents. Today, he lives together with his mother, who is a single parent. His father has reestablished himself in a step-family with new children. When Kristian is asked how his situation is today, three years after the divorce, he answer *"No, it isn't so bad now. When we change and everything ...matters are just fine."*

For Kristian, it is important that his parents can meet and exchange children without incident. He doesn't like the fact that his father has moved away, but when the children are exchanged he gets a chance to be with his father and mother. In addition, *"it's kind of fun living with Mom and then visiting for a few days with Dad. It's fun being other places too."* We may surmise that he has had a lot of new experiences resulting from the fact that his parents live apart and in two separate households. Kristian has his new friends in his father's neighborhood and he has kept his former friends that live nearby his mother's home. He has many more friends than he would have had if his parents had stayed together.

Kristian speaks about his everyday routines and his feelings associated with those routines in a very ordinary fashion. *"It is a little ...sometimes, it's a bit stupid, but then all at once everything is fine, and sometimes I think ....well, for example, it will be one week and one day before I get to see my Dad again."* Besides that, his sister Kari, who is two years younger, is a great source of irritation in his life. The interviewer was left feeling that if Kristian could get what he wanted most, it would be to be rid of his sister's tiresome teasing.

What does Grethe tell us about her situation today? She was one of the children who did not understand what the word divorce meant. When she found out just what it would mean for her she experienced the new situation as being rather exciting. Her father lived at his place of work for quite a while. It was an institution and there were living quarters there for some of the employees. He was preparing to move elsewhere now. Grethe believes that she has a very good relationship with her father. He lives alone and doesn't have a partner that lives elsewhere. Her mother has remarried. Grethe gets along very well with her mother's new husband, Gunnar. He was slowly introduced to her and it took some time before she met his children. Grethe is the oldest of three sisters. The other two are also part of the sample and all three speak positively and with a smile on their faces when asked about Gunnar's children. Gunnar's children are about the same age as Grethe and her sisters.

When drawing a picture of her family, Grethe includes all of Gunnar's children. She excludes their grandparents and her own in the family picture. If she were to include her own grandparents, then she would include the grandparents of Gunnar's children, too. This is because she sees them much more often than she sees her own grandparents. Gunnar's parents live in Trondheim and that is why they see each other so often. She calls Gunnar's mother *grandma Gyrid*. Grandmother Gyrid relates to Grethe and her sisters more or less in the same way that she relates to her own grandchildren. She buys them all the same presents and Grethe remarked that she gets a lot of very nice Christmas presents.

Her mother's life with Gunnar has led to lots of changes. They moved to a very nice house that they are restoring. They are very often together in the surrounding woods and fields, because Gunnar is an avid outdoorsman and likes skiing. Grethe has registered a big change in her mother, too. Her mother *"has become much happier, since she met him, I think. Before they met she was, well, a little sad, after the divorce and all"*. This change in her mother is very important for Grethe, who is a very caring daughter. Grethe wouldn't be able to be happy unless the important people around her were happy too. Grethe expresses a caring and responsible form of rationality (Sørensen, 1982, Wærnes, 1984) when speaking about her mother.

Grethe's life consists of an assortment of activities, including dancing ballet, acting in school plays and doing her homework. Visiting her father can easily be understood as being an interruption of her daily schedule, but by and large, Grethe believes that her situation in life is fine. *"It is okay that they are divorced. That's the way it is and the way it should be."* Grethe has realised that the term

divorce does not necessarily include arguments. Divorce for her has primarily meant that there are more people in her life, more people to whom she must relate.

Truls was also one of the children who did not initially understand what the term divorce meant. After the initial period of disturbance, the situation calmed down considerably for Truls. He initially lived together with his mother and bicycled each day to his father's house in order to visit. His father has since moved to another town and it takes many hours to travel there. This is something that Truls deeply dislikes. He often misses his father and when that happens, he calls his father on the telephone. Truls is not bothered by the fact that his parents are divorced, but it does bother him that his father has moved to another town.

Truls realises that his father's moving away is connected to the divorce. His father has moved in with a step-mother that Truls likes, but he realises that she is the reason that his father has moved away to another town. He would rather have his father nearby, but this does not mean that he dislikes his step-mother.

His mother is in a living apart together relationship with John, who is from Italy. The day after the interview, which was made in Truls' home, John was expected for a visit. Truls was really looking forward to John's visit. He and his mother had lived together with John in Italy for six months and Truls had learned to speak Italian. Truls has a lot of contact with John. When they lived together in Italy, they went on many walks together with the dog and lots of fishing trips, too.

When John is in Norway, Truls and John do lots of things together, like fishing, playing soccer, and walking in the woods. Truls likes John a lot and hopes that he will be granted the right to work in Norway.

Morten is a sixteen year old who is very satisfied with his situation these days. We may remember that he created his own explanation for the reason why his mother and father don't get on well together. At the time of the interview, Morten was living together with his mother and his father had established himself in a new family relationship with a woman with whom he had two new children.

Morten told the interviewer about his relationships to his parents. When he is at his father's home, he feels like a visitor. He doesn't feel at home there in the same way that he does with his mother.

He and his father are more like friends than father and son and he can talk about more things together with his father than he can with his mother. He and his father have lots of common interests and they spend a lot of time talking about *"literature and other matters"*.

He sees his relationship to his mother as a *"typical parent-child"* relationship. Most of his time at home is spent doing everyday things and he and his mother are able to talk to one another about their feelings.

He is often disappointed by his father, particularly because he does not have his own room in his father's house. When his father and the woman he lives with were making plans to redecorate their home ... *"no one brought up the idea that it might be best if I had my own room ... the idea was never discussed. That has irritated me."*

His disappointment has effected his relationship to his father and to his two half-brothers. While his father keeps on saying how much Morten and his two half-brothers look-alike and that Morten should bring them to and from their kindergarter because they are so proud of having a big brother. Morten points out that *"he sees through his father"* and that his father is only saying *"what he wants to believe"*.

Morten thinks that his visits are too hectic. Whenever he visits his father in Oslo he feels that he has to be together with his father the whole time and be on his best behavior in order to justify the expensive airplane tickets that his father must buy for each visit. *"He doesn't really pester me but I can't help but notice that he often says that he wants me to be with him whenever I visit ... since he has paid for the airfare."*

Morten feels that his father is often inconsistent in regards to their relationship. He isn't included in their family vacations anymore, because only those that live together in their common household are included. That makes Morten feel that his father and his new family have excluded him. Still, he included his father, his step-mother and his half-brothers in a drawing that was meant to define his family.

During the interview he referred to a vacation where his step-mother behaved childishly. She complained that Morten and his father had conversed together too often. His father should have walked and talked to her and to their two little boys when they were out strolling together. *"That's*

*when I felt ... how should I put it? It was the opposite of an inferiority complex ... I felt that she was being childish and immature.”*

Morten says that he is glad that his parents don't live together anymore, because their split-up has created possibilities for his own development. *”Their split-up has made me think about things and question things more. When you are forced to confront difficulties at an early age it makes you reflect and you get a better picture of reality as it is, much better than those who haven't experienced those difficulties.”*

He believes that he is far more mature than all of his friends and the reason for this is that his parents were divorced. *”It set off lots of thoughts and such ... I feel that in certain areas I am more mature than others are at my age.”*

Morten does not *”blame the divorce. On the contrary, I have a very clear relationship to it ..... it is my reality ....and when I think about how I have developed since the divorce and what I am able to do in my free time...well ...I realise that I am dependent upon it ... Let me give you an example, Whenever I am here or visiting friends and so on, I realise that most teenagers my age spend a lot of time with their families watching TV together. They spend hours and hours together each evening watching TV. This is something that I rarely do.”*

Sunniva, aged 16, is another teenager who is happy about the fact that her mother and father live apart. She is very enthusiastic about Trine, the woman who lives together with her father. Trine is 28 years old, and in many ways the two of them have become friends. She can talk to Trine about matters that she would never discuss with either parent. In addition, Trine is a role-model for her when it comes to getting an education. Trine studied at the Norwegian Technological University in Trondheim and she has a very good job. Trine was far from being a math genius and that has reassured Sunniva. Sunniva realises that she can choose to study natural sciences in high school without being a math genius and that she might, one day, enter into a programme at the very same Technological University. Sunniva experiences her step-mother Trine as being a terrific resource and makes a point of stating that she is more of a friend than a step-mother. Trine helps Sunniva to set high goals for herself in life and particularly in regards to the work-world. Sunniva watches her mother struggling very hard to complete her high school education. Sunniva's example helps her to realise that she can get a good job as soon as she gets a good education.

When her parents decided to split-up Sunniva continued to live with her father because he initially kept their former home. In time, Sunniva moved in with her mother and her father moved to another town. Sunniva moved in with her mother because she felt that her father wasn't able to understand her when it came to "boyfriends and such".

At the moment, Sunniva would like to move back with her father. She has become very goal-oriented and believes that her father would be better able to help her with her homework, now that she will be entering high school. Another reason is that her father's household is a much quieter place to live, since her brother doesn't live there. In some ways, she does miss not having her father at home, particularly because he would be a good resource for her when doing homework. *"The parent you live with is the worst one. The one you see least often is the one you prefer. It's nice to have a sanctuary once in a while."*

All of the children in the sample were asked about the advice that they might give to a friend who was trying to cope with his or her parents divorce. Sunniva's answer was: *"Try to understand both of your parents. Understanding is important ... why they are divorcing. Don't try to get them to move back together. If they decided to split-up, you can be certain that the decision has been made after lots and lots of thinking. It's also important to not pretend that everything is OK, if it isn't. It's important to talk about your experiences, even when nothing is bothering you."*

## **Remembering?**

As already mentioned, many of the children were unable to provide any information at all regarding the process of divorce or how that process effected them. For some of these children, the process did occur too early in their lives to expect any memory of events. It is very difficult to remember events that have occurred before the acquisition of a rather well-developed conceptual vocabulary. Very young children do not have an imagination that is well developed enough to be able to picture the idea of divorce.

One might well ask at what age we can expect children to remember? The answer will vary, as it has in this particular study. There are children who are old enough to have remembered the events who tell us that they do not remember. We can assume that they do not, in fact, remember those events and that they are telling us the truth. Children, like adults, forget lots of things that happen.

They can forget important events just as easily as incidental matters. It may well be the case that the separation did not bring any significant changes into the daily routines in the life of the child. The everyday world of the child may not have been seriously affected by the break-up (Sviggum, 1999). Everyday life may continue in an uninterrupted manner, even after one parent moves away. If the separation occurs in a calm and peaceful manner, the event itself may not be so decisive for the child's well-being. It should be remembered that none of the children in this study lost contact with the parent that moved away.

Lots of things we have forgotten, for the moment, are remembered at a later time. When a memory is actualised, many other different happenings can re-emerge into one's conscious mind as memories. We need only to be reminded about how much easier it is to remember words in a foreign language when we are actually in a country where that language is spoken. At such times, we spontaneously remember many words that are completely lost to us when we are at home. We have all experienced not remembering words that only a few days later were remembered quite easily. The words of a foreign language acquire renewed meaning for us when we hear them repeatedly spoken in a foreign country. The words become available to us because the setting provides those words with meaning. The same process is probably at work for children who forget about events but who might well remember them if the interviewer were able to construct a context where those events were given meaning. In other words, if the interviewer were able to create a context within which the events of the child's life were included as a natural part, yes, then surely many more of the children would have been able to provide information about their own experiences during the process of divorce. However, the interviewer will always have limited time and resources and in this particularly study it was not practically possible for the interviewer to undertake more than one interview with each child. Under different and better circumstances we might well assume that re-interviewing some of the children could have served as a catalyst for memory and a more complete report about their experiences during the process of divorce might have been forthcoming.

Some might object to this reasoning and propose an alternative interpretation. They might say that the children have suppressed their memories of separation and divorce because their feelings during that period of time, when those events occurred, were too obtrusive. The theoretical perspective that promotes this interpretation more or less describes suppressed feelings as hiding out somewhere in order to re-appear in different ways and under different guises later on in the child's life. On the

other hand, if those feelings are properly treated they will lose their force and not be able to further influence the child's well-being.

It is difficult to determine whether or not a child has forgotten or suppressed memories. On the basis of the interviews I myself have undertaken in the course of this study, I am left with the feeling that almost all of the children have moved beyond the process of divorce and have entered upon another lifestage. I believe that it would have taken more interviews for them to be able to have remembered those forgotten experiences. I did not have the feeling that these children were the victims of divorce or that they were suppressing painful or difficult feelings. Thomas' theorem is very close to my own theoretical perspective, *"If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences"* (Thomas & Thomas, 1928, s.572) and his theorem is also true about children (Sviggum,1999).

The following account is from an interview with a girl who was very young when her parents separated. Frida celebrated her eighth birthday on the day before her interview. She was between three and four years of age when her parents separated. She didn't remember anything at all about her home-life at that time beyond the fact that she and her parents lived together in Trondheim. She remembered nothing at all about their separation. At the time of the interview she was living in a step-family with her mother and Carl in Oslo. Her father lived in Trondheim and she visited him once or twice a month.

When directly asked, she answered that she missed her father *"a little bit"*. The interviewer continued by asking what she did when she missed her father. *"Nothing really, I just miss him"*, was Frida's answer. *"I just feel it sometimes, at school and elsewhere."* Missing her father was one of many feelings that Frida interacted with in the course of a day. It doesn't make her depressed, *"it's just the way things are"*. She never mentions it to her friends, but her mother knows that she misses her father sometimes. When asked how she feels about the fact that her mother and father are divorced, she answers *"It's fine with me ... because I like to fly in airplanes."* The interviewer asked if she wanted to visit her father more often. *"No, because I want to go to school too."*

Frida is very attentive to her step-father Carl and she likes him a lot. *"Yesterday I was together with Pia ( a girlfriend) and he picked us up at school and took us to the swimming pool at Tøyen and after that we went to a cafe and had hot dogs and then we went to a toy store and he bought us little dolls...that cost five crowns for two."*

On her family diagram, Frida drew in her *”half-brother, but I just call him my little brother, his name is Joakim, and he also has another big sister, but she isn’t related to me.”* The interviewer wanted to know more about Joakim and Frida answered *”It’s like this – my father and mother got divorced, you know and then my dad had a child together with Johanna and she is Joakim’s mother, ... because my mother isn’t his mother but my father is his father...and Johanna is also Janne’s mother but Carl isn’t her father.”*

Frida is sad about the fact that she isn’t together with Joakim more often. The reason for that is that her father doesn’t live together with Johanna and Joakim. Even though Joakim lives in Oslo, she never visits him *”never, because my mother doesn’t have anything to do with Joakim. She isn’t related to him. My mother is always saying that we are going to visit Joakim, but we never do ...”*. Frida says it’s sad because *”I miss him sometimes.”*

Frida doesn’t remember the events that occurred when her parents separated. She can barely remember living together with her mother and father. Still, she knows that they separated and divorced. When her girlfriend Pia’s mother talks about Frida and calls her a child with divorced parents, Frida doesn’t like it, because her situation in life is described as being different, something special. Like the other children in this study, Frida isn’t particularly happy about the fact that her parents are divorced. She relates to her everyday life in much the same way that other children do, whether they live in nuclear families, in step-families or in single parent families. For all children, everyday life consists of situations which are *”stupid”* (for example, Frida isn’t together everyday with her father or her half-brother Joakim) and of situations which are just fine ( Frida enjoys being together with Carl, with her girlfriends and she likes going to school, to name just a few).

### ***Final remarks***

By and large, when divorce is discussed there is an underlying concern regarding whether or not divorce is good or bad for those involved and particularly for the children. Beyond that, divorce is seen as being a sign of individualism in contemporary society. Some like to connect the increase in divorce to the increased numbers of women who participate in the paid work-world or to the contemporary ideology known as *women’s liberation*. In this article, the frame of reference that is used to understand divorce as a phenomenon is the vastly increased length of life in contemporary

western societies. In the course of the 20th century, the average life expectancy has increased by 25 years. This enormous change has had consequences that go far beyond society's need to increase facilities and care for the aged. The phenomenon of divorce cannot be understood solely by examining its ethical aspects (i.e. whether or not it is good or bad for the children involved). The phenomenon of divorce is not simply a symptom of our increasingly individualised society. It cannot be understood as being the result of women's liberation. The phenomenon of divorce is also connected to developments within medicine and to the consequences of those developments for the various rates of mortality in western societies. The promise of marriage "until death do us part" is a very different matter today than it was a hundred years ago. One hundred years ago, the probability that a husband or wife would die at an early age was quite high and this probability was reflected in the high rates for remarriage. If mortality rates continue to sink, the phenomenon of divorce will become more and more usual.

When the phenomenon of divorce is addressed in social research or in public debate, a single term is used to designate several differing phenomena. The singular is used even though plural phenomena are discussed. One speaks about "the difficulties of divorce". More often than not, the period of time just after separation is in focus. Without making any distinctions at all, one speaks about the situation that children experience after their parents divorce. The listener seldom knows whether the speaker is referring to the immediate reactions that children have when learning about the impending separation of their parents or whether the speaker is referring to situations that children experience many years after their parents have divorced.

This article addresses divorCES and the differences between diverse phenomena which do not only refer to differences in degree but to differences in kind. The article combines theoretical discussion and empirical findings. For the children in this study, the term divorce has referred to two different and distinct phenomena. The first phenomenon has been called *the process of divorce* in this article. It refers to the series of events that include telling the child or children that one of their parents will soon be moving to another address, separation, or the actual events that occur when one parent moves away and establishes a new home elsewhere, and the establishment of new everyday routines. In addition to the events identified within this process, one must also consider and include the emotional aspects of this process for the children involved. By and large, the process of divorce doesn't take a very long time for children to complete, although the time needed can vary. The second phenomenon refers to the life stage that begins when the process of divorce had been completed. This period includes all the years thereafter, and the everyday happenings that aren't

really very different from the everyday life of other children. The children are still children of divorced parents, but the divorce does not create any particular problems for these children in their everyday lives. This second phenomenon has been referred to as *divorce as a life stage*.

The distinctions I have made differ from the categories used by Bohannan (1970) in his classic study. Bohannan pointed out that divorce should be understood as a process incorporating six distinct stages. Bohannan's six stages are all included in what I have referred to as the process of divorce. I have pointed out that children continue to be referred to as children of divorced parents long after Bohannan's six stages are completed. When children themselves speak about their own lives, years after the conclusion of the process of divorce, they speak about an entirely different phenomenon than the earlier one. I have referred to this period in their lives as divorce as a lifestage and this phrase must not be confused with Bohannan's terminology.

In everyday speech and in much of the literature within social science the same term is used to refer to the often relatively short period of life when parents dissolve their marriages and to the long-term lifestage that follows, when new routines of everyday life have become stabilised. The term doesn't adequately reflect the social realities. In this article, the process of divorce has been distinguished from divorce as a lifestage. This distinction is a useful one but it would be better still to have two distinct terms.

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## **Family and parenthood in late modern society. A Swedish perspective *Margareta Bäck-Wiklund***

### ***Individualism versus individualization***

Is contemporary society becoming more individualistic? This is a question frequently posed in most recent text about modern western democracies often in relation to the decline in fertility rate. Giddens is reflecting on the subject when asking: “are we witnessing the rise of a ‘me’ generation, resulting in a ‘me-first’ society which inevitably destroys common values?” (Giddens 1998). However he immediately answers that the “me-generation” is a misleading way to describe the new individualism, and it does not signal moral decay as often have been argued. Rather to the contrary, surveys show that the individuals in late modern society are more sensible to moral concerns than previous generations were. But they do not accept or relate these to tradition or accept traditional forms of authority, and in a sense some of them are post-materialistic such as ecological values, human rights and sexual freedom. With help of Ulrich Bech Giddens introduces *institutional individualism* as a way to understand individualism in a welfare state context:

“Not market individualism, not atomization. Most of the rights and entitlements of the welfare state are designed for individuals rather for families. In many cases they presuppose employment. Employment in turn implies education and both these presuppose mobility. By all these requirements people are invited to constitute themselves as individuals: to plan, understand, design themselves as individuals.” (Beck 1998)

In the quotation above individualism is framed in a welfare state context, which makes the Nordic countries as advanced welfare states of special interest. In the following I intend to discuss the idea of individual institutionalism in a Swedish perspective. However I will take the discussion a bit further and to some extent question the trend towards individualism. Instead I will argue that it is rather a matter of individualization, where individuals freed from old constrains and with autonomy can shape their own identities and reflect on the meaning of their relationships and how to adjust their “life plan” to their “family project”.

This paper deals with two themes in order to discuss modern parenthood. First young *adults transition to parenthood* and second *young parent’s ways of forming their parenthood with special*

*focus on motherhood.* But first I will discuss the welfare state as a context for parents with special focus on family policy.

### ***The welfare state context***

In 1990 Esping-Andersen developed the now well known classification for welfare state clustered by regime types: *the liberal, the corporatist and the social democratic welfare state regime.* He takes into account de-commodification (independence on market compulsion), social stratification and employment as keys to how people adjust and form their life and identity in a welfare state. The analysis is focused on pensions, sickness benefits, creation of work and it is based on the interaction between the *state, the market and the family.*

The Social Democratic welfare state regimes cluster is the smallest and is represented by the Nordic countries. The state has a strong position with social *insurances built on citizenship* and universalistic principles with a maximum of de-commodification effects. The goal is to prevent segregation and dualism between state and market, which means that also the middle-class are service users. The Nordic countries have a generous family policy, with Sweden representing an advanced design. The two most salient pillars in the family policy, is the parental insurance and the public day-care. Together those systems help families to balance between family and work, and at the same time do they illustrate the most distinguished trait of this regime type notably its *fusion of welfare and work*, as it is through being a gainfully employed parent's get full access to the benefits from them. The regime type can be characterized as follows:

“The social democratic regime's policy of emancipation addresses both the market and the traditional family. In contrast to the corporatist/ subsidiary model, the principle is not to wait until the family's capacity to aid is exhausted, but to pre-emptively socialize the cost of family-hood. The ideal is not to maximize the dependence on the family, but capacities for individual independence. In this sense, the model is a peculiar fusion of liberalism and socialism. The result is a welfare state that grants transfers directly to children, and takes direct responsibility of caring for children, the aged, and the helpless. It is accordingly, committed to a heavy-service burden, not only to service family needs but also to allow women to choose work rather than the household“ (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p.28).

Esping-Andersen's typology from the beginning of the 1990s has had a tremendous impact on welfare state analysis. However de-commodification as one of the central concepts lead to a gender biased discussion. It refers to male workers because most Swedish women at that time had not entered the labour market and become commodified. As a consequence women and their unpaid work in the family were excluded from the analysis as a source of welfare. Accordingly the typology has been criticized from a feminist perspective, because it presupposes that families lean on the standard male production worker including the male-bread-winner model (Sainsbury 1994, Lewis, 1993). Taking the critique into account Esping – Andersen (1999) moved on and included families and particular women's economic decisions into his analysis. In his revised comparison of welfare states the distinction between state and regime is emphasized and the family and women's economic activities are included.

Given this context Esping-Andersen introduces a new typology. It refers to degrees of “*familialism*” versus “*de-familialization*”. The familialistic regimes lean on the principle of subsidiarity and the state is only supposed to intervene when the supporting networks around the family have failed. Familialization goes hand in hand with an almost non-existing family policy. De-familialization on the other hand is a concept used:

*“to capture policies that lessens the individuals' reliance on the family; that maximizes individual's command of economic resources independently of familial or conjugal reciprocities”* (Esping-Andersen 1999, p.51).

Esping-Andersen uses de-familialization and de-commodification as ways to discuss degrees of dependence. He literally states that: “The Nordic welfare state regimes remain the only ones where social policy is explicitly designed to maximize women's economic independence” (p.51). To promote women's economic independence but also more general individual autonomy before dependency on family relations has been a golden rule for Swedish welfare policy. Women shall be able to be gainfully employed and have a family at the same time. It is also obvious that policies directed towards “working parents” have promoted a model for working mothers. In Sweden 80 % of women aged 25-54 with two children and more are working mothers and 60 % of them are employed in the public sector (Fagnani et al 2004).

### ***Swedish family policy – in short***<sup>3</sup>

Since the 1930s state intervention has gradually shaped everyday Swedish family life. During the formative years some principles that still are valid were laid out. Benefits became universal and means tested benefits were phased out in the late 1950s and 1960s, but gradually also more and more entitlement to services were related to wage labour. Women were entitled to social rights on the basis of citizenship and not as dependent wives. They were recognized as individuals in a society which otherwise basically was paternalistic in nature. The land mark was when Sweden adopted their first national old age insurance in 1913, the principles for entitlement were the individual regardless of sex, marital and labor market status. Nevertheless, the principles of individualism should not be overstated although the recognition of married women's pension was radical for its time. But women's position was also recognition of the principle of care and that work in the home qualified for entitlement to social benefits.

The family policy can roughly be divided into three phases. The first stage in Swedish family policy is the beginning of state responsibility for the organization of everyday family life to make it more efficient and to create equal living conditions for children. These objectives were also the main components expressed in the vision presented by Alva and Gunnar Myrdal when they launched their family-friendly policy in the mid 1930s. Their ideas were to ease the burden for families with children and promote the birth of more and healthier babies.

In 1948, a general child allowance was introduced to all families with dependent children. This is a universal, non-means-tested benefit. It was and still is the symbol for the generous institutionalism in Swedish social policy and includes everybody without stigmatization. The child allowance is a cornerstone in family policy but was initially introduced to solve "the population crisis". It was also the first important step towards the parental insurance that gradually included the acceptance of the women's right to work and to have a family. This first stage in Swedish family policy has been labelled "*the house-wife contract*".

Even though this first stage in Swedish family policy leans on a gender-contract where women were house-wives and men breadwinners, Swedish women have compared to many other countries, a

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<sup>3</sup> This section is mainly built on a chapter The Family and the Welfare State: a Route to De-familialization in Özdalga, E. & Liljeström, R. (2002) *Autonomy and dependence in that family*. Istanbul: Swedish Research Institute, updated with official Swedish statistics.

strong positions and individual independence. Women's rights to work and to have a family have long ideological roots, but it seems as the economic forces and the demand for (wo)manpower in the labour market were the strongest incentives to be effectuated into political reforms such as public child-care and a parental insurance. Women's rights were not primarily a question of care, but of wage labour and care.

The second stage of Swedish family policy was initiated during the 1960s. With more and more women on the labour market the quest for child care became urgent along with intensive debates about "sex roles". The official ideological goal became the *dual-earner family* with symmetric gender roles. Economy, work, family and children now became parts in *one* political discourse about wage labour and care. However the opinion in the Social Democratic Party was divided in two directions in these issues, one that leaned on the traditional male bread-winner model and women as house-wives and homemakers, and one in favour of a dual-earner family with gender equality and shared responsibility between the spouses. During the 1960s family policy improved gradually and entitlements were now directly related to women as wage earners.

The third stage of Swedish family policy was enacted in 1974 when the Social Democrats introduced a "new" family policy, with the *dual-earner family* as an official goal. *Maternal leave was replaced by parental leave* and also became liable to taxation. From now on, new principles for entitlements were introduced. Both parents became entitled to six months leave together. Over the years the benefits have gradually improved. At present it comprises of 480 days allocated on a quota basis. So that the mother and the father from now on each have 60 earmarked days. The so called guarantee amount of 60 SEK is raised to 120 SEK from now on called basic level (*grundnivå*). The 10 so called "daddy days" (introduced 1980) is transferable to other insured person than the father. Temporary cash benefit is also transferable to other insured person (Riksförsäkringsverket uppdatering av socialförsäkringssystemet, 2004).

Parallel with the continually extended parental insurance public child care was introduced on a large scale. In the 1960s the demand for child-care provision grows strong. Female labour was in demand and calls for a major expansion of child care facilities intensified. In 1968 the government appointed the National Commission on Child Care to propose a child care system. It laid the foundations for the Swedish pre-school day-care centres. During the 1970s and 1980s places in child care facilities expanded rapidly – but not enough. In 1995 local authorities became bound to provide child care without undue delay for all children requiring it.

Child day care has expanded rapidly since the 1970<sup>th</sup>. In 1998 the number of children participating in full-time child care, i.e. preschool, family daycare home the number was 720 000 children. Compared to 1970 the number was 71 000 a more than tenfold increase (*Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Sweden.*). It was in the 1970s that the scope of the collective childcare enlarged significantly. Childcare in Sweden has become a right by law for parents who work or study or whose children have special needs. In the autumn of 2000 the Parliament passed a decision to introduce a new child care reform. The 1<sup>st</sup> January 2002 a maximum fee for preschool activities and care of school-age children was introduced. This means that a ceiling is set on the fees payable by the parents for their children. The 1 July 2001 municipalities were liable to offer places at pre-school or in a home daycare nursery to children between one and five years old whose parents were unemployed. Earlier this obligation extended only to children whose parents were gainfully employed or were studying. January the 1th 2002 the obligation to take on children also applied to children whose parents were on parental leave and to younger siblings. The January the 1th 2003 universal pre-school was introduced to all four and five-year olds, equivalent to about three hours per day during the school term. At present 720 000 children are participating in full-time child care, i.e. pre-school, family day-care home. Public day care is also used fairly equal among different social classes.

Even though the “symmetrical family” was launched during the late 60s and became the official goal during the 70s, the care of small children is still the main responsibility for the mothers. In this respect there still is a heavy gender bias and mother still fulfil the traditional role as the prime care taker. Cross-sectional data shows gender inequality, however there are signs that the pattern slowly is changing over time. When the new family policy was launched in 1974 about 3 percent of fathers claimed parental cash benefit. Twenty years later the proportion had increased to 29 percent. More and more fathers take parental leave. In 2002, 42 percent of fathers claimed parental cash benefit (Socialförsäkringsboken 2003)

### ***Transition to parenthood***

Swedish family policy seems to have created a model for working mothers but a slow change towards a “symmetrical family”. The political goal is still valid, with focus on labour market participation, wages but also on new parental roles.

Ever since the 1930s, with the Myrdal's and the population crisis, issues concerning population policy has been on the political agenda along with issues of a pro-family policy. A high percentage of working mothers and a high total fertility rate are generally seen as incompatible. The Swedish example, during the first half of the 1990s seemed to prove the opposite notably - women's right to work and have a family, a long time pursued political goal. The generous family policy also seemed to be part of the explanation to the new situation (SOU 2000:3), but the trend has been broken. An analysis women's decision to become mothers indicates the possibility for new patterns in family life and parenthood where both the welfare state and the labour market are important factors for the outcome. It seems as if the propensity to have children is related to the situation on the labour market (Söderström et. al. 1999).

The Swedish example also seems to fit the meaning of *institutional individualism*. The discourse about the fertility rate combines issues about labour market ( gainfully employment and family economy), state support ( parental insurance and replacements levels) and the division of labour between paid and unpaid work among parents including "*the new fatherhood*"<sup>4</sup>. Several studies have showed that during the last 15 years the fertility rate has fluctuated to a larger extent than in most other countries (Varför föds det så få barn? Demografisk rapport 2001:1, Statistiska Centralbyrån) . During the first part of the 1990s the Swedish dual-earner family had, along with Island, the highest total fertility rate (the measure of the number of children each woman will have during her life) in Europe. From the Second World War until the beginning of the 1960s, the total fertility rate was over 2 children per woman in childbearing age. (In order for a population to reproduce itself each women needs to have 2.1 children.) After that it dropped for a period to the same low level as during the 1930s, between 1.7 and 1.8 children. Most European countries have followed a common pattern until the 1980s. In some other European countries the total fertility rate started to increase during the 1980s as it did in Sweden, but it never rose above 2 children per woman. In Sweden, in contrast to the other countries, the total fertility rate continued to increase. 1992 it was 2.1. However, in 1994 along with the economic crisis, it began to decrease and in the late 1990s it was even lower than in the 1930s, (1.4 to 1.6) when Sweden had the lowest birth rate of all Western democracies. In the middle of the 1990s the unemployment rate rose from 2,7 to 8,2 percent in less than three years (1991-1993) (SOU 2000:3). This was a remarkable jump and unique in an international context and the economic crisis dominated the political and public debate.

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<sup>4</sup> For a presentation of the "New fatherhood" se for example Plantin, L. *Män, familjeliv & föräldraskap*. Umeå: Boréa.

It seems as family life and parenthood is a “risk-calculated project” where parenthood is construed in relation to the labour market and to welfare state institutions. Gainfully employed are more likely to have children, and even more so if they are well educated with a good salary. The reverse is true for low educated and low paid women or if they are unemployed, then they tend to put motherhood and children on hold ( Hoem, B. 1993, 2000, in SOU 2000:37). The trend signals “no job no kids”, as poorly educated and unemployed women are the least likely to have children compared to well-educated and well-paid. There is obviously a lot of concern, reflexivity and planning in relation to the “transition to parenthood”. It is possible to argue - that we are witnessing a new identity where a secure job is one of several prerequisites for parenthood.

### ***Young parents and their everyday strategies***

In the following I will develop the second theme, young parent’s ways of forming their parenthood with a special focus on motherhood. By using some results from a study of “*Modern Parenthood – family and gender in transition*”<sup>5</sup> the analysis will focus how new practices and identities for parenting are carried out through everyday routines, along with the dynamics of family interaction.

The official Swedish gender policy means that men and women are equally responsible for economy, childcare and maintenance of the home. Modern men and women are expected to form their life according to these ideas. The welfare state has also step by step created possibilities for them to do so. Most Swedish men and women also embrace those values related to gender equality and there is an extensive discourse surrounding the topic. However as we shall see in everyday practices few young families manage to fulfil the ideal of a "symmetrical family".

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<sup>5</sup> The study Bäck-Wiklund, M.& Bergsten, B. (1997, third reprint 2003) Stockholm, by Natur och Kultur. The material presented in this text is a short summary of some of the main results. The design of the project was a longitudinal study focusing on 32 small children and their parents. It is a study of how men and women meet through the child - a family study. The sample includes all families, with one exception, with two or more children, one of which is about six month, with connections to a local child health centre. The parents were interviewed twice separately and twice as a couple. The interview covered material ranging from the parents’ childhood to their present life. The narratives were about past and present family life, the history of their education, different residential places, and working life. The interviews also included critical life events, important role models, and attitudes towards the future. Along with those semi-structured interviews, standardised questions measuring *sense of coherence* were given to the mothers (referring to Antonovsky's comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness). The whole interview procedure was repeated 18 months after the first interviews. Material about the children’s health was gathered from records kept at the local child health centre and included three ordinary examinations. The material about each child consisted of different health problems that the staff had registered. The material also consisted of diaries written during one week by the mothers and focused on everyday problem-solving activities. The first interview round included 32 women, out of which 3 were single mothers, and 21 men. Diaries from 21 mothers were collected. The second interview round included 28 women and 19 men. The questionnaires were filled in twice by 28 women. At the time of the first interview all women were on parental leave but considered themselves as working mothers and co-responsible for the family economy.

### ***Life plan, modernity and identity***

How shall we understand the dynamics of gender and gender specific interaction patterns of parenthood in a society where individuals are freed from old constraints and with autonomy can shape their own identity and reflect on the meaning of their relationships? To find some answers Berger's et al (1974) concept "life plan" was introduced as a working tool.

Berger et al (1974) argues that modernity like segregation, pluralism, reflexivity, openness and the myth of possibility and progression are shaping the individual's understanding of life and identity. In modern society there is segregation between different life spheres and different everyday activities. Specific knowledge and experiences are developed within each sphere. Berger et al (1974) means that this also leads to a segregation of the minds of individuals. Different spheres have different cognitive styles and different criteria of meaning and acting. There is a constant but not balanced flow of knowledge between different spheres. The rational and ideals of working life and bureaucracy are invading the private life, but the flow from the private sphere of knowledge regarding relations, feelings, and mutuality is limited. The modern life is consequently becoming a mixture with a variety of values, norms and ideals. Culture as a set of collective values, norms and ideals has lost its meaning and the collective experience represented by history has lost its links to the future. Everything seems possible. Following Berger et al (1974) the life course is directed by the individual in the present situation. Every new situation has to be coped with in different ways. The collective responsibility, represented by collective values and strategies is now turned into an individual responsibility. Everybody is responsible for his own life, which becomes the result of individual actions. In this society the individual identity is open, ambivalent and in constant change. As everything is possible and everything can get better, the future is not predictable. Personal identity is not stable, every moment means a new possibility to act, to choose a new identity, a new life course.

Many tendencies in the Swedish society emphasize individual autonomy. The family policy is just one example. In a modern welfare state as Sweden many possibilities seem to be open for young parents but the *question is how they can balance between the individual project towards the joint family project*. To capture how modern parents balance and reason about the individual versus the joint project Berger's et al (1974) concept "life plan" is introduced.

"The life plan is the totalization of all relevant timetables, their grand sum and their integrative meaning. In modern society, such life planning has become a value in itself. Its absence is commonly an occasion for reproach. The family unit thus operates as a life-planning workshop. A remarkably large proportion of conversations between family members relates to life planning. The life plan is subject to ongoing revision. ... For the most people, the principal institutional vector of life planning is the labour market and one's relation to it. ... One individual is part of another's project and vice versa. The family and especially the marital relationship occupy a privileged position in such project-sharing... All or most of this planning is long-range. It therefore requires a high capacity for delayed gratification. In order to further the project, the individual must wait and postpone. This brings with it a variety of additional frustrations and anxieties... Such life planning presupposes as specific mode of temporality. An important characteristic of this is the predominance of 'in order to' and 'because of' motives. That is, the meanings of everyday life derive from future plans rather from explications of past events. (Berger et al 1974, p.72-76)

Following Berger et al (1974) the life plan is the primary source of identity, but as the life plan is in constant change, so is identity. To look upon family life from a life-plan perspective points to two strategic questions. First the one already mentioned, is how men and women balance between their individual and their joint project. The second is how everyday life relates to past, present and the future.

### ***Shared values and different practices***

During one interview session the parents were asked to tell about their life plan. One of the most striking results was the common and strong family orientation towards seeing the child's well-being as a precious symbol for the joint family project. At the same time it was obvious that the child also became the symbol for the individual life project and the modern man's extended ego. The idea that the modern men can pick and choose and form their own future is at stake here. The child is one and the only project that can't be abandoned or neglected, at least not without a lot of guilt, shame and pain. In modern society the wellbeing and progress of the child is used as an indicator of whether the parenthood is successful or not.

*"I have no other plan than the family, the children and our house. I am not giving as a high priority to the family as my wife does. I have to earn the necessary money. It is important to keep things*

*going. I am not a climber, but it would be a catastrophe if I did not earn the money I do. I feel responsibility for our economy." (C11-male)<sup>6</sup>*

*"I have no long-term plans, no visions at all. My only life plan is the family and the children. To take care of them and to work for a good future for our children." (C11-woman)*

*"Our children must get a good start. The short-term project is to earn the money necessary for them to survive - and I also want to buy a boat." (D13-male)*

*"Our children are always number one. My job does not mean anything compared to them, but of course I also like to work, to use my knowledge. The work planning, however, always starts with the children. The welfare of our children is directing everything." (D13-woman)*

Both men and women say without reservation that the family, focusing on the children, is the most important aspect of their life plans. Family and children are the common goal they talk about, but when the men and the women discuss how specifically they act to reach this goal the gender-specific behaviour is revealed. Not unexpectedly, the women describe direct and the men indirect care. The women take primary responsibility for work in the home and care for people. Wage-earning to secure the economy and work with material things in the home is the men's way of being responsible for the family. *When the life plans, which are the same in words, take shape in practical deeds, the individual gender-specific projects become clear.*

### ***Everyday family strategies***

Men and women have different practices in everyday family life, but they all claim that they act responsible and "in the name of the family". The interviews clearly show that what men and women say that they do in order to fulfil their life plans is quite different. The family caring acts of the women are direct and the caring acts of the men are indirect. The women are responsible for the work at home and the men are responsible for the family economy and the family's belongings.

Our interviewees do not admit any long-term strategies and they can not say how their acting at present will affect their future. The short-term everyday strategies are, revealed in the interviews.

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<sup>6</sup> The number refers to the way the interviews are organized in the empirical analysis

*"I am always planning. I have some work to do in the evenings at home. I have to run around and fix things, be together with the family for a while ... It is a constant lack of time." (C1-male)*

*"The 5-years old boy has got his swimming school, his football school and the small one has got times for food and sleep. Our life needs planning. Time puts me under stress, I am always occupied, I have to be everywhere at the same time." (C1-woman)*

Careful planning is the main strategy in order to make family life effective. In spite of this planning the lack of time is a problem for both men and women.

### ***Routines and the meaning of life***

The everyday life of both the full time employed man and the part time employed or home working woman becomes a matter of planned routines or rather a matter of partly individual and partly joint routines. This is clearly shown by the diaries we collected in the research project. Family life consists of gender specific routines:

*"Sometimes I feel like only cleaning, washing, cooking and changing nappies. But my God, I do this for us, it is the meaning of my life." (C2-woman)*

*"I try to get home from my work as early as possible. At home I am repairing our house, cutting grass or something like that. I also try to get some time to play with my children. Life is almost only work, but I have to do this and I want to do it for my family for my children, they are the meaning of my life." (C2-male)*

The planning for accomplishing the life plan creates routines. These routines make everyday life continuous and predictable and the routine activities are urgent as they are directly necessary for the survival of the family members. Consequently, the planning and the routines of family life become essential parts of the meaning of life for both men and women. At the same time the family routines are cutting life into small pieces, each one with its special and predetermined content. In between there are small pauses, which are useless as they are too short. This free time is used for "waiting" for the next routine activity with the sense of lack of time as a consequence. Routines are not only effective and time saving, they also contribute to the sense of lack of time.

Along with the interviews 21 mothers also keep a diary during a week. The example below shows in more detail how the children's needs with it's routines and small pauses are the organizing principle for most of the women's activities. The author of this diary is a 35 year old nurse on parental leave. Together with her husband a 37 year old carpenter they have three children: Lars 7 year old, Per 5 year and Sara 6 month. The husband is unemployed at present.

- 4.30 a.m. Sara wakes up. I manage to put her to sleep again. It takes about 5 minutes, after that I have trouble to get back to sleep.
- 6.30 a.m. Sara wakes up. I decide to get up and feed her. I try to rest on the couch while she is eating.
- 6.55 a.m. I give the boys a wake up shout and prepare breakfast for all of us.
- 7.35. a.m. Lars leaves happily for school. The first snow has fallen. I glance in the daily newspaper.
- 8.15 a.m. Per and I takes Sara and goes to the daily shopping.
- 9.20 a.m. Back from shopping tour. Hans ( the unemployed husband) takes care of Sara.
- 9.30 a.m. Unloads the groceries and try to make the house tidy. Loads the washing- machine.
- 10.00 a.m. Hans leaves for at meeting with his labour union.
- 10.30 a.m. Sara wakes up. Gives her porridge.
- 12.00 a.m. Start to prepare lunch. Per is making a lot of trouble and I try to correct him, without any success.
- 12.00 p.m. Sara is crying. The pacifier calms her down.
- 1.00 p.m. Prepares lunch. I have to carry Sara to make her sleep. She falls asleep after 10 minutes – nice as my back hurts badly.
- 1.40 p.m. Lars comes home from school.
- 2.00 p.m. Sara wakes up. Moore food!
- 2.30 p.m. One of the boys friends comes to visit and they all goes out to enjoy and play in the snow. Hans gets back and we drink a cup of coffee together.
- 3.00 p.m. Takes care of the laundry and loads another washing machine. Talks to a friend on the phone.
- 3.30 p.m. The boys come back in. They have been in a fight. Tries to find out what happened.
- 4.30 p.m. All three kids in the bath together – a lot of fun!
- 5. 00 p.m. Lars is not feeling well. He refuses to eat his ice-cream. Hi starts to vomit all over his clothes and the couch. It is disgusting! This goes on the whole evening. I am tiered and tries to get things in order. The dryer breaks down. Call to get it repaired – with no luck!

I didn't need that ... the things you need the most .... This is not my day. I cancel a meeting with some friends and workmates.

6.45 p.m. Gives Sara supper. Se falls asleep after only a few gulps – strange?

7.00 p.m. Lars falls asleep Per eats supper. I take care of the laundry.

8.00 p.m. Per watches a video tape. Lars wakes up to vomit.

9.00 p.m. Per falls asleep. I go through some paper to se if we can apply for housing allowances.

9.00 p.m. I go to bed – very tiered.

10.30 p.m. Lars wakes up and continues to vomit. I try to go back to sleep.

### ***The family project - joint but individual***

The different and gender specific routines result in *a feeling of lack of mutuality in the family project*. Especially women dream of the joint family project, but this is mostly just a dream kept alive and supported by romantic films, novels and commercials. According to the interviewed women ideal family life is a joint project based on common experiences, intimacy and strengthened relations. The men also dream about the joint project but their dreams are more instrumental. A new boat, a house or better economy is by them considered to be the means to create the joint project.

The everyday routines are gendered and binding in the family, but at the same time men and women express their yearning for intimacy with their partner. It is common to talk about going on a journey without the children and spend the weekend together, without the children – just the couple. This seems to be one of the paradoxes in modern family life, you live close together and at the same time yearn for intimacy. The “journey” stands out like a symbol for intimacy and at the same time a reminder of the everyday gender specific routines that seem keep men and women apart. The actual family life as described by both men and women is an individual and parallel project. What men and women say about their life plans, however, show that the aim of these individual projects is the same, the welfare of the family and the children and at this point the family project becomes joint. The tension between the individual “life plan” and the “family project” reveals the different semantics in the individualism versus individualization discourse. Individualism is contested but individualization goes on

## ***Reflexive motherhood***

The study also contains a special analysis of *reflexive motherhood*. None of the mothers were first-time mothers, since one of the goals was to analyse the everyday routines of motherhood and not the stress and strain involved in being a parent for the first time. During two interview sessions at an interval of a year and a half, the mothers were asked to respond to Aaron Antonovsky's (1991) questions, which are designed to measure the *sense of coherence*. Antonovsky's questions relate to *intelligibility, manageability, and meaningfulness*. Intelligibility means that the individual believes the future is predictable, that what happens can be arranged and explained. Manageability includes the individual's feeling that resources are available to meet various situations and demands, and meaningfulness has to do with the individual's motivation, involvement, and emotional investment. Depending on how the individual experiences these three components, the mothers may be *secure, ambivalent, or resigned*. The secure mothers have a good perception of existence, good manageability, and they experience life as meaningful. The resigned mothers experience none of these. Ambivalent mothers see contradictions between one of the three components.

The results of the two interview sessions show that fewer mothers tend to see themselves as secure as time goes by. The question is what the women's view of themselves as mothers and professionals means for either change or stability in their sense of coherence? To answer this question, the further analyse focus on the women's own narratives about themselves as mothers as such and as working mothers. On a question was about their experiences of motherhood. Most of the mothers said that they felt competent as mothers. Then they began to reflect upon themselves, and presented examples where they were not coping. Half of the mothers in the study concluded that they after all were good or at least "good enough mothers". Their answers reveal the contemporary reflexive process the mothers are through when constructing their identity as mothers. They were labelled *reflexive secure mothers*.

*"Oh - I m competent. Sometimes I will run into trouble and conflicts because lack of time. So what are one supposed to? I which that I could spend more time with the children and that we could do a lot of stuff together - but work around the household takes a lot of time. It is important to catch up". (11)*

*Yes I look upon myself as competent. But sometimes I hesitate and think that I am not good enough. Each child needs special attention, and I just can't cope. When everybody needs attention at the same time I feel insufficient." (14)*

However half of the mothers finally concluded that they were not "good enough" and that they needed help. They also often blame themselves for some of the problems that their children seems to have. They are labelled *reflexive insecure mothers*.

*"Yes ( competent) but not if I had been a working mother and away all day long. That should have given me a bad conscious....When he (her son) was examined by a doctor at four years of age , they referred him to a psychologist. Something was wrong with his speech. They couldn't find an explanation. He was all right when he was younger - then he would talk all the time. Maybe it has to do with me keeping him at home alone with me. At the day care centre they do a lot of stuff together and the children are trained to take more responsibility. But on the other hand they (the nurses at the local child health centre) might check the children with non-working mother much more thorough.... well it worries me ... suppose it is all my fault. But they have explained to me that it can't be." (32)*

*"As a parent I feel and act self-evident. But then I will start to wonder if I really did the right thing and it gives angst over what I have said and done. I think all parents feel the same - but anyhow I think I am a good mum. But on the other side I would like to start all over with John - he is hyperactive - maybe things could have been different. He start in life was very disruptive. I can't tell why ... we have been to see a child psychiatrist ...well it is the fear ... what will happen to him in the future? Am I am to blame"? (22)*

The mothers' security or insecurity in their work role was studied in a similar manner. Even in that respect there are two groups, approximately equal in size, secure and insecure. The secure are those who have and have had a clear direction in their job career, who did not discuss or question it, and who did not plan to change jobs. A secure work role does not necessarily mean prioritising paid work. Insecure work roles encompass careers that do not result from their own choice and they involve numerous changes and thoughts of change. Those who for various reasons had insecure position on the labour market or were unemployed were also classified as insecure. It should also be noted that in this study security or insecurity in work roles has no definite link to education. On the

contrary, it sometimes appears that education is a means whereby insecurity or the desire for change is manifested. Below are some examples of *secure work roles*.

Christin is living with her husband and four children in a house of their own. She is educated as a physio-therapist. She has a solid middleclass background. She has been very creative and found out different ways to prolong the parental leave and she has just returned to work when she is interviewed separate the second time. She is quite happy with her job and has no plans to change or enrol into further education.

*"I can't think of going into further education now, but you never know about the future, maybe you need to qualify as professional. Things change all the time and I have just been able to catch up with the new things that came along while I have been on parental leave. I have been working with out-patients and I like it a lot so I want to continue. I can't think of any changes right now."* (12)

At present she is totally committed to the children and don't even consider to spend more time on work or education. She declares: *"that it wouldn't be worthwhile ... no I will hold on to what I am used to."* Her professional choice was done deliberately. After high school she worked for a while in a voluntary organisation where she also has special education. She reflects on these experiences as something very important for the way she acts and thinks at present - *"it became the real me , something I always wanted to do"*. However she decided to take on a university education and became a physio-therapist.

We can see from Christens story that she all along had reflected over different possibilities. She has decided to hold on to certain values both private and professionally. Christin is secure in her work-role.

Malin is a single mother to three children and presents an insecure work role. She has a partner but they don't live together. He comes to see her and stays over night a couple of days every week. When she was interviewed the second time she and her partner are living together permanent. However she is not so sure that it was such a good idea. Her life has become more complicated and she can't decide for herself any more. Her life story reveals many changes. As a teenager she left Finland and the countryside and followed an older sister to one of the larger cities in Sweden. For a period she has had many low-qualified, low-paid jobs. After a couple of years she decided to return to school and took on adult education. She finished but returned to low-qualified temporary jobs.

When she is interviewed the second time the parental leave was just about to end and she also had lost her job. She is actually not too unhappy about that because she remembers how it was to be a working lone mother. She could hardly cope, was tired all the time. Her interview reveals her *insecure work role*. When asked about the future she says:

*"Everything is so insecure and complicated. I can't think about the future - the most important thing for me is to be with my children here and now."* (31)

After that she immediately starts to talk about her plans to start an education. She says that she always have dreamed to "work with people" in some helping profession.

The other example of an *insecure work role* is Cathy. She is well educated and a teacher at a day-care centre. She is married to John who is an engineer. He is employed in a small firm and he is expected to put up with travelling and working long hours. The couple have their own house but Cathy dreams of a much bigger house "with a view over the ocean". When interviewed the second time she is back at work, but not happy about that. She would have liked to stay at home with the kids a little longer, but family economy prevented her. She is very critical about her job and describes all kind of problems due to poor funding in community day care. Most of all she would prefer to put her family and the children first and says:

*"I have to try to forget my own children when I am at work and when I am at home I try to forget the children at work".* (25)

She thinks that her work affects her in a negative way. She gets tired and ends up in conflicts both at home and at work. And most of all - she dreams of another job. She has different rather unrealistic plans for the future, but the continuous change is the leading theme in her story, new job, new house, move to another country, more children etc...

*"On a short term - life is only about coping from one day to another - but I want to live another life".*

### ***Security and "equal value"***

When insecurity in mother role and work role were related to sense of coherence, a pattern appeared. The secure mothers generally have a secure mother and work role. The ambivalent mothers are insecure in their mother role or in their work role. The resigned mothers are similar to the secure mothers. *The explanation is found in the experience of autonomy in the couple relationship.* Both the secure and ambivalent mothers live a traditional family life, with the accompanying division of household tasks. The secure mothers live in a couple relationship in which they see themselves as having autonomy and in which they have defined equality as "equal value" despite of their different tasks and routines they fulfil in the family. They feel they are respected by their partner in both their motherhood and professional roles. Even though they have primary responsibility for the home, the secure mothers are convinced that their partner will take responsibility when necessary. The resigned mothers have the same responsibility. They frequently see themselves as dominant, but without achieving autonomy for themselves. Nor is there any agreement or understanding that the couple grants each other "equal value" in their relationship. These women see themselves as exploited. The ambivalent mothers also live under conditions that are not characterised by "equal value" and, despite constant attempts, they are unable to produce any change or create autonomy for themselves. Their lives are characterised by insecurity in both their motherhood and professional roles.

There is also a clear relationship between mothers' sense of coherence and the security they feel in their motherhood and career roles. It is also found, however, that this is not sufficient. The experience of autonomy and control over one's own life and the feeling that the relationship one is living in as a couple is based on non-exploitation and "equal value" are decisive conditions for secure motherhood.

### ***Concluding words***

Seen in a parental perspective individualism becomes a contested concept both in a welfare state context and in family perspective. When looking at transition to parenthood we become aware of the importance of the welfare state as well as the labour market. In a family context we become aware of the meaning of contradictions between the individual life plan and the joint family project about also the complexity of creating an up to date role for working mothers. It is part of an individualization process but individual autonomy in a couple and parental relations are hard to

establish. The ideal individualization might be free from traditional values and constraints but in everyday parents, and as discussed in this paper, mothers reflexivity shows that the individual life plan is just one of many projects included in a working mother identity.

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**Changes in the security of children in a transition society: the case of Estonia**  
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There have been many abrupt changes in Estonia during the last decade. The changes in the society have an impact on the family and the children's upbringing conditions have changed consequently. Therefore the changes in the society have an impact on children's well-being and security, and organise their experience of childhood. The role of the parents is often complicated in the present day because of their own childhood experience derives from a very different society (Dencik, 1995). The aim of our paper is to discuss the changes in the children's security during the last decade in Estonia.

***Background conditions, which may have impact on children's security and well-being***

Many changes have happened in our society as well as in other European countries during last 10-15 years. Some of them have strong impact on children's upbringing environment, welfare and security. Concerning the special features of the Estonian family-relationships the following socio-cultural influences should be kept in mind (Tiit 2003):

- The European legacy: sharing European values, ways of life and economic level:
- The Scandinavian influence: women's high educational and occupational level, their active participation in political and social life outside families, the absence of religious restrictions and a liberal attitude to family-life.

Being in transition: a reduction of marriage-rate and birth-rate in correlation with economic growth and new career opportunities for both men and women, transformation from a closed to an open society with international and especially European educational and job opportunities for younger people, a belated sexual revolution with its positive and negative consequences like improved possibilities of birth control and an increase of pre-marital sex, a deepening of social and economic inequalities with higher levels of stress, insecurity and risk. Contradictions of the Estonian transformation are conspicuous. The pace of change is high, positive changes are remarkable, but the pace itself causes problems which burden the families. Through the media, the school, the peers and the parents the children are necessarily involved in the transition with its positive and negative effects.

The stability of family life has been decreasing, and the numbers of divorces, non-married people, children born out of wedlock as well as the number of single-parent families, has been steadily increasing (Narusk & Hansson 1999, 18). Marital ties tend to be shorter and weaker, and consequently many children experience the disruptions in family relationships ([www.stat.ee](http://www.stat.ee)). The variety and prevalence of alternative family types have increased significantly in Estonia. About 60 % of the children are born illegitimate ([www.stat.ee](http://www.stat.ee); Kutsar 2003, 16). Young people marry later and children are born later (Tiit & Ainsaar 2002, 36). There are fewer children in families than in the beginning of the nineties. The average number of the children per woman was 2.2 in 1990 and it was 1.37 in 2002. Therefore the majority of children have a childhood without brothers and sisters, or they have only one sibling (Norbalt II 2000, [www.stat.ee](http://www.stat.ee)). Attitude toward the unmarried cohabitation, single parents and other alternative family types have become more tolerant (Alanen, 1992; Kutsar & Tiit 2002, 14-15). Many children have step-parents and step-sisters/brothers (Büchner et al., 1995; Kutsar & Tiit 2002, 30-31; Oras 2003, 80-81).

Mothers' employment has increased continually from the beginning of 1990's because of the materialistic change of values, esteeming career, money and self-realisation outside family. The low average level of wages caused serious coping problems for families with children (Narusk & Hansson, 1999, 17). It is no more taken self-evident that mothers' working outside home is a disadvantage for the child. At the same time the problem is that many working mothers (about half of them) experience a permanent conflict between home and work; they find it difficult to find enough time for their family. The government does not encourage part time work for mothers (Hansson 2000, 103-104). People's life style has generally become very stressful (Einasto 2002, 113-114). Families live together in one household, but in reality everyone has her /his own life. The members of the family have often little time for being together (Norbalt II, 120-123).

Despite increased employment of mothers the risk of poverty has not decreased for a single mother who has two or more children and it has increased for families of students. Large families have the highest risk of insufficient income. According to statistics every additional child raises the risk of the family to fall into a lower level of poverty (Einasto 2002, 107-115; Kutsar 2000, 34-35; Tiit 2000, 31-33). However the children's health is better and death rate is lower than before (Talvik et al. 2000, 16-18) indicating improvement of children's living conditions as a whole.

Because of the mother's employment the children spend the majority of their everyday life in day care centres as members of large group of peers. According to the data from 2002 – 26 % of children spent in the day care about 10 hours and 57 % of children even 11-14 hours , Kala, 2003). The mothers of very young children start working - soon after child is born. Although the birth rate has decreased continually from 1990 onwards, the number of very young (1-year-old) children in baby nurseries has increased continually (Ainsaar 2000, 166-167; [www.stat.ee](http://www.stat.ee)). The main problems in the day care institutions are too large groups and the lack of good system of family day care, which is more suitable for very young children. So, children become objects of “double-socialisation” from their early age (Dencik, 1995). Therefore we can suppose that the family's influence on children has complicated and changed dramatically.

The father's role in child rearing is more esteemed and is acknowledged by the state. Both parents' rights and duties are equal nowadays. For example the father can be at home with child, too. The homogenisation of mother and father roles is going on in society (Dencik, 1995; Uljas et al. 2003). It seems that the government has begun to value the family, children and parenthood more. At the same time fathers work longer hours, in the average 44.6 hours a week while mothers work 40.4 hours. Among men 18 per cent and among women 10 per cent work more than 51 hours a week. Long work days are necessary for better income as well as for career opportunities, especially among younger men whose possibilities to participate in child-rearing and family-life are diminished. (Uljas et al. 2003). A discussion is going on about paying the newly legislated “parent-salary” by the state for 12 months for new parents , but no evaluation of the results is yet available. The intention is to provide women, especially highly educated and paid women the opportunity to take leave from work and have children.

One important change is the humanisation of childhood – child is increasingly accepted as a subject who has her/his own rights. In principle the family has become more child-centred. One expression of this humanisation is the legal requirement of the child's physical immunity. Also children's rights are discussed more than before and. child protection is promoted by a new Union of Child Protection.

Globalisation and enormous spread of media and information technology change everyday life of children. It is not bad, of course if our children know earlier than before what is happening in the world or can use the Internet. But the problem is, how we are able to orient in the multitude of

various choices and to bring up children as discerning and critical thinkers (Lahikainen, Korhonen, Taimalu & Kraav, 2004) ?

### ***Pre-schoolers' fears: changes during the last ten years in Estonia***

One of the indicators of quality of children's environment may be their sense of security. The concept of "security" may be interpreted as an umbrella- concept which includes several other, more concrete concepts. So we can interpret the lack of security as children's experiences of helplessness and anxiety, as worries and fears (Lahikainen et al., 1995). If the fears are suppressed or children can't cope with them, then the problems like various psychosomatic disorders (e.g. headache, stomach-ache, general tiredness, night-time fears etc) may occur. Children's fears are important and useful indicators for an analysis of young children's security.

### **Sample and method**

#### *Sample*

Samples of children aged 5-6 were included in the research. The sample sizes were 117 in 1993 and 91 in 2002. They were selected randomly from the population register.

#### *Method*

Presently we will analyse only some questions of the extensive comparative project between Estonia and Finland (Lahikainen 1995, 2003). The research method has been worked out by the main coordinators of this research: professor A.R. Lahikainen (University of Tampere, Finland) and professor I. Kraav (University of Tartu, Estonia).

*Many child researchers contend that the children themselves are the best but not the only informants in child studies. Several authors report that the agreement between parents' and children's responses is low. Although the parents offer important information, the children themselves must be considered primary informants about their fears and worries (Muris et al., 2001). The adults often fail to understand children's fears properly. Misapprehensions of the child's fears may happen because of the different understanding of fears by adults and children (Goodman, Gurian, 2001).*

An interview method was used in the research for the children and a questionnaire for the parents.

The fear interview included two parts:

- 1) A semi-structured part with the open question: “What things are you afraid of?” and
- 2) A picture-aided part consisting of eight pictures representing fearful situations.

At the end of the open question the fears related to the television, the day-care, animals and nightmares were asked if the child had not mentioned anything about them.

The picture-aided part of the interview was designed on the basis of the Fear Survey Schedule for Children (FSSC-R) (Ollendick, 1983). The eight items of fear from the FSSC-R were selected and presented to the children in the form of a picture connected with a short story.

*The items represented social situations which as such were quite neutral but which in the light of earlier studies may nonetheless evoke feelings of fear (Lahikainen et al., 2003).*

In measuring the intensity of fears both in open question and in picture-aided part we used the technique developed by Carpenter (1990) (Children’s Global Rating Scale) where children can assess their experience of pain and fear. While the child was speaking about the fear the interviewer showed him/her a picture in which there were three different lines: the upper line with sharp curves designated great, the middle line with moderate curves average and the lower, straight line minimal fear. Children understood well what was expected of them and willingly used this technique.

*A semi-structured part of the interview helped to find out the number and variety of fears, and to reveal a number of new fears. The picture-aided part of interview enabled us to study more closely social fears, that are for children hard to recognise and verbalise, and also to communicate to a stranger. The picture-aided interview disclosed fears that remained hidden in the semi-structured interview (Lahikainen et al., 2003).*

In this paper we analyse the fears and their changes according to the semi-structured part of interview only. But we complete the picture gained by the children's descriptions and present parent-reported data concerning psychosomatic symptoms of these children.

## Results

### Changes in the profile of the children's fears.

There are some significant differences in the profile of fears between 1993 and 2002. Today, pre-school children expressed more fears than ten years ago. In 1993 the average number of fears was **5,2** and in 2002 it was **6,6**. Ten years ago most children (71 %) reported from two to five fears (Taimalu, 1997). In 2002 there were significantly more children who mentioned from six to nine and ten and more fears.

Why the profile of fears has changed? We suppose that one reason may be the higher extent of openness of society and there may be the influence of democracy. Also more frightening things for small children (e.g. television, increasing violence in society etc) may be present in society. We cannot exclude the possibility of decreased and insufficient adult surveillance.

### Changes in the children's fears

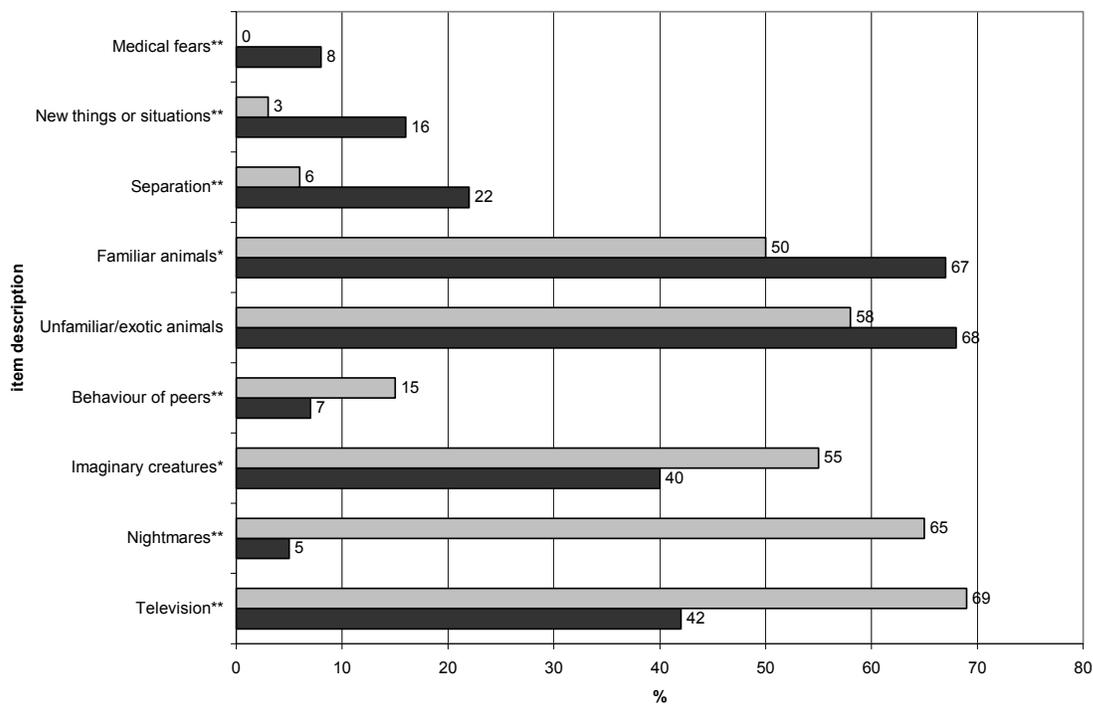
Like the society and family the children's fears have changed. The fears were divided into 19 categories in our research. In 2002 the Estonian children most often reported fears of nightmares, television, unfamiliar animals, imaginary creatures and familiar animals (50 % and more children). The lists of the ten most common fears in 1993 and 2002 were significantly different (table 1).

Table 1. The ten most common fears of 5-6-year old Estonian children in 1993 and 2002 reported in the semi-structured interview (percentages indicating the number of children who were afraid of "some extent + a lot")

<b>fear category</b>	<b>% 1993</b>	<b>Fear category</b>	<b>% 2002</b>
unfamiliar/exotic animals	68	Television	69
familiar animals	67	Nightmares	65
television	42	Unfamiliar animals	58
imaginary creatures	40	Imaginary creatures	55
separation	22	Familiar animals	50
strange people	22	Minor injuries	20
minor injuries	20	Strange people	19
new things and situations	16	Darkness/dark places	18
darkness/dark places	14	Behaviour of peers	15
big accidents and death	11	big accidents and death	13

In 2002 two new fears appeared in the list of the ten most common fears – nightmares and behaviour of peers and two fears were left out – separation and new things and situations. The other eight fears remained same.

There are some significant differences between the children’s fears in 1993 and 2002 (figure 1, percentages indicating the number of children who were afraid of “some extent + a lot”). In 2002 children brought out more frequently nightmares, television-related fears, imaginary creatures (imaginary related fears) and fears connected with behaviour of peers. The frequency of some fears has decreased. In 2002 the children mentioned less often the fear of unfamiliar and exotic animals, familiar animals, separation, new things and situations and medical fears (going to the doctor) than in 1993.

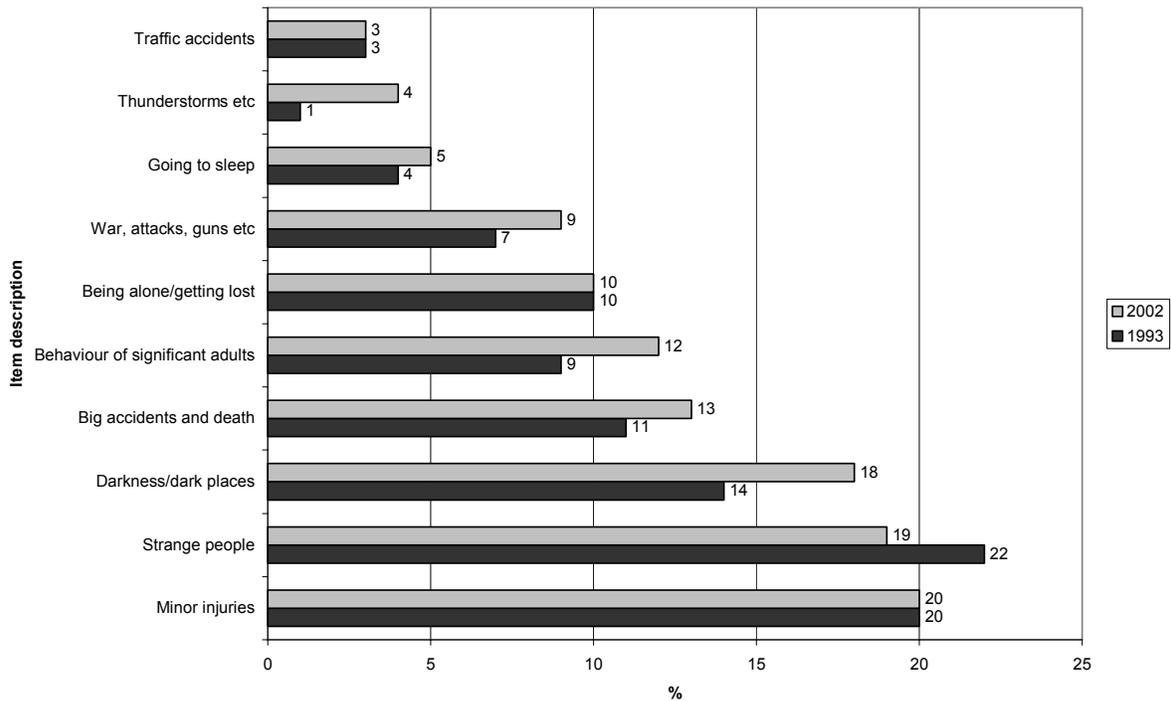


**Figure 1.** Significant changes of 5-6-year old children’s fears in 1993 and 2002 in Estonia (\*\*  $p < 0,01$ ; \*  $p < 0,05$ )

The most dramatic change to appear between 1993 and 2002 was the increase of the fear of nightmares. Many authors have found the nightmares to be one of the most frequent fears among pre-school children (Kirmanen, Lahikainen, 1997, Muris, Merckelbach, 2000). The family context

is considered a significant factor because nocturnal fears often arise at times of parental illness or marital conflict (King, Ollendick, Tonge, 1997).

The other 10 fears have not changed significantly (figure 2, percentages indicating the number of the children who were afraid (“some extent + a lot”).



**Figure 2.** The 5-6-year old children’s fears in Estonia which have not changed significantly

The increase of the fears of nightmares and imaginary created fears are connected with television. In several cases the content of children’s nightmares clearly originated from a television programme. The other cause may be the lifestyle of the family today –the parents work hard and do not find enough time to be with their children. The children are left alone more frequently and they spend more time with the television. The television has spread enormously in Estonia from 1993 onwards (table 2).

The time per day and per week for children’s programmes have increased. In 1993 the children’s programmes were mostly non-aggressive, just funny and “carried by good values”. In 2002 the children’s programmes were often aggressive cartoons (e.g. Digimon, which caused children fears, too). Unfortunately in 2002 significantly fewer original Estonian programmes for children were

presented (compared with 1993 when the majority of programmes for children were produced in Estonia).

The problem is that children often watch not only children's programmes, but programmes for adults, too. The children's fears originated from adult programmes often – for example news, police-chronicle, films for adults, etc.

Table 2. Television programmes (main + cable television) and time for children's programmes in Estonia in 1993 and 2002

	<b>1993</b>	<b>2002</b>
Channels available	2 + (5)	3 + (35)
Programmes for children in workdays average/per day (minutes, main channels)	45	<b>155</b>
Programmes for children in days off average/per day (minutes, main channels)	105	<b>407</b>
Original Estonian programmes for children (minutes, all together per week)	315	<b>150</b>
The beginning time for children's programmes (workdays/days off)	19.00 / 09.00	07.00 / 07.45

The increasing fear of behaviour of peers may be influenced by the increasing violence in our society. School-violence is a frequently discussed topic, but violence may grow already among pre-school children.

The most frequent fears of the Estonian children in 2002 are quite similar with the most frequent fears of the Finnish children in 1993 (figure 3). The Finnish children in 1993 most frequently reported fears of nightmares, television, familiar and unfamiliar animals, imaginary creatures and darkness (Kirmanen, Lahikainen, 1997).

It seems that in 2002 the fears of Estonian children resemble more the fears of Finnish children than they did in 1993. The differences in the early 1990's may be just the last remnant of the socialist system in Estonia. These findings support our earlier hypothesis that to a great extent, the family

contributes to the impact of society on childhood and when the society changes the family and children's feelings of security change, too.

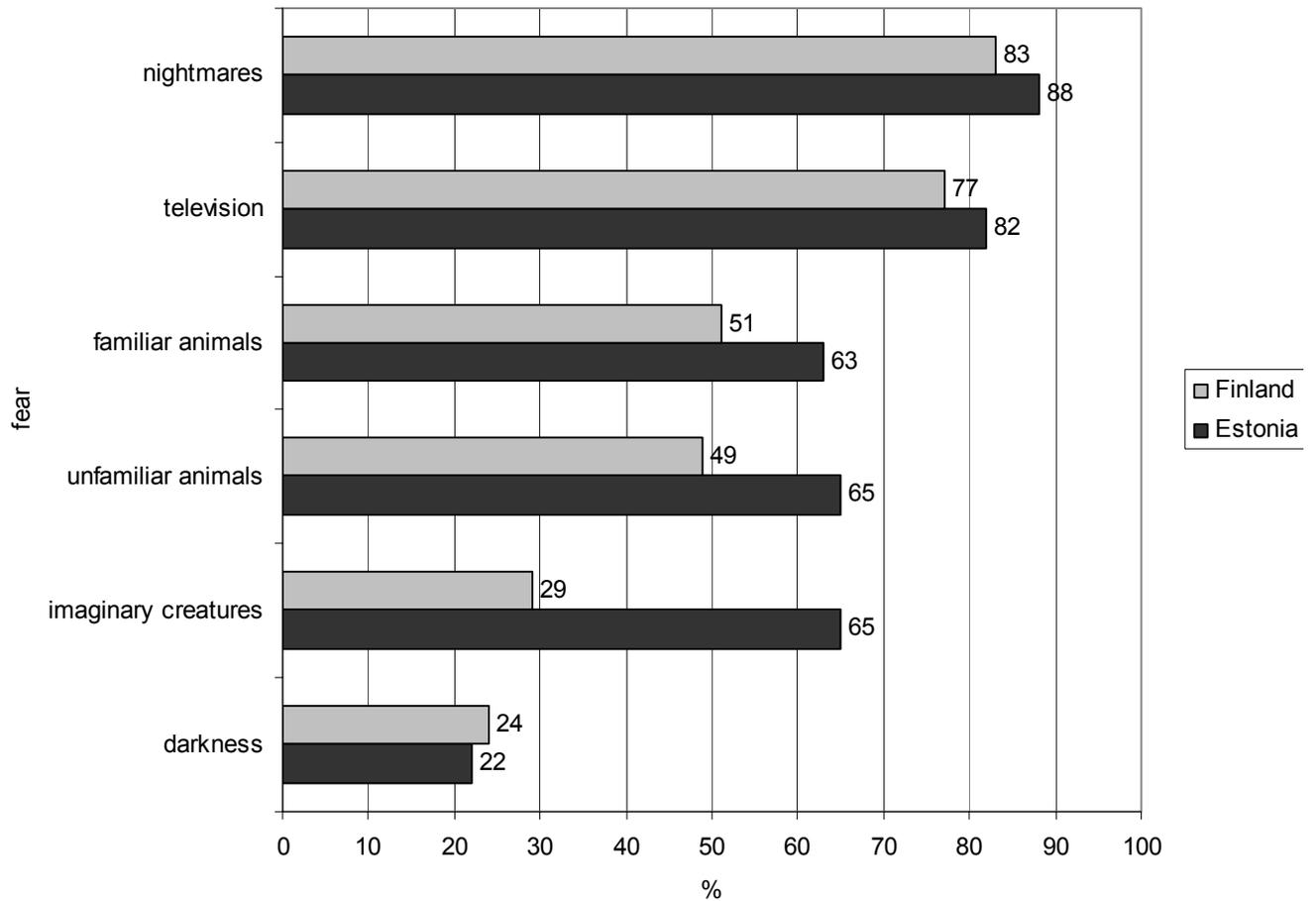


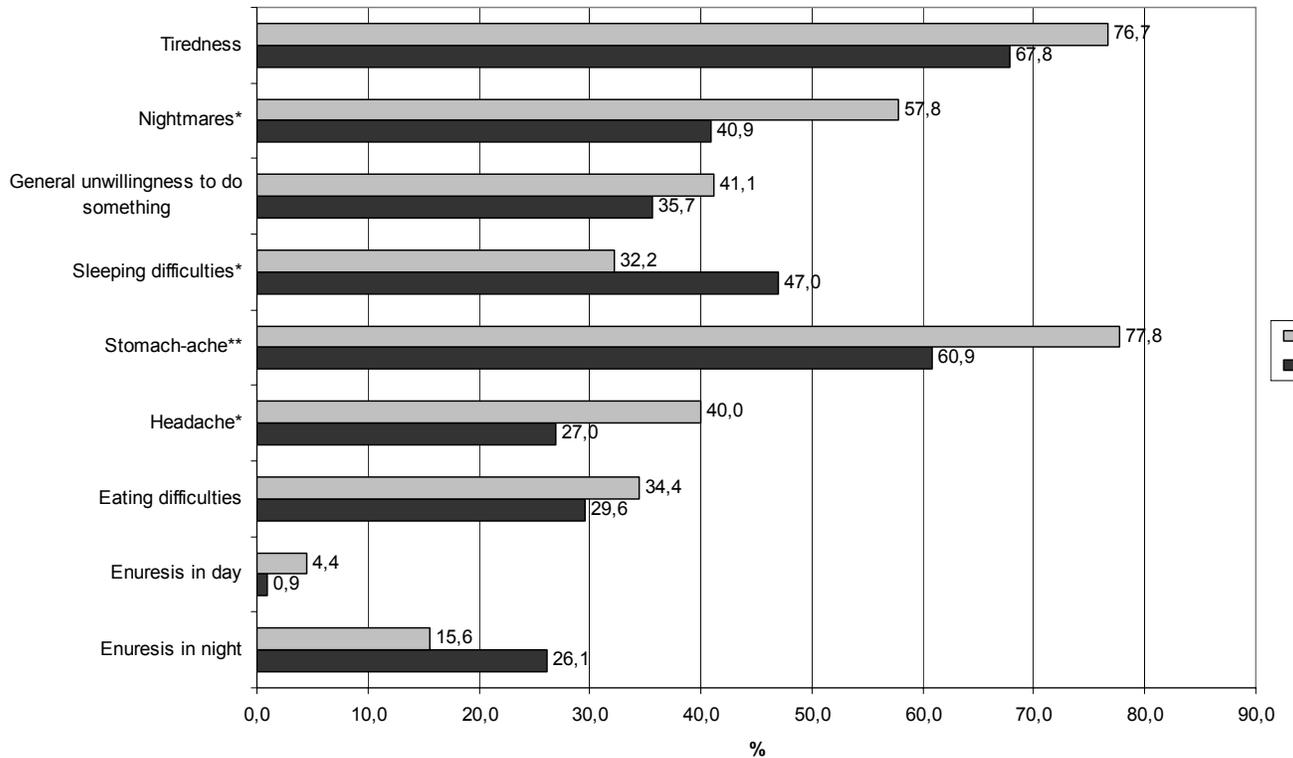
Figure 3. Children's most common fears in Estonia 2002 and in Finland 1993.

### **Changes in children's psychosomatic disorders.**

If the fears are suppressed or the children can't cope with them, then the problems may appear in the form of various psychosomatic disorders (e.g. headache, stomach-ache, general tiredness, night-time fears etc).

There have been some significant changes in these disorders, too (figure 4, percentages indicating parent's answers "sometimes + often"). In 1993 parents reported more problems with enuresis and difficulties in going to sleep than in 2002. Generally there were more psychosomatic disorders in 2002 than in 1993 (headache, stomach-ache, frightening dreams and tiredness). The same direction

of changes can be seen here as in regard to fears – there were more disorders in 2002 than 10 years ago.



**Figure 4.** Changes of 5-6-year old children's psychosomatic disorders in 1993 and 2002 in Estonia (\*\*  $p < 0,01$ ; \*  $p < 0,05$ )

### **Summary**

Several significant changes in pre school children's fears have taken place during the past ten years in Estonia. Children have more fears today than ten years ago. However, in reporting of fears children use mainly the same general classes of fears as they previously did. There are certain types of fears that children experience from time to time.

But the changes in the society have an impact on children's lives at the same time. These changes influence children through the family. Because of the changes in society, the prevalence of children's fears have changed, too.

Although changes in the society are unavoidable, the role of the state must be to provide more support for the children and the parents. A lot of elaboration of these data is required before we can analyse in a more exact fashion the connections between macro-level changes of society and changes in children's lives.

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## **Families Difficult to Speak About - some remarks from the Finnish youth residential care *Tarja Pösö***

### ***Introduction***

While conducting a study on the Finnish reform schools, I came across some remarks which left me very uneasy concerning the concept of family in relation with the young residents. "Family" seemed to be in that particular context an issue of silence, of difficult or scarce words expressed by the young people or else of limited, mainly legal definitions used by the professionals.

The reform schools, the state-run institutions for young people between the ages of 12 and 17, have been geared to approach the psychosocial problems of young people from the point of view of family or family-centred work (Salminen 2001), along the same lines of any social welfare practice. As the intention in this particular study was to describe and even to try to understand the meanings of residential placement for young people, the notion of family became a more complicated issue than just a description of a treatment approach. What does 'family' actually mean there?

It is a well known feature in social work literature that difficult family relations may be treated as secrets which are not easily touched upon in professional encounters. In this article, I would like to challenge that statement, as true as it might be, by examining the ways family was worded by the young residents as part of the interviews carried out during the ethnography in two reform schools in 2001 and 2002 (Pösö 2004). There were not many words about family relations used, but the few which were should be taken seriously in analysis as I will try to do. In addition, I will present the descriptions of families found in the young people's case records. The data is used to argue that there is a need to find new words to speak about complicated, harmed, damaged or difficult family relations. The need is both conceptual and practical.

The approach is mainly empirical owing to the nature of the data. However, underlying this a theoretical idea which argues that the words play their part in making something into being, and that the lack of words may be a feature of excluding or silencing practices. There are some connections with social constructionism in this paper as well as with critical family studies in that the claim is that the very idea of family is not to be taken for granted. We need words and definitions to make (a variety of) family relations into being (Gubrium & Holstein 1991; Muncie & Sapsford 1995;

Morgan 2002) and explore family relations from the points of view of different family actors, addressing children as well (Smart et al. 2001).

### ***Difficult families in social work***

Social work has long traditions in working with families, especially with children and their mothers. Today this is even more the case, as the main concern of child protection is no longer abandoned or orphaned children but children from families with problems. Analysing the possible risks of family lives has become a crucial task of child protection while at the same time the very concept of risks is a complicated issue in postmodern society (Parton 1999).

Per Schultz Jorgensen (1999, 408 - 410) argues that there has been a strong tradition in social work to approach families from the point of view of social inheritance when speaking about families with social problems. In the Nordic countries, that debate is closely related with Gustav Johnsson's work (1967). His arguments were based on his long-term clinical practice and studies in residential child protection in Sweden. Johnsson claimed that families with social problems tend to be crossgenerational: the social problems are socially and culturally transmitted from one generation to another one.

Another tradition of approaching families in social work focuses on family problems as moral diffusions. In that approach, family problems may be due to a lack of moral standards, moral deviations or even evil (Lounavaara et al. 1998). Lack of communication and confused family roles, among other things, are also present in social work literature about families, not to forget the growth of interest in attachment theory (for ex. Sinkkonen & Kalland 2001). More broadly, the concept of ecological parenthood (Belsky 1984) puts family relations and practices into social and cultural contexts. From the perspective of social policies, stratification among families has been mentioned as a risk for the exclusion of families (for ex. Sauli et al. 2002) from mainstream family lives.

What all these approaches share is the aim to explain family problems. They do not intend to ask what is meant by family in the context of social work and research (Forsberg et al. 1991). This is of special importance especially in the Nordic countries where the ideological frame of social work, and child protection particularly, focus more in families than in children (Hearn et al 2004; Khoo et al. 2002; Pringle 1998).

### ***The context of the study***

The particular institutions studied here, the reform schools, have a special position in Finnish child welfare. With a history extending more than 100 years, Kaisa Vehkalahti (2004), an historian, claims that while the state schools were the major instrument in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to regulate the private family life, the reform schools through their existence were the other instrument. They were, as a matter of fact, even more powerful concerning individual families than the state education system as they had the power to intervene into the depths of the privacies of familial relations

At the present, the reform schools are the only child protection institutions maintained by the state in Finland and their role is very clearly defined as being to look after the "most difficult children and young people". They are often located as being the most specialised treatment form within the service structure for dealing with the psychosocial problems of children. (Bardy et al. 2001). There are roughly 200 children between the ages of 12 and 18 placed in these institutions, staying there for periods of varying lengths, approximately between 18 months to 2 years, sometimes even up to 4 years. The majority of the residents (3/4) are boys as has always been the case.

In this study, during the ethnography in 2001 and 2002, 42 young residents were individually interviewed and 15 group interviews (involving 38 young people) were carried out. As the residents were challenged to take pictures of the institution to communicate about the institution as a place to live, 588 photographs were taken. Additionally, the case records of 62 residents were analysed. The approach was qualitative, inspired by critical humanism (Plummer 2001), and the main aim was to try to understand what a reform school meant for the young people living there, admittedly with the understanding that this aim would be quite impossible to reach. The study looks at the reform schools as a state of being, on the one hand, and as a phase of life, on the other, reporting individual experiences. The group interviews focused on the issue of violence, unlike the other types of data. From the vast data gathered, I will now look only at the notions of family relations.

### ***Family Talk - descriptions by young residents***

Throughout the study, the eagerness of the young people to participate was welcoming to the researcher. Participation in the research interviews was on a voluntary basis - as much one can talk about voluntary participation in a semi-closed institution (Honkatukia et al. 2004) - and the themes of the interviews were not meant to be intrusive. The family issue was, in effect, the only issue

which caused any obvious irritation among the young people. The only interview which did not get finished was the one where the boy interrupted the interview around the family theme by saying that he could not understand why such issues should be discussed at all and why should he know why his mother visits the institution or not (which I did not actually ask). In all other interviews, the theme was handled in more detail but not in great depth.

During the field work periods, I mentioned my surprise at the difficulty to speak about family issues to the staff in some discussions. They did not seem to be surprised at all as family was a very sensitive and difficult issue for them as well. Some of them said that it might take a long time before such trust developed between the young person and the staff member that family relations could be introduced in the discussion. There is a secrecy, the sensitivity and vulnerability around family relations which function as a barrier even in a professional residential relationship, otherwise so much flavoured by intimacy.

However, when looking at the rare words used by the young people about family relations, "family" is given quite a variety of meanings. In the following, I will present the six different sets of meanings of talking about families. In the analysis, I have looked at all the expressions the young people used to tell something about their families and thematised them under the six following core themes. The target of the analysis is not, self-evidently, the families of the young people as such, but the young people's narration about their families.

The "of course family"

In some accounts, when talking about family, the young people mentioned mothers and sisters and fathers as self-evident family members. Very often they also added that they are the most important people in their world, of course. They also claimed that they were missing their mothers, fathers and sisters as the home is always a better place than an institution, of course. The "of course -family" is a culturally accepted construction about the structure and importance of one's family in one's life history.

The "has to be explained family"

refers to talk where the young people give accounts about the members of their families. The family is not taken as a self-evident construction but its members and their relations have to be explained. The most complicated story included 16 family members. The girl wanted to make clear the members' biological and emotional relationship with her (that is that the biological position did not

matter on its own) and also the generational aspects were important (one could have a sister who is as old as one's mother and it makes the story very complicated). Often the young people only gave accounts about the biological or social position of the family members. The description of half-brothers/sisters/fathers/mothers was common as well as the descriptions whether the mother, for example, was "just a mother" or a foster mother. It was not uncommon that the youngsters stated that their mother was really a foster mother but her meaning was so important that they called her as a mother. Or they gave accounts about the positions of foster mothers as the closest types of mothers. Some accounts included a statement about the sisters being the most important family members. There they wanted to argue that family relations do not have to be cross-generational but if so, they had to explain and argue for their own construction. Family relations were not taken for granted and they needed a lot of explanation.

The "to be cared for family"

refers to those descriptions where the young person in residential care expressed his/her concerns how the parents, most often the mother, copes while the child is not there at home to look after them or her. For example, the boys who was a master cook in his ward when they prepared the meals for themselves, was concerned what would happen to his mother. The mother had periods of heavy drinking and during those periods she could not take care of herself. The boy was worried whether she would get anything to eat. In that account, the boy's role was unconventional as he was not the one to be looked after but the one to look after.

The "to be protected from" family

means that the children described their family relations as harmful or violent. In that context, life in a reform school meant an escape and a shelter from violent relations. The violent family -theme turned up on many occasions in the residential life. For example, some children wanted to stay or at least sleep behind locked doors to be sure that the violent father would not get there to harm him/her.

The "to be rescued family"

means that the family was sometimes seen to be the object of the resident's protective activities. These stories were mainly told by the boys. In those accounts, there had been violent episodes at home and the child had to intervene in order to, for example, rescue the mother from the father's violent attack. The child's role meant phoning for help or in most descriptions, violent encounters with the violent father for the sake of protecting someone. There were children who said they had

been 9 years old in a situation when trying to stop their father from hurting or even killing the mother.

The "invisible family"

was the family which existed in residential life mainly through its invisibility, as not being there. This notion is not based so much on the interviews as the previous ones but is to be found in the ethnographic data. Invisibility became a topic for example in the residents' attempts to contact the parent during their residential period without any response from the parents. They did not answer the phone calls or did not turn up for the meetings which had been arranged by the institution. Invisible parents also refer to neglecting parents, such as those who did not respond to the needs of the young people. This invisibility can be heard in some life stories. For example a boy was telling about his life and one of the major narratives was that he had been drinking alcohol, eating pills and later taking drugs since he was 8 and that the mother did not know anything. She was nowhere to pay enough attention to his behaviour even though they shared the same home. Here, in the institution, the boy, now 15, tells the story about the invisible mother as a story to share.

These remarks are not unique or new. Research around substance abuse has often brought up the issue of the children's roles in families where the parent(s) misuse alcohol or drugs. The meaning of the *family "to be cared for"* can be recognized in those studies as well. On the other hand, the research around the children's understanding of their families in reconstituted families has also shown that children tend to *explain their family relations* and use the criteria of biological and social parenthood to make sense of their family relations (see Ritala-Koskinen 2001).

My point is, however, that these kinds of remarks should be taken seriously by the researchers of family and childhood studies. They belong to the (present) practices of family life and they are not only unique descriptions by a group of children at the margins of our society's service systems. For those children, these descriptions make an essential part of their life story and their self-understanding. How can you make sense of something you do not have any easy words for?

### ***Objective families?***

The analysis of the case-records of the young people in the reform school did not give any more unifying tools to describe the family relations. In the case records, so rich in many aspects, the family was described most often in terms of custodians. Every child's custodian was presented. The

names, addresses and phone numbers were to be found in the papers. This means that the very idea of family in the formal child protection texts was foremost administrative and legal.

It was, however, impossible to construct a comprehensive picture of the young people's family relations in any other sense but administrative and legal. The case-records varied vastly in relation to the information given about - for example - the living arrangements of the children before the residential placement. Therefore it was not possible to learn with whom the youngsters had shared their everyday lives. Who were the adults looking after them? Were there any siblings to share the life with? Was there anyone who was close to the young person? In other words, family as a set of emotional or caring (or abusive) relations was weak as a theme for the case-records.

There were some exceptions, though. Some case records included detailed accounts of the child's family relations, even having the important pets listed. Some included careful descriptions of the psychological and emotional relations as well detailed information about the changes in family relations during the child's life course. There might be a reason to assume that some of the residential workers had become acquainted with the residents' family relations and that they knew the family relations in a wider sense than just as an issue of custodians. The important point here, however, is that family relations are not an easy target for knowing: even the professionals tend to approach the issue in a narrow (administrative and legal) way, excluding other dimensions of family relations from the agenda of knowing the families of residential children.

### ***Challenges for more words***

The difficulties in putting family into words either by young residents or their social workers writing the case records should challenge us to think of more words. The challenges are not unique as, as we know, present family research is occupied with the variety of family relations and structures and tries to expand the idea of family from the traditional nuclear, heterosexual meaning. If the focus is on family diversity (for example Beck-Gernsheim 2002), the family relations known in child protection practices should become highlighted as well. Children's accounts should play a part there equally. Additionally, there are notions in family research challenging the idea of family as an exchange system only for mutual love and trust. Hannele Forsberg (2003), among others, claims that the recent mainstream theoretical debate around family focuses on the family as a system of mutual love (mainly among the adults) and care, which excludes such issues as dependency, hate and violence from the research agenda of mainstream family research. There are,

however, many children and adults who give accounts of such family life. The debates around those issues are often discussed under the titles of special issues such as violence in close relationships - or family violence as know in Finland - but the point is that they should be included in the mainstream agenda as well.

One feels challenged to argue that the fact we do not have easily available words to describe such family relations which the children were telling about is very much a reflection of the general theoretical approaches to family life. Children's descriptions, and especially those which report cruel, neglecting relations, have not been heard very much in a theoretical sense.

Assuming that we need words to be able to handle such family issues the children were telling about, I am suggesting or challenging the researchers to develop some new words. The words which I am missing for use in such cases should be such that

- they would be sensitive to the variety of family relations and the variety of the social and emotional positions adults and children have in the family
- they would recognise the dilemmas of being dependent and independent in each family position
- they would recognise the emotional ties which might be contradictory by nature
- they would recognise change in the meaning of family relations (the meanings of family change during the life time, and for children in child protection there may be a fair amount of change even during childhood)
- they would be free from moral standpoints as they should be non-judgemental.

In the Finnish debate, Eeva Jokinen (1996) introduced the powerful concept of tired mother to mirror the common state of motherhood as experienced by women, and Riitta Granfelt (1998) about broken or damaged motherhood to describe the motherhood of homeless women whose children had been taken into care. Both of them touch some secret and silent parts of parenthood without being judgemental. We would need more words of that type for the research and for people - children, adults and professionals alike - to word such family relations which do not fit into the concepts and words available so far. The young people in residential care and the adults working with them should have the first opportunity at inventing the new words.

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## II SELECTED RESEARCH NOTES

### **Research on Family in Lithuania: topics and methods since 1990** *Irena Juozeliuniene*

The aim of this paper is to review briefly the research on family in Lithuania after the restoration of independent Lithuanian state. The year of the restoration of independent Lithuanian state was 1990. Before 1990 Lithuania was a part of the former Soviet Union. As a rule research programs carried out after 1990 focus attention to the numerous changes (rather than continuity) after this date. The period after 1990 is associated to radical changes in political and social life, in values and institutional practices with families.

It can be said that talk about family is intensifying in Lithuania. Demographic perspectives are typical starting points in analyzing changing family. Different demographic factors like numbers of births, number of out-of-wedlock births, marriage and divorce figures are being analyzed<sup>7</sup>.

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- Different demographic aspects of family life are studied at the Universities as well as Research centers in Lithuania. Several research studies could be mentioned. Population size and age structure, fertility, mortality, household composition, parental home, partnership formation, partnership dissolution, children, values and beliefs, women's education and employment were the main topics of the Fertility and Family Survey (FFS) as a part of the international project undertaken by the Population Activities Unit (PAU) of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UN/ECE). It was conducted in 1994-1995 by Demographic Research Centre under the Lithuanian Institute of Philosophy and Sociology. A sample of 5.000 respondents (3.000 females and 2.000 males) aged 18-49 were interviewed.
- Attitudes towards marriage, divorce, cohabitation, number of children in a family, out-of-wedlock births, single parent families as well as the views on the role of the government in the solution of such problems as occupation of youth, combining professional activity with childcare, acquisition of housing, health protection, care for the elderly were analyzed during the Second European Comparative Survey on the Acceptance of Population-related Policies (PPA2), carried out in 2001 by the Demographic Research Centre under the Lithuanian Institute of Philosophy and Sociology. The sample covered 1400 respondents (787 females and 613 males) aged 18-75.
- Values related to family issues as well as to work, friends, leisure, politics, religion were examined during European Value Study (EVS), conducted in 1990 and repeated in 1999. It was requested of the Institute of Culture and Art by the research centre "Baltic Research". A sample covered 1020 respondents (in 1990) and 1018 respondents (in 1999) aged 18-75.
- The most outstanding household tendencies, related with the ways of receiving income, ascription of a "survival strategies" to the corresponding family were examined during the international comparative six-

It has to be noted that researchers distinguish the family life and family patterns before 1990 of the family life and patterns after 1990. Families before 1990 are labelled as “soviet families“. According to the research data, in soviet period marriage-based family formation remained universal, cohabitations and births outside marriage were rare, because they did not fit either to the “Soviet family“ - ideology or to Catholic tradition, deeply rooted in Lithuanian society. Single parent families were rare as well. Early marriage dominated. Nevertheless decline of the traditional large families and spread of small families started to take place.

After restoration of independent Lithuanian state, the country faced huge changes in family life and patterns. Among them were decrease in the number of marriages, postponement of marriage and parenthood, increasing divorce rates and the numbers of young people living in non-marital relationships. In research these changes are analyzed as consequences of the economic crisis of the early 1990s, peculiarities of transition from a centrally planned country to market economy and privatization after the restoration of independent Lithuanian state, in the light of new migration features and new trends in family ideology, as well as consequences of economic growth and low inflation within a last few years (Stankuniene et al., 2003). It was argued that economic instability, significant decline in living standards, consolidation of market relations, emergency of unemployment, changes in economic activity, formation of dwelling market, steep rise in housing prices etc. were part of the new family forms and practices. The new features of family practices were characterized by all new factors of the crisis situation of the transitional society and seen as a direct response to aggravating living conditions (Sipaviciene et al., 1997). However, it would be shortsighted to look for causes of transformation of Lithuanian family solely through the structural and economic changes. The surveys conducted indicated that changing value orientations should be

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country sociological study “Social Change in Baltic and Nordic Countries”, conducted in 1993-1994 (the sample covered 1483 respondents) as well as during “Lithuanian Household Panel Study”, carried out in 1995 as a part of the framework of international project “Family and Living Conditions in the Baltic States” (twenty five families were interviewed). Both studies were carried out by the Lithuanian Institute of Philosophy and Sociology.

- The attitudes towards marriage, divorce, ideal model of the family, children, abortions, abuse in the family, equal opportunities for men and women as well as the views on the role of the government in the implementation of social policy in Lithuania were analyzed in the studies of “Gender roles in the Family”, carried out in 1994 and repeated in 2000. It was conducted by G.Purvaneckienė and A.Purvaneckas in collaboration with the research centre “Baltic Research”. Sample covered 1522 respondents (1020 females and 502 males).

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noticed. There has been a shift in individual preferences towards individualization, freedom and independence and new demands to quality of interpersonal relations, such as faithfulness, mutual understanding and respect. State and church as normative regulators have lost their importance. (Jonkaryte, 2001). Demographic trends and changes are seen as a specific adaptive reaction to rapidly and controversially changing conditions. The term “second demographic transition” is used to define the recent situation in Lithuania.

Ethnologists, historians, pedagogues, psychologists, cultural analysts, philologists etc. are involved in family studies. They describe family with different approaches. Historians and ethnographers, as a rule, classify Lithuanian family into traditional, ethnic and modern. The peculiarities of customary law and the impact of the Catholic Church and socio-economic relations on the concepts of family life, love and happiness, and on motivation for marriage are examined in different historic periods. Special attention is paid to spiritual qualities of wife-mother, husband-wife relations, child upbringing patterns, life principles common to parents and children etc. (Marcinkeviciene, 1999).

Educationalists are inclined to describe family within structural approach. They define the form of the family on the basis of one or another selected feature, e.g. father/mother living together or number of spouses. On the basis of this approach they distinguish three nuclear family forms: social (married couples with no children), biological (married couples with a child/children), and “incomplete” (one-parent, usually mother-headed families with a child/children) families. The term “incomplete” family is used and different meanings are given to that term. Disagreements often arise with the meanings of the terms. Some authors classify childless married couples as nuclear families, while others attribute them to the group of “incomplete” families (Rupsiene, 2001).

Family psychologists acknowledge that there are different approaches in describing families; therefore, they select certain relationships to define family. It is defined as a biological, legal, or functional family, a long-term social commitment, a subjectively perceived social structure, etc. Types of parent-child relations are seen to define families, usually defined as democratic, authoritarian, or liberal. Characteristics that influence the psychological status of family members serve as a basis for classifying families and their social environment relations into different types (Navaitis, 2002).

Sociological research in Lithuania was for a long time dominated by the structural functionalism perspective. The family was defined with the help of structural elements and socially normative

functions (Stankūnienė, 1995), by placing family in a certain social and historic context. The family was perceived as a relatively stable social institution. New trends in family research and the diversity of conceptualizations of family in Western sociological theories have turned attention to new family research methodology. Participation in international research has stimulated a process-based approach to family research. This has meant for instance recording life events of individuals biographically in terms of time, space, and family life practices. Sociological researchers classify families into different types according to the specifics of organization of the everyday family practices; marriage and family aspects are analyzed from the perspective of interrelations of family members by studying life stories (biographical study). There is a growing tendency not to limit research to structural functionalism but rely on a wider usage of micro-sociological paradigms in the spirit of the tradition of such researchers as Cooley, Simmel, Schutz, G.H. Mead and A. Strauss. Nowadays family research is increasingly based on constructivist methodology of social research. It is argued that the concept of the family based on traditions, customary law and religious constructs has lost the normative position, and the everyday life is increasingly oriented towards one's personal family concept rather than a socially accepted family concept. There are studies which analyze the normative usage of the terms "marriage" and "family" in Lithuanian sociological and legal literature, trying to catch the meanings of the "general" and the "normative" family concepts as well as the personal family concept. The interface of these concepts and their links with different family lifestyles are discussed. Moreover, new family practices, such as Living Apart Together (LAT) are studied and different Lithuanian terms suggested to such partnerships (Juozeliūnienė, 2003).

Taking part to international family research has meant that the family concepts and approaches are selected by the representatives of the country organizing the research. In such a case the duties of the other participants include among others the task to translate the research tools (e.g. questionnaires). The problem we meet is, whether we have Lithuanian terms to describe the phenomena we are going to study. This question obviously involves a focus on language. To put it very simply: different social contexts give words different meanings. Thus, there is always a possibility that different meanings could be given to the same terms by the country participants of the international comparative research. Sometimes the country participants may not at all have terms to describe the phenomenon in question. In the worst case the final draft of the research report may reveal that you were analyzing different phenomena from the very beginning.

Without any doubt the idea of comparative studies is very promising. At the same time it may activate dangerous attempts to mechanical analogies (e.g. between the Lithuanian situation and Western experiences). For these reasons differences in cultural climate had to be taken seriously. Basing on my personal experience I argue that mechanical analogies e.g. of the terms “immigrants” and the “host society” are very dangerous on the level of the nation-related issues (Juozeliuniene, 1998). Family related issues still hold a lot of “silent taboos” concerned with the privacy of relations within the family. Even the questions on cohabitation seemed very uncomfortable to the Lithuanian informants and difficult to talk about 8 to 10 years ago. Also experiences with sexual abuse and commercial sex are still treated as very ambivalent to what is acceptable to talk about according to the local culture. On the one hand “democratization of intimacy”, to borrow the term from A. Giddens, is intensifying rapidly in Lithuania. On the other hand, cultural norms concerning socially accepted family topics still hold a strong position in Lithuania.

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## **Constructing troublesome family in Estonian child protection practice *Judit Strömpl & Marju Selg***

*“Our reality arises out of a restless, boundless sea of language, meaning and interpretation. And as our sense of self arises within relationships which are conducted in the medium of language, and as language carries meaning which undergoes endless interpretation, there can be no fixed or essential quality to human consciousness, the human self and to human being. We have no choice but to search for meaning, although there are no ultimate meanings to find. Therefore, notions of moral and social progress are illusory, dangerous and restrictive. Life is necessarily contingent and uncertain.” (Howe 1996:86-7)*

### **Introduction**

The current paper aims to introduce some results of our study concerning the constructing process of clients in Estonian child protection practice. The article is based on data produced during three research projects:

- “Constructing deviance as social problem in social work practice” (2001-2004) grant No.4617, supported by Estonian Science Foundation
- “Family discourse in social work practice” Estonian Government Minister of Population 2001/2002
- “Survey of work with children and families with children in Tartu town. The vision of the specialists” Tartu local government’ project 2002

The main focus for all three researches was the constructing process of young professional discourse of Estonian social work – particularly how social workers define and interpret their work. In our studies we used the social constructionist theory approach: we observed the phenomena of social reality as the results of people’s everyday activity and were interested in knowledge about this process and the constructed phenomena as the results of the process (Blumer 1988, Burr 1995, Hall *et al.* 2003, Gubrium & Holstein 1990, Parton & O’Byrne 2000, etc.).

Although, projects were focused on different aspects of the constructing process and its results, they started with the same research questions as follows:

- How do Estonian child protection practitioners describe the goal and essence of their everyday work?

- How do they define the client?

During producing and analysing the data arose the topic of troublesome family as one of the most problematic phenomenon in child protection practice. Concerning this we analysed the following issues. Firstly, how troublesome family is constructed in the Estonian professional child protection practice? Secondly, as child protection professionals are also ordinary social actors who have their own vision about the general concept of family, based on their personal experience of family life, how do the child protection practitioners talk about the concepts of family as private people? Thirdly, social workers and other representatives of connected professions are important socialisation agents for young generation and they are in some sense bearers of social norms (White 2003). We observe the talk about general concept of family as a context in which the understanding of ‘normality’ was expressed. This seemed important to us for better understanding of professionals’ talk about ‘troubles’ in families. We were interested in understanding what is the impact of professionals’ own experiences to general vision of ‘normal’ family and their definition of troublesome family as client. “The client of child protection are the child and its parents in a mutual interaction and care relationship.” (Juhila *et al.* 2003:12)

### ***Data and research process***

The information was based on the data produced during qualitative individual and group interviews with child protection workers and other experts working with children (ordinary school teachers, child psychologists, staff of children’s home, youth police officers, school social workers, etc.).

We decided to add representatives from other connected professions in our sampling at least because of two reasons. Firstly, Estonian child protection as part of social work is a new phenomenon. There is also a reason to think that nowadays child protection is influenced by other professions dealing with children especially pedagogy, paediatrics, and psychology that had their longer history and created the context for emergence of child protection in Estonia. Many of previous teachers and paediatrics switched to the area of child protection. However, there was child protection in the soviet period too and in a sense our child protection continues its existence from the soviet past with its pedagogical and medical concept of activity. We cannot ignore its influence to the formation of the “new” profession and some of child protection workers continue their activity since the soviet time.

Secondly, there are much more professionals who officially are not child-care workers, but in fact they do also childcare when doing their own tasks.

We use the word 'general' considering the concept of family as the notion that include the interviewees personal experiences and the wide understanding of family that interviewees accept as normal for Estonian society. The general family discourse that was expressed by the child-care practitioners and the representatives of connected professions on the basis of their personal experiences we use as context in which practical child protection proceeds.

The analysis was made on the basis of 25 individual and 11 focus group (62 persons) interviews (see Appendix).

Most of the interviews were carried out by two of us. In group interviews we focused mostly on the general concept of family based on personal experience (Kitzinger 2000), while in individual interviews we discussed the professional vision.

### ***The general concept of family***

We started our focus group interviews with following: *"Let's talk about family today. What do you think first when you listen the word 'family'? What it means to you personally?"* The respondents reacted to this introduction as a rule with keeping silence for some minutes, smiling and mediating before starting to answer. To think and talk about their family experience was evidently a pleasant topic for the interviewees.

Concerning the family issue several other notions like 'safety', 'home', 'the home of childhood', 'traditions', 'relations', 'blood relationships', 'respect for the family and home privacy' arose. Interviewees described their own family relations as *"something warm"* and safe, which has its time and space dimensions. Family relations were something that continues for a long time. Family traditions were pointed out as important factors in defining family. The following extract is from one focus group interview with schoolteachers.

*"- Family traditions, which keep people together. ...*

*- Unfortunately, during the last 20-30 years family relations are weakened comparing with earlier time...*

- *Yea, family celebrations are (important)...*”
- *For me it (family) means something little: only my own family...*
- *For me in opposite – it is something big – when the whole big family, all relatives come together. It happens not every day, but it means family to me. We had such meeting this summer ... There were more than hundred people together. ...*”(TG,1)

It is notable that answering the question concerning family, tied with an intimate sphere of personal life, teachers start with the less sensitive topic - big family celebrations. It's a topic, which could be demonstrated for outside world without any risk. Also the topic of home that was offered by the interviewees in the beginning of discussion seemed to be harmless, because it enabled to avoid the sphere of personal relations between family members.

Family is connected with a special place: 'home'. The concept of 'home' has a specific role in the Estonian family discourse.

- “- *Home is the place, ... where I feel safe...*
- *...where nobody can disturb, I can be, as I want to...*
- *you are alone, you can do what you want, feel, as you want.*
- *(Being at home) I don't have to be under pressure (ma ei pea olema pinges all)*
- *Home is the place where you always want to go*”(TG, 1)
- “- *Home should be a special space. In a block of apartments one cannot feel as at home. It should be your own house. ... First I lived in a flat, but now I have my own house. This is my home. There are your things that you have gathered during your life...*
- *... self-made things (ise sätitud nipset-näpset).*
- *For us, Estonian people home is a place where one has gathered favourite things (asjakesed armsad) and is one's own home with one's things, smells and feelings.*”
- *Now I have two homes: one is in town and the other in countryside. And last time the accent is more and more twisting on the countryside home.*”(TG, 3)

“*All my life I was dreaming... about my own house. Now I've reached it and I don't know if it a cross on my neck, but I am satisfied, because I've reached what I wanted.*”(TG, 2)

“*It was blessing that I should privatise the house (where we lived) and it is now my own, because there is not much safety for people nowadays. People live in a rent-flat and they think that it is the true home.*

*In a flat you have to consider with others” (TG, 2)*

The above extracts are taken from teachers’ group interviews. The respondents were middle-aged females from Estonian province. Maybe that is the reason why a separate land home with walls and fences (i.e. protective space) was emphasised. It is remarkable how important for the teachers is the safety of place, were they shouldn’t apprehend from an alien eye. It is notable also that teachers’ description of home does not include people who share the same home.

The younger generation of teachers and school social workers described the notion of home first of all due to those people who share this space.

*“I think home isn’t just walls or big house. If there isn’t home warmness: those people who live, who wait, and hope, and do something together. There should be really home warmness.” (SSW, 1)*

Together with concept of home the importance of ‘childhood home’ was emphasised.

*“- A real home feeling I can feel in my mother’s home, where I can go to the garden, yard...*

*- Real home is one’s childhood home – house, fence ... here I stay in an apartment. It isn’t a real home...”*

*“- Childhood home is important. Now I live far from my childhood home, but when I can be at home and see those places where I’d barefoot run... This is nostalgia. ...*

*- Childhood home. This is the certain place where the childhood ran, where parents are. I had different places to live, but homes where not so many. This (childhood home) is, which is well stabile.*

*- Yes, home is connected with childhood.*

*- Still childhood and home of my childhood.*

*- For me also. Homes of my independent life were changed, but the childhood home is only one and stable.*

*- I also remember the home of my parents as my own home. If you are moving from one rent-flat to another, these are not your real homes. Even now when I speak with my sister and one of us tells: I go home, it is clear that she means the home of our parents.*

*- I wish that my home will be for my children as the home of my parents is still home for me.”*

The family relations were also more observed as relations between children and parents and not so much as relations between spouses or siblings. The vertical relations between relatives seemed to be more important than anything else. *“My family are my children and my father and mother.”* First of

all, family engages rather blood relatives than people who stay together for a long time. *“It is not easy to get used to live together with a stranger (meaning husband)”*.

The parental role with emphasis on the importance of mother seemed to be the most relevant one:

*“... And the soul of home is the mother.”*

In general the family discourse introduced by child-care practitioners is very traditional and stereotypical. There are many topics that are connected with silence, about what it is not fair to talk. These topics are connected first of all with intimate relations between family members, particularly between spouses. There was no word about love. Instead of love another word - ‘trust’ figured. To be trustful a person should be ones blood relative or tested for long time.

According to our data gender roles in the family are also traditional and show well-known stereotypes.

*“A man should be strong. His function is to earn money, but the women’s task is to take care about the family. She is the home keeper.”*

Respect for the family and home privacy was pointed out as the most essential demand in family discourse. It is in harmony with feeling discomfort in talking about family relations and demanding non-interference to the family issues.

When the interviewees were asked to define the family through its members they started with vertical relations (parents and children), but later gave a wide spectrum of possible and acceptable family types. The interviewees showed high tolerance towards different kinds of new living forms, except the gender roles. Despite that there were some differences considering the age- and residential characteristics of the interviewees, it is notable that even the young Estonian women repeated the traditional stereotypes in characterisation of gender roles describing new family relations.

The Estonian word for spouse - ‘*abikaasa*’ was pointed out, which means ‘*helping fellow*’. Despite of the nice idea that is expressed in this Estonian word the relations between wives and husbands in traditional family were described first of all as a struggle for power.

There was an interesting discussion about new types of so-called contemporary family. The tolerance concerning contemporary family models was quite high when the interviewees talked about their own family or families of their grown up children.

The notion of so-called contemporary family was described both through its negative and positive sides. As negative were mentioned the following aspects.

*“Time deficit...”*

*“Long working days...”*

*“Children spend time in hobby groups, are busy with their doings...”*

*“TV, computers, parents have no time...”*

*“Family members don’t meet each other; people come home just for sleeping...”*

*“Everyone takes whatever from refrigerator and eats whenever...”*

*“Everyone is busy with one business...”*

*“Only money, money, money...”*

As positive sides of the contemporary family were pointed out next moments:

*“This is a family where wife and husband are equal partners and they share all the homework in a such way that nobody can feel he or she is subordinated as it is in a traditional society.”*

*“Children and parents relate as equal partners.”*

*“If it is a normal family then I think in such contemporary family the members are for support to each others. There is no fighting for power, but there is balance.”*

*“Contemporary family means that all its members try to do something for development. ...”*

### ***The troublesome family***

Professionals evidently define Child in trouble as the Estonian child protection client, but the troubles of the child are directly tied with his or her troublesome family. Describing the problems of troublesome family the child care professionals approached from the values that they as private persons in their own family life value.

In professional representation of troublesome family the following moments were emphasised:

- *“Parents are not protecting their children”* because of different reasons. *“There is no safe home.”*

- *“Parents are unable to cope with family life in general, they have no skills to organise and manage, keep the home in order and plan daily activity of their own and children.”*
- Parents are reckless because of alcohol and drug abuse.
- Parents use violent raising methods.
- *“Parents do not care about their children”* because of different reasons.

Talking about troublesome families the professionals pointed out reasons that are not directly dependent on parents' behaviour and personality and those that are parents fault.

Lots of problems caused by poverty, unemployment, restructuring of rural life, disease and death of some family member, too young age of mother, too big family, single mother with many children without any help from outside, child with special needs or with chronic disease, etc. were mentioned. The professionals were sensitive and helpful towards such family problems, because they think the causes of such troubles lie first of all in state carelessness.

The troubles caused by parents personal attitudes and characters were always connected with the absence of parental responsibility. In general those parents were blamed in rejection of their parental tasks. Such kind of troublesome parents and especially mothers provoked a lot of blaming by different child-care professionals. Children from such families are difficult to help and especially if the parents are alcohol or drug addicts – the only method is ‘intervention’ that in Estonian child protection practice means taking the child out of the biological family and deprivation of parental rights.

The personal and professional approaches to the observation of family were quite relevantly connected with each other. Professionals' general expectation toward parents' role drives from their own understanding of family. In this connection the idea of home and family privacy and the specific use of intervention perturbs the well-timed intervention. It is notable that the concepts of client and social work intervention in general have negative reputation among professionals. To our question, whether the interviewees would like to be a client of social work or let her or his child to be a client of child protection, the answer was explicitly negative. Social work intervention was described as a negative procedure obviously directed against the troublesome family. It is in Estonian child protection vocabulary a term, which is comparable with term punishment. (More about the term ‘*intervention*’ – ‘*sekkumine*’ see in Selg & Strömpl in current issue, pp.: ...)

Estonian social work is struggling with inner contradictions: on the one hand social work is defined as helping profession, which aim is working for the client, but on the other hand, being a client assigns a negative stigma for the problem bearers. Social work intervention means that there is somebody who is guilty in arising of problems and who is guilty should be punished. The family in trouble is apprehended as the goal of child protection, however, the help is directed only to the child and ignoring the troublesome parents.

### **Conclusions**

To sum up the above described the following moments should be emphasised.

First, in the centre of the concept of family are emotional relations between family members, which belong to the intimate sphere of personal life and as such are closed to the outside world.

Second, safety and warmness are the most important feelings concerning family and home.

Third, home should be the most trustful place for everyone. As such its privacy should be respected most than anything else.

Fourth, professionals as most relevant to the whole course of life assess childhood home and positive feelings considered with childhood experiences.

Fifth, formal membership or family type is not as important as emotional relations inside the family, however, most trustful people are blood relatives.

Sixth, parents' main task is to provide an emotionally warm and safe home to their children.

Seventh, there are reasons that are not directly dependent on parents' behaviour and personality and those that are parents fault.

Eighth, in first case professionals are sensitive and helpful towards such family problems.

Ninth, parents, who maltreat their children and do not guaranty a safe home for them, deserve denunciation and punishment.

Tenth, punishment of reckless parents is “intervention” that has in Estonian child protection a specific meaning.

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## **Appendix**

### **Sample**

#### Focus group interviews:

- Teachers	4 groups	(32 persons in total)
- Local government social workers	2 groups	(11 persons in total)
- Child protection workers	1 group	(5 persons in total)
- School social workers	2 group	(5+3=8 persons in total)
- Children's home staff	1 group	(4 persons in total)
- Youth police officer and child protection worker	1 group	(2 persons)

#### Individual interviews

- Child protection workers	2 person
- School psychologist	1 person
- Elementary school teacher	1 person
- Youth police officer	1 person
- Managers of municipality departments	4 persons
- Specialist of municipality department of education	1 person
- Social worker of Pediatric clinics	1 person
- Leader of local juvenile commission	1 person
- Clinical child psychologists	3 persons
- Child psychiatrist	1 person
- NGOs leader-persons working with children and families	9 persons in 9 NGOs

## **Love, Companionship, Care, Trouble? Remarriage Of Widows And Widowers** *Kirsi Pankarinkangas*

### ***Introduction***

This paper is based on the literature and concerns widowhood and remarriage of (mainly middle-aged and older) widowed men and women – especially why they get remarried or why not.

### ***Widowhood***

Widowhood has been described as a stressful life experience (Gentry et al., 1987) and a major change of life (Hurme, 1990; Hokkanen & Jylhä, 1994). It often changes the practical setting of a person's life, the former roles and activities are replaced with new ones, and it also changes the way one experiences life. (Arber & Ginn, 1991; Hokkanen & Jylhä, 1994; Tuominen, 1994).

Quite a lot of research has been done of being widowed, it's connections to psychological and physical well-being and the adjustment to widowhood, but less attention has been paid to the re-formation of the family relations and to the remarriage of middle-aged and especially older adults after widowhood (see e.g. Vinick, 1978; Gentry et al., 1987; Davidson, 2001). Close personal relationships have a strong relation to psychological well-being and happiness in adult life (Veenhoven, 1984; Perho & Korhonen, 1999; Takkinen, 2000 Tanskanen et al., 2003) and it should be kept in mind that the need for intimacy does not disappear in later life (Travis, 1987; Jerrome, 1993).

The re-formation of marital and family relations after widowhood is topical, since remarriage is culturally more approved than earlier (see e. g. Haavio-Mannila & Kontula, 2001) and the proportion of older adults will increase in the future, as the so-called baby boom generation gets older and life expectancy increases (Heikkinen & Marin, 2002; Helin, 2002). Thus, widowhood and getting remarried after that possibly affects more and more people.

### ***Remarriage Of Widows And Widowers***

Even though nowadays there is growing acceptability of new sexual relationships in later life (Jerrome, 1993), remarriages are still quite rare in middle-age and in later life. In Finland 255 50-years old and older widowers and 251 widows got married second time in 2001 (Väestötilastot,

Tilastokeskus, 2003). However, according to Haavio-Mannila and Kontula (2001) ‘second chances’ – such as getting remarried or setting up a new family - are utilized more and more in later life. Indeed, about twenty years ago remarriages and cohabitations of widows older than fifty years (within four years of widowhood) were almost non-existent (Tuominen, 1994<sup>8</sup>).

Although being widowed concerns especially women (there was over five times more of 50 years old and older widows than widowers in 2001 in Finland) (Suomen tilastollinen vuosikirja, 2002), several reports and reviews indicate that remarriage rates for widowed men are higher than for widowed women. This tendency increases with age. (see Gentry et al., 1987; Bowers & Bahr, 1989; Arber & Ginn, 1991; Tuominen, 1994).

### ***Reasons For Not Getting Remarried***

According to several researches widows are often reluctant to remarry, because they do not want to lose their new independence (see Gentry et al., 1987; Lopata, 1987; Thompson et al., 1990; Arber & Ginn, 1991; Davidson, 2001) and take main responsibility for everyday domestic tasks again (see Gibson, 1993; Davidson, 2001) or possibly to care again for an ill husband (Lopata, 1987; Davidson, 2001.)

*Mary: "I just couldn't be bothered, I mean. It would have to be an old man for a start, I mean I'm 70. Who wants to marry a man about 75? Oh, I couldn't go bed with an old man like that. I couldn't bear the thought of it. No. No thanks. Yes, and why should I lumber myself with another man? I'll have to cook for him, wash for him, go to bed with him. Oh no, I couldn't be bothered with that. (Mrs. M. B., aged 70)." (Davidson, 2001, 312)*

Widows' anticipations of increasing responsibility for taking care of both the household and the new husband really seems to be correct, because at least some of the widowers hope to have a caretaking wife (Vinick, 1978<sup>9</sup>). Indeed, in a Finnish study, Tuominen (1994) actually found that

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<sup>8</sup> In Tuominen's study almost 3000 in 1980 widowed Finnish persons (80 % of them were women) were interviewed four years after the death of the spouse. The average age of the widows was 60 and of the widowers 62 years. Persons older than 80 years were not included in the study. The terminated marriage was the first one among about 90 % of the participants and the length of the marriage had been more than 30 years of the great majority.

<sup>9</sup> In Vinick's study, 24 remarried couples (both partners had been married at least once formerly) were interviewed in-depth. Most of them had been widowed, though few had been divorced. The age range was 60 to 84 and the participants had been married from two to six years at the time of the interviews.

the new wives of men who remarried after widowhood typically took responsibility for the domestic tasks.

Some of the widows tend to idealize (“husband sanctification”, see e.g. Lopata 1987) or feel so deep loyalty to the late husband, that it may be an obstacle to the formation of new male relationships (Gentry et al., 1987; Lopata, 1987; Thompson et al., 1990). Furthermore, some may also fear negative reactions from (adult) children, other family members or friends (Gentry et al., 1987; Lopata, 1987; see also Borell, 2001).

Although we know less about widowers’ than widows’ attitudes about remarriage, research indicates that, like widows, some widowers feel that nobody could ever replace the deceased wife and that is the reason why they don’t want to get married again. (see Kaunonen et al., 2000; Davidson, 2001). However, according to Kaunonen et al. (2000)<sup>10</sup> men seemed to be a little bit more worried about loneliness than women after the loss of the spouse (although the difference was not statistically significant). To fill the emptiness and loneliness in their life, men were more prepared to get involved with someone new.

In a quite recent study Davidson (2001)<sup>11</sup> found, that the prospect of caring for another spouse or loss of freedom were not the reasons to remain unmarried for those widowers who took care of their ill wife. They may even miss the daily routine they had established while taking care of their late wife. However, Tuominen (1994) found, that *both* Finnish widows *and* widowers stated that their desire to remain independent is one of the reasons for not getting married again.

The decision to remarry may be affected by an anticipated weakening of financial situation, too (Gentry et al., 1987). In Finland, the amount of pension payment is a little bit greater for a widow or a widower who lives without a partner than for a remarried or cohabitating person (Kela. Mitkä asiat vaikuttavat leskeneläkkeeseen?).

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<sup>10</sup> The mean age of the participants at the beginning of the study was 56 years and the range was 30 to 77 years. 76 % of the participants were females. The data was collected by questionnaires (318 in total). The deceased spouse was between the age of 25-65 and he/she had died more than six months before the data collection.

<sup>11</sup> The study group consisted of 25 widows and 26 widowers and they were interviewed in-depth. The average age of the widows was 75 and of the widowers 78 years. The participants ranged in age from 65 to 92 years. For the widows, the

### ***Reasons For Getting Remarried***

The motives for remarriage are often related to satisfying needs which are connected to marital and family relations. The gendered division of household tasks may also be connected to motives for getting remarried after widowhood. (see e.g. Vinick, 1978; Gentry et al, 1987)

As mentioned above some of the widowers would like to have a caretaking wife (Vinick, 1978). Some widows also think that remarriage can solve problems, which are related to living without a partner. Younger widows are more likely to see remarriage as a way of coping with their problems than older widowed women (Gentry et al., 1987)<sup>12</sup>.

According to Gentry et al. (1987) the most frequently reported reasons to get remarried (of widows who had considered remarriage and widows who had remarried) were loneliness and longing for love and companionship. Economic reasons and children (the possibility to have more children, to provide a father for the children they already had or get help and support in problems with children) were also important factors as women were making the decision about remarriage. Some women (widows who had not yet remarried) found married life appealing as it is (see also Davidson, 2001). Moreover, some widows also hope or had hoped that a new marriage and spouse would offer them emotional support and safety, share decision making and resolve problems of sexuality and living independently. (see also Vinick, 1978.)

For both widows and widowers - especially for older persons – living alone after losing the spouse may be troublesome. Women often are troubled about maintenance and repair at home (Arber & Ginn, 1991). Widows, in general, also have lower income than widowers. In spite of that, some research indicates that widowhood seems to be more difficult matter for older men than older women, who live alone. (Vinick, 1978; Arber & Ginn, 1991; Tuominen, 1994). According to Vinick (1978) this difference between the sexes is due to gendered roles concerning involvement in family and friendship relations and in domestic tasks in comparison with the women (see also Scott

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average length of the 'only or last' marriage was 36 years and 38 years for the widowers. They had been widowed for at least two years, were living independently and had not remarried.

<sup>12</sup> In this study widowed women were interviewed in 1979-1980 and they were classified into three groups: **The first group** consisted of 39 women who had been widowed and *had remarried*. The average age of these women was 49.5 years (from 24 to 73 years). The median length of widowhood was 35 months and they had been remarried an average of two years. In the **second group** there were 192 women who were widowed and had *considered remarriage but had not done so*. They were on the average 49 years old (from 22 to 77 years). The median length they had been widowed was 30 months. The **third group** consisted of 419 women who were widowed and *did not consider remarriage*. They were on the average 59 years old (from 24 to 88 years). The median length of widowhood was 23 months.

& Wenger, 1995). Men may also have to deal with the “double loss” (Vinick, 1978), if they lose both work and spouse in short period of time. In a Finnish study (Tuominen, 1994) it was shown, that especially the re-formation of social life has been found to be more problematic for men than for women. This concerns especially older widowed men and as mentioned above, they seem to be more prepared to get involved with someone new (Kaunonen et al., 2000).

### ***Plans For The Future***

As mentioned at the beginning, less attention has been paid to the re-formation of the family relations and to the remarriage of middle-aged and especially older adults after widowhood in comparison with the research of being widowed (see e.g. Vinick, 1978; Gentry et al., 1987; Davidson, 2001). In my research project the aims are to examine 1) what are the reasons for getting married second time after widowhood, 2) are there differences between widows' and widowers' motives, 3) are motives different in different age groups and 4) what were the obstacles or worries related to the decision to remarry. The data will be collected by quantitative and qualitative methods from Finnish widowed and remarried middle-aged and older adults (50+) at the beginning of their marriage.

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## **LIVING WITH CHILDREN: A Dialogical Perspective On The Drama Of Everyday Life *Eero Suoninen***

In the last few years in Finland there have been active public debates on parenting. In those debates the importance of *child centred ideals* has often been emphasised. On the other hand the importance of *parents' abilities to set limits* to their children's behaviour has also been emphasised. However, the discussion on the ideals seems to be on a rather general and abstract level.

This presentation discusses the difficulty of putting generally acknowledged ideals in practice, because of the unpredictable and subtle nature of the everyday drama between children and their parents. In the presentation I focus on the '*interactional texture*' that children and parents construct with each other. By considering the details of the interaction process between parents and their children the presentation aims to introducing a dialogical perspective and methodology for researching everyday family life. In order to illustrate the dialogical perspective I shall introduce an extract of observational data collected from a typical family situation in which the members are making contrasting initiatives to one another and trying to achieve some kind of common understanding.

My theoretical perspective is based on social constructionist thinking, which emphasises the importance of participants' situational acts in creating social reality and institutions (e.g. Gergen 1994, Burr 1995). The methodical idea is to *immerse oneself into every moment of complicated strings of actions* in order to interpret what is happening from the point of view of the participants in the interaction. This way of looking at interaction is adopted from the traditions of discourse analysis (Potter & Wetherell 1987, Suoninen 1999) and conversation analysis (Sacks 1992). However, the type of the data that I use as an illustrative example – a case description written by the participants – is not generally utilised in these traditions. Observational data is more typical in the tradition of ethnography. This combination of background traditions invites us to understand the analytical work more as some kind of creative handicraft than applying specified methodical practices in a conventional way.

### ***An Empirical Example***

I illustrate the dialogical perspective by means of a data extract, written by parents of a family. The instructions to the parents emphasised the *aim to collect the type of everyday episodes or processes*

*that may be particularly essential in most families.* Instructions for noting observations emphasise *as detailed a description as possible.*

Extract from observational notes: *A tired child*

- 1 A family (two children and their parents) is walking in a foreign town. The younger of  
 2 the children – Mika, a boy of three – suddenly looks tired. His walking becomes slower,  
 3 his steps shorten radically and his appearance becomes exhausted. He says that he is too  
 4 tired to walk because he is so hungry.
- 5 The parents (especially the father) try in many ways to persuade Mika to continue  
 6 walking, but he keeps on crawling and even more slowly than before. The family  
 7 navigates extremely slowly and bad temperedly towards the centre of the town in order to  
 8 get something to eat.
- 9 They walk towards the centre the straightest possible way, through the sports field, and  
 10 their route happens to go beside a running track. The running track excites Saara, a girl of  
 11 nine, to run despite her parents' objections.
- 12 Her little brother seems to be envious and wants to run too. Despite the parents'  
 13 objections Mika flies eagerly after his sister and all the way around the track running  
 14 most of the way (400 metres!) very fast. When he enters the final straight the parents start  
 15 to applaud loudly.
- 16 After this running the boy continues to walk lustily and there is no need to stop  
 17 before the grandmother's place, which is further from the centre of the town.
- 18 Tiredness, caused by hunger, has totally vanished without getting anything to eat.

From the dialogical perspective it is useful to start the interpretation of this episode by looking at the actions of the participants. It is not necessary to know if the actions are conscious; what is more essential the way other participants interpret (or just accept) the actions: what is the socially identified meaning or function of each action. In this collective situation actions may be understood as some kind of invitations to other participants of the family.

This is the case at the beginning of the episode (lines 2 – 3). Mika suddenly looks tired: his walking becomes slower ... and his appearance becomes exhausted. This non-verbal 'language' works as an

invitation to other members of the family somehow to change the way the family is moving in a foreign town. The indefiniteness of the action and its function does not make Mika's behaviour less meaningful from the point of view of the family. The nature of actions in everyday situations is often indefinite (especially concerning children's actions?), e.g. of the type 'away from something but without explaining in what direction'. Nor does this mean that there is no sense or intelligibility in ambiguous actions. In many cases the account concerning the sense of an indefinite action is given after the actual action. This is the case in line 4, where Mika explains that he is too tired to walk because he is so hungry. This is an instance where a *child appeals to a biological framework of interpretation (or discourse)* in order to legitimate his action.

The boy's action forces his parents to interpret his 'initiative' somehow and make their own responses or 'responding initiatives' in order to recover practical co-operation for the whole family. For example, Mika's mother or father could possibly try to carry their son or they could call a taxi. They choose another line of response (lines 5 – 7): they try to persuade Mika to continue walking, and after this fails they seem to believe the biological theory the boy suggested, that he is hungry, because they make for the centre of the town in order to get something to eat. This does not mean that they necessarily believe that their son really is hungry. However, what is sure is that they *choose in a practical way to believe* their son's account as a basis for their action.

When trying to get to the centre the family happens to pass a running track. Although it is not a human actor, the *running track seems 'to invite' Mika's elder sister, Saara, to run*. Such coincidental occurrences may be of an essential stimulus-type in families with small children. When Saara darts to fulfil this invitation, the parents try in vein to object to her running. The little brother takes his sister's running as invitation to do the same (lines 12 – 14). Mika Also runs around the track in spite of his parents' objections. In these situations the parents must choose how far they allow their children to disobey. The situation is complicated because there are more practices present than just family decision-making. The situation also includes elements of sports activities, which are usually positively evaluated as hobbies for children. The dilemma of contrasting practices is most topical when the children enter the final straight. *Then the parents have to choose if they blame their children* (for disobeying or incoherence of action) *or on the contrary if they praise* them (for excellent running). They choose the latter by applauding loudly.

After applauding the parents have to choose if they come to some kind of reflection of the situation in order to teach the children not to behave in such a complicated way in the future. Parents seem to

interpret the illogicality of the children's actions mildly enough to be forgotten. In the end *a biological interpretation seems to be replaced by a motivational interpretation.*

### **Actions and cultural resources**

Let us take one step further in analysing the episode. If explicating the chain of actions (what happened) and the cultural resources the actions are leaning on (the culturally given resources and practices that make the actions understandable) it is possible to formulate a surprisingly long list.

#### WHAT HAPPENED

#### RELEVANT CULTURAL IDEALS AND PRACTICES

Child communicates his wish to change the activity setting of the family

You should listen to your child

Biological framework of interpretations

Parents (especially father) try to persuade the child to obey

You should have authority

Gender practices

Child opposes by being passive

You should respect the experience of your child

Parents accept the biological theory

You should respect the experience of your child

You should take practical responsibility in the family

Parents decide about the practical realisation of action

You should have authority

Running track 'makes an invitation'

Sports practices

You should listen to your child

You should encourage your child's creativity and exercise.

You should devote time to your child

The elder child 'makes an invitation' to the younger child

You should treat equally your children

(Equality practices between children)

Parents try to hinder

You should have authority

Parents applaud loudly

You should encourage your child

Sports practices

Parents choose to accept the  
illogicality

You should advocate a harmonious  
family

Motivational framework of interpretation

Parents choose also to refrain from  
criticising afterwards

(You should teach your child)

Through this explication *parenting appears to be constant choosing*: how far to follow each ideal, when to change your logic of action and when it is time to teach your child by reflecting on the interactional process.

### ***Methodical implications***

The episode analysed here illustrated the subtle and complex ways in which culturally given ideals may be present in everyday dialogue. The ideals can serve as resources for legitimate suggestions or actions, or they can give a general rationale to the actions without being mentioned. The ideals are not actualised in only one way but are tightly interwoven with other culturally given virtues and practices. In a fast moving train of interaction their appearance is dependent on the chain of instant decisions in situations which do not give much time to reflect on the multitude of aspects at hand.

If we presume that the episode analysed here illustrates the nature of everyday family interaction, we can draw *some critical conclusions about research methods*. Having limited space I make only a few general level comments about theorising family life.

1. If researching parents' *attitudes or characteristics* it is very difficult to say much about the great variation of everyday family life. This is the case because the most important topic seems not to be an abstract attitude or characteristic but balancing between a variety of different attitudes or meaning dimensions.
2. If taking a move towards a research methodology that emphasises a family member's *own interpretations* of meanings, the analysis may still miss the key issues of everyday family life if studied outside live situations. Meanings are something that family members create

together in and through their interactional processes. The children's stake is an essential part of meanings constructed in the speech and actions of parents and vice versa.

3. The *appearance of meanings and ideals* is difficult to analyse even in the case of interactional data, because they are often actualised in real life situations without explaining. One opportunity that may be useful is to try to read the meanings (or functions) of actions (including speech acts) from the social consequences in the situation.
4. *Ethnographic or observational data* may be sufficient for understanding family interaction in a new way. However, *audio and video recordings* could give useful additional information about the nuances of negotiations between parents and children. The relevant additional information could include ascertaining how far persuasion continues in different situations, how sensitively (or emotionally) the child centred perspective is adopted and – related to this question – the significance of non-verbal communication in balancing between competing virtues of parenting.
5. The *analysis of 'the micro landscapes'* of family life may produce a huge number of variations of competing family ideals, virtues and practices. Paradoxically, the kind of micro level explicating may contribute to raising discussions about the macrolevel ideals and ideologies of our time, because the dialogical perspective concretely concerns the presence of the culturally given ideals and general atmosphere of our society.

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## **Health promotion of families with children - action research in a paediatric ward, *Hanna Hopia, Eija Paavilainen & Päivi Åstedt-Kurki***

Nursing is geared to promoting family health, yet this is an area that has received very little research attention. The family health is a complex phenomenon that finds various expressions in family life. We know from earlier research that chronic childhood illness and hospitalization invariably affect family health. The maintenance and promotion of family health is particularly important in situations where a child is afflicted with a chronic illness and has to be admitted to hospital for treatment. Parents who are under constant stress because of their child's illness and hospital treatment are in need of special support. If nursing staff are to maintain and promote family health, they need to know the family's situation: what the child's illness means to the family, how the family has coped with previous stressful situations, how the family is coping with the extra burden caused by the illness and what kind of resources the family has access to.

The research is part of a large development project on family nursing being carried out in the Department of Nursing Science of Tampere University. The aim of the research is to evaluate the realization of family nursing and its effectiveness in practical nursing in the Paediatric Ward of Tampere University Hospital. The point of view is that of the health promotion of families with children who have chronic diseases. The research is an action research, in which the researcher together with the subject, the working community of the paediatric ward, develops family nursing.

The frame of reference in the development work is the model of a learning organization on the co-operational development of work, which equals the practical and conscious approach of action research. The research describes the interventions that support the health of families while the family's child is being treated in hospital. The research also creates an action model for practical nursing, describing the health promotion of a chronically sick child's family.

The nursing staff of the Paediatric Ward, i.e. the nurses and other professional groups participating in the nursing care of families form the target group of the research. The target group also includes 30 families, selected by discretionary sampling, whose children have received treatment in Paediatric Ward. The material for the research is collected by group, individual, and family interviews, by observation the interactive situations between the family and the nurses, and by analysing nursing plans. The same methods of data collection are used twice during the research process: before and after the development work. Research material is also collected in the

Paediatric Ward of Central Finland Central Hospital, which is used as a comparison unit. The research material of the comparison group is collected with the same methods and at the same time as the initial and the final measuring of the treatment group, but the target group is smaller. The comparison unit is used only for the collection of research material, whereas the development work is implemented in Paediatric Ward of Tampere University Hospital. Collecting data in two different paediatric units enhances the reliability of the results. The interview and observation data are analysed using the grounded theory method.

The Ethical Committees of both hospitals have given their approval for the research. The research is based on sub-publications and it will be completed by the year 2006.

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