

Summary

Parents in a modern society are expected to raise their children to become socially skilful and critical citizens. Parents themselves also seem to adhere to an ideal of conscious parenthood. What values and attitudes do parents think are important for the future of their children? This sociological study about raising children in contemporary society focuses on the question of what orientations parents use in the process of child-rearing and in particular how their own upbringing is important in this respect. An approach that dealt only with the meaning of the past would not, however, be sufficient to give an understanding of the attitudes and skills valued by parents in the raising their children. This research therefore also gives attention to significant others with whom parents talk about child-rearing and from whom they receive support.

The research question is twofold. First, how do social legacies affect the way in which parents raise their children? What child-rearing support networks can be distinguished, and how do they offer support for parents in raising their children? This study makes use of Bourdieu's concept of capital and Elias's notion of social inheritance. Bourdieu distinguishes three forms of capital: economic capital, social capital (social relations) and cultural capital (education and style). In this study the last two are the most important. Parents transfer to their children not only a genetic and a material legacy, but also a social legacy. Social legacy is used as a sensitizing concept. In this study it is seen as the values, attitudes and practices which people take over from their parents and which they consider to be meaningful in the raising of their children.

The second part of the research question addresses the social embeddedness of child-rearing. I have referred in this context to social child-rearing networks. Sociological theories about modernization assert that modern individuals are increasingly becoming the 'directors' of their own lives. An approach which sees child-rearing as part of a lifestyle, allows social inheritance and parents' social child-rearing networks to be studied in their mutual relation. Lifestyles are social practices and ways of living that reflect identities. Lifestyles may be seen as individual and collective expressions of differences.

This study can be situated in the qualitative research tradition, where typically a restricted number of cases is studied on several related aspects. In this study sixty parents have been individually questioned: mothers and fathers of different social backgrounds. The results of the study do not permit statistical generalisation to 'the parents in general'. They do, however, permit generalisation to social inheritance. The empirical results of the study are considered in chapters 4, 5 and 6. With respect to the values and skills which parents find important for their children, three main issues can be distinguished: education, personal growth, and social skills. Of these, the parents in this study stress the importance of personal growth and social skills. In what respects do parents make reference to their own upbringing? Most of them remember education as an important goal from their own youth, unlike to personal growth, which they do not remember. Social skills are also remembered, but in a more religious context.

How do parents deal with the task of raising their children? To whom do they turn for support? Do they rely predominantly on their families, or do they rather turn to friends or to professionals? The parents in this study virtually took no advice from professionals and did not read magazines about raising children. Instead, they received most of their support from their own social networks. I distinguished two types of networks: the family network, dominated by kinship ties, and the mixed network, dominated by people other than kin. In all networks, however, members of the family play a significant role.

Yet, this does not mean that kinship ties have the same meaning in every network. I found three different types of meaning: parents may have a predominantly family network, because they lack the skills to turn to others and therefore have no choice but to rely on their family members. Second, there are parents with a traditional orientation, who automatically turn to their family. A third motive is found in parents who make a deliberate choice to turn to their family. These parents are mostly higher educated. In all cases, the social networks of both mothers and fathers are largely made up of women. In family networks the support seems to be of an encompassing nature, whereas in mixed networks the support is more differentiated.

What different meanings are attributed to social legacies? The most positive valuation was found among parents who see their legacy as a guideline: they see their own upbringing as a criterion for the way they want to raise their own children. Next are parents who see their legacy as an inspiration; they have selected a specific theme from their past, which they explicitly wish to pass on to their children. A legacy of mixed feelings⁶ is found among parents who have neither a specifically positive, nor a specifically negative attitude towards their own upbringing, or who are ambivalent towards their past. Parents who are predominantly negative in their valuation of their own upbringing are classified as seeing their legacy as a burden. These parents wish to follow a different path in raising their children. The most striking conclusion in my opinion is that social legacies are extremely important for most parents. In almost all the interviews I conducted, parents spontaneously told me about their legacies, often in considerable detail.

The last chapter of the book presents an answer to the question concerning the relationship between social legacies, social networks, and the values which parents find important for their children. As the starting point for this synthesis, I took social legacies, since these were found to be important for the parents. I applied the lifestyle approach to the raising of children, and called it the stylization of child-rearing. Stylization may be regarded as referring to the essential colour⁷ of child-rearing: it is stylized by the meaning that every individual parent derives from her or his unique past. In this study five different patterns of stylization were discerned.

A style of intergenerational continuity was found among parents of lower education, who refer to the past to express the values they find important. These values are education and social skills, and they have a family network. They see their legacy as a guideline in a changing society.

A style of intergenerational innovation was found among more highly educated parents, who see their legacy as inspiration. They have quite large mixed networks and see personal growth and social skills as most important for their children.

A style of intergenerational ambivalence corresponds with a legacy of mixed feelings and with large mixed networks. These parents are also more highly educated, have quite large mixed networks and adhere to values of personal growth and social skills.

A style of intergenerational burdening. Parents with this style of child-rearing have a negative legacy. They have predominantly bad memories of their own childhood, and wish to raise their own children in a different manner. Their attitude can be characterized as *You have to make the best of it.* Most of them have lower education and their relationship with their kinfolk is strained. They have not been able to break away from their past and are stuck with relatively small family networks.

A style of intergenerational fracturing. Finally, there are parents who experience their legacy as a burden, but have been succeeded in breaking with it, assisted by a supportive social network. Their attitude is dominated by the wish to surpass their heritage. Their networks are mixed; the attitudes and goals in child-rearing of these parents are the most discontinuous with respect to their legacy. This style is found among parents with both lower and higher education alike.

The book ends with a reflection on the way in which social legacies stylize child-rearing. The past provides chances which shape lifestyle choices. The interplay of chance and choice forms the basis of the concept of lifestyle. In the theoretical discussion about modernization, much attention is devoted to individualization processes, which are seen as a central feature of society in a stage of high modernity, and held to be responsible for the fundamental changes in the way personal relationships are formed. These changes are reflected in the expectations concerning children. The need to choose and the constant interchange of orientations and values are strongly emphasized in this school of thought.

An important outcome of this study is that social legacies were found to be extremely influential in the raising of a subsequent generation. Parents have many different ways of giving meaning to their legacy; the variations are considerable. I have described five different patterns of the ways in which social legacies can influence child-rearing practices, calling them: stylizations of child-rearing. Parents in this study showed convincingly that they use their social legacies in many different ways as a source of support in a changing society.

In this study, the thesis on individualization is refined: in a rapidly changing society, the influence of the past undoubtedly exists. A radical stance on individualization does not seem appropriate in this respect. I would like to emphasize the importance of studying the ways in which people give meaning to their past, without falling into the trap of creating too static an image of a fixed past. The introduction of social inheritance as a sensitizing concept can be a starting point. This study provides insight into the many different ways in which parents make sense of their own rearing in the past. This may give a deeper

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understanding of the choices parents make, the goals for which they strive, and the values to which they adhere in raising their children.