

FATHER PERSPECTIVE TO CHILD PROTECTION

Does Gender Matter?

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## ABSTRACT

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The aim of this thesis was to describe fathers' experiences as child protection service users, how they as fathers had been taken into consideration in the social work processes and if their gender had played a role in the interaction with social workers.

The data was collected in five individual interviews in three different languages and the thematic narrative analysis was used to analyse the data.

All five fathers had different views over the child protection work. Yet none of the fathers claimed directly any failure in the process or dissatisfactory outcome due to the social worker's gender but rather due to the lack of life experience, professional or interactional skills of the social worker. Same gender did not necessarily guarantee a respectful cooperation, quite the contrary sometimes. Even after dissatisfactory interaction with female social workers, they were sometimes still preferred for dealing with family matters. The gender was not as such the determining factor to any success or failure in family work. The key was workers' professional expertise acquired through personal life histories and combined with long professional practice. The professional wisdom covered also gender sensitivity as one component.

To sum up, gender was not portrayed as a key to success or failure in child protection work as such. Professional wisdom included under its umbrella all social workers needed to bridge with fathers to look after their children's best interests.

Key words: Gender, fatherhood, child protection, thematic narrative analysis, qualitative research

## TIIVISTELMÄ

Eeva-Liisa Finne. Isänäkökulma lastensuojeluun. Onko sukupuolella väliä? Järvenpää, Kevät 2013, 74 sivua, 3 liitettä.

Diakonia-ammattikorkeakoulu. Diak Etelä, Järvenpää, Degree Programme in Social Services.

Tämän opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena oli kuvata isien kokemuksia lastensuojelun asiakkaina, kuinka heidät oli isinä otettu huomioon sosiaalityön prosessin aikana ja oliko heidän sukupuolensa vaikuttanut yhteistyöhön sosiaalityöntekijöiden kanssa..

Aineisto kerättiin viidessä yksilöhaastattelussa kolmella eri kielellä ja aineisto analysoitiin käyttäen temaattista narratiivista analyysimenetelmää.

Kaikki viisi isää näkivät lastensuojelutyön eri tavoin. Kuitenkaan yksikään heistä ei väittänyt, että mikään epäonnistuminen prosessin aikana tai siinä saavutettu epätydyttävä lopputulos olisi johtunut ilmiselvästi sosiaalityöntekijän sukupuolesta, vaan pikemminkin sosiaalityöntekijän puuttuvasta elämäkokemuksesta, lyhyestä työkokemuksesta tai heikoista vuorovaikutustaidoista. Sama sukupuoli ei välttämättä ole taannut molemminpuolista kunnioitusta yhteistyöhön, joskus täysin päinvastoin. Jopa silloin kun isä oli tyytymätön vuorovaikutukseen naissosiaalityöntekijöiden kanssa, hän silti mieluummin asioi perhettä koskevissa asioissa naistyöntekijän kanssa. Sukupuoli ei itsessään ollut olennainen tekijä perhetyön onnistumiselle tai epäonnistumiselle. Avainasemassa oli työntekijöiden ammattitaito, joka oli kertynyt omista elämäkokemuksista yhdistettyinä pitkään ammatin harjoittamiseen. Ammatillinen viisaus kattoi myös sukupuolisensitiivisyyden yhtenä osa-alueena.

Kaiken kaikkiaan sukupuolta ei kuvattu sellaisenaan avaimeksi lastensuojelutyön onnistumiselle tai epäonnistumiselle. Vahva ammattitaito sisälsi kaiken tarvittavan, minkä avulla sosiaalityöntekijät voisivat löytää yhteisen sävelen isien kanssa heidän lastensa etua valvoessaan.

Asiasanat: sukupuoli, isyys, lastensuojelu, temaattinen narratiivinen analyysi, kvalitatiivinen tutkimus

## ABSTRAIT

Eeva-Liisa Finne. La perspective des pères sur la protection des enfants. Est-ce que le genre jouerait un rôle? Järvenpää, Printemps 2013, 74 pages, 3 appendices.

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L'objectif de cette recherche était de décrire les expériences des pères en tant que clients auprès des services de protection des enfants, comment ils ont été considérés en tant que pères au courant des procès de l'assistance sociale et si le genre a joué un rôle dans l'interaction avec les assistant(e)s sociales/aux.

Les données ont été rassemblées lors de cinq entretiens individuels en trois langues différentes et l'analyse thématique des narratives a été utilisée pour l'analyse des données.

Tous les cinq pères avaient des points de vue différents sur les services de protection des enfants. Néanmoins, aucun des pères n'a directement réclamé le genre de l'assistant(e) social(e) étant la cause de l'échec quelconque dans le procès ou bien du résultat dissatisfaisant mais plutôt le manque d'expérience personnelle, professionnelle ou bien des compétences interactionnelles de l'assistant(e) social(e). Le même genre n'était pas toujours la garantie d'une coopération respectueuse, bien au contraire parfois. Même après l'interaction dissatisfaisante avec les assistantes sociales, les pères préféraient quelquefois tout de même gérer les affaires de famille avec des femmes. Le genre n'était pas en soi l'élément déterminant pour le succès ou bien l'échec de l'assistance familiale. La clé était l'expertise professionnelle des assistant(e)s acquise via les expériences personnelles ainsi que la longue pratique professionnelle. La sagesse professionnelle couvrait également la sensibilité de genre en tant qu'un élément.

Pour conclure, le genre n'a pas été représenté comme la clé pour le succès ou l'échec des services de protection des enfants tel quel. La compétence professionnelle a inclus tout ce que les assistant(e)s sociales/aux avait besoin pour se connecter avec les pères pour le meilleur intérêt de leurs enfants.

Les mots-clés : Genre, paternité, protection des enfants, analyse thématique des narratives, recherche qualitative

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## 1 FATHERS AND CHILD PROTECTION IN FOCUS

Gradually the importance of fathers' role in the lives of their offspring has gained more space in public discussions. Abigail Gregory and Susan Milner (2011, 589) indicated in their article the increasing public interest in fathers and fathering in Western Europe and North America. Gregory and Milner also wrote about the changes in fatherhood and the so-called new fatherhood, which result out of working life developments and altering gender role expectations among other factors. In Finland another topic of growing public interest and also concern has been the increasing numbers of child protection cases. Päivi Repo (2010) brought up most common reasons behind them, some of which came across in my five cases as well, namely parental fatigue, conflicting family situations and mental health disorders both with children and parents.

Many authors have tackled the problematic situation of fathers. One of them is the child psychoanalyst Didier Dumas, who accused men themselves for existing laws who have deprived fathers from fatherhood. He reminded that it was no one else but the male law makers who stamped the laws that weakened the fathers' position in the society, not feminists as so often has been claimed. Not to say that they understood the consequences of those resolutions at the time or, for instance, how fatherhood would later on become recognized only through maternal approval in some countries, or how overall diminished father role would then be. Dumas has met at his clinic a great number of patients who have longed after their absent fathers. Dumas underlined the over-generational wounds in families and their effects on the offspring, especially the tacit non-articulated ones. Likewise he repeatedly stated that both parents were needed for a child to reach the maturity. He also argued that children moulded parents in the interaction and not vice versa. Parents, after identifying in themselves the child they once were, were able to respond to the needs of their own children. (Dumas 1999, 16-27, 34-38, 46.) Dumas is one among others to declare that for our psychological development as human beings it is important to remain in touch with both parents.



Child welfare in Finland covers, on the one hand, the preventive child welfare services and, on the other hand, the child and family specific services (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2010). These services include a number of methods and actors. In my interviews concerning child protection were given examples of the work with child welfare officers, home visits, support families, multiprofessional meetings, immigrant social services, police interventions and general public health and social services. Despite the fact that all the five fathers had been customers at child protection, basing on their narration, only one father referred to a child taken into custody. In all the other cases supportive measures had succeeded to improve the situation back to normal without using the ultimate option of losing child custody.

Considering the vivid interest in fatherhood and the concern for children's well-being expressed in public inspired the selection of my topic. The main aim of my study was to describe the experiences of fathers having faced child protection services. The majority of social field workers are continually female, in Finland still in 2008 approximately one employee out of ten was male. In 2005 social services had equally male and female clients and yet 97% of family workers were female. (Ailasmaa 2011, 1; Koiso-Kanttila 2009, 177). Taking those figures into account, the second aim was to find out if the gender affected the work with fathers especially in difficult challenges for families such as divorce, guardianship or serious illnesses. Gender here has been restricted to the traditional bipolar fe/male frame as it has come up in the narratives told.

## 2 FATHERHOOD

In his article about theoretical models of fatherhood Thomas Johansson (2011, 237-240) established four variations or developmental stages, which may have followed each other chronologically but have also coexisted simultaneously. The traditional functionalist model was based on the strong head of the family, who earned the living for the whole family and served as a strong role model. Then Johansson has discovered the modern reflexive orientation in fatherhood, which was stated to remain rather weak and perplex and where the long-lasting conventional models started disappearing. Then the theories of hegemony started to restructure fatherhood towards multifaceted

equality, also beyond the gender equity. Finally, with the gender neutrality approach fatherhood became more and more often replaced by the gender-free concept of parenthood.

Father involvement in family lives has been discussed broadly. One attempt to approach the topic has been developing tools to measure it. Hawkins et al. (2002, 186) elaborated a set of nine dimensions to create the IFI, the Inventory of Father Involvement. They divided the nine dimensions into two categories, one with the conventional and one with the contemporary components. The traditional parameters followed Johansson's functional model of strong fatherhood as a provider and representing the leadership in the family. The new fatherhood appeared as more emotionally present and included parenthood sharing in daily lives.

### 3 GENDER

Gender as a concept has been subject to altering understandings throughout the history. The biological idea having roots in natural sciences and deriving from psychoanalysis has highlighted the two distinct sexes determined at birth – men and women. This view has dominated everyday life. Social sciences produced the socially constructed concept of gender, which considered the influence of the social environment to the developing gender through interaction. These both approaches established their theories on the grounds of gender differences; whereas the former was rather fixed the latter prepared more openly territory for deviations to the rule. As a comparison to these approaches, in psychology numerous studies have after all come to a conclusion that women and men are psychologically very much alike. (Holmes 2007, 2-3, 30, 172.) Richard Dyer rather downplayed the biological difference between men and women compared to their similarity (Dyer 2002, 53). Apart from these discussions, social gender as a whole is flexible and keeps changing, when we try to comply with social norms surrounding us by repeating what we believe to be conform to the norms (Butler 2006, 67, 240-243).

Gender as a concept is complex (Holmes 2007, 171-182). Firstly, every person acts and interacts mixing femininity and masculinity in their behaviour regardless their biological sex. Secondly, there are minorities dissolving any clear categories. The body may differ from the experienced gender identity. Some babies are born with physical features from both sexes. There are various sexual orientations. Keeping the multifaceted reality around sexes and genders in mind, theories soon appear to be quite simplistic. One of the merits of gender studies has been to show how artificially built a category gender is (Jokinen 2010, 128). Black and white yes or no categories tend to offend those who cannot place themselves solely in one category in the binary system created. In fact, we tend to lean on such simplified models. As Mary Holmes pointed out we are not able to think of the world around us gender neutrally, because we see every person coloured by our clear-cut gender understanding as a man or a woman (Holmes 2007, 1-2).

After this brief look at the wider horizon of sex and gender concepts, I restrict the boundaries of this study, where I have used the binary fe/male distinction between genders, based on the gender representations these five fathers have formed in their narration. Nonetheless, to slightly resist the binary gender world leading easily to the fierce opposition of genders, I have avoided the juxtaposition of women and men in my report whenever possible. Although the binary thinking affirms “the other” to exist with no doubt in parallel (McDowell & Pringle 1992, 3), I have tried to avoid comparing and referring to the female counterparts. I rather desired to discourage with my study – in my view unnecessary - gender opposition and gender rivalry.

## 4 MEN’S STUDIES

### 4.1 International Studies

The early stage of men’s studies took place in the sixties and seventies in the United States. Men started questioning a homogenous gender group and paid attention to other factors like ethnicity, sexual orientation and social class which often were the cause for oppression within the male gender as well. The trend was away from the biologically

determined sex thinking towards the socially defined gender. A more critical and reflective approach was developed at the end of seventies in Australia, Britain, North America and Scandinavia. The discourse of the hegemony of the unified men's group did injustice to the oppressed men. This second wave included both theoretical and empirical research. The debate around the hegemonic masculinity (both male supreme power over female gender and over other men) and queer theories (stretching traditional norms) with their refreshing views over normality delivered the third wave at the end of the millennium. Researchers broadened up from oversimplified gender understandings to observe male images and representations in cultural and historical contexts. Intersectionalism conquered space reflecting on not solely gender matters but also other determining relevant factors in each case. (Jokinen, Ahlbäck & Kinnarinen 2012, 172-174, 178-179.)

#### 4.2 Finnish Studies

In Finland men's studies (*miestutkimus*) were launched as a term in the mid-eighties. There were studies on strongly male relating phenomena like homeless people, alcohol problems, health issues and suburb pubs, in other words the scope was problem-centred. In the nineties life stories and article collections dealt with a number of topics from fatherhood, unemployment and sexuality to honour, shame and emotions. The effects of war time emerged in research, so did violence and some male cultures and/or representations in arts. Critical men's studies in the nineties wanted to empower those men who had been marginalized and initiated more positive discourses on masculinity in general. Men had become victims of the ruling male class and suffered from conventional restricting masculinity expectations themselves. The third wave at the dawn of the new millennium has expanded the areas of interest. Yet, the overall image of men's studies is a scattered one and shared among various faculties such as cultural and pedagogical studies. The need for gender equality policies exists, yet the research has not met those needs in social or political sciences. (Jokinen, Ahlbäck & Kinnarinen 2012, 175- 177, 179-183.)

Gender studies in Finland at the moment focus mainly on female gender. There are not many researchers in the Finnish academic world conducting gendered studies on male gender. Therefore men's and masculinity studies do not have a firm footing at the

universities and lack simultaneously both financial support and manpower. In other words, there have been no posts for developing men's studies and teaching has relied on some occasional courses. Male gender emerges nowadays as the invisible gender in its turn. Even the research done on men and boys does not demonstrate gender sensitivity. However, the increasing interest in the gender equality from male and father perspective would require more gender specific knowledge. (Jokinen, Ahlbäck & Kinnarinen 2012, 171, 182-184.)

Ilana Aalto (2012, 186-191) joined the choir by criticizing fatherhood studies as dispersed and not coordinated. She also blamed them for concentrating too much on adult perspective thus ignoring children. Research topics have touched the process of becoming father and later on acting as a father, emotional aspects, work related fatherhood, parental leaves, divorce cases, father identities, household work and child care taking. Aalto called after fatherhood representation studies and inquiries on ambiguities in research findings about the institutional processes with fathers in education and social field. Some studies have proved that dealing with fathers was mother-centred and other studies that the work approach was father-supportive. All in all, she was concerned about the missing critical reflexivity in fatherhood and men's studies to challenge the traditional power structures and fixed ideals of norms and normality within families or among genders.

During the literature review it appeared that an array of articles agreed how unfair the social work world was with men and fathers. Timo Kitunen made no exception to the rule. He partially founded his opinions on his personal experiences as a male social worker in a female dominant profession. He accused female colleagues for easily excluding a lonely male professionally as the advantage of the majority. He continued by regretting how male clients were not heard or understood. He deemed social work as apparently gender neutral, where there was no space for gender specificity, which was buried under jargon called professionalism and neutrality. He suggested gender specific approaches in social work education, which have already been undertaken by some associations to name one example Miessakit ry. (Kitunen 2007, 113-115.)

Marjo Kuronen with her co-editors went as far as calling Finnish social work practice and research gender blind compared with international studies. They reminded of the Finnish gender research history. It was the reason why the general public discussion has

learned to avoid – pursuing gender equality ideas - making any gender differences or touching female specific areas. However, according to Kuronen et al. in social work practice social problems and interventions were gendered. (Kuronen & Granfelt & Nyqvist & Petrelius 2004, 5, 8.)

## 5 METHODOLOGY

### 5.1 Data Collection

#### 5.1.1 Starting Point

From the very early stage I planned to carry out a qualitative research with a typically small number of informants to construct the data for a closer scrutiny and not to begin with any ready hypothesis to be tested. This matched with my aims to collect personal experiences, not to create statistical facts (Silverman 2005, 113; Hesse-Biber 2007, 119; Alasuutari & Bickman & Brannen 2008, 6; Bergman 2008, 590.) A group interview as an option was ruled out. Firstly, it did not seem to be a proper forum for unveiling sensitive family matters and secondly, it was impossible due to three different interview languages needed. Thirdly, finding a suitable gathering place in common would have been difficult due to long distances.

#### 5.1.2 Purposive Sampling

I used a purposive sampling for my interviewee selection. According to David Silverman (2006, 306) a purposive sampling requires that we select cases, which are relevant to our topic. The five cases in my thesis study were chosen most importantly because either I was aware of or had been informed that they had been social work clients as fathers. I realized before long that they had all used, to be more accurate, child protection services. Having said that, a precision needs to be made, male or father in this report is used in a traditional heterosexual way as the participants had represented themselves during the interviews. Likewise, all the five cases represented biological

fathers. Since straight from the beginning the gathering of informants was through my own networks and connections, I did not want to change the channels despite the fact that two candidates were dropped out during the thesis work process.

For pragmatic reasons, we possessed at least one language in common to converse fluently. I deliberately did not take notice of any other criteria or background information during the selection process, although I tried to find fathers both with a Finnish origin and with a foreign origin. Neither did I ask many background questions during the interviews, because within this small sample I would not have been able to evaluate the effect of various background factors. None of the fathers shared either municipality they lived in or child welfare office they had used.

When I considered more participatory options and action based approaches for the data collection to replace traditional interviews, they did not seem adequate for the type of information I was looking for and here again the language barrier interfered. However, after pondering the possible benefits of my study to the participants, I decided to add abstracts in all interview languages, namely in English, Finnish and French and according to possibilities return to each interviewee to review together the outcome. In addition to this, I enlarged the questions out of the original narrower gender scope to reach the questions of an ideal father and social worker and asked the fathers to construct their ideals. The intention behind was to inspire the participants to reflect on their fathering and existing capacities in comparison to their own ideals. At the same time the purpose was to take distance from the real life situations (Hänninen 2003, 55) at child protection and reflect on what they wished as service users from a professional social worker. Narration as such is often regarded as an empowering tool to manage turning points in life and at the same time informants not only supply the data but also build up identities and meanings (Riessman 2008, 8; Doucet & Mauthner 2008, 335; Hänninen 2003, 50).

### 5.1.3 Interview questions

I created the questions first in English (Appendix 1) and then translated into French (Appendix 3) and Finnish (Appendix 2). The interview questions contained both closed- and open-ended ones, but most closed-ended questions (with a limited choice of replies

like yes and no) were still followed by an additional question. The interview questions were formed before opting for any specific data analysis method.

The set of questions included themes such as the assessment of the overall family work process, consideration of fatherhood at child protection services, gender effects in interaction with social workers, gendered family roles at home, ideal fathers and ideal social workers. As the interviews progressed, the narratives of each participant about fatherhood and life management in difficult times but also the interaction with social workers and other authorities increasingly drew my attention. Had I known from the start, that I would be choosing the narrative approach for the collected data, I might have used written narratives instead of interviews, which as a more formal and time consuming approach from the interviewee perspective did not seem operational with the volunteers at hand. That being the case, I should have reached out for informants in a different manner. Thus the written text format was excluded. Following the interview pattern, had I known from the early stage onwards my analysis method, I would have given more space and freedom to the interviewees to develop the answers. The questions as well as the interview sessions were now quite structured, which probably partially limited the free flow of conversation and narration. This way I as an interviewer directed strongly the interviews and answers by my guiding questions, although some interviewees did introduce new topics.

#### 5.1.4 Conducting Interviews

The interviews were held between August 2011 and August 2012. As I had sent beforehand the questions to all participants, all of them had apparently spent some time to reflect on the questions in advance. At the outset, the first interview was filled with emotional load and stress concerning the techniques used: the new audio-recorder for the interviewer and possibly the official-like recording session as such for the interviewee. After a few trials with the recorder the seating arrangement was changed in order to avoid the face-to-face seating. Then the emotional tension calmed down, the technical side had become more familiar for both and the interview session continued as planned. After the first two interviews it was clear how important it was to remind the interviewee of the possibility to switch off the recorder at any moment. The second interviewee mentioned that he had been a social work client already before arriving to



Finland. I gave him the liberty to choose and he singled out Finland. Therefore, every father described the child protection services in the Finnish context.

In the third interview the routines were already more familiar to me as an interviewer and I was able to support and encourage the interviewee better than during the first two interviews. During the transcription this became an obvious asset. Since the conversation had been running smoothly, it was easier to transcribe as well. During the last two interviews I was clearly more ready to probe and return to unclear issues. In the fourth interview the informant returned to a topic he had touched earlier during the interview and elaborated further on at the end of the discussion. In the fifth interview I as an interviewer decided to extend the discussion after the original questions were over.

All in all, two interviews were conducted in Finnish, one in French and two in English, in other words two participants were of Finnish origin and three of foreign origin. The language used affected the verbal exchange, because I was the least at ease in French and less flexible as an interviewer. From the language aspect, it was harder to run an interview in a foreign language, as one has no similar kind of flexibility to think whilst concentrating on the language itself. The same effect could perhaps be found on the interviewee side, since the fathers with a foreign origin could not use their native languages. They had all lived in Finland for some years already and I believed they had quite a good knowledge of the Finnish society. That is why I was not truly concerned of the cultural understanding from their side.

Comparing the interviews I conducted with the typology of interview strategies by Noaks and Wincup (2004, 80), my interview situations developed during the research process from structured through semi-structured to open-ended. First, it was difficult to prompt or adapt in the interview setting and I followed strictly the questions. When the practicalities became more familiar, I started feeling more confident and was able to ask additional questions to clarify and support the understanding or the flow of conversation. Although the original questions remained the same, the situations became more interactive. Building trust was not a significant challenge in this study, because all the interviewees knew me in advance either directly or through our common network. (cited in Silverman 2006, 110.)

Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber has used the scale formal/informal for interviews (Hesse-Biber 2007, 115-116). In her scale my interviews advanced from formal towards informal. My set of questions included both open- and closed-ended questions, which I first faithfully followed leading the interview situation. Hesse Biber has paid attention to the power relations, where more formal and structured interview situations shift control to the researcher. My interviews shifted gradually more control to the interviewees without ever becoming fully informal or unstructured. Even though I became influenced by feminist researchers during the literature review, in this matter I remained far from their ideal of conducting a non-hierarchical research (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008, 330).

#### 5.1.5 Challenges

Anna Rastas reminded that the differing original cultures may hinder the proper understanding between the interviewer and the interviewee. At times some of the obstacles may be overcome by the selective choice of the interviewees, yet considering all possible cultural differences in advance is impossible. Cultural interpretations need to be reflected during the data analysis. Then again it would be simplistic to claim that those presumably from the same original culture would always have a culture in common. Geographically or nationally based identities are not the only ones nor do they necessarily take over at all times. (Rastas 2005, 80-93.) This cultural aspect came up especially at the report writing phase. There were some quotations I wanted to use but hesitated because of the possible contribution to any negative stereotyping, which I especially wanted to avoid. Yet, at the same time those quotes showed how deeply context relating self images were and constructed to fit a wider communal or cultural identity frame.

What turned out to be the most significant challenge for interview meetings was finding a suitable timing to match with busy father schedules. Some interviews were postponed several times due to cancellations and overlapping events. That is the reason why at some point in time I tried to obtain answers in written format from the busiest fathers, yet my trial failed. Already the first written input showed the impossibility. The brief yes, no and blank answers were not helpful for the analysis, not to talk about utilizing narrative analysis. I then fully abandoned the idea of receiving any written inputs and

continued my pursuit for interviews. As Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber (2007, 119) indicated, a personal face-to-face contact missing, connecting to the informant may prove to be more difficult. Finally, after the fifth interview I decided to stop searching for more participants, since there seemed to be enough data for the analysis purposes by then. Furthermore, I did not want to change the informant search method in the middle of the process.

## 5.2 Data Analysis

### 5.2.1 Steps in Data Analysis

According to David Silverman, the data analysis starts already before the data for the study in question is collected. The first step is to go through the existing relevant information in relation to the research aims and the second step is to reflect the data against research questions and possible data analysis methods and their adequacy throughout the data collection. The third step after the data collection is to make sense of the data, in other words to find out the key issues and connections between them. (Silverman 2005, 149-157.)

### 5.2.2 Starting Point after Data Collection

The duration of the final recorded part of the individual interviews, excluding the introductions, the breaks in recording and recording trials, was from 16 minutes to one hour. After the transcription work they equalled to a total number of 51 pages. Final transcripts interpret the interview situation (Ruusuvuori & Tiittula 2005, 24.) As my intention was to search narratives from the data, I kept the signs in the transcripts to the minimum. I intentionally neglected precise notes on details such as the length of pauses, intonation, simultaneous talk or pace of talk particular to other more linguistic narrative analysis methods than thematic narrative analysis (Riessman 2008, 59). The usage of too sophisticated signs for transcription lost its meaning in this study and might have guided to a wrong direction in data analysis. The scarce field notes taken and observations registered supported the general understanding of the transcripts

(Silverman 2005, 163-164). However, I added occasionally in parentheses complementary descriptions, which supported the meaning of the speaker or illustrated the interview atmosphere in general. These choices I made were conform to my anticipated assumptions and understanding of the outcome and data analysis methods to be used (Nikander 2010, 433).

Before starting any more profound analysis of the collected data, I renamed each five cases with a letter, from A to E, in order to dispel the personal characteristics and remain consistent about the confidentiality. In data analysis both levels of reading the data are needed, since the macro and micro levels complete each other (Ruusuvaori & Nikander & Hyvärinen 2010, 22). After the transcription work was completed, I read the interview scripts through several times to discover what mostly drew my attention in the texts be it words, expressions or general tones of the narration. There were similarities and differences in the individual cases and I started gathering the main points from the responses in a table to be able to review them more effectively. After collecting the core information together, I began to realize the overall nature of each case more clearly. In parallel, I started to recognize typical repeated narratives among them, and started regrouping them for my narrative analysis (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, 222). On my way I also found those narratives, which deviated from others and were exceptional in the data at hand.

### 5.2.3 Research Questions vs. Emerging Themes

There were two main topics in the narratives that drew my attention in relation to my research questions: how fathers viewed the social services received and how they estimated gender affected the interaction with social workers. In addition to my original research questions in the data analysis came up strongly the overwhelming zeal and passion fathers described their fatherhood and families with at the interviews.

I divided the narratives in two main thematic categories. First one described social work from different angles as they occurred in the narratives; interviewees' general attitude towards social work, trust in social work processes, legal aspect in social work, gender influence and suggestions to improve working practices. Second one collected together families and peers mentioned in narratives; how family and peers were supporting the

process, how gender roles worked out in families and the visions of ideal fatherhood. In other words, the classifying of the themes started from the relations between the fathers and their social workers and what possibly hindered or improved the relations according to these informants. It ended up by the relations fathers had with their peers and families, how they saw the societal changes had affected gender roles in families and what their fatherly role visions were. As accustomed in thematic narrative analysis, I intentionally limited focus to these themes and mostly ignored other perspectives such as language or context (Riessman 2008, 54-59).

### 5.3 Narratives

In his reply to the critics of narrative inquiry and his attempt to clarify the position of narratives in the research world, Michael Bamberg (2012, 203) has defined narratives as follows:

Narratives are about people (*characters*), who act (*events*) in *space* and *time*; typically across a sequence of events (*temporality*). The narrative form (structure) is said to hold the content together (what the story is about — its plot) and sequentially arrange the story units (*orientation, complication, resolution, closure*) into a more or less *coherent whole*.

As a term narrative is used in a number of ways and quite often interchangeably with story in social sciences (Hyvärinen & Löyttyniemi 2005, 189). It may appear in various forms, not exclusively as texts but also in audiovisual formats. It can be found in both formal and informal accounts of events as well as in both official and artistic ones. In research it may narrowly refer to one specific interviewee's answer to a certain question, or to a series of interview conversations or even more broadly to a fully covering life story. There are three levels of narratives in research: first the participant produces her/his own narratives, then the researcher during the analysis stage her/his own and finally the reader of the final report yet another one. (Riessman 2008, 3-8.)

Timo Tolska explained how Jerome Bruner (1985) differentiated narrative thought from narratives. On the one hand, according to Bruner there is a process of thinking when a person constructs a story. On the other hand, there is the end product of that thinking process called a narrative, which is narrated to others in order to describe lived experiences. All the cases in my study were woven around problematic turning points in

family lives leading to the usage of child welfare services. As Bruner et al. (1990) noted, narrative thinking is used to solving problems and making sense of unusual events. (cited in Tolska 2002, 23, 146.) Therefore the narratives delivered during the interviews and their analysis appeared to be an appropriate tool to describe the interviewee's experiences about child protection services.

According to the definition by David Silverman (2005, 379), a narrative is an organized and meaningful story built up for a certain occasion. This would suggest that a narrative is not an objective collection of facts but one interpretation of the world around. It is also an end product of an interaction between the author and the listener. Therefore I have tried to maintain throughout my report that what my interviewees have expressed are not facts and figures but collected memories and accounts of events as they have seen them and wished to represent to me as a researcher. As a research method narrative analysis produces yet another story created by the researcher revealing her/his interpretation of the interviewees' world view. Mary Juzwik (2010, 377) criticized in her article the over-stated representative character of narratives, whereas they were only reduced accounts of experiences.

Catherine Riessman (2008, 8) stated that because the audience and narrator generate together the narrative, the context is always relevant for the interpretation process, for instance, the social role of a story as a political catalyst, the historical timing, culture, surrounding discourses and power relations. Furthermore, Wolfgang Kraus mentioned that narratives were a way to reconstruct the social cohesion when it was endangered in order to bring about a sense of belonging. (Kraus 2007, 129-130.)

Tarja Aaltonen and Anna Leimumäki agreed with other researchers that as such we cannot compare directly life and experience with narratives. Narratives are events built up in narrative forms to be performed to an audience. That process is a tool to make sense of what happened, to restructure the world around and to portray it to others. While the process is ongoing, the narrator reveals not only his world view but also his self-understanding and identity. Narration shows how the narrator has undergone what has happened, but narratives are exposed to endless variations of decoding their message. (Aaltonen & Leimumäki 2010, 146.)

Narratives are only one type of discourse. Their special characteristic is their structured place in space and time, as they bridge the past and the present. They often describe a process of transformation. They also offer a stage to uncover or build up one's identity and understanding of self. By narrating a human being may handle different turns in life and bridge stages of life together but equally may find one's place in the social reality. (Bamberg 2004, 353-354, 358; Aaltonen 2002, 43-44.) Jerome Bruner (2004, 694-695) stated that life and narrative influence each other bilaterally. That being the case, our autobiographies reflect what our life has been, is and is going to be like. Our narratives take over our life course, although they are simultaneously affected by external interference from the surroundings. Bruner assessed this was the possible healing aspect of self-narratives as well, since their instability means they may be subject to changes through external interventions.

Riessman pointed out that narratives were invitations to use the lenses of the narrator, to understand their experiences, although she recognized the danger of being purposefully misled by the narrator. At the same time she reminded of the strength of the narratives as a possible fuel to positive social change. (Riessman 2008, 9.) Briefly, one could say that in narratives our attention is drawn by somebody's lived reality, a world view, a transformation or a progress. What changes are narrators, main characters and stages of events. (Hyvärinen & Löyttyniemi 2005, 191.) In my research I have collected five lived realities of fathers who have been child protection service users. Their narratives had distinctively different styles, also the characters and the practitioners included differed. Hence their personal accounts were all experiences of using child protection services but, nevertheless, coloured by their individual life histories.

#### 5.4 Narrative Research Process

Narrative research derives from the humanist tradition and person-centred approach in social sciences but also from the postmodern multiple and multi-layered subjectivities created in the social interaction (Cigdem 2011, 92). Ruthellen Josselson (2007, 7-8) pointed out that every stage in narrative research is about interpretation be it building up the key concepts, choosing the target group, creating questions, transcribing or analysing and focusing on certain issues. He also illustrated how different the levels of interpretation may be starting from a surface level of echoing the interviewee's voice to

a deeper level of hidden meanings related to the cultural context. As a matter of fact, Michael Bamberg contested the choices made during the interpretations which sometimes promote only one narrator's voice, favour the most interesting and meaningful narratives, narratives with less connection to the context or the more structured ones. Narrative, according to him, is not a fixed form; it can be modified at different times and the same narrative may produce diverse interpretations. (Bamberg 2004, 356.)

Barbara Czarniawska (2004, 47-49) approached the interviews from several angles. She warned about the danger of getting in a dialogue with the interviewee, although she was ready to admit, that there is no straight forward interrogation during interviews. The interview is constructed in interaction between the researcher and the interviewee. She emphasized that rather than their own views on the research topic, the researchers should offer a listening pair of ears and a genuine interest toward the interviewee's interpretation of the topic. Johanna Ruusuvuori and Liisa Tiittula (2005, 23) slightly disagreed by admitting that interviews may resemble to spontaneous discussions, although are guided by the research aims. Besides, in their opinion, the question and answer role setting between the interviewer and the interviewee is usually quite clear. Researcher is there to collect information.

Czarniawska (2004, 62) continued by arguing that the interpretation or a new narrative constructed by the researcher does not need to be a repetition of what has actually been said, she claimed it to be both the right and the duty of the researcher to create a new story. Nonetheless, she emphasized the author's responsibility of the interpretation and towards the interviewee. She continued further by saying that the researcher may oppose in her/his views to the interlocutor, as long as s/he stays loyal to the interlocutor by clearly distinguishing the conflicting positions.

Interview scripts can be analysed and the researcher makes her/his own narrative out of them by rewriting and interpreting them. They can be also reviewed through conversation analysis as narratives of interviews and hence a special form of text describing the interaction. (Czarniawska 2004, 55.) There is no ready commonly agreed model for narrative analysis. Researcher decides based on the research questions how to approach the data, but it is rare to have an interview, which would contain only one narrative. (Hyvärinen 2010, 90.)



In his critical article about narratives, Crispin Sartwell argued that a narrative is not the only form of communication and therefore not more or less important as any other way of conveying a message. He also stated that a narrative is more of a linguistic tool and can be too narrow an approach to express broad life aspects such as culture, identity, experience or meaning. (2007, 185-186.) According to Angela Woods, narratives seem to have stolen the central stage from other ways to reflect on or to present experiences. They are claimed to provide a straight access to an authentic personal lived reality forgetting the interaction and performance that guide them. They are criticized for privileging certain capacities in human beings such as logical and causal thinking to give a meaningful account of events, which is not even necessary everywhere. Their universality is questionable and their linguistic emphasis reprehended. (Woods 2011, 400-405.)

As it became apparent the responses at the interviews were often told in narrative forms, I decided to carry out a narrative analysis, which tolerates a wide range of ways to conduct the analysis and may concentrate more on the representations of ideas, relations and roles than only on plain discourses or texts. During the analysis phase I further narrowed down to thematic narrative analysis to better match with the collected data and to better illustrate the key findings that emerged from the data.

## 5.5 Narrative Analysis Models

The three models of narrative analysis are structural, thematic and interactional/performative. The structural analysis concentrates on how the story has been told and structured. The thematic model keeps the focus on the contents and emerging themes in the data. The interactional/performative model highlights the coconstruction of narratives between the narrators and the audience or the larger social context involved. In this study I decided to use the thematic model. I broke down the individual cases into thematic units of analysis. (Cigdem 2011, 98, 105.) Catherine Riessman (2008, 141) has also added visual analysis to the list as a fourth narrative analysis method to handle aesthetic representations.

In the narrative analyses there are two main approaches; naturalist and constructivist. In the naturalist approach the emphasis is on what and in the constructivist one rather how and in what context (Cigdem 2011, 96). In my thematic narrative analysis I have paid less attention to the aspects of how (interaction, self positioning, narrative structure and discourse) and where (context) than what has been told to have happened (contents).

## 5.6 Beyond Narrative Themes

In thematic narrative analysis the main interest is in the themes found in the narratives in question. However, selecting themes alone is considered as too narrow of an approach in narrative analysis, which then would exclude other aspects such as the dialogue and narrativity (Hyvärinen 2006, 17). In the narrative classification by Kevin Murray (1989) there has been identified a romance, an irony, a comedy and a tragedy (cited in Hänninen 2003, 96). From this typology I have borrowed for my observation the last two: comedy and tragedy. In a comedy the main character is shown as someone to feel sympathy for, in other words, who may have his weaknesses but overcomes them by discovering his abilities and chances available. In a tragedy the main character proves to be innocent but still loses in his battle against the evil.

Elaborating Murray's typology these narratives in my thesis work could be divided into two model stories. I have named them here as Success (comedy) and Failure (tragedy) narratives. If in the overall picture all these informants wanted to give the impression that the family work process was completed and a success, in varied themes their narratives turned out to be both Successes and Failures. In their Success narratives they have told what has helped the cooperation with their social workers and in their Failure narratives they have captured what has been hindering the cooperation. Themes selected for the thematic narrative analysis will provide a deeper insight into what may have been affecting the processes to become a success or a failure.

Any narrator wishes the audience to be interested in their stories and consider the tellability by creating attractive enough accounts of events. Narratives are not always a ready neat package to be unwrapped. They can be inconsistent and even contradicting with themselves. (Hyvärinen 2006, 7, 10.) For instance, when directly asked, all these five fathers answered without any exception that the family work processes were over.

Yet, afterwards they mentioned in different ways how, after all, the work was still ongoing. Time-wise they presented as if the process was already past, and yet despite their general denial, the processes were not only present but at times predicted to possibly continue in the future. Nonetheless, in order to construct a completed action in the narration, they described the processes as closed.

At the same time, in parallel, with their time-lines used they referred to the success of the work. If the dramatic turning points or other events in their lives had started in the past leading them to child protection services, afterwards there had been the successful family work process they had described to be over. End of story. Hence, in the terms by Aristoteles there was similarly to a proper tragedy a beginning, a middle part and a closing in each case (Hyvärinen 2006, 3). The plot of the story evolved through more or less effective interventions by social workers, which I have collected in this report under various themes influencing the social work process outcomes.

Hyvärinen (2006, 6) cited the linguist William Labov's narrative structure model. According to Labov, a complete narrative would have an abstract, an orientation part followed by the complicating action, then an evaluation phase, a result or resolution and a coda at the very end. The order of the components may vary. To reach the coda, the happy end, these five fathers all closed up the chapter by maintaining that the processes were over. After all, because the most dramatic incidents were behind and solved, life was in practical terms back to normal.

Hyvärinen (2006, 10-13) also referred to the philosopher Paul Ricoeur's narrative analysis model, which has portrayed the functionality of narratives. Ricoeur has discussed the discontinuity between the lived experiences and the narration. What appears in narratives may not exist at the time of narration. Narratives are an attempt to reach the absent past and future. The conflicting elements are moulded into a plot to achieve a common ending. Because we are able to enter fictional situations in narratives, we have the possibility to choose how we narrate in a dialogue with our interlocutors. We construct narratives and they form us and our narratives in turn.

My position as a researcher has been part of the narrative construction during the interviews. My gender, my nationality, my ethnic background and my professional future as a social field worker have all played a role in the formation of these fathers' narratives. The narrators have tried to position themselves into cultural, professional and

gendered frames with regard to their interlocutor. They have constructed their narratives in relation to their own social contexts or story repertoires. In the case of the interviewees with a foreign origin, they have furthermore sought the balance between the social context frames in their country of origin and in the new host society.

## 6 LIMITATIONS AND VALIDITY

As a novice researcher I have chosen challenging paths at times in the construction of my thesis work. This has led to some theoretical limitations as I have not been able to view the collected data broadly enough in the analysis phase. I set up clear boundaries for my thematic narrative analysis but that directed me to deadlocks every now and then. After first narrowing down my scope I had to broaden up again without fully achieving the more complex horizon of the thematic narrative analysis, which would in a comprehensive manner consider the wider horizon beyond the thematic contents. However, in my opinion, particularly the thematic narrative analysis approach illustrated better than any other analysis method the manifold angles of the results.

Quoting transcripts and enclosing their translations add to the openness and validity of the research. Notwithstanding the thematic narrative analysis I transcribed the language as original as my transcribing and translation abilities permitted. I kept possible dialects and informal expressions in the scripts to convey the personalities and personal characters and to equally show respect to the identities of the informants. (Riessman 2008, 54, 57-58; Nikander 2010, 436, 439.)

For Finnish and French quotes I inserted translations into English in parentheses after the entire quote following as faithfully as possible the original text. Whenever in doubt about the correct translation, I chose the option which, in my opinion, reflected more closely the original idea or spirit of the text. Needless to say, the more languages, the more probable confusions due to translations, therefore the option to verify the original language version is available. All in all, I have used interview quotes largely to offer the reader the possibility to assess my interpretations and to enjoy the initial words behind the analysis. Having said that, I have rarely included interviewer's part if otherwise

comprehensive as is the custom in thematic narrative analysis and concentrated rather on what has been said by the interviewees (Riessman 2008, 58). Otherwise I shortened sometimes the quotes to overlook partially texts without added meaning or with possibly identifiable details.

## 7 ETHICS

Since the first invitation to the interviews had been informal, not everyone had immediately understood the confidentiality aspect and the consequences of the public distribution of the final report. Therefore, I had to emphasize that the confidentiality required also the informant's own responsibility to remain discrete about his participation. All candidates had orally given their informed consent before the interview sessions. No written forms were used as this data was not to be used as a source for any other study (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, 70-71).

I sent every time the interview questions beforehand as much to ease the interview situations as for the sake of an optimum transparency. Before starting any interview, I first explained how I conducted the interviews and needed the audio-recording for the later transcription work, and then continued debriefing on other practicalities in my research. I equally described once again the dissemination of the results to make sure that the informants understood how widely the final report would be published and in what language version. Furthermore, I promised to make special efforts to take into careful consideration the confidentiality in three different ways; firstly, by not asking largely personal background information that could perhaps be identified from this small sample but which was not relevant to my research goals this time; secondly, by not including any possibly identifiable accounts from the interviews to the final report and thirdly, by destroying the recordings and transcripts after the publishing of my final report.

When I commenced to find various themes from the narratives, I decided to avoid labelling the narrator roles to any confined models such as heroes, survivors, victims or losers as occasionally is the case in narrative analysis (Hänninen 2003, 53). First,

labelling any narrator as a loser or victim would have severely conflicted with my impression of their fatherly role and how they described their sometimes quite laborious exercises they had been through to safeguard their dignity as fathers. In this respect using these terms they were all heroes in my eyes having endured different hardships maintaining their fatherhood. Second, I did not intend to accentuate their identity building as such in my analysis, since my main interest was hearing through their descriptions how they had experienced family work situations. There again I wanted to avoid classifying fathers with polarizing terms such as non/cooperative, passive/active or distant/present. In their narratives they all had an active role as fathers.

From the ethical point of view, covering painful topics during the interviews may prove to be extremely stressful and emotional for participants. The researcher has to stay considerate and discrete. (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, 73.) This became obvious in one of the interviews where the recorder was switched off for a while in order to allow free time and space for the emotional turmoil. Likewise, it is crucial for the informant to feel confident of being respected at every stage of the research. Having met all the final interviewees at least twice earlier facilitated the starting point in our conversation. Opening up to a total stranger at the very first meeting would probably have been more challenging. In order to make the informants feel at ease during the interview sessions, they all took place either at the participants' homes or at the interviewer's home.

A certain degree of familiarity during the interview is equally produced by the topics under discussion, but the downside of this is that an informant may disclose issues s/he could regret afterwards (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, 73). The criticism of narrative approach notifies about the possibility of damaging or harming the narrators by reviewing painful series of events. This issue occurred with one of the original candidates. I suspected that the social work process was still too close behind and therefore the emotional turbulence may have refrained him from giving input. (Juzwik 2010, 376-377; Mansfield & McLean & Lilgendahl 2010, 250.)

## 8 SOCIAL WORK UNDER SCRUTINY

### 8.1 Impressions about Social Work

After reviewing Jonathan Scourfield's text (Scourfield 2001, 70-89) about child protection workers and their views on their male clients, it is no wonder that the negativity/positivity initially captured my eyes from the service user side as well. He has categorized discourses about male clients in the social work office, for instance, negatively how men are seen as aggressive, irrelevant and absent or positively similar to women and better to women (usually in case women are to blame or in fault).

When I started my more profound data analysis, the first discovery among the interview transcripts was the general negativity/positivity of narratives, which recurred in negative/positive attitudes in relation to the social workers. It seemed that in those three cases A, B and C, where the negative remarks appeared repeatedly, according to my understanding based on the interviews, fathers had become involuntarily child protection customers, whereas the remaining two fathers D and E seemed to have had more options. Pia Salonen (2010, 46) claimed income support customers she had interviewed felt being treated as passive subjects, whereas practitioners had the power in their hands. This passive rejection and submission in front of the authority coloured to varying extents the narratives of A, B and C in my interviews.

Iris Marion Young based her concepts of series and seriality on Jean-Paul Sartre's thinking. Young notified that a series was not necessarily collectively aware of its existence or pursuing a common goal but the members happened to possess some common features or factors to link them with the artificially created category (Anttonen 2000, 328). In these five interviews every father had a slightly different degree of positivity in contrast to Salonen (2010, 48), who briefed how only one among her interviewed income support customers came up with some positive experiences. In my study the most negative remarks came from the two fathers A and B, who would seemingly have had encounters with social workers at more than just one occasion for several reasons. In their stories, repetition was actually expressed as one of the causes to their irritation as if it at the same time echoed the frustrating repetitiveness of them coming back to social services.

A: se on...se on tota...tämmöst jankkaamista kaikil negatiivisil asioilla  
(A: it is...it is well...this kind of going on and on about all the negative issues)

B: Et puis il y avait un peu le stress. Ils insistaient et revoyaient toujours sur les mêmes choses, sur les mêmes questions...  
(B: And then it was a bit of a stress. They insisted and reviewed always the same issues, the same questions...)

The most positive three cases C, D and E incorporated only one or two explicit incidents to manage with the assistance of social workers. This may have affected their attitudes as two of them D and E had also had a more voluntary based starting point with the child protection services. These positive feelings prevailed, especially in the narration of those two. As I had first realized the negativity/positivity scale in the overall narration, the category was surprisingly obvious in each case.

As a whole, A was negative with very few positive comments on child protection or social workers. However, he affirmed that his understanding toward social workers had grown by acknowledging that they were professionally tied up by laws.

A: ja ei kovinkaan mukavii...mukavaa kuvaa kyllä näistä sosiaali-ihmisistä saanu että...

I: Ovatko tunteesi muuttuneet prosessin kuluessa? Jos ovat niin millä tavoin?

A: No...eipä ne nyt oikeestaan muuttunu oo että. Sikäli ymmärtää vaan sosiaali-ihmisii paremmin, että se on vaan lakipykälät määrää niitten...niitten tota...noi menettelytavat

(A: and not very nice...a very nice image I've got about these social people so...

I: Have your feelings changed during the process? If yes, how?

A: Well...no they haven't changed really no. But in a way one can understand better these social people, that it is just sections of laws that dictate their...their well...procedures)

B was mostly negative but admitted at some point that the appointments with the social workers had been a learning process for him.

B: Voilà. La meilleure expérience c'est que...j'ai découvert pas mal de choses. Surtout pour l'éducation des enfants. J'insiste là-dessus. Il faut pas toucher les enfants, il faut pas taper les enfants parce que nous en Afrique c'est souvent talocher les enfants...la femme il faut l'insulter comme tu veux, ou bien la taper...pour ça j'ai pris un peu d'avantage et il y a eu des choses qui sont améliorées.



(B: Right. The best experience was that...I have discovered quite a few things. Especially about the education of children. I insist here. One must not touch children, one must not slap children because we in Africa it is often times cuffing on the ear with kids...wife one may insult as one pleases, or slap...for that I've stepped a bit forward and there have been things which have been improved.)

C was in the middle of the negativity/positivity scale describing both negative and positive encounters with social workers. Like A and B, he also expressed his frustration but rather in front of health than social authorities and restricted access to information during the crisis as an unmarried father and therefore possessing no confirmed paternity by then.

I: What do you mean you didn't get any information? [...]

C: Yeah, very sparingly we got and we didn't get much information. I couldn't visit, I wasn't allowed to visit and...yeah, it's kind of frustrating. If you don't know the time frame and the diagnosis and everything, so...[...] because we weren't married or anything and legally I wasn't a father. Maybe that stopped me a bit away from getting the information that I wanted.

C was the only one to represent also very negative experiences and even an additional pressure coming from male family workers, although his experiences were mostly positive otherwise. Like B, he constructed a learning process in his narrative as well.

C: So, the feeling (emphasizes) I had a little bit was like, if I talk with men they were more like trying to pressure me I think [...] it's like they thought worse of me I think than the women like...or they [...] were trying harder to show me how important it is to be an active father and everything. And the female workers they maybe like trusted me a little bit more in this regard.[...] ...having the same gender there is maybe more comparison and more direct advice like how would he do it [...] So I think women they maybe kind of let the fathers more like create their own roles – more than men. That's the feeling that with men it might be a bit more of the...you know like somebody telling me like or somebody presenting an image that I have to recreate or something like that.

Likewise Kirsi Eräranta (2006, 301) referred in her literature review to reports recalling that not all mothers or fathers share the same role model that ignores their individuality nor are willing to swallow the ready-made concepts from authorities. Leslie Brown (2010, 219) has summarized as one of the key issues in her book review the diversity of the fathers' needs and therefore a need for diverse service programmes aimed at them. Despite the criticism quoted above, C was in general very satisfied with the support he received.

C: Well, I must say, I always got a lot (emphasizes) of support. Like the feeling I have is like the worse my situation was the more support I got or the more difficult the situation was the more support I got. So, I got really much support in the beginning, yeah, it was very effective really. I got very good solutions always to problems and very practical help and a lot of different things and it was really efficient.

As mentioned before, D had himself agreed to see the social worker with his child's mother. He had the initiative in his own hands.

D: So she feels that she was kind of arguing with me. So I said go and make an appointment. Let's go to social worker and let them...[...] She said ok. She made an appointment, we went there

E was overwhelmingly positive wishing everyone had the chance to get the support the way they wish and precisely the time they need like he did. For E all the support came in due time and even exceeding his expectations.

E: No huonoo ei varmasti oo [...] Nii. Että kyllä mulla on ollu tää prosessi, menny nii hienosti että! Kylmä niinku jäläkeenpäin ihan ihmettelen että miten apu on tullu aina missäki vaiheessa että...

I: Nii oot saanu tukee...

E: Kyllä! Kyllä oon. Kyl se on ihan...sitä mentiin aina sillon pahimpaan aikaan kahen viikon välein. Katottiin semmosia jaksoja ja ja aina sitte sitä että toimintajaksoo mitenkä taas mennään eteenpäin. Se oli alakuun sitä ja sitte välit piteni ja...niin kauan ku nyt tuntee ihtesä jo ettei tarvii. [...] Kyllä mun kohalla ainakin on menty niin hienosti tää, kaikki sairauvet ja sitte näissä perheasioissa on otettu huomioon isyyvet ja ihan ei mulla oo niinku pahaa sanomista mittään tässä. Että kyllä mun kohalla on menny niin hienosti. Ihan kiittäminen (korostaa) että on sattunu niihin tilanteisiin.

(E: Yes. That I have had this process, it has gone so well, I tell you! I kind of wonder afterwards how the help has always arrived at each phase...

I: Yes, you have got support...

E: Yes! Yes I have. It's quite...during the worst period we had two week intervals. We checked in such periods and then to see for the next period of action how to get forward. At the beginning it was like that and then the intervals got longer and...until one feels no need for it now. [...] Well in my case at least everything has gone so fine, all the illnesses and then in these family matters they have paid attention to my fatherhood and really I have nothing bad to say here. That in my case it all went so well. Actually I need to thank (emphasizes) what has occurred in those situations.)

The only negative point for E was changing workers, which meant discontinuity for him and unnecessary tiring repetitions of his story.

E: Kylse väsyttävää oli mut kylmä jaksoin. Kylse oli sillai että tunti että sitä kelattii jo aika aina monelle ja monelle mutta kuitenkin mä sitä jaksoin ihan tehä ja...

I: Nii ettei tullu semmonen olo että taas ne kyselee? Taas pitäs jaksaa selittää!

E: Kyllä joskus. [...]

I: Tulikse sit vaikka sillee että työntekijä vaihtu ja sä jouduit taas uudestaan sen tarinan selittäään...

E: Joo mun kohalla kävi paljon sillai että niitä vaihtu

(E: Yeah well it was tiring but I could make it. Yes it was like one felt that one had to always go through with quite many really but still I always managed to and...

I: You mean you didn't feel like here they go again? That one should be able to tell the story once again!

E: Sometimes yes. [...]

I: Was it like the worker changed and you had to tell your story again...

E: Yeah, that happened to me a lot that they changed)

Jonathan Scourfield and his collaborators have captured in their literature review very similar phenomena to what these fathers in my study have described. Scourfield et al. illustrated disrespectful attitudes from the practitioner side, mothers rejecting cooperation, traditional mother-centred understanding of parenting roles, reluctance of fathers to cooperate with workers or workers neglecting fathers' needs and perspective. In their report they pointed out the necessity of including fathers on board as early as possible and verifying that they know the engagement expectations of professionals. (Scourfield et al. 2011, 16.)

## 8.2 Building up Trust and Self-Confidence

Forming trust between social workers and service users takes time and efforts. Pilvi Härkönen and Paula Turro have interviewed health care nurses on how they first prepared the favourable atmosphere during the health checks and then motivated their middle-aged male clients to cooperate to improve their health condition. Nurses assessed the personality of the client immediately as they entered the room and tried to act on the same level respecting the individuality. Nurses could introduce more delicate matters with humour to make them more approachable. In any case they recognized they had to overcome some reservedness and rejection from men, who were not necessarily too keen on changing their accustomed lifestyles. (Härkönen & Turro 2010, 34-35.) In my study, even the most positive narrator E recognized some lack of trust at the starting point of the process with his family workers.

E: mutta kyllä mulla alussa oli semmosta [...] niinku epäluuloo toisia kohtaan. [...] Mä tunsin sillai koko ajan että kaikki on vähän mua vastaan. [...] Mutta nythän se tunne on ku on parantunu ni, nythän se on luottavainen. Että kaikki oli ku tuntu että mua nyt painostetaan ja se ol semmosta...

I: Siinä vaiheessa tuntu siltä?

E: Nii, kyllä.

(E: but yes in the beginning there was some kind of [...] like mistrust toward others. [...] I felt like that all the time that everybody was a bit against me. [...] But now of course that I am cured, now I feel confident. That all felt like now I am pressurized and it was like that...

I: At that stage you were feeling like that?

E: Yes, right.)

Then E declared how he had bridged to his social workers after the first suspicions had disappeared.

E: Semmosta että niinku välittämisen tunnetta että ihmisestä välitetään. Semmosta se oli. Mä sain niinku semmosta turvaaki [...] Ja siinä tuli sitä tosiaan tukee. Siinä ymmärrettiin

(E: It was a feeling like being cared for, that they care for the person. That's how it was. I also felt like some kind of security [...] And then there was that support really. There was understanding)

C illustrated how social workers may project an old traumatizing social work case on another service user thus failing to treat him as an individual.

C: I mean if somebody's working with cases like violent fathers or something that it could influence him or her in the areas where there's no violence you know, I see it a bit like...I think they should take every case individually and not...I just could think that something like that could influence. Bad experience that you have with some fathers and you project it on to others. Yeah, that's one thing that for example one male social worker that I was talking to had (emphasizes) was that he assumed that I would not want to be responsible without even talking to me first. And with a very you know...very offensive like aggressive way to handling the situation and I think you should give a bit of chance to...let the father like, I don't know, realize on his own and you know...

D (see chapter 8.4) had been suspicious about how fair his social worker would be toward him with a foreign origin but his fears vanished during the appointment, where he was treated like any service user in line with the regulations.

What about the trust the social workers were able to build in the service users to manage their lives independently? This might be the area where narratives could change the course of lives, if social workers succeeded to gear the self images into more positive directions by encouraging positive narration (Hänninen 2003, 52-57). It would seem that the most negatively narrating service users A and B had the least confidence of not needing to return to the social services, although they did not declare it that overtly.

B: Maintenant là nous sommes clients les services sociaux pour tout le monde. Donc, que ce soient des finlandais que ce soient d'autres personnes. Nous sommes maintenant là-bas.

I: D'accord...euh...est-ce que le procès avec les services sociaux continue encore?

B: Oui. Ca continue toujours, mais pas de façon activée.

I: D'accord. De temps en temps ?

B: Non. De temps en temps non. Avant c'était vraiment de temps en temps.

I: Régulier ?

B: Régulier vraiment. Oui.

(B: Now then we are clients at social services for everybody. So, be it Finns or other people. Now we are there.

I: Right...hmm...does the process with the social services still continue?

B: Yes. It continues still, but not in an active manner.

I: Right. Every now and then?

B: No, every now and then no. Before it was really every now and then.

I: Regular?

B: Regular indeed. Yes.)

B still indirectly suggested at another occasion that he may return to social services.

B: Bon. J'ai travaillé en grande majorité jusqu'à aujourd'hui avec des femmes.

(B: Well. I have mostly worked until today with women.)

A and B would seem to have gained least self-confidence and independence according to their narratives. They had equally least relied upon social workers treating them respectfully either as fathers or as men. At the interviews they seemed to mainly criticize social work methods (see chapters 8.1 and 8.5). Whereas C, D and E (see chapter 8.1) quite openly estimated, that they did not need support from the social workers any longer, A and B appeared to have little faith in controlling their own lives. This may lead back to the question of having behind several or only one case to deal with at social services but also possibly to the failure or success in communication or in conflicting goals with social workers.

C: There is of course some kind of stage where you realize you don't need that help anymore so much and it's in a way somewhat weird feeling because you kind of got used to it and everything. So but you know kind of it's you don't really need the help so much anymore so I think this is a bit like you have to realize yeah, like now you have to be on your own in a way.

I: Mikä susta on parasta nyt kun sä koet, että sä oot taas oma ittes lasten kanssa?

E: Just se ku mä oon se sama melekein ku ennenki ja tunne...[...] on kuitenkin se tunne...niinku tunnemaailma kohallaan [...] tuntee asioista hyvää ja huonoa, iloitsee ja suree ja...

(I:What do you think is best now that you feel you can be yourself again with the children?

E: Precisely the fact that I am almost what I used to be and the feeling...[...] there is this feeling...like the emotional world is back to normal [...] one can feel good and bad about things, be happy and sad and...)

Jennifer Sherman was interested in the class differences and interviewed low-income and middle-class parents in the United States. According to her some parents were encouraged and some discouraged through support services. Some parents were complimented and some received mainly negative feedback on their parenting skills. Sherman assumed this derived from social classes; service providers belonged to the middle-class and hence empowered middle-class parents but disempowered poor parents. At the same time she was sceptical about the support measures from not-for-profit organizations. She accused them, too, for creating dependency in the service users, acting as another channel for monitoring or dictating households similarly to authorities and imposing class-based norms. In this manner they recreated the social class distinction. (Sherman 2011, 106-107.) Her arguments may have applied to social classes in her interviews but resembled to the negativity/positivity and discouragement/encouragement division in my study. Yet, after the interviews I carried out, I would rather decline to claim that there is no one singular parameter to define the division of experiences alone; neither gender, nor social class. They both may partially explain certain issues but not entirely. Aveen Maguire has described the control and power aspect in the society. She has given plenty of examples how contesting in unequal power relations, as by all means I classify child protection encounters, may damage the interaction, if someone tries to disobey the rules and expectations. (Maguire 1992, 24-25.) Could this have been one cause for some negative experiences A, B and C had in my study?

D not only admired the professionalism of his social worker but simultaneously expressed that what he had done had been sufficient to support him. He had suggested functional solutions to his problems and mediated between him and his child's mother if need be.

I: He considered your situation.

D: My situation yes...and again he tried to make peace whenever the lady is trying to create problems [...] all he was doing was calming her down. Trying to let her understand the truth. Making her know that he is doing the right thing. [...] I don't think I have any suggestions for him because he knows what he is doing. And he is doing his job very well. It means also I don't think I have anything to add to what he's doing you know.

What makes child protection workers continue in their work filled with conflicts of interests, heavy work load and high expectations? Sinikka Forsman has interviewed some practitioners. One of their rewards was the successfully built trust and cooperation with families to work toward common goals. They enjoyed the functional interaction with their clients, especially when they had overcome with their professionalism demanding challenges such as prejudices of their clients in the first place. They regarded significant to keep faith in human beings, see positive outcome in the processes and obtain positive feedback once in a while. (Forsman 2010, 108-109, 132-138.) As these quotes from my interviews have shown, the full image is multidimensional. All five participants have declared their child protection cases closed or coming to an end shortly. This means that they all had enjoyed relevant enough services and solutions. Some of them had succeeded in building trustful connection with their social workers but not all. None of them accused their female workers' gender directly being the cause to any dissatisfactory outcome.

### 8.3 The Law Will Never Smile at a Social Worker

Central Union for Child Welfare (Lastensuojelun Keskusliitto) addressed the importance of preventive child protection work. They claimed that it has not received the full political attention it deserves, nothing but from the financial saving aspect, and even more so as an effective early intervention method, which usually requires less dramatic or costly tools achieving better results than later interventions ever. (Savolainen, 2012.) The breaking news of neglected or abused children every now and

then add fuel to the flame of these discussions. Social workers have been in focus to get the blame, although they cannot defend themselves by opening up on any individual cases as their lips are sealed by the confidentiality. Social work in general but child protection in particular tend to have an overly negative public image, because the public usually hears about the cases when something failed. No wonder then child welfare posts are not popular considering also the legal responsibilities and heavy work load they carry on their shoulders. (Kettunen 2012, 13-14; Ristimäki 2012, 4.) All participants in this study had used child protection services, nevertheless only one of the fathers remarked in his narration that one of his children had been taken into custody. All the other occasions with these five fathers (concerning eleven children in total) have been managed with other supportive methods.

Pia Salonen (2010, 44) noted that decisions made at social services concerning income support should be based on the existing laws. Her informant brought up his suspicions of supplementary local municipality regulations that were implemented with income support applications but not explained to service users. In my study none of the fathers directly rebelled against regulations or guidelines used but rather how they were implemented in practice. Whereas A complained how social workers followed laws by the letter and showed disrespect in the communication, D complimented (see chapter 8.4) the same law obedience of social workers guaranteeing him a fair treatment in spite of his foreign background. They both agreed that social workers have laws guiding their procedures and D emphasized the heavy legal responsibilities social workers face in court cases which pressurize them additionally.

A: lakipykälät määrää niitten [...] menettelytavat mutta tietysti se, millä tavalla ne niinku puhuu asiat vois olla eri tavalla...erilainen että tota...ei tarttis välttämättä hyökätä niin...suoranaisesti.

(A: sections of laws dictate their [...] procedures but of course it, the way they like talk could be done in a different manner...different from well...there's no need to attack so...directly actually.)

D: They do the right thing yeah, and periodically they refer to the law there in your presence if they forget anything they go to check. So they know the consequences of working outside the law. They know. That's why they refer to the law. Immediately. [...] and the client [...] then take them to the court, and it is discovered that the social worker did not work within the law, the law will never smile at a social worker. So that's the reason, too, they are very very careful with the client what kind of job they do.



D repeatedly during the interview raised his puzzle of how police forces were able to leave husbands in vulnerable conditions in the streets even in winter time as a disturbing contradiction to his law obedient social workers. In his opinion, in this kind of situations the law did not seem to respect both genders and he wondered if social workers were able to defend men in this matter.

D: The law wears more human feelings for women than men. The law wears more human face for women than men. So if today you and your wife have a problem at home, if the police, the cops comes, it is you (emphasized) the man that they will ask to leave the house. [...] But one question I keep asking is this, why is it that when the police comes, he asks the man to leave without making provision for the man [...] where the man go and stay. [...] I've already mentioned it before but I still want to, I still want to stress it more. The aspect of police coming between couples having problems and saying that the man should leave the house without making adequate arrangements [...] for him. [...] If a man has been kicked out. Fine. The women are usually seen as a weaker sex. Fine. Then that's why they are being really really protected. It's ok. It's not bad. [...] But if the man must, has to pack and this way asked to leave the home, provisions should be made. Immediately they should have a temporary provision where such men can stay.

#### 8.4 Here in Finland

Every nation, culture or state has created its own communal narratives, which echo in personal narratives (Hänninen 2003, 51). For the three fathers with a foreign origin in my thesis study, one topic at child protection services has been the different approach in child upbringing in their new host society in comparison to their country of origin. It is a valid question, whether child education in Finland is truly very different from other countries if we take a longer historical perspective and also the effects of our war history on parenting into account. We tend to forget that many changes and many today's phenomena in Finland are very recent on a historical scale. There is a peculiar contrast between the myth-like high quality child upbringing, schooling and care in Finland and the growing number of child protection cases. For instance, the number of emergency care orders has tripled between 2000-2010 in Finland (Terveyden ja hyvinvoinnin laitos 2011, 51).

Stereotypes can be used to highlight boundaries which in reality might not exist at all (Dyer 2002, 52-53). B presented (see chapter 8.1) the stereotypical image of the African child education in his intervention and referred to domestic violence as if it was the rule

in Africa but did not exist in Finnish homes. It was in his discourse something he needed to learn away from following the norms of the Finnish society, which he had probably majorly become familiar with at child protection gatherings. By his comments he reinforced common generalizations for both communities. B, C and D with a foreign origin had all comments about how differently Finns managed child education, regardless whether they wanted to adopt as such the Finnish way of education or not.

C: Besides they also have to kind of explain to you, they try to explain you of course some cultural things about how to raise a child in Finland and you know...

I: How did you feel about that that they were telling you that yes in Finland we raise a child like this?

C: I don't really know...it is always just hard for me to separate what is about Finland and what is about general parent, because I have a feeling here in Finland there is a lot of this mentality that especially with parents to tell them pretty much what they are supposed to do...like the life, the growing up the children is very much planned here in Finland, there is right from the start the state has some kind of ideas of how the children are raised. Starts with the kindergarten, and everything, there is an ideal and they try to you know, teach you the ideal.

When discussing about the possible effects of social workers' background on their work, particularly social workers having no children, D was sceptical of them doing family work. He justified his argument as follows and established his viewpoint on his experiences in his country of origin.

D: I don't think it's really possible, because if you don't have children, it will be difficult for you to really experience life with children. They are two different things, life with children and life without children. They are just two different things. That's true. That's true. You can't. You can't experience it if you yourself don't have them. [...]

I: How would it affect the way you behave when it's your own child or it's somebody else's child? [...]

D: It depends on the individual. Some would take other people's things as their own, as theirs. Some people handle other people's properties as they would handle their own, while some people handle other people's properties. It is not theirs (emphasized) [...] the way you handle your own (laughs) is different from the way you handle someone else's own. That is true. I remember, I know that in my country it's different from here. I don't know here. But men are a bit different anyway. In my country, you can hire the service of a maid, to live with you, the way you treat her as maid is not the same way you treat your own daughter.

D had suspected unfairness due to his foreign background, but was really impressed by the professional social work process.

D: I was thinking that maybe because I'm a foreigner that they, maybe the social worker will not be fair. You understand. But surprisingly he was very very fair. [...] Because the system consider, I think the social welfare system, it considers about your welfare. [...] but surprisingly he did everything according to how it's supposed to be done.

B explained how it took time to learn to get used to the appointments with social workers, besides having interpreters in the meetings caused additional feelings of shame at first. This may arise especially within small ethnic communities or lack of trust in the interpreter due to historical religious or ethnic conflicts (Launikari 2005, 165). Salonen (2010, 50-51) also found in her interviewees the feelings of shame to be income support customers, which according to her were generated by contradicting internal and external bread-winner expectations and by the men's work-centred role in the society.

B: mais ça nous mettaient un peu parfois mal à l'aise. C'est la première fois... ça nous mettaient mal à l'aise de rencontrer [...] chaque fois avec eux. Vraiment. Et [...] ce qu'on pouvait pas parler devant quelqu'un...il fallait qu'il y ait une interprète à cause de la langue...donc on était obligés de nous sortir et puis avec du gêne parfois. Et au fil du temps on a commencé à s'habituer à ce genre de pratiques.

(B: but it made us feel uncomfortable at times. It is the first time... it made us feel uncomfortable to meet [...] every time with them. Honestly. And [...] that we could not speak in front of someone...there had to be an interpreter because of the language reasons...so we had to come out and sometimes with embarrassment. And gradually we started getting used to these practices.)

B alluded to the status change as a mile stone, when he was moved from immigrant social services after the first three years in the country to general public social services open for clients with a Finnish origin, too (see chapter 8.2). D wished to create a foundation for his child's future to live a better life in the new host society than he had ever had (see chapter 9.3). Both B and D foresaw in these two ways an improvement in their families' social status ahead. B expressed a tighter connection to the host society through common services with the service users of Finnish origin. D worked hard to build up more comfortable living standards for his offspring.

## 8.5 Gender Plays a Role

In her dissertation about family work with domestic violence Suvi Keskinen warned about the dangers of the gender neutral discourse around parenthood, which leaves fathers easily behind the scene (Keskinen 2005, 317). Miika Lehtonen wondered how much the good caring mother myth has affected social work. In Finland the gentle kind mother myth was created around the World War II, when in parallel men were prepared for the battles by creating a heroic aggressive male image. This historical fact contributed together with the strengthening social welfare institutions and new family laws to the increasing control of welfare agencies over families and child education. This development took place to the detriment of the father position. Lehtonen illuminated the beneficial effects of both parents acting as role, interaction and identity models for children and advocated for long term affectional bonds. (Lehtonen 2007, 52-56, 59.)

In their narration, A, B and D (see chapter 8.3) stated how strong a position women held in front of authorities in Finland to a great distress of men. A and B described how women had the priority at social services. A referred at different occasions to the exclusivity and disapproval towards the father. Salonen quoted a comment among her family work unit informants, which was very much alike, where father had neither been listened nor given attention to. Another informant of hers esteemed that if fathers are not equally and fairly taken into account, the whole process may be endangered and the father will probably stop coming to the meetings. (Salonen 2010, 68-70.) Other studies confirmed that despite very different approaches to their fathering roles, all men became frustrated if their parenting styles were belittled or their feelings around parenting were ignored (Jämsä 2010, 113).

A: No se oli tota, nää lastenvalvojan luon ensimmäiset käynnit oli varsinkin niin tota...siinä oikeestaan isä...isä suljettiin kokonaan pois et siinä ajettiin äidin etuja [...]

I: Mikä on ollut paras kokemuksesi ja mikä huonoin?

A: (yskintää)...no ei oikeestaan parasta kokemusta oo, ku kaikesta on jääny vähän paskan maku oikeestaan suuhun...

I: No entäs mikä ois huonoin kokemus?

A: No huonoin on oikeestaan noi oikeestaan niinkun isommassa mittakaavassa niin yleensä syytökset...et siinä jyrätään niinku isä kyllä niin olemattomaks... [...] Noh, viittaaan kyllä edellä mainittuihin, ettei siinä paljoo isää oteta niinku

positiivisessa mielessä roolimallina millään tavalla huomioon, että kaikki negatiivinen tulee sitte.

(A: Well it was like, those first visits to the child welfare officer especially were like...well in fact the father...the father was completely excluded and they were looking after mother's interests [...])

I: What has been your best and worst experience?

A: (coughing) ...well actually there is no best experience, since everything just left rather a bit shitty after-taste...

I: Well, what was the worst experience?

A: Well, the worst actually was like in a bigger scale generally accusations...that the father is rolled over completely to non-existence... [...] Well, I refer to the above-mentioned, that the father is not positively taken into consideration as a role model in any way, that all the negative comes up then.)

A continued by describing how the guardianship is given automatically after divorce to the mother and accused social services of discrimination in that respect. Salonen (2010, 80-81) had come across similar opinions, where her family work clients stressed the female and mother centred work approach based on the mother myth comprising stronger mother-child bond since the birth and mother's almost automatic priority as a guardian. Jari Sinkkonen (2009, 204-205) also gave a pessimistic account of fathers' rights. In his opinion even when there was no reason for children to not to live with their father, mother was given the priority as a guardian. He had witnessed many ordinary men fighting fiercely for that in the court and losing money in vain.

A: No, esimerkiks tämä tota, että avioeron jälkeen lapset niinkun automaattisesti puhuttiin jo siinä, että tota ne jää äidille (painottaa), et siinei niinku tota...mä joskus kysyin sitä...että jos mä haluaisin niinku lapset asumaan niinku itelleni, niin siinä sosiaalityöntekijä sano oikeestaan näin, että jos äidillä on alkoholiongelma, huumeongelma tai se on koditon, niin sitten sitä voidaan ajatella (painottaa) edes. Niin tota...kyllä mää kattosin, et siinon sukupuolella ollu sillon merkitys [...] kylse mun mielest jonkun näkösest syrjinnästä kertoo.

(A: Well, for instance this thing that after a divorce children like automatically were talked about there, that like they stay with their mother (emphasizes), that there isn't like well...I did ask once...that if I wanted to have the children to live with me, and then there the social worker actually said, that if the mother has substance abuse problems or is homeless, then it could be considered (emphasizes) perhaps. Well then...I would say that then the gender had some kind of significance [...] in my opinion that tells about discrimination of some sort.)

However, A was the only one to have had only female social workers and was convinced that child protection was not comparable with other social services.

A: kaikki on ollu naisia joka asiassa niin tota...[...] sen kuvan on saanu, että...[...] siinä niinku nainen ajaa naisen asioita...[...] mut sitten taas [...] jos puhutaan muunlaisista asioista esimerkiks toimeentulotuen hakemisesta niin tota...niin silloin siinä taas en oo nähny yhtään et siinois sosiaalityöntekijän sukupuolella taas mitään vaikutusta

(A: all have been women in every case so then... [...] the idea I've got is that... [...] there like a woman advocates woman's issues... [...] but then again [...] if we talk about other matters like an income support application then there...well then there I haven't seen anything to do with the gender of the social worker)

Despite his heavy criticism blaming female social workers for being gender biased, A still admitted he preferred talking to female employees in family matters. Would he have felt the same threat dealing with a male worker that C (see chapter 8.1) expressed in his narration where the same gender caused the imposing of the worker's own father model on the service user? Did he fear the possible comparison with the same gender workers? Among the interviewees receiving income support Salonen had in her study, all stated the relative easiness in a dialogue with women compared with men. However, among her family work unit interviewees, one believed a male worker would understand better a man and a father. (Salonen 2010, 54, 68.)

A: ehkä kuitenkin tota miehen on tavallaan niinkuin ehkä helpompi jutella tota...jutella tommosista asioista niinku naisen kanssa [...] kun ei oo tullu vastaan, niin ei voi tietysti varmana sanoo mutta...ehkä se tuntuis jotenkin omituiselta puhuukkin miehelle sitten, tai käydä niit asioita läpi

(A: maybe still well for a man it is somehow maybe easier to chat...to chat about those things like with a woman [...] since I haven't faced it, I cannot say for sure but...maybe it would feel somehow weird to talk to a man then, or to go through those things)

In contrast to what A said, E did not see any difference between the two genders of social workers. This would match with the guidelines by Heikki Koiso-Kanttila (2009, 177) that ideally practitioners should cooperate with families, not to take sides or create conflicts between parents.

E: Ei se vaikuta. Kyllä ne on ihan yhtä lailla...[...] Kyllä, ei mulle tullu mieleenkään [...] että kumpiko se on sitte...

I: Nii onko mies vai nainen?

E: Nii.

(E: No, it doesn't matter. They both are pretty much alike...[...] Well, it never even came to my mind [...] that which one it is...

I: That is it a man or a woman?

E: Right.)

B reminded that not only women went before fathers but also children. This is in contradiction to the interview results Salonen had with her family work unit customers. They stated that children with their own opinions were ignored in the course of the process. (Salonen 2010, 73-74.)

B: Oui. Les services sociaux donnent plus l'importance à la mère. Le moins aux hommes et aux pères. Plus importance aux enfants [...] Ca je veux qu'on remarque ici. La femme est prioritaire. La femme a plus du droit que l'homme. Les enfants ont plus du droit que le père. Ca c'est que j'ai remarqué.

(B: Yes. Social services give more importance to the mother. The least to men and fathers. More importance to children [...] This I want to be taken note of here. The woman is the priority. The woman has more rights than the man. The children have more rights than the father. This is what I have noticed.)

A confirmed B's statement about mothers being the number one at child protection.

A: Kyllä se aika minun...mun mielestä kyllä paikkansa pitää, että [...] äiti on niinku etusijalla (painottaen), asia kun asia, on se sitten asumiseen liittyvää tai elatusmaksuihin liittyvää, niin kyllä se äiti niinku menee siinä ykköseksi.

(A: Yes in my opinion it is quite true that [...] the mother is like the priority (emphasizing), whatever the issue, be it living arrangements or child maintenance related, then yes the mother like takes the first place.)

D gave a concrete example how Finnish women imposed their will over foreign origin fathers when conflicting ideas surfaced between parents. It was an issue where he had asked for a piece of advice from his social worker as well.

D: I noticed that in this part of the world...people...when a foreigner makes a baby with a Finn, in most cases the woman detects the name, the name that the child is going to bear. Everything depends on the woman. The woman can decide not to take, to choose any name proposed by the father. She can decide to do that.

D was the one who made me wonder how the opposite gender would have narrated the same encounters with the social worker. In his narrative he assessed the process had been fair and just, but his child's mother could possibly have strongly disagreed about the justice made. He stressed that a welfare system will always be a fair one, as his assumption, and even more so based on his experience with the Finnish social workers. He did not believe the fair treatment had anything to do with the (same) gender of his

social worker and founded his opinion on his position in the process. According to Pia Salonen (2010, 61-63) her informants prioritized the personality and interactional side of the social worker. They bypassed gender as a secondary factor to an effective social work process, although the workers' approaches with men and women were saturated by their personal past experiences. One of her informants raised the question of rivalry amongst men like C did in my study (see chapter 8.1).

## 8.6 Wisdom Counts

Ministry of Social Affairs and Health has published a report about the current state of the child protection in Finland. They have gathered some main points to be worked on. Both children and parents in their contributions highlighted the importance of being heard and a functional interaction in the family work processes. They desired for a participatory work approach, where all parties involved would be well informed and aware of the procedures. In my study there were equally allusions to the pressure practitioners had to deal with. Hasty routine meetings with clients would let assume the limited time resources social workers had. Constant changes of social workers had been mentioned, too, like in the Ministry report, whereas the lack of cooperation or shuttling between agencies working around families referred to in their report did not show with my informants. (Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö 2012, 8-11.)

Central Union for Child Welfare in Finland had received suggestions from social work professionals' side in January 2013 as how to improve the current state of child protection as a reply to the ever increasing expectations by all parties. The practitioners evaluated the major developmental areas to be the cooperation among authorities, non-residential or early intervention supportive measures and the implementation of children's rights and participation in the processes (Sinko & Muuronen 2013, 32).

There were some proposals for improvements these five fathers in my research work addressed as well. A protested strongly the negativity in dealing with the father during the appointments and stressed that whatever social workers may personally think about the father, nothing can change the fact that he is a father. As quoted earlier, he wished different communication styles; less direct accusations or attacks and more positive and listening approaches with the father. He also proposed that the social workers should be



flexible enough to customize their services, which Suzy Croft and Peter Beresford have named as the recognition of the diversity among service users (Croft & Beresford 2008, 398). Salonen presumed skipping personal approach and complying with routines during appointments, as A in my study has described, could surface when workers were too busy. In her study, too, the interviewees longed after mindfulness, dialogue and empathy. They also noted the importance of frankness, genuine interest for clients and a relaxed atmosphere. (Salonen 2010, 45, 50-51, 53-54, 75-76.)

A: että tosiaan niinku kuuntelis sitä isää...[...] eikä vaan [...] että mää oon niinku sosiaalityöntekijä ja tää nyt on pakko käydä tää tapaaminen läpi tässä että...[...] eikä menis aina niitten kaavojen mukaan. [...] sosiaalityöntekijät vois olla ehkä vähän...ei tartteis aina olla niin virallisia...vois ottaa välillä vähän lunkimmin...

(A: that they would really listen to the father...[...] and not just [...] that I'm here like the social worker and now we must get through this meeting and... [...] not just always follows the routine procedures.[...] social workers could be a bit maybe...they wouldn't need to be always so official...they could at times be more cool...)

If A mentioned how awkward he felt facing routine procedures as a service user, Scourfield et al. (2011, 37) have come across the pressure social workers face to shorten the meetings to the minimum with their clients because of the work load they have. Professionals seemed to believe that leaving less space to the clients to speak up or to improvise would reduce the time used for each appointment. This behaviour, however, conflicts with the wish from service users to be able to interact on equal terms with their workers (Croft & Beresford 2008, 398).

C rejected the strong control by officials and complained how social workers may be insulting during home visits if they give direct advice. Croft and Beresford (2008, 398) had listed out support rather than dictation as a component service users expected from social work. C stressed the free will of the client to construct the family life the best suits the parents, since all couples are different in managing their parental roles. Parents within a family sometimes have very similar parenting roles, sometimes they prefer very distinct gendered roles (Jämsä 2010, 113).

C: I mean social workers, especially when they visit you at your home, I have a feeling they kind of show you how to live your life, it can be a bit almost insulting, you know what I mean [...] in a way it is maybe almost better to have somebody who [...] doesn't immediately like tell you if you are doing something wrong or you know, doesn't give you the feeling...[...] I think the ideal social

worker would, would be supportive, and not too, try to find a good balance between, between supporting and not telling or not giving too strict and too...not bossing somebody around if you know what I mean...but I'm not saying somebody did that but I think it's a bit of a thin line between giving advice and telling what to do. [...] I think they should give the chance to create your own structure in a family and find your own roles.

D demanded equal treatment for all clients, when asked whether fathers should be treated differently. He recalled what the main task for welfare services was. Service users wanted equity no matter their background factors and focus in their capabilities to be able to step forward on their own (Croft & Beresford 2008, 398).

D: So if the well-being is the bottom line, then why be biased? Treat every client as the same! The same way you treat the client A should be the same way you treat client B. No matter the colour, no matter his gender, no matter what. Everyone. Every client is a client. And they should be treated equally. That is my opinion.

B summed up all different opinions in one idea: a social worker needs to be wise. B also demanded a social worker should have skills to interact in front of numerous problems and deal with the substantial diversity among service users. He underlined the interaction skills of the practitioner, professional experience after long involvement in social services and personal life history the same way the income support customers did in the research by Salonen. In her research one father from the family work unit reminded how delicate the situations for families were and how one wrong word from the practitioner might cause an overreaction. Family work customers summarized that a practitioner can manage the work by using common sense and heart and hence the gender was not in the main scope. (Salonen 2010, 54-58, 76, 82-83). In another study child protection workers did not share the views that their work could be managed without a proper education and qualifications, quite the contrary. For the continuation of their work they agreed that to start with if anywhere, in child protection the employees needed a broad knowledge and only the best of the best could cope. In the long run they valued all kind of variation to the routines and regarded a continuous education as a necessity. Bringing in one's personality to work approach was seen as an asset, too. (Forsman 2010, 118-120.)

B: D'abord cela joue autour de la sagesse. D'abord ce métier demande beaucoup de la sagesse. Un travailleur social est appelé à rencontrer divers genres de personnes, de diverse monde. [...] On peut être professionnel et ne pas être sage, or la sagesse d'abord il faut savoir comment discuter avec la personne. Est-ce que ce que je veux lui dire, est-ce que ce que je veux lui poser comme question

ne va pas l'offenser? Ou va le mettre à l'aise ou mal à l'aise? Donc des trucs comme ça. Moi je pense que la sagesse aide beaucoup. [...] C'est souvent d'être au plus près des clients. [...] Parce que ceux-là viennent toujours avec des problèmes multiples, avec des problèmes où il faut être un peu à la hauteur, de les satisfaire, même si ce n'est pas cent pour cent.

(B: First it goes around wisdom. To start with this profession requires a lot of wisdom. A social worker is invited to meet different kinds of people, diverse people. [...] One can be professional but not be wise, because the wisdom first you need to know how to discuss with a person. If what I want to say to him, if what I want to ask him is not going to insult him? Or makes him feel comfortable or uncomfortable? So things like that. I think that wisdom helps a lot. [...] It is often to be as close to the clients as possible. [...] Because they always come with plenty of problems, with such problems you need to be ready to cope with, to satisfy them, even if it isn't hundred per cent.)

Scourfield et al. (2011, 19) had interviewed social work service users. The message the service users conveyed was that the empathy and respect shown, cooperation rather than dictation, careful listening, clear communication of expectations and work plans are the keys to a successful collaboration with fathers. Their findings are in line with the narratives of my informants. Kirsi Eräranta (2006, 299) cited articles which valued the importance of the solid professional expertise being able to incorporate the gender specificity flawlessly and every now and then to exceed the personal gendered identity of the worker. Trish Hafford-Letchfield (2006, 71) has gathered results from focus group interviews conducted in Britain, where participants had desired practitioners to be accessible, able to provide the needed information but pragmatic in their approach, able to play professionally the dual role of closeness and distance by showing at the same time interest and yet guaranteeing sovereignty.

These narrators in my study have emphasized that the gender of the social worker does not always guarantee the success; on the contrary A and C have expressed the unwillingness to deal with male workers. Success comes along with an adequate approach with clients and through personal wisdom practitioners draw from their individual life histories and the expertise acquired in the long run in practice. Terhi Laine has obtained similar results in her inquiries with emergency shelter (turvakoti) workers. They agreed that professional and private life completed each other providing a base for a broader expertise. Long career in the field does not ensure alone the expertise required. Then again clients' drastic family situations may be perceived through one's own gender and touch painfully. Mentoring and therapy are introduced as effective tools to create distance between the professional self and emotional reactions. (Laine 2005, 122-123, 142-144.)

## 9 FAMILIES AND PEERS IN FOCUS

### 9.1 Family and Peers as a Pillar

Apart from the professional help, my interviewees portrayed how their families and peers had or could have contributed to their advancement. Whereas C noted the lack of family support because of his foreign origin, E praised how essential his wife's role had been during the process as a strong pillar for the whole family. E also brought up the meaning of peer discussions to make him closer examine his own situation through more positive lenses. Peer talk made him highly appreciate his wife's perseverance, but he was the only father in my study to mention peers.

C: [...] So I think they saw me as twice as they saw me a bit more helpless maybe because I don't have the family background here, and even though my wife has family here but they live not so close and you know it's not so easy for me to like have them as my back up.

I: Mikä susta oli kaikista raskainta, kun sä aattelit, että sä olit isä ja sit oma oleminen on niin tuskasta niin mikä susta oli isänä raskainta? Lapsia ajatellen ja näin?

E: No vaimo, että se jaksaa siinä sitä perhettä viii eteenpäin. Että se oli että se yhteiselämä että sitä jaksettiin mennä sillain että sen piti vielä toisen sairaus kantaa ja perheen lapset.

I: Nii että sä koet, että sun vaimolle tuli niin iso taakka?

E: Kyllä se oli taakkaa varmaan, mutta hyvin se jakso! Kyllä mä kunnioitan sillai vaimoani että...monissa tilanteissa tämmösissä ni niissä äkkiä eroaa ja...[...] paljon tiiän tilanteita, että on käyny sillai. Ja sairaalassa justiin kun niistä vähän juteltiin niin...

I: Keskenään siellä joo.

E: Niin siellä joo.

(I: What was the most difficult part, when you thought about being a father and then your own being was so painful, what was the toughest part of it? When you think about the kids and all?)

E: Well my wife, that she has the energy to lead the family ahead. That there was our life in common and we were able to carry on and that she had to also carry the sickness of the other and the kids.

I: So you feel that the burden on your wife was so heavy?

E: Yes, it must have been a burden, but she made it beautifully! Oh, I do respect my wife that...in these situations many times people get divorced and... [...] I know a lot of cases that has happened. And in the hospital as a matter of fact there was some talk about it...

I: Amongst yourselves there.

E: Right, there yes.)

## 9.2 Changes in Gendered Family Roles

Elisabeth Badinter has ambitiously traced back until the prehistoric era the lengthy history of gendered role patterns. Firstly, her historical literature review shows where certain today's phenomena stem from. Secondly, her review shows that what we sometimes believe to be only recently discovered has actually existed long ago. Badinter referred to the traditional developmental idea of evolvement of the two gendered (male and female) behaviours due to differential tasks equally prominent for the survival of a human being; how she gave birth and he protected her, she took care of the household and family whereas he travelled for glory and conquests. In other words, she was the mistress of the house and he was the master of the universe. (Badinter 1986, 11.) These were supposed to be the rock solid bases for the gender identities universally and eternally.

Elisabeth Badinter has written her book in the eighties, when the new possibilities for in vitro parenthood had recently seen a day light and she curled her stories around the puzzling possibility of resembling genders. She admitted that there had always been a

gendered division of tasks throughout the times. She also objected to the novelty of the gender relations as they appear today by referring to studies, which would show that thousands of years ago there would have been a great harmony between men and women in certain societies. She concluded that if in the past the gender understanding was more based on the opposition and complementarities of the two genders, nowadays if they wanted to approach each other, they needed to be allies and alike. (Badinter 1986, 11-13, 23, 91)

Badinter discussed research studies on old civilizations where marriage had no strict regulations, where children outside marriages were accepted by the society, where boys and girls received the same family education and equal sexual liberties just to make a valid remark again. So as a matter of fact, what we today in the Western world think of as something achieved through the feminist battle and the late revolutionary development of gender equality of our times as we call it, has indeed existed thousands of years ago elsewhere. She evoked the idea that the fear in men with regard to women would have been the engine of some forms of the patriarchal behaviour. At the same time she reminded like Dumas (see chapter 1) that women never made this glorious gender revolution, since men themselves paved the way for the changes in the society, for instance by the French revolution and the winds of democracy. This was due to the power struggle, which was not particular only to male-female relations but also known in male-male relations. With the declaration of human rights, the gendered question was ready: were human rights established to cover everyone or only (white) men? There again, Badinter noted that there were already centuries before the feminist move philosophers who claimed that gender did not come by birth, that we were educated to the gendered behaviour and also that genders were actually very much alike. Only little were they listened or given attention to at the time. (Badinter 1986, 41 78, 91- 95, 100-101, 184-194.)

Feminists had marched in. In the past, the white man was accused of the power abuse against others, now all men were accused of the power abuse against women. Some men joined the feminist battle for equality. The sons of the new generation, brought up with surrounding feminist echoes, contested the overall aggressive masculinity their fathers had valued. They identified themselves rather with the feminine values of their mothers. To add to the embarrassment of fathers, not only men needed to adopt more feminine ways to operate, but also women started acting in more masculine ways.

Women then became in many fields their direct rivals unlike before. The alternative options to parenthood that have been created to replace the traditional male-female sexual intercourse have nothing but increased the perplexity among fathers. Men have lost the control over fertility. Marriage has lost its destiny like institutional status. After women became financially more independent, they divorced more easily. Being a single was not necessarily as despicable as it used to be. The sacred motherhood, the sacred fatherhood and the sacred family have been lowered from their pedestal. (Badinter 1986, 210-212, 222-224.)

Flying back from the historical skies to the daily life of our days, the puzzle and anxiety facing still transforming gender roles is visibly present. Elisabeth Badinter referred to the lack of models for the new fatherhood. She invited to reflect on our gender identity concepts and create something new. She talked about the masculinisation among women and feminisation among men as in contrast to the clear gender division that existed and was imposed in the West until sixties. (Badinter 1986, 239-241, 246, 254.) I would rather agree with the argument tossed in the air by Badinter that if one of the genders suffers, they both suffer. She asked, as the motherhood has become complex, too, and the role of a social parent has become more vital in a child's life than before, was there finally then any longer real difference between mothers and fathers? (Badinter 1986, 275, 293.)

After the historical review over gendered role division with Badinter, we may find out how the feminist waves have shaken the lives of these five fathers in my thesis study if at all. Some of the respondents assessed that men have started to increase their share of the household work. This has come up also in the research by the Finnish Family Federation (Väestöliitto, 2012). If in Finland in the nineties fathers shared over a third of household work and child caring, in 2011 their share had augmented to over 40%. Similar arguments were introduced by my participants.

E: siinon joutunu sitten isät ottamaan kotiaskareisiin enemmän niinku osaa

(E: there then fathers like must have started taking more part in household work)

D mentioned that both parents working they may do child caring at home in turns, too.

D: When the man is home, woman can be working. So he can take care of the child. If the man is working, the woman will be home.

B saw the changes through his African origin in the roles of spouses, as a working woman may wish to climb up higher in the power ladder not only career wise but also in the domestic sphere.

B: parfois la femme travaille et le mari ne travaille pas, la femme veut être à la place du mari. Donc, il y a cette influence-là. Donc, elle ne veut pas, elle ne veut plus être à sa place. Elle veut monter et essayer de hausser le ton. Chez nous en Afrique, les femmes ne peuvent pas hausser le ton devant le mari.

(B: sometimes the woman works and the husband doesn't work, the woman wants to be in the husband's place. So, there is this influence. So, she does not want, does not want to be in her place anymore. She wants to climb up and raise her voice. In Africa, women cannot raise their voice in front of the husband.)

C has not realized in his family any dramatic effects coming from the emancipation.

C: I didn't notice it strongly in my personal family. My wife is, would call herself probably an emancipated woman. But still there was never any clash whatsoever that we had. And maybe it's because she's very, even though she's emancipated, her interests could be quite typical, quite old school woman

### 9.3 He Is a Father After All!

These five fathers in my study painted a manifold image of an ideal father by including both traditional and developing new father roles comparable with models designed by Jouko Huttunen. From the traditional father features came up the breadwinner, the head of a family and either absent or present but still in control over his family. From the developing new traditions of strengthening fatherhood were brought up shared parenthood, strong presence, interaction and caring. (Huttunen 2001, 153.)

A reminded, among other things, similarly to Dumas (see chapter 1) the importance of remembering own childhood to understand the needs of the child.

A: hyvä isä on...se on läsnä ja tekee lasten kans, kuuntelee heitä, rakastaa ja näyttää sen ja... [...] ilonen [...] asettuu niinku tavallaan vähän niinkun lapsen kenkiin. Pitää välillä muistaa se että mimmonen, onhan itelläkin ollu lapsuus niin...

(A: a good father is...it is present and does with kids, listens to them, loves and shows it and... [...] joyful [...] places himself a bit like in the shoes of a child. Have to remember at times that how it is, one had a childhood, too...)

B: idéal c'est lui qui a l'oeil sur sa famille [...] A moindre problème il est là, présent, il essaie d'apporter son soutien à toute la famille.



(B: ideal is the one who keeps an eye on his family [...] To the least problem he is there, present, he tries to give his support to the whole family.)

Jari Sinkkonen (2009, 214) reminded that instead of blaming fathers for long working hours, they should be thanked for providing income to cover the family expenses as part of their fatherly role. Tommy Hellsten (2003, 254-256) referred to the same when fathers liberate women to their motherly role by providing favourable circumstances for them. Hellsten stated that to be fathers' dilemma in today's societies, where the welfare state has swallowed a major part of their traditional provider role and has left them idle on a side track. D specifically mentioned as a father's task to work for his family. C and D affirmed that they tried to create the foundation for their children's future.

C: gives the children a lot of attention, like spends a lot of time and teaches them the most important things they need to know and at least somehow leaves them some freedom to be what they want to be or try not to control them too much.

D: cares for his family. A father that understands the need of his family [...] is not a lazy father. A father that works to make sure that his family survives. [...] My dream is to make life fairly comfortable for him. [...] That he doesn't suffer any bit of what I suffered. [...] My desire is for him to have a career that [...] will make him a reputable man in this society. Because the day, if he's happy in the future, he will remember me. Oh, I had a father. And this is what my father did for me. This was the foundation he laid for me.

Rob Palkovitz in his article listed out what fatherhood changed in men's thinking. He included many of the examples described above by the five fathers, such as how to provide, how to teach, how to be an example of a good behaviour but also memories from their own childhood and upbringing (Palkovitz 2007, 25-41). Leena Valkonen has studied texts pupils had written about parenthood and found majorly similar definitions of a good parent to my study. She categorized children's definitions close to these five fathers' definitions. Children emphasized care taking, time spent together, caring and supporting, boundary setting, teaching, trust and sobriety. Moreover, children wished parents to be nice, generous, fair and not too severe or aggressive. (Valkonen, 2006, 38-39.) The only items not touched by fathers in my research were so often stereotypically linked to male behaviour and/or divorce: quarrelling, violence and substance abuse. Every other element in the pupils' texts had come up also in the descriptions of an ideal father in my study. The image of a violent father, not mother, seems to be so dominant that fathers tend to fully deny it and strongly emphasize non-violence in their families (Oulasmaa & Saloheimo 2010, 26).

The British Fatherhood Institute has discovered in the research with children resembling results. Both parents were expected to show constructive examples for their offspring, to give their time, help, steady life and advice, not to forget about both emotional and physical closeness. (Fatherhood Institute, 2001.)

E stressed father's role as an example for his children.

E: Se on vähän semmosta niinku esimerkkillistä että kuitenkin lapsille olemista. Että haluaa näyttää sitä ite miten haluaa lastenki käyttäytyvän.

(E: It is a bit like giving an example, being for them. That one wants to show how would like the children to behave.)

Juha T. Hakala (2009, 59) defended diversity in fathering and instead of a fixed ideal would leave the definitions to be made within each family by fathers and children themselves. Jouni Kempe (2000, 13) recalled how fathers set their father identities in relation to the cultural understanding and image of men. Merja Rankinen (2010, 92-93) pointed out that fathering models stem from one's own father, male relatives, male neighbours, but not only from the male gender, since fathers may adopt models from the female gender, too.

In Jukka Lehtonen's opinion (2000, 15-17) the conventional male role model has been heteronormative and blind to diversity. He claimed that this model has been an obstacle for showing emotions and expressing feelings particularly amongst men and saw the hope for a change in youths to create new diverse role models. In my study the five fathers were all openly emotional and caring when narrating about their families and followed in that respect the new role model pattern. Needless to say, we have to keep in mind that they interacted with a female researcher, which unlike male gender masculine rivals may have permitted or encouraged showing their emotional side more overtly.

The Family Federation (Väestöliitto) in Finland has conducted a research among fathers about forbidden feelings. Not only those fathers told about their negative feelings around fatherhood but were most willing to enclose their positive feelings of love and happiness as well (Jämsä & Kalliomaa & Rotkirch 2010, 6). The data collected painted quite a different view over fathers and their emotions from the persistent stereotype of a (Finnish) man who does not talk and certainly not boast about his feelings. Fathers had their own personal channels to express their fatherly feelings but excluded institutional services as an improper stage for that. (Oulasmaa & Saloheimo 2010, 27.)

I have quoted in the heading here one of the interviewees, since it described so well the high ambitions these fathers had in their fathering role and the strong contrast to their position in front of sometimes belittling social workers. This conflicting feeling is hardly surprising, if we remember that according to Jukka Virtanen (2004, 88), children may be the most important issue in fathers' lives and even prior to their spouses. Virtanen believed men were ready for remarkable efforts and to cede their gendered privileges in favour of their offspring.

In my research process I was deeply touched and highly impressed by the emotionally loaded descriptions these five fathers gave about fatherhood and their dreams as fathers. They were filled with overwhelming fatherly pride during the narration. If I had desired to reach men through their feelings and emotions, latest in the question of fatherhood they came into surface in abundance. Juha T. Hakala (2009, 80) underlined that a father has a special bond with a child and a special position in her/his life. A father is not a father in relation to a mother; not someone to compete with her or to replace her. He is a father with his own special role in his family. A father is a father and a mother is a mother.

## 10 LESSONS AS A NOVICE RESEARCHER

When I first got inspired by the topic, it seemed that there was a discussion going on around fatherhood, fathers' and men's position in the society or as a family work service user. However, I did not find that many studies over my subject in the Finnish context then. Towards the end of my research process I discovered that the vivid interest had been shared by others and along the way new studies were issued. The child protection cases had entered the head titles in the news again because of the claimed negligence of some social workers relating to devastating destinies of some children. This is a good example of how much social work lies as a public service under the public eye but also often offers an easy scapegoat, when the human cruelty in private sphere is hard to accept or understand.

My anticipated fear of receiving only overly flattering image of female workers because of my personal gender had been futile. If already after the completion of the interviews I was tempted to estimate that these five cases showed me colourful scenery over the social work world, that impression was only intensified after the transcription work. At that stage, after piling up the information, I was absolutely convinced that despite my gender I had captured five different personal views. This variety among the responses would let assume that my female position had not jeopardized the work.

If I started this study by assuming that fathers would bring up gender issues continuously in their replies, I was wrong. Gender had much less importance in their narratives than I expected. The three fathers with a foreign origin acknowledged all in different ways that women do have a stronger position in Finland than in their country of origin, especially when dealing with authorities as a family. In their cases it was not that they felt fully ignored in the process but instead they seemed to feel having the lack of protection for their say at times. They seemed to believe it originated from the Finnish society structure based on strong women, not so much particular to social services.

Further reading of feminist theories did largely influence me as a researcher, as I could find various instruments that resonated with my intentions. Elina Oinas (2004, 210) referred to the situated narration and personal interpretation. Likewise I have understood that being critical or scientific does not necessarily mean being positivist or claiming to be an objective outsider in relation to the topic. I am aware of being very much involved in the process from the beginning to the end. The knowledge I provide is based on my personal understanding of the results. It is local and situated not only through the participants but also through me as a researcher. We are located somewhere in the time and space and have narrated accordingly. We both, researchers and informants, have our life histories which we carry with us here, too, if not otherwise at least through our ways to narrate. This was in a very concrete manner revealed, when one of the fathers (with a foreign origin) claimed that in Finland the state formed the ideal parenthood model to be followed by the citizens. According to him imposing this model started from the small children and continued until they were adults (see chapter 8.4). He having grown up elsewhere looked at it from a different perspective and surprised me by unveiling the major role the state and authorities had in Finland in child upbringing, the extent of which I had clearly not been fully aware of.

Oinas (2004, 210) included ethics as one of the main themes in feminist interview literature. Ethical thinking has been my guiding star from the very first steps of the process. I wanted to guarantee that the participants could trust along the way that their private sphere was respected, protected and valued by my research. I doubted my very ethical approach, when one of the interviewees burst into tears in the middle of the conversation. Paul ten Have criticized interview researchers for taking the liberty to inquire as self-evident without considering the private space of their interviewees or connotations their interviewees make with sometimes interrogation-like encounters with authorities (ten Have 2004, 57-58).

Especially after these interviews it will be difficult for me to agree that fathers would have a less emotional bond to their children than mothers. The emotional incident was only one proof to me how sensitive and personal issues around fatherhood were. It proved also how deeply hurt a father can be, when his fatherhood has been questioned or devalued by authorities. One of the fathers stressed what I believe many fathers would agree with against judgemental behaviour of social workers. In his opinion child protection should literally look after child interests and keep the focus there.

A: kylse mun mielest niitten pitäis niinku ottaa huomioon se, että siellä ajetaan niinku lapsen asioita ja niinku ei niinku niin tarkkaan tarttis, sitä isää siinä tarttis välttämättä huomioida, niinku niin, tai niinku noita et mitä sen elämässä on. [...] Se on isä kuitenkin.

(A: well I think they should remember that we are there for the child's sake and then...then there is no need, no need to necessarily focus so much on the father, well I mean, I mean what he has, he has in his life. [...] He is a father after all.)

The main learning experience for me was, apart from the technical aspects of how to carry out a research, to sincerely respect my informants. Time after time I was truly impressed on their ways to describe in front of me what fatherhood meant for them or how they expected an ideal father to be or act like with his children. Their will, commitment and devotion as fathers was touching despite all different challenges they had been through to end up at child protection counters. None of these fathers had given up on their fatherhood despite the rocky path. They had not only been fighting fiercely to keep their rights to fatherhood and maintain contacts with their offspring under troublesome circumstances, but with the honourable vision for their own fatherhood they continued providing what they best esteemed to be for their children. They fought for the best interest of their own children. With and without social workers.

Unlike the modernity would let assume, I have no ambition to claim to be able to give any ready answers or fixed truths of the reality around us. I rather wish to prepare the territory for further inquiries and interpretations. Instead of closing up I wish to open up the path for others thus following the feminist research tradition ideals. (Korsisaari 2006, 49, 64.)

Neither can I claim my study to be value free. There is no research without preferences and sociologists have a reputation of being advocates for their cause whatever it is (Bernardes 1997, 60-61). My preferences have been running the process thoroughly to begin with the selection of my thesis topic and the literature sources used. As much as he blamed himself for being ambiguous, I acknowledged the same in my process. It was not obvious to remain consistent and follow the guiding stars as I have referred elsewhere to. As an example, I pretended to be open-minded in my study, fully aware of my own prejudices behind the scene. After the process I more humbly declare to have been sufficiently open-minded to hear the various tones in the narratives instead of totally excluding the conflicting ones from my report. I have tried to balance in between and give equal voice to all my interlocutors, although their ways to narrate differed and their viewpoints were stronger and more vivid for certain questions than for others privileging those who had given more time for the relevant question.

I strongly disagree there is any need to lead genders to a fierce gender battle by research studies, since there are no winners in a war, even less so keeping in mind that the traditional bipolar male/female setting is too shallow a picture of genders even in its biology based interpretation. Not every person is clearly one or the other. In my understanding no person is strictly feminine/masculine neither psychologically nor socially. This we should keep in mind before confronting too aggressively the other genders. If we offend the others, we offend simultaneously ourselves after all. We all are multifaceted collections of feminine and masculine features. Having said that, I agree we may, sometimes even simultaneously, be pro-male and pro-female also in research regardless to our own gender position.

I have used narratives here as a tool for my data analysis. However, I have learned from the interviewees and their narration that maybe still more important than anything else in social work is the empowering of service users. In my thesis work there was a clear distinction in these fathers' narrating styles, which reflected their self-images and their

self-assessed positions in both the private and public spheres. For social work practitioners narratives can serve as one tool among others for interventions following Bruner's idea cited earlier. Practitioners may actively encourage service users by positive feedback and support them to build up a more positive self-understanding and more participative role in social work processes. Professionals should aim at independency not dependency of their clients. In my opinion, that is the main reason why both parties, the social worker and the service user, should pay attention to the discourse and narration styles used. My data analysis would suggest that they are strongly linked to the outcome.

## 11 PROFESSIONAL WISDOM AS AN UMBRELLA

I personally agree with some authors that gender specificity is a relevant part of social work expertise, but I cannot base that idea on the narrations of these five fathers under my observation. As I have interpreted their narratives, even more than having the same or different gender, they expected their social workers to pay attention to their individual needs. More than giving advice they demanded for listening approach to help them build up independently their own tools to tackle various challenges in life. This did not require in their minds any certain gender. Their message was rather that whatever the lacking personal experience (for example as a father, as a parent, as a foreigner) it could be often covered by long professional experience and personal life history, which helped workers to be open and interactive enough to bridge to the fathers. According to them, gender is not the key to a satisfactory process. None of them desired or suggested to change to the same gender employee. Same gender may just as much be favourable as it may be damaging for the service user as my quotes have proved.

These are the reasons behind my argument that gender counts only to a certain extent and other elements in human interaction may contribute even more at times. This is not to understate the experiences of exclusion or mistreatment of male clients, which naturally came across in my study as well. It is to stress that these fathers agreed that gender challenges can be overcome many times by professional skills, frankness and high respect towards the service users.

After all, my interpretation based on the publications read and these five child protection cases heard, would let assume that at least some men feel excluded to some extent as a male representative of the family facing social workers in difficult situations. Some of my informants have described the feeling of lacking the space and voice when decisions are made, for instance, regarding their children's custody. Some of them have also expressed devaluing attitudes reflecting social workers' gender prejudices towards fathers. However, in line with my results, not all previous studies showed the great importance of the gender specific work at social services either.

In this study each case portrayed a slightly different approach to child protection services. Social work images were conflicting with each other when it came to communication experiences. Most negative narrators had felt inequity and most positive ones equity in power relations during the process. Some narrators claimed social workers focused majorly on the mother and the child ignoring the father and furthermore showing disrespect to the father. Some narrators stated they had been fairly treated and expressed gratitude for the support given. Gender sensitivity seemed to be for some social workers a natural part of their work and for some not, based on the narrated experiences between genderly biased and fair treatment.



None of the fathers consistently insisted the gender of the worker being a challenge. Even those who blamed their social workers for being gender biased at another occasion denied the gender being the obstacle for a proper process. They then suggested it was more about the way workers communicated and their both professional and life experiences that contributed to an effective collaboration. My respondents did not show green light to any special treatment of fathers either. They demanded a fair and equal interaction, not gender-based. In this sense they did not bring up gender sensitivity as a necessity. On the contrary, some even denied they wanted to have a same gender employee to deal with at child protection or had instead experienced more negative pressure from the same gender employees.

In my thesis I could not enlarge the reflection on other background factors that could count, although the foreign perspective emerged at times in stereotypes or prejudices expressed by the fathers with a foreign origin. After my research process and findings I believe that intersectional approach is a necessity for a larger picture. Gender is only one angle to the topic and hence gives quite a narrow view over complex matters.

This thesis study has distinctly shown that there was no one voice to represent these five fathers. They like any group are a cluster of individuals containing several voices and personal experiences. How they see the world and how they represent their role in it depends among other things on their personal life history, their audience and their image about themselves. As one of the interviewees stated, a social worker needs to be wise. After all, it would seem based on these five interviews that for clients it is wisdom that counts and not gender that matters.

As discussed before, fathers have an equally crucial role in parenting with mothers and should not be bypassed or neglected in family work by no excuse. The consequences of a functional family work and early interventions can be perceived on an individual, family and society level. They can be calculated in a concrete manner by comparing expenses needed for early intervention measures and the ultimate option of the residential care. Not only extreme child protection measures are a costly solution but they also represent the least effective support measure for families. As stated earlier, securing father engagement in parenting and as a self-evident part of family work processes ensures the well-being of the entire family.

## 12 FURTHER STUDIES

Even in this research the interviewees had diverse backgrounds, although this time the main scope was not there. There could be further intersectional studies considering various background factors possibly adding to the usual ethnicity, social class and gender complementary information such as immigrant/native background, sexual identity/orientation, self image, un/employment status, education, non-/residential parenting, family size, family cultures and multiple family compositions, age, age of fatherhood and language skills. Including various parameters would also require a bigger number of informants. This study leaves us with the question what factors could affect the efficiency of the support given if gender was not necessarily the most determining one.

Many authors have yearned for more unified men's studies and research traditions in Finland. One point has been bothering me throughout the literature review. If men really want to improve their position in, for instance, family matters, they should have the say on their own behalf. In my opinion too many researchers have been female. Too many authors have been female. That is why I was glad to notice that this trend has started changing, some of the newest publications about men had amassed a group of male authors to represent men. Even if we occasionally as female researchers might be able to enlighten certain genderly outsider point of views our male counterparts may be blind to, in my opinion the major spokesmen should come from their own gender representatives.

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## 13 APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS IN ENGLISH

### FATHERS AS SOCIAL WORK CLIENTS

#### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. In what kind of situation(s) and/or needs you have been a social work client as a father?
2. How old were you at the time when you started using the services?
3. Is the process with social services still ongoing?
4. What were your feelings during those meetings?
5. Have your feelings changed during the process? If yes, how?
6. What has been your best experience and what has been the worst?
7. Do you think that social workers have been able to consider your role as the father of the family? If yes, how? If not, how would you wish them to?
8. Do you think your gender has affected the way the social workers have worked with you? If yes, could you give an example?
9. Do you think the social workers' gender has affected their way to work with you? If yes, could you give an example?
10. What do you think about the statement that social workers are not able to pay enough attention to fathers (compared with mothers) during the family work process?
11. Do you think you yourself would have acted or communicated in a different manner if your social worker had had a different gender?
12. Do you think any other aspect from your background or a personal factor could have affected how the social worker(s) has/have worked with you?
13. Do you think that you share the image of an ideal father with your social worker(s)?
14. Do you think women's changing role during last decades (e.g. emancipation and entering working life) has affected men's role within families? If yes, could you describe how?

15. Do you think it is possible for a female worker or for any worker without children to build up an understanding of the complexity of fatherhood as not having experienced it themselves?
16. Imagine an ideal father. How would you describe e.g. his way to behave, his character?
17. When you have had big changes in your own personal life, have they changed somehow your fatherhood? If yes, could you give an example?
18. Imagine an ideal social worker. How would she/he support the father during the appointments or in the process as such?
19. In your opinion, should social worker treat male clients, in this case as fathers, somehow differently? If yes, could you give an example? If no, please explain your argument.
20. Would you like to give any suggestions to your own social worker as how to improve her/his ways of working (with regard to fathers)?
21. Could you think of any other aspect that could influence the gender specific social work but which has not been mentioned here earlier?
22. Would you have any other comment or idea you would like to share?

## 14 APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS IN FINNISH

## ISÄT SOSIAALITYÖN ASIAKKAINA

## HAASTATTELUKYSYMYKSIÄ

1. Millaisessa/millaisissa tilanteessa/tilanteissa tai minkä asian vuoksi olet ollut isänä sosiaalityön asiakkaana?
2. Kuinka vanha olit kun aloit käyttää palveluja?
3. Onko samainen prosessi sosiaalityön kanssa yhä meneillään?
4. Millaisia tunteita koit noiden tapaamisten aikana?
5. Ovatko tunteesi muuttuneet prosessin kuluessa? Jos ovat niin millä tavoin?
6. Mikä on ollut paras kokemuksesi ja mikä huonoin?
7. Koetko, että sosiaalityöntekijät ovat pystyneet ottamaan huomioon roolisi perheen isänä? Jos kyllä, niin millä tavoin? Jos ei, kuinka toivoisit heidän ottavan sen huomioon?
8. Ajatteletko, että sukupuolesi on vaikuttanut tapaan, jolla sosiaalityöntekijät ovat työskennelleet kanssasi? Jos kyllä, voitko kertoa jonkun esimerkin siitä?
9. Onko sinun mielestäsi sosiaalityöntekijöiden sukupuoli vaikuttanut tapaan, jolla he työskentelevät kanssasi? Jos kyllä, voitko kertoa jonkun esimerkin?
10. Mitä ajattelet väitteestä, etteivät sosiaalityöntekijät kiinnitä yhtä paljon huomiota isiin (äiteihin verrattuina) perheen kanssa työskentelyn aikana?
11. Ajatteletko, että olisit itse toiminut tai kommunikoinut eri tavalla, jos sosiaalityöntekijäsi olisi ollut eri sukupuolta?
12. Voisiko mielestäsi joku muu taustaasi tai henkilökohtaisiin ominaisuuksiisi liittyvä asia olla vaikuttanut tapaan, jolla sosiaalityöntekijä(t) työskentelivät kanssasi?
13. Onko teillä mielestäsi sosiaalityöntekijäsi/jöidesi kanssa samanlainen kuva siitä, millainen hyvä isä on?
14. Onko sinun mielestäsi naisten muuttunut rooli viimeisten vuosikymmenten aikana (esim. vapautuminen ja työelämään siirtyminen) vaikuttanut miehen rooliin perheissä? Jos kyllä, voisitko kuvata millä tavoin?

15. Onko mielestäsi naistyöntekijän tai lapsettoman työntekijän mahdollista muodostaa kattava käsitys isyyden moninaisuudesta, kun he eivät ole kokeneet sitä itse?
16. Kuvittele millainen on hyvä isä. Miten kuvailisit esim. hänen tapansa käyttäytyä tai hänen luonnettaan?
17. Kun omassa elämässäsi on ollut suuria muutoksia, ovatko ne jotenkin muuttaneet isyyttäsi? Jos kyllä, voisitko antaa esimerkin?
18. Kuvittele millainen on hyvä sosiaalityöntekijä. Kuinka hän tukisi isää tapaamisten aikana tai ylipäättänsä sosiaalityössä?
19. Oletko sitä mieltä, että sosiaalityöntekijöiden pitäisi kohdella miesasiakkaita, tässä tapauksessa isinä, jollakin tapaa eri tavoin? Jos kyllä, voisitko antaa esimerkin? Jos ei, voisitko perustella väitteesi?
20. Haluaisitko ehdottaa parannuksia oman sosiaalityöntekijäsi tapaan tehdä työtään isien kanssa?
21. Tuleeko mieleesi jokin muu näkökulma, joka voisi vaikuttaa sukupuolisidonnaiseen sosiaalityöhön, mutta jota ei ole vielä mainittu?
22. Olisiko sinulla joku muu kommentti tai ajatus, jonka haluaisit jakaa?

## 15 APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS IN FRENCH

### PERES EN TANT QUE CLIENTS DES SERVICES SOCIAUX

#### QUESTIONS

1. Dans quelle situation ou pour quelle raison avez-vous été un client de services sociaux?
2. Quel âge aviez-vous au moment de commencer à utiliser les services sociaux?
3. Est-ce que le procès avec les services sociaux continue encore ?
4. Quelles étaient vos émotions au cours des entretiens ?
5. Est-ce que vos émotions ont changé au cours du procès ? Si oui, de quelle manière ?
6. Laquelle était votre meilleure expérience et laquelle était la pire ?
7. Est-ce que vous pensez que les travailleurs sociaux ont été capables de considérer votre rôle en tant que le père de famille ? Si oui, de quelle manière ? Si non, comment souhaiteriez-vous qu'ils le fassent ?
8. Croyez-vous que votre genre a influencé la façon de laquelle les travailleurs sociaux travaillent avec vous ? Si oui, pourriez-vous donner un exemple ?
9. Croyez-vous que le genre des travailleurs sociaux a influencé leur façon de travailler avec vous ? Si oui, pourriez-vous donner un exemple ?
10. Qu'est-ce que vous pensez de l'argument que les travailleurs sociaux ne sont pas capables de considérer les pères (comparés avec les mères) au cours du procès familial ?
11. Pensez-vous que vous-même vous seriez comporté ou communiqué différemment si le travailleur social avait un autre genre ?
12. Croyez-vous qu'un autre aspect dans votre histoire ou un facteur personnel aurait pu influencé la façon de laquelle les travailleurs sociaux ont travaillé avec vous ?
13. Pensez-vous que vous partagez l'image d'un père idéal avec votre travailleur social ?



14. Pensez-vous que le changement dans le rôle des femmes au cours des dernières décennies (p.ex. l'émancipation et l'entrée au marché du travail) a influencé le rôle des hommes dans la famille ? Si oui, pourriez-vous décrire de quelle manière ?
15. Croyez-vous qu'il soit possible, soit pour un travailleur social féminin soit un travailleur social sans enfants, de construire une compréhension sur la complexité de paternité sans avoir une expérience personnelle ?
16. Imaginez un père idéal. Comment décririez-vous p.ex. sa façon de se comporter, son caractère ?
17. Lors des grands changements dans votre vie personnelle, est-ce que votre paternité a changé d'une manière quelconque ? Si oui, pourriez-vous donner un exemple ?
18. Imaginez un travailleur social idéal. Comment pourriez-t-il ou elle soutenir le père au cours des rendez-vous ou autrement dans le procès ?
19. Selon vous, devrait le travailleur social traiter les clients, dans ce cas-ci les pères, différemment d'une façon quelconque ? Si oui, pourriez-vous donner un exemple ? Si non, veuillez expliquer votre argument.
20. Est-ce que vous souhaiteriez suggérer à votre travailleur social comment améliorer ses façons de travailler (avec les pères) ?
21. Est-ce que vous pouvez mentionner n'importe quel autre aspect qui pourrait influencer le travail social avec les hommes mais qui n'a pas été mentionné encore ?
22. Avez-vous un autre commentaire ou une autre idée que vous souhaiteriez partager ?