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**FROM FAMILY POLICY TO PARENTING SUPPORT.  
PARENTING-RELATED ANXIETY IN FINNISH FAMILY  
SUPPORT PROJECTS**

by Ella Sihvonen

ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

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From my home in Myllypuro, Helsinki, Finland

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# Abstract

This study aims to examine parenting support as provided through family support projects. The need to support parenting arose out of parenting-related anxiety, along with public and political attention regarding proper parenting and the wellbeing of children and youth in the late 1990s and early 2000s in Finland. In political and public debates, parenting was perceived as a source of many social troubles, causing multiple problems for children and youth, ranging from depression and irresponsible behaviour to social exclusion. Parenting-related anxiety became a concrete issue in numerous projects aimed at supporting parenting, of which 310 projects are analysed in this study.

The projects examined here were implemented by public organisations as well as non-governmental organisations, and were carried out between 2000 and 2010 in Finland. The data analysed in this study draw upon diverse project management documents, such as funding applications, midterm and final reports, as well as other project documents, including project plans and brochures. The documents were analysed through qualitative text analysis. Considering the large amount of data, some of the central characteristics of the data were categorised and quantified in order to describe the data at a general level, although the main focus lies on the qualitative analysis.

In this study, I examine how and why parenting support became such an important element in family policy in early twenty-first century Finland. The increased attention on parenting support within family policy is called here a 'turn to parenting'. This turn to parenting is not a Finnish peculiarity, but was identified in other Nordic countries as well as in many other parts of Europe. This study contributes to the recent critical research discussions around parenting support and parenting determinism. Parental determinism refers to the uncomplicated idea regarding how the absence of particular parenting skills represent a cause-and-effect relationship linked to multiple childhood dysfunctions, and which relate to virtually all that parents do or which remains undone.

This study was also motivated by the question regarding what exactly is supported in parenting support. In my assessment, 'parenting' is not taken as self-evident, but as something that needs to be closely scrutinised. By examining parenting support, we can enhance our understanding of what parenting itself signifies, as well as what kinds of responsibilities and competencies parenting requires. Hence, I study how parenting is understood

within Finnish family support projects and how it can be conceptualised from the sociological point of view. In this study, I also frame parenting and parenting support historically and place the ‘turn to parenting’ along a continuum within the long history of family, parenthood and childrearing. Furthermore, I emphasise ‘parenting’ as a unique concept in relation to, for example, parenthood, which denotes the kin relationship between a parent and a child. Moreover, parenting also contains certain new connotations different from those related to ‘childrearing’, which are also important to delineate carefully.

My results demonstrate that parenting support is either targeted towards supporting interactions between family members—more accurately, the relationship between the parent and the child—or towards (re)building community and strengthening parents’ peer relationships with other parents in their community. I suggest that there are two different approaches to parenting support identified within the family support projects: individualised parenting support and communal parenting support. These two approaches are employed in family support in order to increase the wellbeing of the family in general and specifically to prevent ill-being amongst children and youth. To carry out parenting support, family support projects employ particular techniques such as activation, responsabilisation, empowerment and highlighting parents’ own expertise.

In this study, I indicate how in individualised parenting support these techniques aim to increase parents’ active awareness—their own inner expertise in parenting—and, hence, emphasise a kind of reflexive parental agency. As a consequence, good parenting seems to be connected to parents’ constant reflexive evaluation of all possible options related to childrearing, often from a child-centred perspective. Furthermore, in communal parenting support, parents are encouraged to rely on their contemporaries when addressing parenting issues. This is what I have labelled the ‘horizontal expertise of parenting’, wherein the intention is to strengthen parenting with help from the community and peer relations.

I raise the following sociologically intrinsic question in this study: How can we better study, conceptualise and understand ‘parenting’, ‘childrearing’ and the ‘socialisation of children’ from a sociological point of view? I propose that by turning our gazes from parenting and primary socialisation to the socialisation of children from a broader perspective, we can increase our understanding of childrearing and how the parent–child relationship is also constructed in relation to wider structures within contemporary society.

# Tiivistelmä

Tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan vanhemmuuden tukemista perhettä tukevien projektien valossa. Vanhemmuuden tukeminen nousi Suomessa poliittiseen ja julkiseen keskusteluun 1990-luvun lopulla ja 2000-luvun alussa. Keskustelusta välittyi syvää huolta lasten ja nuorten hyvinvoinnista sekä kunnollisesta vanhemmuudesta. Puutteellisen vanhemmuuden nähtiin olevan syynä monenlaisiin lasten ja nuorten sosiaalisiin ongelmiin, kuten masennukseen, vastuuttomaan käytökseen ja syrjäytymiseen. Keskusteluissa näkynyt huoli vanhemmuudesta konkretisoituu lukuisissa vanhemmuuden tukemiseen tähtäävissä projekteissa, joista 310 projektia on käyty läpi tätä tutkimusta varten.

Tutkimuksen keskiössä ovat vuosien 2000 ja 2010 välisenä aikana järjestetty julkishallinnon ja järjestöjen koordinoimat perheprojektit. Tutkimuksen aineisto koostuu perheprojektien hallinnollisista dokumenteista, kuten rahoitushakemuksista, väliraporteista, loppuraporteista ja muista projekteissa tuotetusta materiaalista, kuten projektisuunnitelmista ja hanke-esitteistä. Analysoin dokumentteja laadullisen tekstianalyysin avulla. Laaja aineisto on mahdollistanut myös projektien määrällisen luokittelun, mistä on ollut hyötyä perheprojektien yleisluonteisessa kuvailussa. Tutkimuksen pääpaino on kuitenkin laadullisessa analyysissä ja siihen pohjaavassa tulkinnessa.

Tutkimuksessa selvitetään, miten ja miksi vanhemmuuden tukeminen nousi keskeiseksi teemaksi suomalaisessa perhepolitiikassa 2000-luvun alussa. Vanhemmuuden tukemiseen kohdistunutta lisääntyneitä poliittista ja julkista huomiota kutsutaan tässä tutkimuksessa 'käänteeksi kohti vanhemmuutta'. Käänteeksi kohti vanhemmuutta ei ole vain suomalaisen perhepolitiikan erityisyys vaan ilmiö on tunnistettu myös muissa Pohjoismaissa ja Euroopassa. Tutkimus osallistuu viimeaikaiseen kriittiseen kansainväliseen tutkimuskeskusteluun vanhemmuuden tukemisesta ja vanhemmuuteen liitetystä vahvan deterministisestä ajattelusta. Vanhemmuuden determinismillä tarkoitetaan yksioikoista ajatusta siitä, että vanhemmuuteen liitettyjen erityisten kykyjen puuttumisen ja lasten monenkirjavien ongelmien välillä olisi syy-seuraussuhde. Ajatus ulotetaan koskemaan lähes kaikkia vanhempien tekemistä tai tekemättä jättämistä.

Tätä tutkimusta on motivoinut myös kysymys siitä, mitä silloin oikeastaan tuetaan, kun tuetaan vanhemmuutta. Vanhemmuuden käsitettä ei oteta tutkimuksessa annettuna vaan se nostetaan keskeiseksi tutkimuksen

kohteeksi tutkimalla myös sitä, miten vanhemmuus ymmärretään suomalaisessa perhepolitiikassa ja miten vanhemmuutta voisi käsitteellistää sosiologisesta näkökulmasta. Johtoajatukseksi on, että tarkastelemalla vanhemmuuden tukemista, voimme ymmärtää paremmin vanhemmuuteen liitettyjä odotuksia, vastuita ja velvollisuuksia.

Taustoitan tutkimuksessa vanhemmuutta myös historiallisesta näkökulmasta, ja sijoitan 'käänteeseen kohti vanhemmuutta' osaksi perheen, vanhemmuuden ja lastenkasvatuksen pitkää historiallista jatkumoa sekä perheen yhteiskunnallistumista, jonka viimeaikaisin ilmentymä on vanhemmuuden tukeminen. Lisäksi tarkastelen vanhemmuus-käsitteen omaleimaisuutta ja erityisyyttä suhteessa vanhemman ja lapsen väliseen sukulaissuhteeseen sekä lasten kasvatukseen. Väitän, että perheprojektien tuen kohteena oleva vanhemmuus sisältää uusia merkityksiä, joiden huolellinen määrittely on tärkeää.

Tutkimuksen analyysin perusteella vanhemmuuden tukemisella tarkoitetaan joko perheenjäsenten välisen vuorovaikutuksen tukemista – tarkemmin vanhemman ja lapsen välisen vuorovaikutuksen tukemista – tai vanhempien vertaissuhteiden ja laajemmin yhteisöllisyyden tukemista. Perheprojektien analyysissä hahmottuu siis kaksi erilaista tapaa, jolla perheprojekteissa vanhemmuutta tuetaan: yksilöllinen vanhemmuuden tukemisen tapa ja yhteisöllinen vanhemmuuden tukemisen tapa. Näitä kahta vanhemmuuden tukemisen tapaa tarjotaan perheprojekteissa ratkaisuksi, joiden avulla perheen ja erityisesti lasten ja nuorten hyvinvointia voidaan lisätä. Vanhemmuuden tukemisessa perheprojekteissa sovelletaan erityisiä tekniikoita kuten vastuullistamista, voimaannuttamista ja vanhempien oman asiantuntijuuden korostamista.

Yksilöllisessä vanhemmuuden tukemisen tavassa näiden tekniikoiden avulla on tarkoitus vahvistaa vanhempien tietoisuutta, aktiivisuutta ja omaa sisäistä asiantuntijuutta, eräänlaista refleksiivistä vanhemmuustoimijuutta. Seurauksena on vanhemmille asetettu velvollisuus reflektoida omaa vanhemmuutta lapsikeskeisestä näkökulmasta, jossa keskeistä on lapsen kehitykseen liittyvien moninaisten mahdollisuuksien jatkuva puntarointi ja tämän puntaroinnin sidos hyvään vanhemmuuteen. Yhteisöllisessä vanhemmuuden tukemisen tavassa vanhempia taas kannustetaan tukeutumaan toisiin vanhempiin omaan vanhemmuuteensa liittyvissä pohdinnoissa. Kutsun tätä vanhemmuuden horisontaaliseksi asiantuntijuudeksi, jossa vanhemmuuden toivotaan vahvistuvan, ei niinkään ammattilaisten ja asiantuntijoiden tukemana, vaan yhteisössä jaetun tiedon, kokemuksen ja vertaistuen avulla.

Sosiologisesti kiinnostava kysymys on, kuinka voisimme paremmin tutkia, käsitteellistää ja ymmärtää vanhemmuutta ja lastenkasvatusta sosiologisesta näkökulmasta käsin. Esitän tutkimuksessani, että suuntaamalla katseemme vanhemmuudesta, vanhemman ja lapsen suhteesta ja primaarisosialisatiosta laajemmin lasten socialisaatioon voimme havaita paremmin sen, kuinka lasten ja vanhempien väliset suhteet rakentuvat myös suhteessa ympäröivään yhteiskuntaan ja sen rakenteisiin.





# List of original publications

This thesis is based on the following publications:

I Sihvonen, E. (2016) Anxiety about the decline of parenting in Finnish society in the 2000s: childrearing and responsible parenthood. (This sub-study was published in Finnish in *Kasvatus & Aika* [Huoli kadonneesta vanhemmuudesta 2000-luvun suomalaisessa yhteiskunnassa: lasten kasvatus ja vastuullinen vanhemmuus], 10(5), 72– 86. It has not been published in English).

II Sihvonen, E. (2018) Early Interventionist Parenting Support: The Case Study of Finland. *Families, Relationships and Societies* 7(1), 519–521.

III Sihvonen, E. (2018) Parenting Support Policy in Finland: Responsibility and Competence as Key Attributes of Good Parenting in Parenting Support Projects. *Social, Policy and Society* 18(3), 443–456.

IV Sihvonen, E. (*under review*) ‘They are alone in their parenthood’: Parenting support and (re)building community.

The publications are referred to in the text by their Roman numerals.



To my parents  
Sirpa and Keijo Sihvonen



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# 1 INTRODUCTION

School authorities are not actually blaming children per se [for disturbing and ignorant behaviour], but rather an accusatory finger is pointed at the home, at the parents. “We have started to use the phrase disappeared parenthood,” the school authorities clarified (newspaper article, 3 March 1999, *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat*).

This study aims to elaborate parenting support as described in and provided by 310 family support projects in Finland. Parenting support arose from parenting-related anxiety, along with the public and political attention placed on notions of ‘proper parenting’. This kind of debate increased in the late 1990s and early 2000s in Finland. In these debates, parenting-related anxiety was closely aligned with discussions about the ill-being<sup>1</sup> of children and youth in public discussions (Jallinoja 2006; Sihvonen 2008; Forsberg & Ritala-Koski 2011). The ill-being of children and youth was quickly established as truth, and not easily deniable despite little evidence indicating that children and youth were worse off than they were previously (Harrikari 2008; Forsberg & Ritala-Koski 2011). Simultaneously, claims about ‘disappeared parenting’ increased in popularity, as rather aptly illustrated in the citation above from a Finnish newspaper. In tandem, disappearing parenthood, as a metaphor for anxiety, was increasingly treated as truth without an historical perspective. No one asked what precisely is lost in parenting, which obviously previously existed, but has now disappeared. However, parenting was perceived as a source of many troubles, causing multiple problems for children and youth ranging from depression and irresponsible behaviour to social exclusion. Children presumably reacted to the lack of responsible parenting by behaving irresponsibly such as by painting graffiti. In particular, parenting was not only treated as a source of but also a solution to those problems, creating an ambivalent scope for actions (Sihvonen 2008; cf. Lee et al. 2010). It seems as though this ambivalent situation created the scope for ‘parenting support’ that served as the solution to the problem of the ill-being of children and youth.

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1 Ill-being is considered an umbrella concept here for different kinds of social malaise amongst children and youth. The Finnish word *pahoinvointi* has sometimes been translated also as ill-fare, denoting the opposite of welfare (e.g., Forsberg & Ritala-Koski 2011, 63). At times, the ill-being of children is also described as ill-health (e.g., Widding 2018).

Discussions about the ill-being of children and youth can be illustrated by the concept of moral panic (Sihvonen 2005). This moral panic usually arises as particular individuals or groups emerge and become defined as a threat to society, particularly to societal values and interests (Cohen 1972). However, the framework of the moral panic does not fit into discussions about parenting and parenting support studied in the research at hand, an issue others scholars also noted (e.g., Lee 2014a). As Faircloth et al. (2013b, pp. 4–5) pinpoint, the ‘problem of parenting’ is not simply another version of moral panic. Indeed, discussions about the ill-being of children and youth abated in the early 2000s, and discussions about parenting support were tamed and firmly adopted in family policy during the first decade of the twenty-first century in Finland. Thus, parenting support was implemented as a central feature of family policy and practical work with families (e.g., Kuronen & Lahtinen 2011). In this study, I employ Daly’s (2013b) account—namely, a ‘turn to parenting’—to describe this increased attention to ‘parenting’ in different spheres of society.

The increased attention to parenting is not particular to Finland, but shared across other Nordic countries (Sundsbø & Sihvonen 2018) as well as in other parts of Europe (Daly 2013a; Lee et al. 2014) and beyond (Faircloth et al. 2013a). Yet, country-specific differences persist regarding how parenting support is embodied in social policy and practices. As such, a common denominator appears to emphasise parenting as a problematic sphere of family life. As indicated by many scholars concern about family is not a new phenomenon, but something problematised through modernity as a reliable sphere for childrearing (e.g., Donzelot 1979; Vuori 2001; Jallinoja 2006; Yesilova 2009). In fact, parenting support is closely related to the modern history of family and, particularly, with how childhood is understood.

The emergence of the concept of ‘parenting’ indicates a preoccupation with relationships and bonds between parents and children, typically depicted as uneasy and parents as incompetent carers (e.g., Smith 2010; Lee 2014a). These assumptions about parents as incompetent or unreliable carers of their children lie at the centre of anxiety about parenting. However, anxiety about parenting did not remain within the discourse; instead, parenting-related anxiety materialised in different kinds of parenting guidance, re-education and support programmes aimed at promoting good parenting in different parts of Europe (e.g., Gillies 2011; Daly 2013a; Macvarish 2014, Sundsbø 2018a; Widding 2018). Likewise, in Finland, parenting-related anxiety became a concrete focus within multiple projects aimed at supporting



parenting, 310 of which I examine in this study by analysing the diverse management documents they produced. These projects, which I call *family support projects*, were implemented between 2000 and 2010. My curiosity about parenting could be crystallised in confusion about whether something was wrong in parents' childrearing capacities. I also sought to determine if our requirements, standards and connotations related to 'parenthood' and the 'socialisation of children' have changed along with the intense invocation of parenting.

## 1.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study was motivated by questions surrounding anxiety and parenting. In my research, 'parenting' is not taken as self-evident, but something needing scrutiny in order to understand one of the primary questions raised in this study. Specifically, I examine what is supported when parenting is supported. This line of thinking also inspired other scholars, although their focus typically fell on *support* for parenting (e.g., Daly 2013a & 2015; Faricloth et al. 2013a; Lee et al. 2014; Martin 2015; Sundsbø 2018b). In addition to anxiety and support, my curiosity targeted parenting *per se*—that is, how parenting is understood in family support projects and how it could be conceptualised and studied from the sociological point of view. Indeed, parenting denotes the social relationship between a parent and a child, whereas parenting support brings to mind the policing of parenting. In this study, I examine both aspects. For these purposes, I address and scrutinise the following questions:

- How and why did parenting support become such an important element within family policy in early twenty-first century Finland?
- How is parenting understood in family support projects? What is supported when parenting is supported?
- How is parenting support conducted within family support projects?
- What is the role of the parenting experts and expertise in parenting support?

I examine these questions placing different degrees of emphasis within sub-studies I through IV. The question about how and why parenting support became an important element within family policy in Finland is examined

specifically in sub-study I and sub-study III. Furthermore, questions about parenting experts and expertise sub-studies II and III, although parenting expertise is also touched up within other sub-studies (I and IV). In sub-study II, the question about the conduct of parenting is examined within the reference to early interventionist parenting support. The most important question raised in this study—*What is supported when parenting is supported?*—is scrutinised carefully in sub-studies II and IV.

## **1.2 OUTLINE OF THE SUMMARY**

This study is summarised here and the four sub-studies are briefly presented in Chapter 5. Each manuscript is also attached in its entirety following this dissertation summary. In the next chapter, I frame parenting and parenting support historically and place them along a continuum of the long history of family, parenthood and childrearing. The historical context is important, as illustrated by Gillies and Edwards (2013) in their examination of the differences between parenting in the 1960s and the 2010s in Britain. For instance, what was once considered standard parenting practice in the 1960s would currently be considered neglect. An historical contextualisation helps us consider the need for parenting support confined to time, space and culture. Furthermore, in Chapter 2, I also conceptualise ‘parenting’ as a unique concept containing new connotations important to carefully delineate. At the end of Chapter 2, I discuss parenting support and the politics of parenting in Finland and elsewhere in Europe. In Chapter 3, I introduce the theoretical design of the study. Subsequently, I present the data—that is, the family support projects—as well as the methodological principles I applied to this study and discuss the analysis of the documents. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the primary results from sub-studies I to IV, followed by Chapter 6, where I synthesise and discuss those results in relation to theoretical considerations. In Chapter 7, I conclude these results and present implications for sociological research, in particular, how the socialisation of children could be further studied and utilised in sociological family research.

## 2 THE LONG HISTORY OF CHILDREARING – THE SHORT HISTORY OF PARENTING

In order to understand the recent anxiety surrounding parenting, it is important to outline some preliminary understandings about the history of the family, specifically the history of childhood. Namely, concern regarding the socialisation of the next generation is not a recent phenomenon. Indeed, concern about the upbringing of children was discussed in early twentieth century Finland. This concern is well-illustrated in the extract below, taken from an invitation to the founding meeting for a new association named the Home Upbringing Association written in 1907. The Home Upbringing Association is a predecessor to the contemporary organisation, the Finnish Parents League, which is reasonably influential in the sphere of non-governmental organisations in promoting the wellbeing of families with children. In the extract below, concern is expressed regarding how children are raised at home, and how childrearing should be on par with the upbringing and the education provided by schools. Furthermore, the school and the home are presented as separate social institutions, yet firmly tied together by the common purpose of upbringing children:

Upbringing is eternal and the foremost obligation and duty of parents, whereas teachers at the school are always and only their professional partners. And no matter how successful schoolwork is, it always requires support from the home, because even the finest lesson loses its message if the spirit and mode of upbringing in the home is not in harmony with the lesson. This is a matter, which unfortunately is so very rarely conceived. There are too high expectations for the school, and low expectations for the home. To claim that we have neglected home upbringing is not an exaggeration at all, albeit there are parents who have a burning desire to do all they can for this matter (Extract from an invitation to the founding meeting of the Home Upbringing Association of Finland, Autumn 1907, cited in Parjo 2003, p. 1, translation E. Sihvonen).

At that time, however, societal interest in the family as well as the upbringing of children were firmly associated with population policy objectives, which were important for the burgeoning formation of a new nation. Social support and guidance for parents were particularly and explicitly targeted to

working class mothers as charity from middle- and upper-class women who volunteered under the aegis of new associations and popular movements (Pulma & Turpeinen 1987; Markkola 1994; Satka 1994; Kuronen 1999). Concern was primarily targeted at the high infant mortality rates, associated with issues such as poor home hygiene and poor nutrition (Helén 1997; Ojakangas 1997; Nätkin & Vuori 2007; Yesilova 2009).

The extract above from the Home Upbringing Association's document was published at a time when understanding children, their care and education was also gradually established based on new scientific knowledge, which extended to within homes as well. In that extract, a school and a home are both listed as institutions responsible for the upbringing of children. Moreover, the home is specifically highlighted as an important institution in harmonising and spreading the school's educational and civic efforts.

However, it took nearly a century until 'parenting' *per se* became problematised. In particular, the emergence of 'parenting' as an important factor for child wellbeing intertwines with the long history of the family and, specifically, with how childhood is understood in different societal and cultural circumstances. This study outlines, therefore, that it was only after gradually redefining family, childhood and parenthood in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that 'parenting' as a specific task evolved to become understood as requiring particular skills and was regarded as a problem requiring a solution (also Lee 2014a). In what follows, the history of childhood and childrearing is discussed and linked to the process of modernisation and civilisation of manners (Elias 1939/1978). Furthermore, I apply the framework of social characters available for parents in childrearing issues within different societal phases (Riesman 1961/2001).

## **2.1 PARENTHOOD: FROM INVISIBLE TO VISIBLE**

Some claim that concern about the family is a phenomenon commonly associated with modern times, although divisions and clearly defined lines between the late Middle Ages, the early modern and the modern period have been disputed (Stacey 1997, p. 7). However, differences regarding how the family, childhood and parenthood have been understood exist regarding different social circumstances and different periods. I briefly outline these here.

Gillis (1997) states that at the time of pre-modernity societies were fighting high birth and mortality rates with scarce resources, which undoubtedly moulded forms of care and parenthood (Gillis 1997, p. 7), observations highlighted by many other historians (e.g., Hardyment 1983, p. 7; Gélis 2001). Some scholars even argued that childhood did not exist before modernity, and that during pre-modernity parents only scarcely addressed a strong attachment towards their children (Ariès 1966). Although Ariès's study accurately portrays the origin of modern childhood, many scholars have outlined the parent–child relationship in pre-modernity not as unsentimental as Ariès presented (e.g., deMausse 1976; Gies & Gies 1987; Gélis 2001). For example, attitudes towards infant and child mortality might seem pragmatic from the point of view of the contemporary cultural environment. But, we cannot draw conclusions from an apparently pragmatic orientation, for example, towards death on the quality of the parent–child relationship. The French poet Scevole de Sainte Marthe describes the death of a child and the distressing sorrow it brings in his didactic poem from the 1500s as an illustration of the profound feelings parents must have felt towards their children:

Of all misfortunes incident to humanity, none is so distressing to a feeling mind as the death of children. It is an affliction which preys upon the mind and increases with time. The longer time the sufferer has to reflect upon his loss, the more he thinks what his son, or daughter, might have been...It is the only evil in life for which nature has not provided a remedy (Sainte Marthe 1585, translation H. Tytler 1797, ref. Hardyment 1983, p. 8).

In the pre-modern era, childrearing mostly rested upon religious doctrine(s) in Europe. Advice literature for families became common in all parts of Protestant and Catholic Europe following the Reformation. Despite differences between denominations, matters concerning childrearing did not differ on any essential points in such advice books (Lidman 2019). Childrearing was based on the original sin doctrine, whereby children were born evil and incomplete, and their inevitable tendencies towards evil must be guided towards good through parental discipline (e.g., deMausse 1976, p. 10; Tähtinen 1992, p. 95; Häggman 1994, pp. 141–143; Ojakangas 1997, pp. 53–54).

In general, the demands of childrearing duties among parents differed tremendously from the duties of parents nowadays. Distinctions also existed in the social order of the family prescribed by the patriarchal social order. Specifically, this type of social order relied on the long judicial tradition

of *Patria Potestas*—that is, a household ruled by the father’s authority.<sup>2</sup> According to Allen (2005, p. 44), by 1890, a new legal doctrine took its first steps, which included the rights of the child (see, also, Harrikari 2019) along with the rights of women. Yet, the road to more equitable childcare responsibilities between mothers and fathers has been long in Western countries, including the Nordic countries (e.g., Haavio-Mannila 1968; Eydal & Roostgaard 2015; Julkunen 2010; Salmi & Närvi 2017).

In taking advantage of Riesman’s (1961/2001) viewpoint regarding the different types of social characters, I focus on the orientations of parents’ towards their children in various societal and cultural circumstances. Through social characters, Riesman (1961/2001, p. 6) denotes historically conditioned ‘sets’, or ideal types, for which he identified three different kinds: tradition-directed, inner-directed and other-direct social characters. Whilst Riesman considers social characters as abstractions, which may appear concurrently during the same period, he also describes character types as socially and historically shaped conditions which people draw upon to relate to others and the world around them. Therefore, social characters may be employed to describe the typical social characters of parents, for example, in the pre-modern, modern and late-modern ages. DeMause (1976) has a rather similar idea in his proposal of the ‘psychogenic theory of history’ and parent–child interactions, wherein he argues that the evolution of parent–child relations constitutes the central force and source for change in history.

Accordingly, through the framework of social characters introduced by Riesman, parenthood (as well as childhood) in the pre-modern period could be described as tradition-directed, for which the actions and relationships were guided through continuity and shared traditions, rituals, routines and religion. A range of conscious choices appears to shape her destiny to only a limited extent, and, therefore, the need for an individualised type of character also appears minimal (Riesman 1961/2001, pp. 11–12, 39–40). Whilst the parent–child relationship was not insignificant or insensitive, as already discussed above, parents’ behaviour towards their children, the parent–child relationship, was also not under a microscope. Furthermore, as Riesman describes children were socialised into the adult world through childrearing

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2 As fascinating as the history of the family is, scrutinising the many hundreds of years of pre-modern history wholeheartedly lies beyond the scope of this study. Here, I contend myself to briefly summarise that relations between children and their parents were surrounded by very different societal circumstances compared to contemporary Western societies, which also affected the parent–child relationship.

or models of imitation and generalised in terms of the adult group as a whole rather than confined to the parents (Riesman 1961/2001, p. 40). In this way, parenthood represents a particular relationship, sometimes perhaps even something unique for children's development, yet remaining largely 'invisible'.

For a long time, religion provided a tradition, continuum and basis for the socialisation of the next generation. As an exception to the childrearing expertise founded upon religion, we can turn to the work of Erasmus Rotterdam, for example, who greatly influenced the diffusion of knowledge on manners to a wider awareness at the time (Elias 1938/1978, p. 168; Lidman 2019). However, in the familial advice literature by Erasmus Rotterdam, childcare and interaction with a child were not highly valued, and remained the primary tasks of those in lower hierarchical positions in a family ruled by a male head of household (Hays 1996; Allen 2005; Lidman 2019). Indeed, unlike childbearing, childrearing did not bring honour or a higher status to women, and childcare, including nursing and breastfeeding, was often carried out by (female) servants and wet-nurses if available (Hays 1996, p. 23).

The advice literature published during the Enlightenment, such as Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Émile, or on Education*, approached a child from a new frame of reference leading to a redefinition of childhood (Rousseau 1862/1933). Religion was sidelined by nature and reason—that is, natural laws and the power of reason (Marvick 1976; Hardyment 1983, 14; Ojakangas 1997). For Rousseau, children were nobly savage, born natural, free and innocent. He encouraged mothers to allow their babies to play freely on the ground rather than using a common manner to swaddle them in restrictive clothing. In a way, Rousseau was critical towards 'active' civilization. According to Rousseau, a new-born child is pure and innocent, and adult interference would only damage the natural being of children (Rousseau 1762/1933). Paradoxically, this new kind of orientation towards children eventually gave rise to modern pedagogy, which neither relied on traditions and manners nor on mothers' own experiences, focusing instead on scientific pedagogy (Ojakangas 1997, pp. 11–13).

Whilst many studies of modern childrearing experts began as early as the 1700s, the real change in understanding new childrearing practices, including a new understanding of the parent–child relationship, occurred in the 1800s (Robertson 1976; Hardyment 1983; Hays 1996). This was a period of industrialisation, urbanisation, population growth and the problem of social order, whereby efforts to delineate the world of the adult appeared to form that of the child (Ariès 1966; Lee 2014b, pp. 53–54). Indeed, central to the

understanding of modern childhood is the physical removal of children from labour to school, which renders essential the distinction between childhood and adulthood (Faircloth 2014, p. 40). As outlined at the beginning of this section, the explosion of societal concern for the family and childrearing is often linked to the destiny of the state, or in the Finnish case, the formation of a new nation in the early twentieth century.

Based on historical behavioural and advice literature, Elias (1938/1978) describes in his general theory of civilising processes how human behaviour and personality structures are intertwined with broader societal processes. Such theorising is reminiscent of Riesman's understanding of social characters as historically and socially shaped conditions. According to Elias (1938/1978), the cultivation of manners, normative monitoring and the self-regulation of people's manners increased in early modernity. Along with redefining childhood, parenthood was also redefined as a specific social relationship for children's wellbeing. In this way, parenthood serves as a particular and important social relationship in children's lives and becomes 'visible' in a new way.

This new kind of parenthood visibility could also be interpreted using Riesman's second social character, namely, the inner-directed character. According to Riesman (1961/2001) the inner-directed type of parent becomes more aware of the existence of competing traditions, customs and paths of life, and, therefore, possesses more flexibility in adapting to the ever-changing requirements of a more open society. However, because traditions no longer delineate the inner-directed character's social being-ness, a new psychological mechanism is introduced, a kind of 'psychological gyroscope' according to Riesman, which inner-directed parents 'install' during the early socialisation of their child and 'set it going' (Riesman 1961/2001, pp. 13–16, 40–45, *cf.* deMausse 1976, p. 52). Whilst 'set it going' sounds easy, it actually requires a strict upbringing and the education of children, so that they internalise the conscious character training, self-observation and regulation occurring under the intensive and undivided scrutiny and control of parents (Riesman 1961/2001, p. 44). These internalised manners developed during childhood are central to Elias' civilising process, since it works towards the goal of regulatory behaviour that begins early (Elias 1938/1978, p. 140). The self-regulated behaviour embraced during the civilising process and Riesman's inner-directed character type closely resemble each another. The essential issue from the point of view of this study is that parenthood becomes visible in a completely new way. That is, the social bond between a child and a parent becomes highly significant in relation to the social development of children.



Interestingly, as the mother's role in childrearing began to take on new importance particularly among middle-class families in the early 1800s towards the end of the century, a mother's instincts, however, were no longer considered sufficient to ensure proper childrearing. A mother's instincts became secondary to science (Hays 1996, pp. 30, 39; Ojakangas 1997, pp. 13–14; Lee 2014b, p. 55). Still, middle-class women who were active in many pedagogically popular movements did not actually disfavour this shift. As Hays (1996) put it: 'It did after all promise to elevate their child-rearing and domestic duties to the status of a scientific profession' (Hays 1996, p. 43, see, also, Donzelot 1979, pp. 57–58). Indeed, a curious coexistence regarding the questioning of certain parental practices emerged, consisting of upholding the home, family life and motherhood (Lee 2014b, p. 59). Questioning parental practices based on new beliefs allowed for the possibility of discovering scientific, technical, expert-guided and state-enforced solutions to various kinds of social ills, including the social ills related to family life (Hays 1996, p. 41; Ojakangas 1997).

But, what were these new solutions in relation to childrearing and family life? As stated at the beginning of this section, concern first focused on household hygiene, infant feeding and physical care practices (Reiger 1985; Markkola 1994; Kuronen 1999, pp. 70–72). However, soon after the 1920s, concern emerged regarding the psychological vulnerability of infancy, at least in the United States and the United Kingdom (Faircloth 2014, p. 45). Attention focused on the 'inner world' of the child's mind, which garnered a growing interest (Lee 2014b, p. 59). Lupton and Barclay highlighted that in the late nineteenth century, advice on childrearing was directed to self-discipline and self-control, qualities that became increasingly important in the wake of industrialisation (Lupton and Barclay 1997, p. 39), resembling the characteristics that Riesman linked to the inner-directed social type.

Indeed, during and after World War II psychological and cognitive child development theorists, such as British psychiatrist John Bowlby, published their studies of childhood, in which childhood experiences were viewed as affecting child development and the overall outcomes in children's future lives (Faircloth 2014, p. 43; *cf.* Rose 1999a, p. 217; Rose 1999b, p. 133). Central to such studies stood the growing preoccupation with the problem of attachment and maternal deprivation, which specifically highlighted early maternal bonding and a continuous, loving relationship with the mother and the mother's constant presence as the foundation for lifelong mental health of a child (Faircloth 2014, p. 43; Lee 2014b, p. 60). Bowlby's theory

of attachment also became widely recognised in Finland, especially given the Finnish translation of Bowlby's report prepared on behalf of the World Health Organisation (Bowlby 1957). It was claimed that psychosocial knowledge gained increasing attention and greatly influenced how parenthood was viewed in Finland (Helén 1997; Vuori 2001; Yesilova 2009). This shift towards psychological knowledge in understanding family was labelled 'a psychosocial interpretation of family', wherein 'social' primarily referred to family relations not, for example, social structures (Vuori 2001, pp. 19–20; Nätkin & Vuori 2007, p. 14).

In addition, according to Hays (1996), infancy and early childhood became the targets of concern and the stages most critical to the child's overall development at that time. In order to be a good parent, parents were obligated to want, to acquire and to cherish these aspects of cognitive and emotional development (Hays 1996, p. 47). By emphasising the young child's need for nurturing and intimacy as preconditions for normal psychological development, Bowlby is widely seen as one of the founding figures in the shift towards 'child centredness', which is now seen as a foundation of good parenting (e.g., Lee 2014b, p. 61). Indeed, parenthood was not only becoming more 'visible', but gradually included thoroughly new ideas, which eventually lead to the introduction of a new concept of 'parenting'.

Before proceeding to the emergence of 'parenting' as a new concept related to family life, I backtrack to examine the social characters introduced by Riesman. Indeed, there is still one more social character, the other-directed type, which only evolved when Riesman published his study in 1960. For the other-directed social character, the gyroscope is not sufficiently flexible and a new psychological mechanism is called for (Riesman 1961/2001, p. 18). This is what Riesman calls 'abundance psychology', meaning that that the only thing parents can do is equip their child to do their best. Riesman explains that what is best is not within their parents' control, but in the hands of the school, the peer-group and the media along with the success of the parents' themselves. The peer group and the opinions of contemporaries become the most important guiding principles for the other-directed social character (Riesman 1961/2001, p. 21). These considerations from Riesman regarding social characters provide an ingenious vantage point from which to reflect upon the recent emphasis on parenting. However, the other-directed social character type remains quite ambiguous in Riesman's study. Here, I aim to further develop this notion about the social character of contemporary parenthood with the help of some theoretical perspectives introduced later

in this study. However, we must first discuss the emergence of ‘parenting’ as a new concept in discussions about family.

## **2.2 A SHORT HISTORY OF PARENTING: A BATTLE BETWEEN CONCEPTS**

Ian Hacking writes, ‘We live with and through a welter of conceptions that are at once moral, human, social and personal, but there are, at any time, few fundamental concepts that we can watch being made and moulded before our very eyes’ (Hacking 1991, p. 286). Within a few decades, parenting—if not a fundamental concept of our time, one that is certainly conspicuously visible in discussions about family and family policy—has been reshaped and reformulated with new meanings and connotations. Studies from across Europe support such observations. Discussions of ‘parenting’ have increased, indicating the word itself is not simply a new term, but containing some new connotations important to observe (Ramaekers & Suissa 2011; Daly 2013a; Faircloth et al. 2013a; Lee et al. 2014; Sundsbø & Sihvonen 2018). Furthermore, other discussions have focused on parenting as denoting a more active understanding of what parents actually do (Morgan 2011, p. 68) or on parenting that shifts away from intimate family relations towards responsibility loaded with heavy moral and practical consequences (Gillies 2011). However, Daly (2013a, p. 170) suggested that ‘parenting support’ represents an umbrella term for recent concern about the family and a neologism created in the last 15 years (*cf.* Lee 2014a, p. 6; Littmarck et al. 2018, p. 496).

Naming things represents an essential part of social life, allowing us to communicate and make sense of the world. As indicated in the previous section, new connotations for social phenomena, such as how parents behave with their children, might in certain cultural contexts render social relationships visible in a new way. Adapting a new word such as parenting is most likely indicative of some change in one’s social life. It is not, however, a unidirectional influence, but; concepts or language more generally once introduced also affect how social life is understood and subsequently lead to an adaptation to that understanding. This is basically how social life is interpreted within the framework of social constructionism, a useful framework in order to understand a ‘turn to parenting’ (e.g., Berger & Luckman 1966; Hacking 1999; Lee et al. 2014). Using the constructionist framework, human reality stands as a dialectical process between structural realities and the

human enterprise of constructing reality (Berger & Luckman 1966, p. 209). The crucial phenomenon under scrutiny here—namely, parenting—is closely intertwined with the development and rethinking of two particular concepts: childrearing and parenthood. These two concepts are significant here since they spotlight two fundamental dimensions of the parent–child relationship. Specifically, childrearing relates to the socialisation practices of children, whereas parenthood refers to the social relationship between a parent and a child. Here, I argue that ‘parenting’ absorbs substance from childrearing and parenthood as a relationship, whilst simultaneously creating something new.

One of the most illuminating examples of the particularity of parenting as a concept lies in considering the concept in relation to childrearing. Walter Benjamin states that ‘[O]nly the meeting of two different street names makes for the magic of the “corner”’ (Benjamin & Tiedeman 1999). In this regard, I focus on the concepts ‘childrearing’ and ‘parenting’ as the names given to phenomena that at first glance seem to denote the same thing, ‘taking care of children’ (the same street). However, a closer examination indicates that a distinction (the corner) exists, which divides them into separate entities with different meanings. Other scholars have also identified this distinction between the concept of childrearing and parenting (e.g., Daly 2013a; Faircloth et al. 2013b; Lee 2014a). Lee (2014a), for example, argues that a distinct and specific terminology is now used to discuss and problematise what parents do. This is most clearly reflected in the way in which raising children is now called ‘parenting’. Thus, parenting is certainly not just another term for bringing up children.

This distinction emerges clearly if we carefully consider the word ‘childrearing’. ‘Childrearing’ is something that was and continues to be conducted by parents, along with grandparents, siblings and other kin members as well as teachers, day-care workers, football coaches, neighbours, other parents and adults in a community. In contrast, ‘parenting’ is an undivided task, which only parents conduct. Placing the term within the sociological nomenclature, childrearing identifies the target as children, but leaves the subjects in the plural as an open question and unidentified. Yet, parenting identifies subjects straightforwardly and undeniably as parents. Therefore, as Faircloth (2014, p. 36) explains, replacing childrearing with parenting renders childrearing a highly privatised rather than generational responsibility. Similarly, Lee (2014a, pp. 3–4) argues that the task of shaping and developing the next generation has been thought of and fetishised as ‘parenting’.

All things considered, parenting is not a neutral concept that describes what parents do as they raise their children (Lee 2014a, p. 9). Daly (2015) identified three different aspects regarding how childrearing differs from parenting. First, parenting is a normative concept containing the idea of bad or good behaviours on the part of parents. Second, parenting highlights 'doing' the parental role. Third, parenting appears to involve skills that can be taught and learned within a service setting (Daly 2015, p. 162). Throughout these discussions, emphasis is placed on the 'conduct of parents', which I will discuss more thoroughly in what follows.

Faircloth et al. (2013b, p. 1) stated: 'Parenting could be seen as a particular historically and socially situated form of childrearing, a product of a late twentieth century ideological shift around family, kinship, risk and social morality.' This ideological shift can be further scrutinised by carefully juxtaposing concepts of parenting and a parent or parenthood. Moreover, as Lee (2014a, p. 9) states, the transformation of the noun 'parent' into the verb 'parenting' has taken place not only through a socio-cultural process centring on the belief that parenting is a highly important, but also as a problematic sphere of social life. The most important difference between the two concepts is how 'parenting' explicitly signifies the parent and their behaviour (Furedi 2002, p. 197; Lee 2014a, p. 7), whereas parenthood denotes an intimate family relationship. Therefore, one can state that parenting is more than just 'a parenthood,' a kin relationship bonding a parent and a child together. Furthermore, parenting is an activity, described in this study as 'the conduct of parenting'.

According to Lee (2014a), the verb 'to parent' as well as 'parenting' are rather recent arrivals in the English language (see also Smith 2010, p. 360). Faircloth et al. (2013b, p. 1) tracked the emergence of the word 'parenting', situating its origin to the 1950s in the language used in specific fields, particularly in psychology and amongst self-help practitioners in the United States. From there, it was adopted and popularised into everyday language in the United Kingdom, but also in other parts of Europe (e.g., Ramaekers & Suissa 2012). An increasing focus on parenting is well-documented in an examination of books about 'parenting', the number of which has constantly and rapidly increased following the mid-1970s (Lee 2014a, pp. 4–5).

However, it is important to note how concepts have also changed beyond the Anglophone world. For example, in Norwegian, the concept used to refer to parenting support in research is actually 'parental guidance' (*foreldrev-eilednig*), a well-established part of family support programmes (Sundsbo 2018b, p. 515). In addition, Sweden has a long history of parental guidance

or ‘parental education’ (*föräldrautbildning*) as a part of family support and policy. However, Littmarck et al. (2018) identified a recent change to ‘parenting support’ (*förelldrastödt*) beginning in the 1990s and onward, since a new umbrella term was suggested for a wide range of support measures and concerns about family in Sweden (*cf.* Daly 2013a). However, the Swedish concept could also be translated as ‘support in parenthood’ (Littmarck et al. 2018, pp. 495–496). In addition, in French, parenting support is referred to using a new noun *parentalité*, which also denotes parenthood (Martin 2016, p. 4). In Finnish, the concept that denotes parenting support (*vanhemmuuden tukeminen*) is a new concept specifically used in public and political debates about family support, which will be carefully described in this study. Verbatim translation more closely resembles ‘support in parenthood’ as ‘parenting support’, similar to the terms used in Norwegian, Swedish and French.<sup>3</sup> However, a crucial reason for using the concept ‘parenting support’ in this study reflects the recent increased attention on this phenomenon in Finland. Specifically, according to the dictionary of the Institute for the Language of Finland, *vanhemmuus* refers to ‘being a parent’. However, as already discussed in relation to ‘disappeared parenthood’, in this context, parenthood or being a parent does not refer specifically to a kin relationship: disappearance is not, obviously, targeted to a *de facto* familial, social relationship, but to how ‘being a parent’ is conducted. According to many scholars, a distinctive attribute of the concept of ‘parenting’ is to an explicit focus on the parent and their behaviour (Faircloth et al. 2013b; Daly 2013b; Lee 2014a). Therefore, regardless of the different nuances in the terminology used in different countries, a common denominator for all versions of ‘parenting’ is the increased focus on the conduct and behaviour of parents and how parents are actively and consciously related to their children.

## **2.3 PARENTING SUPPORT AND THE POLITICS OF PARENTING**

The politicisation of parenting means that parenting support is considered a discrete area of family policy, a trend reflected in most parts of Europe

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3 Jokinen (1996) introduced the term ‘äitiminien’ in the sociological research about mothering. But, the concept has not been widely used in public discussions about what being a mother means.

(Daly 2013a; Macvarish 2014; Sundsbø 2018b; Widding 2018). In this research, I consider the politicisation of parenting as a continuum within the politicisation of family (*cf.* Donzelot 1979; Yesilova 2009). Donzelot (1979, p. 13) describes how the state in the eighteenth century became more and more interested in means to govern social relations. Furthermore, Yesilova (2009, p. 36) describes the emergence and politicisation of the nuclear family in twentieth century Finland as paradoxically containing the simultaneous privatisation of ‘the family’ as well as the introduction of the family as a target of inevitable public interventions.

This increased attention to parenting within family policy has been called a ‘turn to parenting’ (Daly 2013a) or a ‘shift towards parenting’ (Fairloth & Murray 2013). Political attention on parenting means a particular form of politics related to parent–child relationships, in which the nucleus lies on the wellbeing of those children who are specifically affected by this relationship as a key explanatory factor for their wellbeing and their future success in life. Many scholars have pointed out how parenting support and the politics of parenting is validated by a ‘parental determinism’—that is, a parent’s behaviour or the absence of particular parenting skills—which strongly determines children’s future lives and causes multiple childhood dysfunctions (Furedi 2002, pp. 45, 58; Furedi 2014; Lee 2014a). Furthermore, Macvarish (2014) found that, for example, in the United Kingdom’s family policy, good parenting was previously considered a protective factor against social disadvantage. However, over time, claims have become more strongly deterministic, arguing that poor parenting actively causes a disadvantage (Macvarish 2014, p. 92). Paradoxically, parents are not only the source of but also the solution to myriad social problems, rendering the position of parents rather ambivalent. According to Furedi (2014), this transformation of parenting into a self-contained cause as well as a solution to childhood dysfunctions has led to its politicisation.

I find two aspects of the politicisation of parenting rather significant. First, in parental determinism, the children’s wellbeing relates to the parent–child relationship, overshadowing, for example, social structures affecting family life. As Fairloth et al. (2013a, p. 5) noted, ‘Where poverty once featured as a major policy concern in its own right, this problem is now often discussed in contrast as a “risk factor” for the real problem, poor parenting.’ Second, simultaneously with the politicisation of parenting, changes have taken place in terms of how children and youth are governed (e.g., Parton 2006; Harrikari 2008). According to Parton (2006), instead of focusing on families,

interventions are now directed at children or parents. In Finland, Harrikari (2008) found that the early 1990s were a watershed moment between different periods in child politics, reflecting how children, parents and families were discussed in political arenas. In short, from the 1970s to the 1990s, child and family politics aimed to build and then strengthen state welfare services as well as develop income transfers for families and investments in education. Harrikari labelled the period from 1970 to 1979 in child and family politics as ‘the period of social family politics and the building of the welfare state’. The period from 1979 to 1990 was labelled ‘the time of structural education politics and the strengthening of the welfare state’. A deep economic recession in the early 1990s changed the discourse regarding how children, parents and families were discussed in politics. After a confusing time due to the economic recession in the 1990s, child and family politics were discussed within the framework of increasing concern and as a subject for maintaining order (Harrikari 2008, pp. 56–59; *cf.* Littmarck et al. 2018).

## **2.4 PARENTING POLICIES IN FINLAND AND OTHER NORDIC COUNTRIES**

Some differences exist regarding how family-related state interventions and guidance in family life are viewed in English-speaking countries vis-à-vis the Nordic countries, which are important to delineate here. According to Kuronen and Lahtinen (2011, pp. 68–69), in the Nordic countries, comprehensive family support, including state interventions, are often, although not uniformly, viewed as positive and supportive services. Yet, British researchers, for example, are more often critical and sensitive to state interventions into family life, which are often defined by control and surveillance. These differences might reflect different family policy and welfare systems.

Indeed, when compared internationally, Finland and other Nordic countries are often viewed as representing a particular tradition of the welfare state referred to as the Nordic Welfare Model. In the literature, these particularities of the Nordic welfare state support for families are often characterised by universalism, egalitarianism, comprehensiveness and gender equality (e.g., Ellingsæter & Leira 2006; Eydal & Kröger 2011; Vidje 2013). The introduction of ‘parenting support’ in the Nordic countries is, therefore, embodied in the rather long tradition of state-regulated control and services (Lundqvist 2015; see, also, Sundsbø 2018; Sundsø & Sihvonen 2018).



Although support for families as well as active interventions, guidance and education by family experts are not new in Finland (Jallinoja 2006; Vuori 2007; Nätkin & Vuori 2007; Yesilova 2009), parenting support seems to represent a new method important to discussions given recent changes to the Finnish welfare state. According to previous studies (Forsberg & Kröger 2011), strong global pressure has recommended reinterpreting welfare models and lower tax rates, and the Nordic welfare states is not immune to such changes (*cf.* Littmarck et al. 2018).

Indeed, the Finnish welfare state encountered major difficulties due to a deep economic recession in the early 1990s, manifested in serious cutbacks which hit family services hard and resulted in increasing rates of poverty amongst families with young children (Bardy et al. 2001; Julkunen 2006). In many ways, the 1990s represented a turning point for more market-orientated state policies, called ‘a paradigm shift (Heiskala & Luhtakallio 2006, also *cf.* Pierson 2001; Julkunen 2006; Rantala & Sulkunen 2006b). This paradigm shift was mirrored in family services and policies as well. Although many public provisions for families diminished, an increasing allocation of resources expanded support for new types of family services, such as early intervention, early support programmes and parenting support (Satka 2009; Kuronen & Lahtinen 2011). Through this viewpoint, we can state that the economic recession and cutbacks in the 1990s coincided with a shift to a neoliberal rhetoric, a shift simultaneously witnessed in Sweden (*cf.* Littmarck et al. 2018, pp. 495–496).

Concurrently, with that ‘paradigm shift’ in early twenty-first century Finnish state policy, Jallinoja (2006) identified family-related social unrest, which Jallinoja termed ‘a familistic turn’. According to Jallinoja, those actors taking part in creating a familistic turn in public debates incorporated some modern features, such as the freedom to choose, into discussions about the importance of family, thus popularising that debate (Jallinoja 2006, pp. 264–269). These two changes, the ‘paradigm shift’ in state policy (Heiskala & Luhtakallio 2006) and ‘the familistic turn’ (Jallinoja 2006) in debates about family, contributed to the emergence of parenting as a topical issue within family policy in Finland. This in turn was incorporated as an important theme in multiple family support projects, 310 of which I analyse in this study.

In order to understand the roots of parenting support, I find two particular aspects highly important and worth highlighting within this paradigm shift. These aspects are the responsabilisation of citizens and the innovativeness

of welfare practices. Julkunen (2006) identifies a particular discourse of the responsabilisation of families, which carries implications for how the roles of the state and the family have been reinterpreted. One implication includes a decrease in the normative good life policy to one's own responsibilities within social policy (Sulkunen 2006; also *cf.* Heiskala & Luhtakallio 2006). Second, the introduction of the innovativeness as part of embracing new public management into the field of welfare policy and services spurred the formation of development projects (Rantala & Sulkunen 2006a), including the numerous family support projects studied in this dissertation.

## **2.5 A TURN TO PARENTING IN FINLAND**

Now, after examining the roots of family policy and the paradigm shift in welfare policy in Finland, we must consider how parenting has become such a vital phenomenon to describe family life in the early twenty-first century in Finland. It is necessary to describe the emergence of parenting in discussions about family. Investigations of contemporary documents reflecting family policy, such as newspaper articles and political documents, allow for a better understanding of the emergence of 'parenting'. In doing so, I find philosopher Ian Hacking's (1986, 1991, 1997) theory about the emergence of concepts useful (see sub-study I).

Hacking focuses on the philosophical history, in particular, on language and language formation as well as changes in classifications. He employed such an understanding on, for example, the evolution of the concept of 'child abuse' and how it has come to denote various kinds of child neglect (*cf.* Hacking 1991; 1997). For the purpose this study—to understand the manifestation of 'parenting' in discussions of family and the welfare of children and youth—Hacking's theories regarding the emergence of concepts is highly valuable.

Hacking identified four different qualities that make a certain classification or concept at hand interesting from the point of view of emerging concepts: topicality, significance, scientific dimension and morality (*cf.* Ylikoski 2003). Therefore, in order to investigate the moulding of a classification, a concept needs to be topical and a phenomenon under scrutiny needs to be the target of intense public attention. Furthermore, a concept must strongly affect social interaction, legislation and people's lives in general. For Hacking, the scientific dimension of a classification indicates the need for formulation from experts and based on expertise, which define, explain

and develop a phenomenon. Finally, a phenomenon needs to carry exquisite moral connotations (Hacking 1991; Hacking 1997; Ylikoski 2003, p. 19).

By applying Hacking’s thoughts regarding the emergence of concepts, the visibility and *topicality* (Hacking 1997; Ylikoski 2003) of the concept of parenting is illustrated through the results of searches I carried out in the electronic archives of the *Helsingin Sanomat*, the leading newspaper in Finland. The electronic archive of the *Helsingin Sanomat* houses newspaper articles published since 1990. The purpose of investigating newspaper articles was to trace the frequency of the appearance of ‘parenting’ (*vanhemmuus*<sup>4</sup>) in that newspaper. Altogether, between 1990 and 2014, 1739 different newspaper articles mentioned ‘parenting’ in their texts. The results indicate that an enormous increase occurred in the adoption of ‘parenting’ in public discussions after 1990s. According to my search, parenting was mentioned on average in 14 newspaper articles *per annum* between 1990 and 1993 increasing to an average of 25 newspaper articles *per annum* between 1993 and 1995. However, after 1999, the use of the concept of parenting increased substantially, and was mentioned on average in 92 newspaper articles *per annum* between 1999 and 2001. Indeed, after 1999, the use of the concept nearly tripled by 2014 (Figure 1).

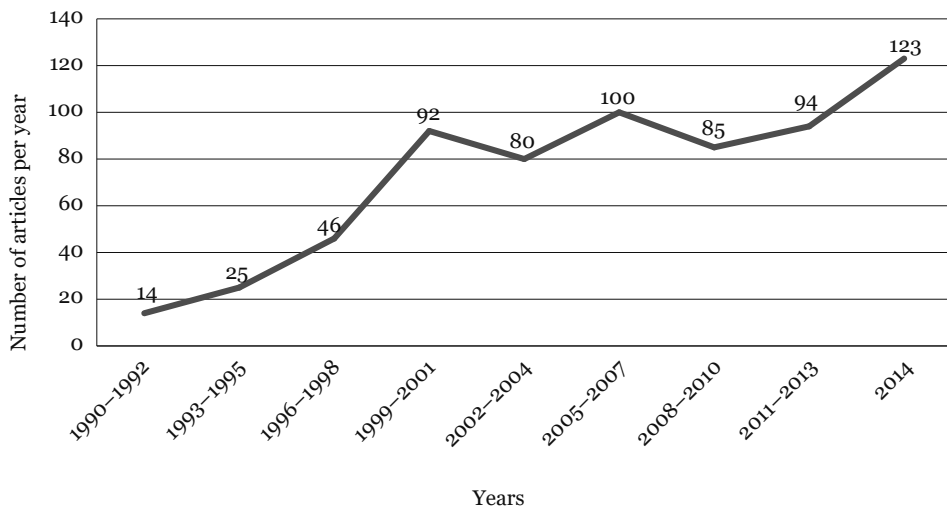


Figure 1. Frequency of ‘parenting’ mentions in newspaper articles in the *Helsingin Sanomat* 1990–2014.

4 The searches were conducted by using the truncation method. The Finnish root word used in this search was *vanhemmuu\** (parenting / parenthood).

Simultaneous with the increased attention to ‘parenting’ in public discussions, the concept was adopted in political debates and documents, which remarkably highlight the *significance* of the phenomenon within family politics and legislation (*cf.* Hacking 1997; Ylikoski 2003). Thus, I examined Finnish government platforms representing the government’s primary objectives. In total, 74 different coalition governments and government platforms have existed since Finland’s independence in 1917. Whilst some of governments endured for only a short period of time in circumstances such as the resignation of a prime minister, most of the platforms released a comprehensive plan related to their political ambitions.

According to an examination of government documents, political objectives related to ‘parenting support’ first appeared in a government platform in 1999 in Finland, which is notably consistent with the increased visibility of the concept of parenting in the media (see Figure 1). In total, five action plans have been released since 1999, and ‘parenting support’ has appeared in each of these. Remarkably, parenting support was included in these action plans regardless of the political party controlling the government, control that has alternated between the left-wing, the centre and the right-wing (Table 5). Hence, parenting support has consolidated its position within political discourse amongst a broad spectrum of political orientations in Finland. A strong consensus seems to exist regarding the importance of parenting support amongst all parties, a finding similar to results emerging in other countries as well. In Sweden, for instance, parenting support, introduced as an umbrella concept in the 1990s, has likewise been adopted by different political parties and ideologies (Littmarck et al. 2018, pp. 498–499). Furthermore, according to Macvarish (2014), in the UK, the fundamental elements related to the politics of parenting have remained largely unchanged despite different administrations and prime ministers (see, also, Ball 2014).

Table 1. Governments establishing parenting support as a goal of family policy in Finland.

PERIOD	PARTY CONTROLLING THE GOVERNMENT	PRIME MINISTER(S) AND GOVERNMENT PLATFORMS	DISTRIBUTION OF SEATS IN THE COALITION GOVERNMENT
<b>Before 1999, there were no mentions of ‘parenting support’ in the government platforms</b>			
<b>1999–2003</b>	The Social Democratic Party	Lipponen (15 April 1999–17 April 2003)	<b>1. The Social Democratic Party (6)</b> 2. The National Coalition Party (6) 3. The Swedish People’s Party (2) 4. The Left Alliance (2) 5. The Green League (1)
<b>2003–2007</b>	The Centre Party	Jäätteenmäki (17 April 2003–24 June 2003) Vanhanen (24 June 2003–19 April 2007)*	<b>1. The Centre Party (8)</b> 2. The Social Democratic Party (8) 3. The Swedish People’s Party (2)
<b>2007–2011</b>	The Centre Party	Vanhanen (19 April 2007–22 June 2010) Kiviniemi (22 June 2010–22 June 2011)*	<b>1. The Centre Party (8)</b> 2. The National Coalition Party (8) 3. The Swedish People’s Party (2) 4. The Green Party (2)
<b>2011–2015</b>	The National Coalition Party	Katainen (22 June 2011–24 June 2014) Stubb (24 June 2014–29 May 2015)*	<b>1. The National Coalition Party (6)</b> 2. The Social Democratic Party (6) 3. The Swedish People’s Party (2) 4. The Left Alliance (2) 5. The Green League (2) 6. The Christian Democrats (1)
<b>2015–2019</b>	The Centre Party	Sipilä (29 May 2015–8 February 2019)	<b>1. The Centre Party (6)</b> 2. The National Coalition Party (4) 3. The Finns Party (4)**

\* The prime minister was nominated after resignation of the predecessor until the end of the term of the government.

\*\* The Finns Party was replaced by a new party, The Blue Reform, after internal disagreements over leadership within The Finns Party in 2017.

As a consequence of the political contribution to ‘parenting support’, the term was also adopted in the vocabulary and objectives of legal texts in Finland. This development further strengthens the significance of the concept. For

example, according to an inquiry I conducted using the electronic database of Finnish acts and decrees (FINLEX), ‘parenting support’ was recently adopted in one central act for family policy: an amendment to the Child Welfare Act. This amendment entered into effect in 2010 (Child Welfare Act Amendment 88/2010), and included ‘parenting support’ as a specific goal which considered preventative child welfare and protection:

Preventive child welfare is used to promote and safeguard the growth, development and wellbeing of children and to support parenting. Preventive child welfare includes support and special support provided in the context of, for instance, education, youth work, day care, prenatal and child health clinic services and other social and healthcare services (Child Welfare Act 88/2007, 3a§ 2 clause).

Finally, the family support projects studied in this research provided a third sphere wherein the emergence of ‘parenting support’ could be analysed. The number of development projects focusing on ‘parenting support’ was particularly notable during the first decade of the twenty-first century, exemplifying Hacking’s scientific as well as moralistic dimensions important to the emergence of concepts (Ylikoski 2003), and which will be described in more detailed in Chapter 4, which focuses on the research data. Furthermore, as many other scholars have noted, parenting support is not a neutral concept describing childrearing practices, but a *moralistic* and normative concept emphasising parents’ bad or good behaviours (Daly 2013a, p. 162; Lee 2014a; see, also, Sihvonen 2008).

### 3 THEORETICAL DESIGN: THE SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON PARENTING AND PARENTING SUPPORT

After framing parenting support from an historical as well as family policy viewpoint, I now turn to the theoretical perspective adopted in this study. Here, I focus on those perspectives important to addressing questions regarding how parenting is supported, that is, the shape of the support provided within in family support projects. In addition, I focus on those perspectives that inform how parenting is understood within the projects and how it could be further theorised from the sociological point on view. These questions rely on the premise that the notion of ‘parenting support’ that emerged in everyday descriptions of family life—described in the previous chapter—is considered in this study as a contingent phenomenon. Specifically, this contingency of parenting support refers to the emergence of parenting as a significant theme in family projects and policy, although not necessarily representing the only way in which things could have occurred. Therefore, it is important to empirically study and theoretically frame the subject from various perspectives in order to determine what is meant by parenting support within family support projects.

In sub-studies I through IV, I applied different theoretical perspectives to interpret the empirical findings of parenting support as well as to direct the analytical gaze towards theoretically inspiring aspects of parenting and parenting support. However, in this summary, I do not provide comprehensive overviews of all of the theories applied in the individual sub-studies (see Table 2), but instead emphasise the most crucial and overarching theoretical elements related to the research questions I posed in Chapter 1. First, in order to answer the question *what is supported when parenting is supported*, which I approached from various perspectives in these sub-studies (see sub-studies I, II and IV), I must delineate parenting from the sociological perspective. Here, I focus foremost on the essence of ‘parenting’ rather than on support. To do so, I find the socialisation theory proposed by Berger and Luckmann (1966) particularly useful.

From the point of view of this research, the importance of the socialisation theory Berger and Luckmann proposed lies in the interpretation of humans as individuals who become members of a society after a certain

Table 2. Theoretical frameworks employed in sub-studies I–IV.

SUB-STUDY	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
<b>I. Anxiety about the decline of parenting in Finnish society in the 2000s: childrearing and responsible parenthood</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• emergence of concepts (Hacking 1991)</li> <li>• modernisation theory and social characters (Elias 1938/1978; Riesman 1961/2001)</li> </ul>
<b>II. Early interventionist parenting support: the case study of Finland</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• governmentality theory (e.g., Foucault 1982 &amp; 1991; Rose 1989/1999a &amp; 1999b)</li> </ul>
<b>III. Parenting support policy: responsibility and competence as key attributes of good parenting in parenting support projects</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• positioning theory (Holloway 1984; Harré &amp; van Langenhove 1999)</li> <li>• pragmatic modalities (Sulkunen &amp; Törrönen 1997; Autto &amp; Törrönen 2017)</li> </ul>
<b>IV. ‘They are alone in their parenthood’: (re) building community and supporting parenting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• socialisation theory (Berger &amp; Luckmann 1966)</li> <li>• community theorising (Schmalenbach 1961 &amp; 1977)</li> </ul>

point, following a temporal sequence of three components or ‘moments’: internalisation, externalisation and objectivation. In short, ‘objectivation is a process by which an externalised product of human activity attains the character of objectivity’ (Berger & Luckmann 1966, p. 87). Furthermore, in society these moments remain in a continuing dialectical process. Hence, institutions also feature a history of which they are products. From that standpoint, parenting could be seen as an institution with an historical context (see, also, Chapter 2). In fact, Berger and Luckmann use paternity—although unfortunately without explicit clarification—as an example of an institution in their theorising (see Berger & Luckmann 1966, p. 86). Yet, objectivation and institutions are not why I find Berger and Luckmann’s socialisation theory interesting here. Namely, paternity, maternity or parenting each plays a more crucial role in socialisation theory, which I turn to next.

Although society is understood as an ongoing dialectical process composed of all three of these moments, for a newborn child, internalisation represents the beginning point of the process through which an individual becomes a member of a society (Berger & Luckmann 1966, p. 187). Therefore, the process of internalisation becomes a significant forum for parenting. Indeed, Berger and Luckmann (1966) differentiate between two forms of socialisation: primary socialisation and secondary socialisation. Primary socialisation is the form of socialisation that an individual undergoes in early childhood. According to Berger and Luckmann, a child is born into an objective social structure as



well as into an objective social world mediated by ‘significant others’ (Berger & Luckmann 1966, p. 151). These significant others are often parents and, therefore, primary socialisation typically relates to this particular and exclusive social relationship between a parent and a child. Essential here is that primary socialisation is precisely where anxiety about parenting is situated within parenting support. That is, parenting support targets this specific relationship. Put differently, within anxiety about parenting, the capability of parents to bond with their children stands as a critical juncture and as a matter of concern.<sup>5</sup>

Secondary socialisation, according to Berger and Luckmann (1966), carried out by institution-based agents such as schools, is not discussed within family support projects that focus primarily on parenting support (*cf.* sub-study I and II). However, in the family support projects examined in this study, concern about parenting is not only raised about *how* parents bond with their children and mediate the social world (primarily socialisation), but concern is targeted to the *social settings* of socialisation conducted by parents, meaning parents’ social relationships and community. In other words, the projects are not only concerned with the bond between a parent and a child and the quality of primary socialisation, but also target the parents’ nexus within a parental culture, and, thus, the socialisation of parents into that culture. Therefore, family support projects attempt to find a solution to the problem of parenting by integrating primary socialisation into a community established by experts and peer parents.

What I present here regarding socialisation theory is important in order to understand how parenting as a relationship between a parent and a child (primary socialisation) and parenting as an institution, based on culturally shared understanding of its premises (secondary socialisation), are theoretically considered. In doing so, I attempt to answer a particular question raised in this study: What is supported when parenting is supported? In addition, Berger and Luckmann state that institutions carry not only historicity, but control (Berger & Luckmann 1966, p. 78). Therefore, in order to scrutinise the question regarding support, which certainly includes control as well, I must also expand the theoretical perspective to encompass *how*

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5 However, the impact of this or any parental activity, the role of parents for child development, are also heavily debated, particularly amongst evolutionary psychologists and socio-biologists (e.g., Pinker 2002), whilst in parenting support the impact of the parents remains unquestioned.

parenting is supported. This leads us to the second step in the theoretical considerations of this study. In order to understand another question raised here—namely, how support is conducted within family projects—further theoretical frameworks are necessary. In this study, this question is interpreted from the policing perspective by using the governmentality theory first introduced by Michel Foucault (1969; 1999) and further developed by multiple scholars such as Nikolas Rose (1989/1999a, 1999b; Miller & Rose 2008) and Mitchel Dean (1999).

According to Foucault (1991, pp. 100–101), a critical moment for rearranging power, from structures of sovereignty to more distant techniques of government, took place in the eighteenth century, when the population became an object of government (*cf.* Donzelot 1979). For Foucault (1982), the term ‘conduct’ stands as a core concept, describing the specificity of power relations (*cf.* Dean 1999; Rose 1989/1999a, 1999b). Of significance here is that government not only refers to political structures and the management of the state, but rather defines the manners and techniques for how individuals should direct their conduct (Foucault 1982, pp. 789–790, 794). This has become widely known and expressed in the literature as ‘conduct of conduct’ (e.g., Dean 1999, p. 29; Rose 1999b, pp. 3–4).

A particular feature of government—namely, freedom—constitutes the specific nature of this Foucauldian mode of conduct of conduct. Indeed, Foucault places a free subject at the core of the power relationship between those who are governing and those who are governed (Foucault 1982, p. 790). Rose (1989/1999a; 1999b) enhances Foucault’s idea about freedom in his studies of governmentality, considering freedom as a power formula. In short, governmentality means different kinds of techniques regarding how people are directed, instructed and conducted from a distance rather than as exercising visible power. From the perspective of individuals, how governmentality works through these techniques is important, which Rose termed the ‘technologies of subjectivity’. That is, through self-monitoring, individuals adjust themselves by means of the techniques specifically provided by ‘the experts of the soul’ (Rose 1989/1999a, p. 11). Rose (1989/1999a, p. 264) continues, emphasising that wellbeing has increasingly been viewed as a consequence of responsible self-government.

This line of thinking allows us to move forward and understand the introduction of ‘parenting’ in family policy as a technique for governing. In other words, since public and political attention focuses on the conduct of ‘parenting’ rather than, for example, childrearing, political attention specif-

ically focuses on the conduct and behaviour of parents. According to Rose (1989/1999a), the family becomes a target of governmentality techniques if it can operate freely and voluntarily without direct intervention in homes from political authorities. Rose explains that, in this vein, governmentality works by activating the self-monitoring of parents' own hopes and fears related to intimate relations:

Parental conduct, motherhood and child rearing can thus be regulated through family autonomy through wishes and aspirations, and through the activation of individual guilt, personal anxiety and private disappointments. And the almost inevitable misalignment between expectations and realisation, fantasy and actuality, fuels the search for help and guidance in the difficult task of producing normality, and powers the constant familial demand for the assistance of expertise (Rose 1989/1999a, p. 132).

These fears related to children have been widely studied from the risk perspective (e.g., Furedi 1997, 2002; Murphy 2002; Lee et al. 2014). For example, Lee (2014a) scrutinises these fears related to children from the point of view of risk theories, pinpointing how in relation to a child, a risk is no longer considered a probability, but children are defined *de facto* as at risk. Indeed, Murphy (2002) indicates how this thinking about risk relates to children including and especially long before birth. According to Lee (2014b), in pinpointing the risks, they need to be identified and parents need to learn special skills to tackle the risks. In this process, the role of parenting experts becomes significant.

Indeed, delineating parenting expertise is an important aspect of this research, which I touch upon in all sub-studies since within family support projects parenting expertise is highly emphasised (*cf.* sub-study I–III). Within the frame of reference of governmentality theory, modern experts focus on the 'self' (*cf.* Rose 1989/1999a). I put this forward here by studying expertise within the framework of the sociology of expertise, which captures changes in expertise in late modernity (Abbot 1988; Miller & Rose 2008; Eyal 2013).<sup>6</sup> According to Eyal (2015), expertise represents a relatively new term in sociology, dating back to the sociology of (modern) professions. In Eyal's opinion, the sociology of professions remains too narrow to capture changes in expertise in late modernity. These changes include multi-professionalism, networking

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<sup>6</sup> The sociology of expertise is often studied by relying on the actor–network theory (ANT). However, this is not that straightforward (e.g., Eyal 2013, p. 877).

and notions of teamwork, the erosion of expertise, expertise gained through experience and multiple new forms that define relationships between clients or customers and experts. Examples of these include emphasising the partnership between parents and teachers in schools (*cf.* sub-study I), between parents and social workers in social services, as well as emphasising parents own' expertise in childrearing (*cf.* sub-studies II and III).

Within this study, the sociology of expertise remains significant because expertise is not fixed to specific professions or experts, but represents a complex of practices encompassing social, organisational as well as conceptual arrangements (Cambrosio et al. 1992; Eyal 2013, p. 871). Indeed, within the framework of governmentality theory, it appears that parents have become to depend upon experts in childrearing, experts who provide a set of skills learned specifically from psychology experts, working primarily through an individual's self-control (Rose 1989/1999a, p. 220).

Interestingly, recent studies that focused on parenting support (e.g., Lee 2014b) expose how, in contrast to the twentieth century, expert focus lies on the actions, behaviours and feelings of parents. Furedi (2004) describes this kind of ethos as a therapy culture, wherein social problems are seen as problems of one's psyche (see, also, Maksimainen 2010). Lee (2014b) summarised these changes and concluded how, unlike child experts from the past, parenting experts currently inform parents on issues beyond what experts consider important related to a child's needs. Instead, the task of parenting experts is to promote a general orientation of a certain kind of behaviour amongst parents towards their children, including, for example, 'positive parenting' (Lee 2014b, pp. 64–65).

Governmentality theory provides a sound vantage point from which to frame questions regarding how parenting is supported, but it does not sufficiently contribute to the empirical findings from my research related to communal support for parenting emphasised within family support projects (*cf.* sub-study III and especially sub-study IV). Although less obvious, governmentality theory also includes considerations of the community aspect in theorising about the conduct of conduct. Indeed, although an individualised view is very much emphasised when theorising about the conduct of conduct, Rose highlights in his later works in particular how governmentality techniques also work through community. For example, Rose illustrates how many government programmes operate based on the presumptions of certain communities (Miller & Rose 2008, p. 93).

However, I still found governmentality theory deficient to capture commu-

nal parenting support emphasised in the projects. For this purpose, I found Scmalenbach's separation between community, communion and society helpful. Scmalenbach (1961 & 1977) was inspired by Tönnies's ideal types of community (*Gemeinschaft*) and society (*Gesellschaft*), which he found lacking. In doing so, Schmalenbach introduces a third category alongside community and society, namely, communion (*Bund*), which Schmalenbach argued represents a way to overcome the incompatibilities he considered in Tönnies's category of community (Lüschen & Stone 1977, pp. 40–43; Schmalenbach 1977, pp. 56–60). It is precisely this communion, which I find useful in understanding the type of community projects seek to establish. For Schmalenbach, one of the most significant incompatibilities in community is related to conscious, acknowledged and shared emotions, which he thinks are fundamental elements for communion. Although emotions are often important also for community, Schmalenbach (1966, pp. 63–69) notes that emotions are not necessary “in the realm of natural things”. For example, in the realm of the family as a prototype of community in Schmalenbach's theorising, the kin relationship of parenthood exists regardless of shared emotions. On the other hand, communion inevitably requires consciously shared emotions to spring up and flourish. According to Schmalenbach (1961), conscious, acknowledged and shared emotions represent the lifeblood of communions (Schmalenbach 1961, pp. 331–335; Schmalenbach 1977, p. 83). The role of the family projects is to foster this particular form of community, namely, a parental communion.

## 4 DATA AND METHODS OF THE STUDY

As discussed in the previous section, the theoretical design of this study relies on several theoretical perspectives which I considered useful in enhancing our understanding of parenting and parenting support. However, I fixated on the theoretical design in close conjunction with the empirical analysis. In doing so, I found Derek Layder's (1998) *adaptive approach* tremendously useful. In the adaptive approach, theorising is not understood as a separate entity within research, something simply adopted in research, but as something that requires *adaptation*. Therefore, I brought together the processes of social research and theory in order to scrutinise, on the one hand, how 'parenting', 'parenting support' and 'parenting expertise' combine to produce specific outcomes in family relationships as well as family policy. On the other hand, this involves further developing some aspects of that theoretical design.

In this chapter, I epistemologically and practically introduce how parenting and parenting support are approached and studied as social phenomena in this study. First, I introduce the data—managing documents produced by family support projects—and how those data were gathered. Second, I discuss the methodological principles and adaptive approach employed in this study. Finally, in this chapter I introduce how methods were employed in the data analysis.

### 4.1 DATA: FAMILY SUPPORT PROJECTS

As discussed in the introduction, this study was inspired by my previous examination of media debates on the ill-being of children and youth (Sihvonen 2005, 2008). In that study, I found that the everyday lives of children and youth were not specifically reflected in discussions about the ill-being of children and youth. To my surprise, parents received the spotlight in those discussions, individuals filled with anxiety. This observation piqued my curiosity: What drove this need to spotlight parents in such an anxious way? This was not something that could be solved by pointing out the particularity of the media in polarising ideas (e.g., Allan 2002; Altheide 2002) or from the framework of moral panic (e.g., Cohen 1972). However, the newspaper articles analysed in my previous study provided a crucial hint

to guide my further investigation. Specifically, several news items referred to some family projects which attempted to solve the ill-being problem of children and youth by developing *parenting support* and strengthening *parenting*. Therefore, the first phase of data collection involved pinpointing how to find specific projects in order to collect data.

‘Project’ is a vague term. Some scholars indicate how it offers in a very abstract way ‘a principle outlining the whole of social life’. This means that a project is not only a way to organise and conduct certain practices, but has become ‘a way of life’. Through a project, citizens organise in such a way so as to make sure their own decisions are supported in those decisions and that they become responsible for the consequences related to those decisions (Rantala & Sulkunen 2006b, pp. 9–11). Yet, on a practical level, project’ describes various attempts to promote certain goals, whether situated in one’s personal life or within institutional settings. However, one common denominator exists for capturing all kinds of projects: the inherently temporary nature of them. Furthermore, in institutional settings, such as within family policy, I linked projects related to parenting support as often conducted with external funding and on a fixed budget.

Therefore, I began this study by exploring records from the two primary funding sources of family policy projects in Finland. First, the central government provides transfers for projects implemented by local governments or municipalities. The focus and aims of those central government transfers are confined to the focus and aims of specific programmes, resolutions and reforms. Furthermore, the emphasis of these programmes affects local governments’ activities (Alavaikko 2006, p. 55). In Finland, the Ministry of Social and Health (hereafter, MSAH) is primarily responsible for implementing family-related programmes. Therefore, the records and documents produced by MSAH provided the first step in the data collection process.

However, MSAH does not provide a dedicated database supplying the share of funding for ‘family policy’ *per se*, which would have proved beneficial in this study. However, the reports from different programmes accurately document the extent of funding and to whom funding was allocated. Therefore, I collected the reports from programmes implemented between 2000 and 2010 aimed at developing social and family services. These consisted of the Early Intervention Project [Varpu-hanke, 2001–2005], the Development Project for Social Services [Sosiaalialan kehittämisohjelma, 2003–2007], the FAMILY Project [PERHE projekti, 2005–2007] and the KASTE Programme [KASTE ohjelma, 2008–2011].

In the first phase of data collection, the funded projects were carefully examined, and all projects related to families with children were included for further analysis. In the second phase, more detailed information was collected from these projects in order to determine if ‘parenting support’ was mentioned as one of the targeted developments of the project. Most projects made related documents such as final reports available online. A minority, however, required that I separately request management documents from a project executor. Decisions about including a particular project in this study were taken after skimming the project documents. If parenting support was mentioned in the documents, the project was included in this study and document(s) were saved in Atlas.ti and SPSS Statistics for further analysis.

The second step involved searching for potential projects, focusing on parenting support implemented by non-governmental organisations (hereafter, NGOs). In Finland, NGOs focusing on activities in the social and healthcare sectors are currently granted support from the Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations (STEA), which replaced Finland’s Slot Machine Association (RAY) in 2017. The ultimate aim of RAY and STEA is to support those NGOs which promote the health and wellbeing of citizens. Such organisations operated through government subsidies regulated to varying degrees and granted funding secured through the Act on Discretionary Government Transfers (1047/2001). At the time of data collection, RAY continued to function within and administer grants to NGOs. In total, four different kinds of grants for non-profit and NGOs existed: operational grants for general activities, grants for expenditures, investment grants and, finally, grants for projects. For this study, the last category is of primary interest. First, the potential projects were collected from RAY’s grant database from amongst those projects granted funding between 2000 and 2010 using certain keywords, such as a child, family, parent and parenthood.<sup>7</sup> Searches produced numerous results containing basic information about different projects that received funding between 2000 and 2010. At the time of data collection, the RAY database also contained the funding applications and other management documents from various projects. Similar to projects funded by MSAH, the documents from potential

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7 The searches were conducted by using the truncation method, in which a word is continually trimmed to the root word and a truncation symbol (which is usually indicated by \*) is added to the root word. The Finnish root words used in the search consisted of *lap\**, *las\** (child), *perhe\** (family), and *vanhem\** (parenting/parenthood).



family projects were skimmed in order to determine if ‘parenting support’ was mentioned as a project aim. If ‘parenting support’ was mentioned, the project was included in the dataset, and the supporting documents were searched and saved in Atlas.ti and SPSS Statistics for further analysis.

Despite the different sources of funding, projects are largely similar with regards to their aims and how parenting is discussed. However, this is understandable, since RAY’s grant activities were supervised and guided by MSAH. Therefore, it is unsurprising that the goals of those projects derived from government-led programmes and those projects conducted by NGOs resemble one another. Indeed, Eagerer et al. (2018, p. 210) discovered that the Finnish system of channelling funding to NGOs resembles government-mandated as well as government-administrated types of channelling gambling revenues that is reflected in similarities in the contents of NGOs vis-à-vis family support projects stemming from state supported programmes.

In total, I identified 310 projects mentioning ‘parenting support’ (Figure 2). Figure 2 illustrates specifically how parenting support gained increasing attention both amongst municipal organisations as well as amongst NGOs in Finland between 2000 and 2010.

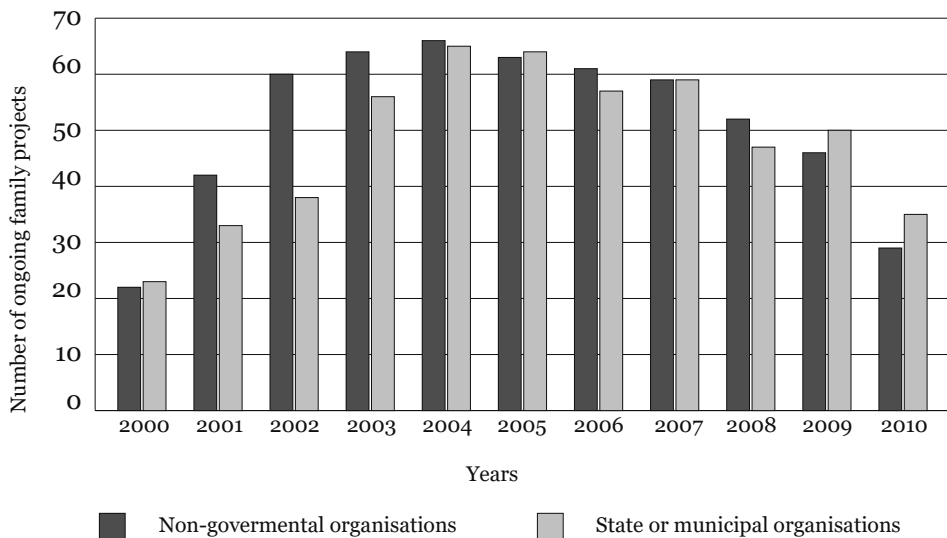


Figure 2. Number of ongoing family projects in Finland, 2000–2010.

Considering the large amount of data, I coded and entered some central characteristics into SPSS, which provided an excellent matrix for organising the vast quantity of information. Variables coded in SPSS included information such as the funding source, the geographical location, the domain/branch of the primary coordinator, all participating domains and so on (for detailed information, see Appendix 1). Projects were anonymised; in the sub-studies, I refer to them using their identity numbers (1 to 310).

The data analysed in this study draw upon various project management documents, such as funding applications and midterm and final reports as well as other project documents, such as project plans and brochures (Table 2).

Table 2. Types of documents from family support projects.

<b>DOCUMENT TYPE</b>	<b>NUMBER OF DOCUMENTS</b>
Project management documents	300
Funding applications	51
Project plans	67
Mid-term reports	28
Final reports	154
Other documents	217
Total	517

Given the data collection conditions, particularly the lack of a distinct database for family projects alone, collecting a representative sample proved impossible. Thus, it was not possible to analyse, for example, a distribution of projects according to the primary coordinator or the geographical distribution in Finland in order to determine statistical significance. However, statistical significance for various specific data categories was not crucial for the purpose of this study, a study aimed at examining how parenting is discussed, understood and supported within family projects. However, the large amount of data still provided an opportunity to employ some quantitative content analysis at times used in qualitative driven document analysis (e.g., Prior 2003; Bowen 2009). The primary purpose of the content analysis was to quantify some descriptive findings highlighted by coding and categorising the data (e.g., Bowen 2008 & 2009; Wesley 2014). One of the most important descriptive categorisations involved comparing the

primary organising domains of the family projects: 51% of the projects in the dataset were public organisations funded by public administrations, and 49% of the projects were implemented by NGOs funded by RAY (Table 3).

Table 3. The primary organisational domains of family support projects.

<b>DOMAINS</b>	<b>NUMBERS</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Family projects by public organisations</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>51</b>
Social and health care	111	36
Early education and school	25	8
Research and development units	17	5
Others	5	2
<b>Family projects by NGOs</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>49</b>
The Mannerheim League for Child Welfare	38	12
The Federation of Mother and Child Homes and Shelters	17	6
The Finnish Settlement Federation	9	3
Nuorten Ystävät (NGO focusing on the wellbeing of children and youth)	9	3
Finnish Central Association for Families of People with Mental Illness	8	3
Deaconess Institute	7	2
A-Clinic Foundation	4	1
Finnish Parents League	4	1
Kataja ry (NGO providing assistance for couples' relationships)	3	1
Sámi Soster ry (social and health organisation for Sami people in Finland)	3	1
Other organisations (e.g., Central Union for Child Welfare, Single Parent Association, Finnish Central Association for Mental Health, etc.)	50	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>310</b>	<b>100</b>

As illustrated in Table 3, the vast majority of projects implemented by public organisations stem from departments of social and health care. Thus, child welfare, maternity and child health clinics and family work projects were implemented by social services. Family projects implemented by NGOs comprised 49% of projects in the dataset. Amongst projects implemented by NGOs, only a few organisations were more active in developing and im-

plementing parenting support projects. Indeed, most projects implemented by NGOs (30%) were carried out by NGOs, which only implemented one or two projects. The distribution of the organising responsibility between many different NGOs likely reflects the funding policy of RAY/STEA to support different NGOs. Furthermore, relative to the population, the density of NGOs in Finland is high, possibly also affecting the vast distribution of organising NGOs (e.g., GHK 2010). Whilst I categorised family support projects based on the primary coordinator, it is important to note that the majority of projects consisted of cooperative endeavours. Thus, one project consists of many actors from various domains and the documents reflected the importance of multi-professionalism. Furthermore, projects organised by public organisations in particular involved intensive cooperation with NGOs since they aimed to support the family and parenting.

I also categorised family projects into prevention projects (68%) and intervention projects (32%), which required some descriptive analysis of the project contents (Table 4). This categorisation proved illustrative in describing the content of projects on a general level. However, this categorisation also proved quite useful in the analyses for sub-studies II and III, wherein this categorisation served as a starting point for a more detailed text analysis.

Table 4. Distribution of family projects based on the project type: prevention and intervention.

<b>TYPE OF PROJECT</b>	<b>NUMBER</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Prevention projects</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>68</b>
Non-selective prevention projects	180	58
Prevention projects for selected groups (young mothers, immigrant families, etc.)	31	10
<b>Intervention projects</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>32</b>
Parenting support for families in child protective services: child behavioural problems, etc.	57	19
Parenting support for families in child protective services for other reasons: parents with mental illnesses or substance misuse issues	35	11
Other intervention projects: supporting parenting during a prison sentence, etc.	7	2
Total	310	100

A majority of the family support projects aimed at prevention efforts, often inclusively targeted all families in a municipality or other selected area, although some prevention projects targeted particular groups of parents based on certain characteristics such as gender, age or immigration status. In contrast, intervention projects exclusively targeted families in child protective services who were experiencing serious and often urgent problems such as substance misuse, mental health problems or other social problems related to the parents' or children's ill-being. Although these descriptive content analyses proved quite useful in order to gain an overview of the data, in order to answer the questions posed in this study, a more detailed analysis was needed and a more elaborate methodology was employed.

## **4.2 METHOD: THE ADAPTIVE APPROACH TO PARENTING SUPPORT**

By employing the *adaptive approach* (Layder 1998), I emphasised theoretical understandings and models which fed into and guided this study whilst simultaneously attending to the generation of theory from an ongoing analysis of data. The adaptive approach provides a set of rules for a sociological method capitalising on some of the strengths of existing approaches—namely, grounded theory—by expanding its range to also include new approaches and strategies. These strategies consist of both particular and practical recommendations regarding the use of theory in research (Layder 1998).

The adaptive approach relies on multiple other methodological approaches, primarily grounded theory (e.g., Gleiser & Strauss 1967; Strauss & Corbin 1990). For example, in both approaches, no conceptual schema exists prior to the initial data collection and analysis (Layder 1998, p. 20). In this study, this represents an important starting point, since the study was principally driven forward by curiosity about the emergence of 'parenting' in discussions of family. These preliminary observations occurred without any particular theoretical framework in mind at that time. Furthermore, similarities between the adaptive approach and grounded theory emerged since these two approaches are compared to deductive reasoning, in which ready-made hypotheses and theories are tested using new empirical material (Layder 1998, p. 17). In a grounded theory, reasoning is composed in reverse, and is called inductive reasoning. Inductive reasoning refers to theorising that includes theoretical concepts that must originate from

empirical evidence (Layder 1998, p. 17). The adaptive approach employed in this study falls between these two types of reasoning.

Furthermore, there are some crucial differences between the adaptive approach and grounded theory, particularly in terms of the role of the theory and how the overall process of theorising is understood within them. These differences specifically concern the types of reasoning, an important issue to discuss here in order to understand the process of reasoning applied in this study. Namely, in the adaptive approach ‘adaptive’ indicates that theory is shaped by incoming evidence from data as well as data filtered through and adapted to the theoretical materials employed in a study (Layder 1998, p. 38). In this sense, Layder’s adaptive approach is quite similar to the *abductive approach* recently introduced in sociological discussions by Timmermans and Tavory (2012 & 2014). The abductive approach has gained much attention amongst recent sociological research and, therefore, the link between Layder’s adaptive approach and Timmermans and Tavory’s abductive approach requires brief delineation here. I find this particularly important, since the link between the approaches is not transparent and not mentioned by Timmermans and Tavory, although the similarities between the approaches are obvious. Both approaches—the adaptive approach and abductive approach—indeed lie between the deduction and induction processes. Whilst the abductive approach finds that theories represent a fundamental feature of the research process, it leans on similar considerations made by Layder about empirical findings and considerably guide how and which theories are employed and further developed within a study. One minor difference between the approaches also exists—the importance of observational, empirical surprises, which lie within the nucleus of the abductive approach (Timmermans & Tavory 2012). Because the abductive approach is based on the theory of inference from pragmatist philosopher Charles S. Peirce, it could be regarded as an advanced application of the adaptive approach.

The last point related to observational surprises within the abductive approach is also important to pinpoint here, since the methodological principles within sub-study IV draws from this line of thinking about observational surprises. Nevertheless, I have primarily employed Layder’s adaptive approach in the sub-studies of this compilation thesis (in sub-studies I, II and to some extent III). In the next section, I explain how I employed these methodological principles and the specific methods of the adaptive approach in my analysis of project documents.

### 4.3 DATA ANALYSIS

This study involved different phases of data analysis, some of which are easier to place in chronological order than others, a common feature of qualitative research. The choice of topics (parenting support) and methods (textual analysis) as well as data collection (from the RAY database and MSHA funding documents) took place first. The second phase included the analysis (coding, memo-writing and quantitative content analysis), theoretical considerations and reading relevant studies on this subject. The tasks included in this phase of the analysis overlapped further, a common occurrence in studies employing the adaptive approach. Indeed, according to Layder (1998, p. 10) coding, memo-writing and theoretical considerations influenced each other for the purpose of forming an explanatory framework for a particular sphere of social life.

Here, I first describe some overall principles guiding the document analysis. Next, I explain how coding proceeded. However, I will not discuss all of the codes, concepts and accounts here, but rather highlight a few important codes and concepts and explain how the process for these were carried out to illustrate the practices of coding. Furthermore, by highlighting a few significant codes, I can also illustrate how the process of theoretical deliberation and coding overlapped in this study.

In this study, I conducted a textual analysis (McKee 2003), also known as a document analysis (Prior 2003). The interpretation of the textual material such as project documents allowed me to understand the ways in which people make sense of the world around them at a particular time and in a particular culture (e.g., McKee 2003). Thus, it is important to pinpoint here that the documents produced by family support projects are produced for specific situations. Put another way, texts are always defined by the particular representations and methods of productions (Atkinson & Coffey 1998; Prior 2003). In family support projects, these methods are often related to the administrative purposes and requirements of, for example, the funding organisations. In this way, the scope of this study lies not only on the specific projects, but extends to the intended audiences for those documents, affecting how parenting support is discussed within specific texts. Another important aspect related to the production and function of the projects lies in considering the authors of such documents. In the family support projects, named individuals who often served as project managers or other project staff wrote most of the documents. Yet, sometimes the documents

had unidentified subject-author(s). Identified or unidentified, the authors of those documents produced by family support projects represented the voices of those organisations.

As previously discussed, I conducted some descriptive, quantitative content analysis. Whilst coding these variables (the organising domain, the participating domains, the funding source, location, the first and final year of the project, prevention or intervention project, etc.) and entering them into an SPSS matrix, I simultaneously skimmed the content of the documents. 'Open coding' or 'pre-coding' was carried out first, and three different thematic categories were defined: the professional context, the project work context and the family support context. In this phase, I already understood that my primary interest lay in the last thematic category. One initial, more detailed observation related to the concept of 'early intervention', which was strongly emphasised in the family support theme. Therefore, I completed 'axial coding' focusing on early intervention in order to scrutinise the key elements related to that subject. Eventually, early intervention emerged as an important element in sub-study II. During this phase of analysis, some theoretical perspectives strongly resonated in the preliminary findings, such as 'activation' and 'parents latent capacities'. These perspectives were also discussed in governmentality theorising and studies about parenting support that relied on those theories (e.g., Rose 1999b; Gillies 2005).

In sub-study II, I initially focused on early intervention in relation to the categories of prevention and intervention projects. However, I later noticed that early intervention represented a particular mode of a broader approach I identified in the data, namely, the individualised parenting support approach. This particular parenting support approach as well as its counterpart, the communal parenting support approach, I identified through 'selective coding'. These emerged as the primary themes penetrating all family support projects, as well as the theories guiding the analysis and discussions in sub- III and IV. These approaches, thus, represent the primary results from this study and are further discussed in the chapters that follow.

## **4.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Finally, and before presenting the results of the study, I put forth the following ethical considerations. This research is based on the analysis of documents, which are in most cases publicly available, especially project



documents from governmental organisations. However, some documents I requested from administrative sources only for the purposes of this study. Most of these documents originate from projects organised by non-governmental organisations. However, I carefully evaluated if I should add a list of family projects analysed in this study in an appendix to this dissertation. From the point of view of research ethics, I confronted few human subjects'–related issues. Although I critically scrutinise parenting support, I did not seek to point the finger at particular projects, especially those organised by non-governmental organisations. As described in Chapter 4, projects implemented by non-governmental organisations applied for funding from STEA (before RAY), which delineated the goals and funding policies in concert with the Council of the State. Therefore, power here does not lie with these small non-governmental organisations which try to fund their activities and adjust their aims in relation to various goals which they cannot influence. In some aspects, this also applies to individual municipal projects. Therefore, I did not attached a list of the projects in appendix section. Still, I have named the programmes from which many individual projects stemmed. Furthermore, the collection of data is carefully described, and therefore, any other researcher should be able to replicate the data collection procedure and find the family support projects examined in this dissertation.

## **5 SUMMARIES AND RESULTS OF SUB-STUDIES I TO IV**

This dissertation consists of four sub-studies, the primary contents and results I outline in this section. In what follows, I present the results one sub-study at a time, aiming to summarise the most important observations from each. I provide an introduction to the next chapter, wherein I synthesise the results highlighted here, based on the theoretical design introduced in Chapter 3 above.

### **5.1 SUB-STUDY I: ANXIETY ABOUT THE DECLINE OF PARENTING IN FINNISH SOCIETY IN THE 2000S: CHILDREARING AND RESPONSIBLE PARENTHOOD**

In sub-study I, I examined parenting and parenting support by focusing on how childrearing is discussed in family support projects. I found that childrearing represents an interesting starting point since it appears to be a controversial concept and theme in studies about parenting support. Some scholars claimed that ‘childrearing’ was replaced by ‘parenting’ in discussions about socialising the next generation (Daly 2013a; Faircloth et al. 2013; Lee et al. 2014). Indeed, before a closer data analysis, I hypothesised that discourse in family support projects likely featured rare discussions about childrearing. However, my assumption proved wrong. Discussions about childrearing were vivid within Finnish family support projects. Therefore, it seemed important to pay particular attention to this discourse and focus on how childrearing is included in discussions about parenting.

Framed within an historical analysis of the civilisation process (Elias 1938/1978), types of social characters (Riesman 1961/2001) and the emergence of the specific concept of ‘parenting’ (Hacking 1997), I analysed how parenting was discussed in conjunction with childrearing in family support projects in the first decade of the twenty-first century in Finland. Therefore, sub-study I tackled the following research question: *How is parenting understood within family support projects and what is supported when parenting is supported?*

In my investigation, I employed Hacking’s concept analysis to demonstrate how the use of parenting emerged simultaneously in different arenas

in society, such as in the media and political documents. This expands the debate about parenting overlapping with the increasing number of family support projects. Therefore, sub-study I shed light on the question regarding *how parenting support became such an important element within family policy in early twenty-first century Finland*.

The analysis of management documents from family support projects defined the discussion about childrearing as emerging from a particular framework. Indeed, I observed how childrearing was commonly brought up by juxtaposing the responsibilities of parents on one hand and professional educators or other authorities on the other. Thus, my analysis indicated how childrearing and responsible parenting were closely linked to one another. Family support projects expressed intense concern that societal institutions were required to assume too much of the burden of childrearing and required that the parental responsibility for childrearing should be reinforced.

I also introduced a specific concept, a particular technique which was harnessed to empower parents to assume more responsibility by the family support projects while discussing childrearing. This technique is called the 'educational partnership' (*kasvatuskumppanuus*). I also demonstrated in sub-study I a professional scepticism towards parents' capacities to cope with satisfactory childrearing. Therefore, parents need support, but support not targeted at childrearing practicalities, and instead focused on the 'psyche of parents'.

I interpreted this particular support for parents' psyche by employing Riesman's three types of social characters introduced and delineated in Chapter 2. These types consist of tradition-directed, inner-directed and other-directed social characters. I argued in sub-study I that the other-directed social character replaced the tradition-directed and inner-directed social character types. According to Riesman (1961/2001), the other-directed social character type is less likely to influence their children's lives. In addition, I argued that this development is exactly what family support projects sought to combat. Thus, the other-directed social character type collided with the ideal regarding responsible parenting. Paradoxically, the ideal regarding responsible parenting introduced by family support projects relies on self-discipline (Elias 1938/1978) and the characteristics typical for the inner-directed social character type. This tension is solved in family support projects in a unique way, namely, by supporting parents' own expertise.

In sub-study I, I conclude by pinpointing how discussions about childrearing argue that shared values and goals regarding what parents can lean on

in their childrearing objectives no longer exist. However, I also illustrated how this lack of shared values and goals also concerns professionals and other experts within family support projects. That is, rather than relying on internalised value-based goals, experts in family support projects rely on multi-professional reference groups, different kinds of expert networks and, indeed, parents through educational partnerships.

## 5.2 SUB-STUDY II: EARLY INTERVENTIONIST PARENTING SUPPORT

In sub-study II, I concentrated on examining a specific method widely employed in family support projects, a method I named *early interventionist parenting support*. Initially, early interventionist parenting support seemed to fall between prevention and intervention, two categories I identified from the data. Further analysis, however, demonstrated that early interventionist parenting support actually penetrated the entire dataset and was adopted by both prevention projects as well as intervention projects. Therefore, I took a closer look at how parenting is supported when early interventionist parenting support is employed within family projects. In this sub-study, I asked what is supported when parenting is supported. Furthermore, I asked how is parenting support conducted and how is parenting understood within family support projects.

I identified three main techniques (*cf.* Dean 1999; Rose 1999b) that supported parenting by means of early interventionist parenting support. First, early interventionist parenting support activates parents into parenting, wherein the role of supporters—that is, parenting experts—is to awaken parents' quiescent parenting capacities, thereby mirroring the role of therapists (e.g., Bellah 1985 et al. pp. 47–48). Most importantly, I demonstrated how activation specifically emphasises supporting 'parents own expertise' in family support projects. I concluded in sub-study II by reflecting upon these results and pondering if this emphasis on parents' own expertise relates to the development of the post-welfare state in Finland. Thus, activation and empowerment have replaced other possible interpretations of the need for support.

Second, I noticed that according to family support projects, the nucleus of parenting lies in the relationships between a parent and a child. Therefore, parenting refers to the interaction between a parent and a child. At the

beginning of sub-study II, I demonstrated how parents' duties were previously directed at issues such as healthy nutrition, household conditions and the physical care of children. However, parents' duties now relate to the specific relationship between a parent and a child and the emotional wellbeing of the child.

Third, I further analysed the activation of parents and discovered how latent parenting capacities are enabled. Family workers in family support projects were equipped with different kinds of skills in order to address 'a grey area of concern', the area where hidden worries were supposedly situated, needing delineation and alleviation. I argued that by supporting parenting through talking, early interventionist parenting support relies on a therapeutic understanding of how to solve a wide range of family problems (*cf.* Moskowitz 2001; Furedi 2004, also Maksimainen 2010).

To conclude, in early interventionist parenting support, family workers were not allowed to act as an extra pairs of hands, although both parents and family workers noticed that practical support would have been useful at times. These kinds of aspirations were often rejected due to the limited project budgets. Instead, early interventionist parenting support is narrowed down to the activation and empowerment of parents through activities such as conversations. I argued that relationships between parents and professionals remained ambivalent, because support dependence must indeed be avoided by parents.

### **5.3 SUB-STUDY III: RESPONSIBLE AND COMPETENCE AS KEY ATTRIBUTES OF GOOD PARENTING IN FAMILY SUPPORT PROJECTS**

In sub-study III, I scrutinised two attributes often related to good parenting: responsibility and competence. In doing so, I analysed responsibility and competence within the framework of positioning theory (Holloway 1984; Harré & Langenhove 1999). Furthermore, I applied the analytical tools of pragmatic modalities developed within semiotic sociology (e.g., Sulkunen & Törrönen 1997; Autto & Törrönen 2017). I also discussed the political context of parenting support within Finnish family policy after the 1990s. Therefore, I delineated the question as follows: *Why did parenting support become such an important element within family policy in early twenty-first century Finland?* Here, I demonstrated how increasing discussions about

parental responsibilities as well as their competence as parents became legitimate through the recent paradigm shift in state policy influenced by neoliberal politics.

In this sub-study, I carefully explored how parents were positioned in relation to these two attributes of responsibility and competence. In my analysis, I also used the categorisation of projects into prevention and intervention projects. Furthermore, I employed two different parenting support approaches I identified in the data: individualised and communal parenting support. Within individualised parenting support, parenting is understood as a social problem within intimate family relationships, particularly between the parent and the child. By contrast, communal parenting support is situated within the broader scope of social relationships within a community, and directed towards rebuilding community and strengthening parents' relationships with other parents. Therefore, this study was conducted through cross-examining individualised and communal approaches with two project orientations (intervention and prevention) in order to determine *how parenting support is conducted within family support projects and what role parenting experts play in parenting support*.

As a result, I found that within prevention projects parents' competencies and responsibilities are actively discussed in relation to the competence and responsibilities of professional experts in family support projects. For example, when individualised parenting support was employed, the parents' own expertise in parenting was highlighted. Thus, professional experts in family support projects challenged established hierarchies between parents and professionals. However, in discussions about responsibilities, boundaries between professionals and parents were intensively raised, particularly within prevention projects employing individualised parenting support.

When prevention projects employed communal parenting support, parenting competence was strongly presumed to strengthen community and peer relationships. Furthermore, responsibilities became inclusive and shared with other parents and adults in the community. However, this also reflected how parents were positioned within prevention projects alone. The subjective positions of parents in intervention projects were not actively constructed in relation to the responsibilities of professionals, as was the case with prevention projects. In other words, boundaries were not drawn; instead, parents' responsibilities were actively supported by professionals in family support projects. Furthermore, in intervention projects the parents'

own expertise was not emphasised as was the case in prevention projects. Instead, professional experts' competencies were highlighted and parents were positioned as incompetent.

#### **5.4 SUB-STUDY IV: 'THEY ARE ALONE IN THEIR PARENTHOOD'—PARENTING SUPPORT AND (RE)BUILDING COMMUNITY**

In sub-study IV, I focused on analysing how community support was harnessed to support parenting within the family support projects. I found that along with individualised support, which is well-recognised in studies on parenting support (Faircloth et al. 2013; Lee et al. 2014), another type of parenting support exists in the Finnish family support projects. This parenting support approach, which I named communal parenting support, leans on the relationships in one's immediate community as a supportive element for parents and parenting. I framed this discussion using Schmalenbach's theories regarding community, communion and society (Schmalenbach 1961 & 1977). Furthermore, I discussed in the sub-study IV socialization of children in the frame of reference of socialization theorizing provided by Berger and Luckmann (1966). In this sub-study, I examined *what is supported when parenting is supported and how parenting is understood in family support projects*.

In sub-study IV, I indicated how family support projects actively (re) built community, resembling the notion of 'communion' introduced by Schmalenbach (1961, 1977). Thus, family support projects were concerned with the decline of the community, and the resulting damaging effects on parenting capabilities. Especially changes in family and kin relationships, also called as 'erosion of family relationships' (Edwards 2004), are expected to reduce support that parents can obtain from their close relationships. In the sub-study IV, I argue that parental communion aims to strengthen the sense of community and parents' capacities in parenting, for example, through shared experiences, emotions and horizontal expertise.

However, I distinguished between tensions in projects' attempts to build communion. First, 'sharing the same life phase' was assumed to form the foundation for communion, yet turned out to be an illusion. From the point of view of parents, fewer common denominators emerged than initially

expected. Second, a kind of double standard existed in attempts to support a community. On the one hand, the family support projects wanted to increase community; but, on the other hand, projects specifically focused on so-called marginalised families. A third tension emerged in the gendered nature of communal support, since it often implicitly targeted mothers. Finally, a fourth tension was situated between the overall aims of projects seeking to activate parents in rebuilding communities and parents' general unwillingness to participate in communal actions provided by projects.

In sub-study IV, these tensions are interpreted in relation to the categories of society, communion and community. For instance, the family support projects were trying to build communion, which could eventually become a community. But, they also encompassed the aims of society, such as support targeted to so-called marginalised families. As a result, the community that the family support projects were attempting to build represented a hybrid, composed of elements of all three categories.



## 6 RESULTS

In this research, I addressed the following questions: What is supported when parenting is supported, and how is parenting understood in the family support projects? Furthermore, I ask how is support conducted in the family support projects, and what is the role of parenting experts and expertise in parenting support? Finally, I ask how and why did parenting support become such an important element within family policy in early twenty-first century Finland?

In this chapter, these questions are interpreted in relation to the theoretical frameworks I introduced in Chapter 3, as well as by discussing the primary results related to these questions. Consequently, I attempt to delineate and understand parenting and parenting support from a sociological perspective, and discuss how it can be further theorised. The first questions—*what* is supported when parenting is supported and *how* is parenting understood within family support projects—are discussed in section 6.1. These questions are closely interwoven and form the bedrock for the two subsequent adjacent questions about *how* support for parenting is conducted and the role of experts and expertise in discussions about parenting support delineated in section 6.2. The final question leads to an examination of parenting support at the level of the emergence of parenting support in Finland. Hence, in section 6.3, I attempt to address *why* parenting emerged as an issue in early twenty-first century Finland. At the end of this chapter, I discuss the landscape of parenting through an interpretation of the results presented here as well as reflect upon the limitations of this study. I also ponder suggestions for future research.

### 6.1 TWO APPROACHES TO PARENTING SUPPORT: INDIVIDUALISED AND COMMUNAL SUPPORT

The analysis of family projects revealed that two approaches to parenting support penetrated all family projects in the dataset. These approaches I have named as individualised parenting support and communal parenting support, examined to varying degrees in the sub-studies (Table 6). In the sub-studies, I typically studied one approach at the time to delineate specific aspects of the approach under scrutiny, such as, early intervention (sub-

study II) or development of community family support projects (sub-study IV). However, I highlight that the family projects studied in this research often include both approaches—individualised and communal parenting support—in their discussion about parenting and parenting support. Nevertheless, I here now bring these two approaches together to discuss one of the main questions presented in this study—namely, what do we support when parenting is supported, and how is parenting understood in family support projects.

Table 6. Examination of individualised and communal parenting support in sub-studies I–IV.

SUB-STUDIES	INDIVIDUALISED PARENTING SUPPORT	COMMUNAL PARENTING SUPPORT
Sub-study I: Anxiety about the decline of parenting in Finnish society in 2000s	+	+
Sub-study II: Early interventionist parenting support	+	-
Sub-study III: Parenting support policy in Finland	+	+
Sub-study IV: ‘They are alone in their parenthood’	-	+

These two approaches are framed within this study by socialisation theory (Berger & Luckmann 1966; see Chapter 3). Within individualised parenting support, the problem of parenting is understood as a problem related to a particular family relationship, namely, the parent–child relationship. Through individualised support, parenting is considered an interaction between a parent and a child and, therefore, parenting is strengthened by supporting this particular social relationship. In individualised parenting support, support is focused on the primary socialisation of children wherein parents represent ‘the significant other’ mediating the social world to their children (Berger & Luckmann 1966). Thus, support takes a position within an incredibly intimate sphere of social life, observation made as well as critically discussed by many scholars (Lee et al. 2014).

Altogether, in individualised support the parent–child relationship is placed under the microscope in family support projects, wherein anxiety relates to *how* parents interact with their children in the process of socialisation. Through individualised support, anxiety focuses a particular aspect of parenting, namely, the emotional attachment of parents to their children. An echo of attachment theory remains visibly clear within individualised parenting support and particularly in its variation in early interventionist support (see sub-study II). In attachment theory, the importance of early parent–child interactions and attachment are highlighted as fundamental to the child’s wellbeing at present and in future (e.g., Bowlby 1958). Therefore, the logic behind individualised parenting support is that support for bonding and the parent–child interaction is an effective solution to preventing a wide range of social ills. Consequently, the intimate parent–child relationship is saddled with a heavy burden.

Along with the individualised parenting support approach, I identified another approach, namely, communal parenting support, which I examined specifically in sub-study IV. Communal parenting support differs from individualised support. Contrary to individualised parenting support, in communal parenting support, relationships in the parents’ local communities and the peer support provided by other parents are emphasised as supportive resources for parenting. From the point of view of family support projects, parents remain too isolated and ‘alone in their parenthood’ (*cf.* sub-study IV).

Community is also a subject many sociologists investigated in the late 1990s and early 2000s, particularly in relation to increased individualism (e.g., Etzioni 1996; Bauman 2001; Putnam 2000; also Hautamäki 2005). It appears that the family support projects adopted a quite similar ethos regarding fragile community relations, similar to some scholars who expressed their concern about community decline (e.g., Etzioni 1996). In particular, the reasoning adopted by projects relies on the idea that contemporary parents whose ‘natural’ community relationships with their extended family and kin are weak remain isolated, and, therefore, need peer support from the community and other parents. Edwards (2004) insightfully indicated that ideas about ‘family’ decline and community decline often overlap. This is also the case within family support projects, although many studies about families’ social networks provide no evidence that contemporary families are disconnected or isolated (Edwards & Gillies 2006; Haavio-Mannila et al. 2009). Furthermore, family support projects assumed that the loneli-

ness of contemporary parents is related to ideas about parenting as a skill set (*cf.* Lee 2014b, p. 8) rather than practical family life and childrearing arrangements.

Indeed, within communal parenting support, concern about parenting focuses on the social support contemporary parents presumably lack. I frame concern about parenting by employing socialisation theory in a similar way to how I framed individualised parenting support: concern about parenting focuses on parents' capacities and knowledge to socialise their children. However, unlike within individualised parenting support, concern within communal support is not related to the parent–child relationship, but to the parents' capability to interact with the wider parental community and therefore undertake culturally acceptable parenting practices related to how to be a proper parent (*cf.* Berger & Luckmann 1966). To be precise, the concern expressed by family support projects adopting communal support targets the resources of the parents to make proper connections to the community from whence they can gather the proper sorts of information in order to bring up and bond with their child. In other words, concern targets the socialisation of parents into an acceptable parenting culture and, therefore, parents' competence to interpret and mediate within the social sphere for their children (see Berger & Luckmann 1966, p. 190). In this process, community becomes essential, because, within communal parenting support, the experiences and knowledge provided by the wider community and especially by those 'sharing the same life phase' (*cf.* sub-study IV) represent significant sources for a proper parenting culture and are, thus, considered important for parenting and the wellbeing of children.

To sum up, parenting is supported in the family support projects by supporting the parent–child relationship—that is, the bond between the parent and the child (individualised parenting support)—and by supporting parents' relationships with other parents within the community aimed at enhancing a shared culture of parenting (communal parenting support). These two approaches of *parenting support* specify where the support is located in discussions of parenting, and therefore, answer the question posed in this research about what is supported when parenting is supported as well as how parenting is understood within family support projects. Next, I turn to the important question of how parenting *support* is conducted within family support projects through individualised and communal support, and what role parenting experts and expertise play in parenting support.

## 6.2 PARENTING SUPPORT AS ‘CONDUCT OF CONDUCT’: EMPOWERMENT OF PARENTS THROUGH ACTIVATION AND RESPONSIBILISATION

In order to promote the specific relationship and bond between a parent and a child, as well as to enhance parenting culture and community relationships, special kinds of capabilities are required for parents. These capabilities are discussed here by focusing on the techniques of parenting support by applying the notion of the ‘conduct of conduct’ (Dean 1999, p. 29; Rose 1999b, pp. 3–4). The question I respond to here focuses on *how* parenting support is conducted within family projects. Support as adopted by projects is interpreted here using governmentality theory, wherein support occurs ‘from a distance’ rather than as an exercise of visible power (Rose 1989/1999a). Modern-day experts insist that they are not judging parents (Furedi 2002), which serves to dissipate the hierarchies between parents as experts and professional parenting experts (*cf.* sub-study III). Overall, support provided to parents is intended to intensify parenting capacities, and typically takes the form of refined instructions. In the empirical analysis in the sub-studies, I identified different kinds of techniques, focusing on how parenting support is conducted within family support projects. Here, I highlight those techniques penetrating individualised and communal parenting support as parents’ capacities are enhanced.

First, activation stands as one of the most important techniques in parenting support. In individualised parenting support, activation serves as stimulation of the inherent capabilities and resources of parents, which are then directed towards improving the parent–child relationship (e.g., sub-study II). Parenting expertise, specifically from parenting professionals and experts, represents a widely discussed subject in contemporary studies about parenting support (e.g., Furedi 2002; Lee et al. 2014). According to Lee (2014a, p. 8), who has critically studied the recent focus on parenting support, parenting is considered a skill set, a form of learnt interactions rather than something carried out ‘naturally’. Therefore, parenting appears to require experts as mediators between parents’ instincts and children’s needs during the process of childrearing. In other words, the anxiety towards parental instincts as unreliable, and that parents need to be trained to identify basic childrearing practices has increased request for various kinds of parenting experts and parenting support (Lee 2014b, pp. 63.)

However, my analysis highlights a slightly different kind of reasoning in Finnish family support projects, which I touched upon in all of the sub-studies. In the projects, experts emphasise parents' own quiescent capacities, their own inner resources and, therefore, encourage parents to rely on their own expertise when bonding with their children. Thus, it seems as though a strong faith exists that assumes parents are basically competent in parenting, whilst simultaneously their competence needs assistance, someone to breath life into their latent and quiescent parenting capacities. Within this process, the activation and the role of experts—especially 'psy-experts' founded on knowledge provided by 'psy disciplines' (psychiatrists, psychotherapists etc.)—remains fundamental (*cf.* Sundsbø 2018a, 433; also, see, Maksimainen 2010).

An important comment has to make in relation to intervention projects. Namely, according to my analysis, things are different within intervention projects, wherein activation not only relates to parents' own latent competencies, but also to parents' competencies to receive advice on, for example, child development from professional parenting experts (*cf.* sub-study III). Therefore, there is also in Finnish family support projects, a certain point in parenting support wherein the active participation of experts is explicitly required.

Besides the activation of parents' own expertise, parents are encouraged by the family projects to be active in their communities and to rely on their contemporaries in parenting issues. This is evident when communal support is employed within family projects. Correspondingly, within communal parenting support, activation plays an important role in parenting support. However, unlike within individualised support, in communal support activation is not directed at the parent–child relationship, but towards other parents in the community. This is what I refer to as *horizontal expertise in parenting*, wherein the expertise provided by and shared amongst other parents in a community is emphasised (*cf.* sub-studies III and IV).

Indeed, family support projects organised a wide range of communal gatherings from peer support groups to family centres in order to activate parents to establish relationships with parental peers within their community. The purpose of these gatherings was not only to help parents to meet other parents in their community, but to increase the sense of community and togetherness amongst parents who presumably share the same life phase. From the point of view of the projects, the most important issue is that through these gatherings parents can get to know each other, discuss

how to be a parent and share their experiences and emotions in particular related to parenting issues. In other words, sharing strengthens the consciousness of parenting and therefore, the shared culture of parenting within a community,

Paradoxically, community is something that the projects consider lost, simultaneously placing an immense pressure on the community as a supportive device for parenting. As a solution to this dilemma, family support projects attempt to (re)build the community in a very particular way. This kind of community (re)build by the projects is interpreted in this study using Schmalembach's theories of society, communion and community. In particular, Schamlenbach's idea about 'communion' is important, since it illustrates the type of community that the projects tried to (re)build. However, as demonstrated in analysis of the family projects, there were tensions in projects' attempts to build communion based on 'shared life phase', which eventually turned out to be an illusion. As a consequence, communion is not performing as it was intended since the family projects as the active organisers in (re)building community, after all, represent 'society', which inadequately fits with the essence of a communion (*cf.* Studdert 2016; Studdert & Walkerdine 2016).

Along with activation, the family support projects adopted another technique also reflecting conduct from a distance (*cf.* Rose 1999b), namely, responsabilisation of parents about their conduct and its consequences for the parent-child relationship, which is closely related to activation. Indeed, activation should increase parents' responsibility towards parenting practices, which should ultimately lead to the empowerment of parents. This places empowerment within the nucleus of the support.

Responsibility represents a crucial quality related to good parenting (e.g., Jallinoja 2006; Sihvonen 2008; Widding 2018), often discussed in highly moralistic terms by family support projects, especially when the projects adopted individualised parenting support. In regards to responsabilisation, parenting appears indivisible and something that cannot be shared with other adults or institutions (see sub-study III). Therefore, within family projects, parents' responsibilities and their own expertise are emphasised along with professional parenting expertise (e.g., sub-study I). It is also noteworthy that responsibility is sometimes also discussed by quite heavily juxtaposing the responsibilities of parents and professionals, such as professional educators in early education and schools (see sub-study I). However, Rose (1999b, p. 74) argues that shaping private responsibilities is precisely how the liberal

strategy of government works. Thus, instead of direct advice regarding how children should be raised *per se*, parenting experts advise parents on how they could cultivate *themselves* in order to interact properly with their children as well as with peer parents in their community. This is exactly what *support for parenting* within family support projects means.

Finally, empowerment as an outcome of the activation and responsabilisation of parents seems to reject the patronising dependency of the state and its institutions. That is, empowering is supposed to make parents capable, competent and most importantly, independent from all kind of state and municipal support. Rather interestingly, the empowerment of parents is conducted by emphasising parents' own 'inner' expertise or shared expertise created with peers. This observation leads us to the next question posed in this research and discussed in the section that follows. Specifically, I now examine *how* and *why* parenting support became such an important element within family policy in early twenty-first century Finland.

### **6.3 THE 'TURN TO PARENTING' AND PARENTAL DETERMINISM**

The alliance between empowerment, responsabilisation as well as rejecting dependency and the need for help from state provided family services makes these concepts interesting, particularly from the point of view of the current Finnish welfare state undergoing many changes due to neoliberal reforms (Heiskala & Luhtakallio 2006; Julkunen 2006). In this section, I address the research question regarding why parenting support became such an important element within family policy in early twenty-first century Finland.

As already discussed (see Chapter 2), many family services experienced widespread cutbacks due to the deep economic recession of the 1990s in Finland. These cuts in family services were never restored to pre-recession levels (Bardy et al. 2001). According to Heiskala (2006), emerging neoliberal politics led to a 'paradigm shift' towards a market-oriented state policy, which emphasised the responsabilisation of citizens over their own wellbeing (see, also, Sulkunen 2009). Therefore, instead of restoring family services, resources were allocated to new kinds of family support manifested, for example, as family support projects and parenting support. Indeed, parenting support fits well with this discourse underlying individual responsibilities—that is, the role of parents vis-à-vis the wellbeing of chil-



dren. As a consequence, a juxtaposition emerges between professionals and parents, especially in discussions about childrearing. Indeed, professionals within family support projects expressed a fear that too many childrearing responsibilities fall to public services, and that parental responsibilities for childrearing should be reinforced. (*cf.* sub-studies I and III.)

Closely related to this, I also want to discuss what is *not* supported when parenting is supported. In other words, we must examine what is not included within the sphere of parenting support. Because support within family projects—by means of activation, responsabilisation and empowerment—targets either strengthening the parent–child relationship or strengthening parents’ relationships with other parents in the community such that economic, societal and cultural structures are overshadowed. A similar observation was made by many other scholars studying parenting support (Penn & Gough 2002; Gillies 2005, 2011; Ball 2014; Faircloth & Murray 2014). Yet, these structures also impact the wellbeing of children. I illustrate these changes in support for families by highlighting one example and resulting from a paradigm shift in state policy and family services in Finland. Yet, multiple changes in family policy and income transfers have occurred since the 1990s.

During the economic recession, cutbacks were made to a particular universal service for families, namely, home help for families with young children. Home help for families was developed in Finland in the 1930s, and has been organised as a public social service since the 1950s. Home help for families provided practical help with housework or taking care of children during times of illness, pregnancy or childbirth, but also provided enlightenment and advice on taking care of the home and children (Simonen 1990; Kuronen & Lahtinen 2011). In Finland, home help formed a portion of the preventative, universal, social services for families organised by local authorities. However, two changes have occurred since the 1990s, which Kuronen and Lahtinen (2011) have well-documented. First, home help for families with small children was limited primarily due to a demographic change and an increased need for home help for older people. Second, a change in the content of home help led to a greater selection and means-testing regarding eligibility for the service. Indeed, as I described in sub-study II, home help was contrasted to new parenting support, referring to guidance and talking instead of the practical assistance formerly included within the scope of home help for families with young children. As the analysis of the documents from family projects illustrated that family workers may guide

parents, but they are not supposed to act as an extra pair of hands. I argue that cutbacks in home help mirror overall changes in family policy towards parenting support—that is, from practical help and practical advice to activating parents and parenting capacities.

At least within the frame of reference of family policy, it appears as though activation, responsabilisation and empowerment have replaced all other possible interpretations of the need for support. The introduction of parenting support and a turn to parenting play significant roles in placing parents' behaviour at the nucleus of family policy. Indeed, given that parents' duties lie in promoting the specific relationship between the parent and the child and the emotional wellbeing of children, parenting demands special kinds of capabilities compared to other parental obligations, such as nutrition. These capabilities relate to the parents' competencies to interact with their children, which could be identified as a new form of a normative parental obligation, that is, obligation to adopt a certain kind of parenting style defining active orientation towards their children, such as 'positive parenting' or 'attachment parenting'.

In addition, this new normative parental obligation also relates to parental determinism—that is, how parents' behaviours represent the causes for not only multiple childhood dysfunctions, but also for children's future success in their lives (e.g., Furedi 2002; Macvarish 2014). The deterministic view of parenting argues that the experiences of early infancy and childhood carry life-long implications. Therefore, this deterministic view places pressure on this particular period of life, representing a paradigm which according to many scholars is developed by parenting experts (Hays 1996; Faircloth 2014, p. 44).

Overall, this kind of deterministic emphasis on the socialisation of children is reinforced especially through individualised parenting support. Furthermore, particularly early interventionist parenting support introduced by family support projects and scrutinised in sub-study II is founded upon the idea that parents' dysfunctional behaviour results in the ill-being of children. As a specific variation of individualised parenting support, early interventionist support highlights the importance of preventing small problems from becoming larger ones in a 'grey area of concern' (e.g., Arnkil & Erikson 2009). Concern, anxiety as well as the multiple risks children confront not only because parenting capabilities may be lacking, but because of parents' behaviours, are described by Macvarish as a change from parents being a protective factor in children's lives to parenting as actively

causing a disadvantage (Macvarish 2014, p. 92). Finally, I want to discuss the consequences of this deterministic view on the landscape of parenting in the twenty-first century.

## **6.4 SOME SOCIOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS OF THE LANDSCAPE OF PARENTING**

Here, I discuss in further detail what the techniques of support described above mean within the framework of parenting and the expectations of good parenting. Specifically, I note that all these techniques I described aim to increase parents' active awareness, their own inner expertise in parenting and a kind of 'reflexive agency', as perceptively illustrated by Gillies (2005, p. 85) in the orientation demanded of contemporary parents. Consequently, good parenthood seems connected to parents' reflexive evaluation of all possible options related to childrearing, often stemming from the child-centred perspective. Thus, parenting that is supported and desired within family support projects resembles what scholars describe as 'intensive parenting' (e.g., Hays 1996; Faircloth 2014) or 'neuroparenting' (Macvarish 2018). In short, intensive parenting means child-centred, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labour-intensive and financially expensive childrearing practices (Hays 1996, p. 8). Neuroparenting resonates within all of these and goes even further in relation to the parental determinism discussed in the section above. According to Macvarish, neuro-enthusiasm, often relying more on developmental psychology and behavioural science than actual neuroscience, combines the concern for parenting with brain development (Macvarish 2018, pp. 23 & 37).

To illustrate these notions about intensive parenting and neuroparenting, I turn to toddler finger-food practices as an example of this kind of reflexivity. Indeed, a reflexive parent considers finger food first as a method proceeding from breastfeeding or formula feeding towards complementary food through baby-led weaning, and, second, to encourage the self-feeding competence of a child, both methods highly recommended by parenting experts (e.g., Karmel 2009; Ollila 2018). Parenting experts highly recommend both methods. From another perspective, the finger-food practice could be justified by the parent's desire to eat peacefully without being obligated to physically feed the child. However, the later justification does not lean on any particular knowledge provided by parenting experts and is certainly

not child-centred. Therefore, it is not a suitable explanation for an identical activity with similar results—that is, fed, content and happy children. Another illustrative example of intensiveness stems from Macvarish's (2018) discussion of neuroparenting. To put it simply, a pregnant woman listens to her favourite music and pays attention to how her unborn baby is calmed when certain music plays. Another mother wearing the latest belly buds does the same thing, although she plays music recommended by experts for child-related purposes. She continues this practice, because she wants to ensure that the baby's brain receives all the potential stimulation it needs as early as possible to develop to its full potential.

However, I want to raise a question here: What if there is actually nothing wrong if the ideal picture of proper parenting mirrors intensive, reflexive and expert-guided parenting? There are, indeed, a few consequences that need to be delineated in relation to this question. First, intensive parenting is not gender-neutral. Some have pinpointed how the requirements of intensive parenting do not treat fathers and mothers equally, placing more pressure on mothers than on fathers (Hays 1996). Yet, recent studies indicate that some of that intensiveness has extended to fathers as well (e.g., Dermott 2008). Similarly, parenting support has been described as a gender-blind concept that masks gendered practices (Daly 2013b; Sunderland 2006; Daly 2013b; Valencia 2014), which became evident also in analysis of parenting support in the family projects, particularly as they tried to (re)build community (see sub-study IV).

Second, a reflexive and intensive parent requires financial, social, health and educational resources. That is, intensive parenting demands resources that are not available to all parents and, therefore, it appears to promote middle-class values. Indeed, inequality in relation to financial and other resources renders demands for reflexivity and intensiveness more difficult to meet amongst those with fewer resources, which are not highlighted in parenting support. Furthermore, parenting represents a task requiring resources beyond love and care, placing the capacities of poorer parents under greater scrutiny. As Macvarish (2018) highlights, this leads to disturbing conclusions such as social inequalities resulting from poor parenting. This line of thinking strengthens the idea about parenting determinism, meaning that parents' behaviours, skills and competencies strongly determine their children's futures.

Third, the often-used mantra of communal parenting support—'sharing the same life phase'—becomes problematised in family support projects.

Indeed, according to my analysis of family support projects, the picture of competent and responsible parents whose inner parenting expertise only needs slight awakening applies only to certain families and parents. For example, knowledge amongst the parents of so-called marginalised families is constructed in close relation to experts' knowledge (sub-study III; *cf.* Gillies 2005). Furthermore, in terms of communal parenting support, experiences shared amongst parents do not appear to apply to all parents in a community such as marginalised families and fathers, for instance. Indeed, marginalised families are not specifically viewed as a potential force in a parental community or experts in parenting. Thus, communal parenting support does not invite all parents to share their knowledge about parenting within a community as equal contemporaries, at least not as the constitutive agencies in (re)building community, strengthening horizontal parenting expertise and a shared parental culture. In truth, my analysis of family support projects revealed that involving marginalised families within a parental community represents a path enabling professional expert intervention (*cf.* sub-study II). These tensions in parenting support eventually defeat the very foundation of communal parenting support—that is, 'sharing the same life phase'—and aims to create a common parental culture defined from the perspective of middle-classes considered as representing mainstream parenting model.

I also want to discuss a likely symptom of the heavy requirements of intensive parenting often touched upon in critical studies about parenting support (e.g., Hays 1996; Gillies 2011; Ramaekerst & Suissa 2012; Faircloth et al. 2013; Lee et al. 2013), but rarely further developed. Specifically, I ask if the requirements of intensive parenting actually set parenting goals far too high, thereby affecting in many ways intimate family life and close relationships. As an example of intensive parenting and regarding how the goals might be set too high, I present two different examples. First, an interesting viewpoint in this discussion results from a study about the single mother-by-choice described by Layne (2013), wherein she ponders if single mothers-by-choice can be more intensive parents than parents in two-adult households. This stems from the mother's resources not being directed to a couple's relationship, but solely targeted to the mother-child relationship. This reminded me of a Finnish newspaper article about families coping with post-divorce life that appeared in the *Helsingin Sanomat* in March 2019, serving as the second example of intensive parenting. Some of those interviewed were living in dual-residence families, where children move

between households in order to spend equal amounts of time with both parents. Interestingly, some parents justified the living arrangements by being able to fully concentrate on parenting and be a better parent during those weeks when their children shared the same household. When there is always 'one week off', parents can use that time to concentrate on other aspects of their lives, such as their work. Yet, when children are at home they can fully concentrate on them, a requirement of good parenting. These two examples are naturally quite specific. Still, this lead me to wonder if parenting goals are set too high, too intensive, as if being a good parent requires so much effort that regular life and relationships no longer fit with parenting.

Finally, I wish to return to Riesman's types of social characters (see Chapter 2) —tradition-directed, inner-directed and other-directed. Specifically, I wonder if reflecting the social characters to the findings from this study could increase our understanding of the parental landscape of the twenty-first century. In particular, the emphasis on parents' own expertise could be further interpreted from the framework of Riesman's types of social characters. According to my analysis of parenting support, family projects seem to abandon the tradition-directed social character. Family projects seem aware that the shared, traditional, value-based goals upon which parenting could be based today no longer exist. Indeed, parenting support projects seem to emphasise the inner-directed character type, which relies on internalised self-control. However, parents cannot be left alone in this task; the 'self' needs therapy-like encouragement and, indeed, support in order to be a proper parent in the primary socialisation of children (*cf.* Berger & Luckmann 1966).

Furthermore, Riesman presumed that the third type, the other-directed character type, is less capable of influencing their children's lives, which according to Riesman only slowly emerged when his study was conducted in the late 1950s (Riesman 1961/2001, pp. 47–55). Riesman's analysis of social characters as well as his prognostication about the diminishing control of the other-directed character over her children proved remarkably accurate. Obviously, parents are very much like other-directed social characters, since amongst parents as well as children the opinions of their peer groups and contemporaries are highly important, a notion also supported by family support projects in the form of communal parenting support. At the same time, this seems to represent the development that projects also sought to counter, since they highlighted parental responsibilities (see sub-study I). Surprisingly, such projects adopted a quite similar tone, as illustrated in

the Home Upbringing Association of Finland in 1907, cited at the beginning of this thesis: ‘There are too high expectations for the school and too low expectations for the home’ (Parjo 2002, p. 1).

Moreover, the need to ‘equip the child to do her best’, as Riesman states in describing the duties of the other-directed character, certainly remains an important task for parents (Riesman 1961/2001). However, because of the requirements of intensive parenting practices, this ‘equipment’ does not denote any light parental charge. On the contrary, equipment has become something requiring constant strengthening and support provided by parenting experts. Furthermore, this is also evident in relation to how children and youth are seen; children are considered to be at constant risk, which is, indeed, not a possibility, but a probability of dangerous outcomes for children, who are *de facto* at risk (Lee 2014a, p. 11; Harrikari 2009, pp. 115–116).

To conclude, I wonder what Riesman (1961/2001) would have thought about the social character of contemporary parenthood. I propose adding a new level to this discussion, which focuses on how parents can become equipped whereby the ‘visibility’ or even ‘transparency’ of parenting is obligatory. Perhaps a whole new social character is developing and awaiting investigation and naming.

## 7 DISCUSSION

In this research, I have argued that support focused on parenting is a fairly new idea in family policy, first introduced in the late 1990s in Finland (Valtioneuvosto 1999). Closely related to that argument, I posed the following question: *Why did parenting support become such an important element within family policy in the early twenty-first century?* The results revealed that the emergence of parenting support occurred simultaneously with a paradigm shift in Finnish welfare state policy (e.g., Heiskala & Luhtakallio 2006). Within the nucleus of that paradigm shift lie responsabilisation and activation, techniques that also lie at the nucleus of parenting support as indicated in this research.

Furthermore, I indicated how these techniques theorised through the frame of reference of governmentality theory (e.g., Foucault 1991; Rose 1999b) are consistent with a psychosocial interpretation of parenthood (*cf.* Vuori 2001), widely adopted by parenting experts (*cf.* Faircloth 2013; Lee et al. 2013; Macvarish 2018) including the family support projects scrutinised in this study. This particular approach to parenting support needed to be conceptualised which I named individualised parenting support, also sheds light on another question raised in this research, namely, *what is supported when parenting is supported*. Furthermore, within the frame of reference of individualised parenting support, the question *how is parenting understood within family support projects* is understood as the interaction between family members—more accurately, the relationship between the parent and the child.

However, based on my analysis of a large amount of empirical evidence from 310 family support projects, I revealed another approach to parenting support, which I named communal parenting support. According to my research, the communal approach is founded upon support that targets (re) building the community and strengthening parents' peer relationships with other parents in the community. Overall, communal parenting support aims to support a kind of shared parental culture. In international critical literature about parenting support, individualised parenting support is widely recognised and studied (e.g., Ramaekers & Suissa 2012; Faircloth et al. 2013; Lee et al. 2013; Sundsbø 2018), but communal support is more sparsely discussed. This study contributes to the discussion about parenting support and broadens the view regarding how support for parenting is conducted.



Furthermore, the question raised in this study—*What is the role of parenting experts and expertise in parenting support?*—resonated rather differently in individualised and communal parenting support. In individualised parenting support parents’ own ‘inner’ expertise was highlighted, whereas in communal parenting support parenting was strengthened by peer relationships. In the literature about parenting support, the expansion of parenting experts has received a great deal of attention, often focused on what I have named here individualised parenting support (*cf.* Lee 2013b; Macvarish 2018). By employing governmentality theory, this dissertation increases our understanding of how parenting is guided from a distance in individualised parenting support (*cf.* Rose 1989/1999a, 1999b). Furthermore, expertise in communal parenting support, which I refer to as horizontal expertise on parenting, relies on parents’ peer relationships in a community. This result opens up an interesting discussion in relation to the social character of contemporary parents, which seems to rely on the ‘other-directed social character’ (*cf.* Riesman 1961/2001).

Riesman’s considerations about social characters as well as Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) socialisation theory proved to be highly advantageous, especially in terms of how to develop a sociological understanding and theorising related to the parent–child relationship. For Riesman, social character is a socially and historically conditioned self, which, in the case of a parent, allows us to understand parenting not only in relation to a child, but in relation to wider social relationships. Along the same vein, Berger and Luckmann open up a wider social perspective through which to delineate the parent–child relationship. Therefore, I propose that socialisation theory could advance theory within sociology, which I will touch upon in the next section.

## **7.1 LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER STUDIES**

For the purposes of this dissertation, I collected a comprehensive dataset about a subject which has not previously been studied in the context of Finnish society. The large volume of data—documents from 310 family support project—allowed me to scrutinise the implications of a ‘turn to parenting’ in Finnish family policy as well as to increase our knowledge about how parenting is understood within the discourse of support. Undoubtedly, the comprehensive dataset also enabled me to identify two major approaches

to parenting support, which I have named in this study as individualised and communal support, carefully discussed in the sections above.

Whilst the large amount of data is unconditionally one of the major strengths of this dissertation, it also carries challenges. These challenges are not only practical, such as how to handle the material and huge workload in the analysis required to carefully scrutinise the data, but also related to the demarcation of this study. Since I focused on comprehensiveness and creating a broad picture enabled by the rich dataset, some of significant and detailed nuances of the discourse were excluded from the analysis of this study, leaving room for future studies to tackle them. One of these perspectives is the gendered nature of parenting support, which I touch upon in the sub-studies, but which emerged as an entirely different story and beyond the scope of this study.

Another data-specific challenge exists. Due to the large number of family support projects, at a very early stage of data collection I was compelled to reconsider my preliminary intention to conduct interviews with parents as well as professionals from family support projects as well as with other parenting experts. Furthermore, whilst analysing the data, I noticed how projects referred to each other, which I found fascinating in the context of how knowledge about parenting and parenting support was dispersed via these networks. This, however, also turned out to be much too laborious for one person to tackle. Concentrating on the documents from the family support projects unavoidably lead me to focus on support and how support is conducted within family support projects. However, I have worked vigorously to incorporate the conceptualisation of parenting at every stage of this research, although I study parenting via family projects and support within this research.

This final point leads me to conclude this chapter with remarks focused on future research regarding this subject. The sociologically intrinsic question here becomes the following: How can we better study and understand the bond between a parent and a child from a sociological point of view? According to this dissertation as well as research carried out by many other scholars (e.g., Furedi 2004, Nätkin & Vuori 2009; Yesilova 2009; Macvarish 2018; Sunsbø 2018), the so-called psy-disciplines have been widely cited and adopted by different kinds of parenting experts. It seems that understanding parenting is now strongly composed within the framework of 'psy-disciplines' (Sundsbø 2018), which certainly occupy their own place in enhancing our understanding of child development. However, as illustrated

in this study, childrearing or the socialisation of children remains unequal given what is understood as ‘parenting’, rendering parenting a complicated and narrow concept. Indeed, within Finnish sociological discussions, scholars have expressed their concerns over the sociology of intimate relationships, stating that sociology must handover the majority of research on human bonding to other disciplines (Maksimainen & Ketokivi 2014, p. 103; Martiskainen 2014). A parent–child relationship is a perfect example of an intimate relationship, which should receive more attention in sociology, especially considering the importance of parenthood in every human’s life. Therefore, I propose that by turning our gaze towards the socialisation of children and further developing the theoretical basis of it, we can increase our understanding of how the parent–child relationship is embodied within the wider structure of society.

## 7.2 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Because the data collected for this study concerns the period from 2000 to 2010, a few remarks are in order regarding discussions around parenting as it stands in 2020. Whilst parenting remains in discussions about family life, the intense publicity about parenting anxiety witnessed in the early 2000s has notably waned. However, this does not mean that parenting support is considered insignificant in family policy and family work. Quite the contrary, such that parenting support has become a permanent and fundamental aim within family policy in Finland. For example, one key Finnish government project, ‘the programme to address reform in child and family services’ (LAPE, 2016–2018), highlights the importance of parenting support as a way of improving the wellbeing of children and youth. Parenting support is specifically developed in the Early Intervention Programme, which aims to serve as a resource for evidence-based interventions to support children and families, strongly resembling a well-known and widespread programme known as ‘The Incredible Years’ programme, originally developed in the United States.

As a practical contribution, I propose that parenting support needs to be clearly separated from support *for* parents or families, such as home help for families, income transfers and other kinds of state-supported services for families. Parenting support illustrated by family support projects represents only one specific and extremely limited way of supporting the wellbeing of children and families.

However, following these manoeuvres within Finnish family policy, I argue that parenting support was tamed and firmly adopted within family policy and family work during the first decade of the twenty-first century. Family support projects played a significant role in instilling this particular kind of family support within Finnish family policy and family work. In this study, I have described an important turn in family policy towards parenting support, including some alarming features I discussed here.

Finally, what is now discussed in regards to families, if anxiety about parenting has waned? Instead of parenting, one particular subject has received much attention within recent discussions about family life, namely, the tremendously declining birth rate. Whilst the birth rate has been declining for quite some time across Western Europe, this decline has become remarkably steep in Finland. Specifically, 2018 marked the eighth consecutive year in which the birth rate declined, setting the total fertility rate at its lowest level ever at only 1.41 children per women (Official Statistics of Finland 2018). Various theories and speculations attempt to explain why so few children are born in Finland. For instance, the low birth rate may be due to increases in voluntary or involuntary childlessness, the increased average age of first-time mothers, global warming and an awareness of limited global resources to maintain the huge human population, strengthened individualism and the self-interest of younger generations, economic polarisation and many others. Based on my results here, I need to add one more possibility to this discussion: due to parental determinism, it is unsurprising that parenting represents a heavy burden rather than a source of love and joy. Indeed, pressure to be constantly alert, reflexive and continually reminded that every step a parent takes—or does not take—most likely carries an enormous effect on a child's future. In this atmosphere, it is unsurprising that young adults hesitate in their decisions to have children.

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# Appendix 1: Variables entered into SPSS

Variables	Categories/ values	Categories/ values	Categories/ values	Categories/ values
<b>ID number</b>	1–310			
<b>Location</b>	Coordinating municipality by name / municipality where the project was conducted (NGOs)	All participating municipalities by name	County: Uusimaa Lapland Central Finland North Ostrobothnia Kanta-Häme Southwest Finland Kymenlaakso Päijät-Häme North Karelia Pirkanmaa North Savo Satakunta Kainuu South Savo Ostrobothnia South Karelia Central Ostrobothnia Multiple counties)  Municipal(s)	
<b>Type of the project</b>	Prevention Intervention			
<b>Funding</b>	<b>Primary source of funding source:</b> State RAY	<b>All funding sources:</b> State Municipality RAY Other		



<b>Participants</b>	<b>Main coordinator:</b> State Joint municipal board NGO Municipal CSO	<b>Branch of activity of coordinator:</b> Social and health Early education and School Research and Development units NGO Other	<b>Brand of activity of all participating actors:</b> Social and health Early education and School Research and Development units NGO Other	Participating NGOs by names
<b>Cross reference</b>	Cooperation projects by names (in the data)	Cooperation projects in the data (ID)		
<b>Documents</b>	Genre: Final report Mid-term report Project plan Funding application Other publication document	Length (pages A4)		

