



# Changing men, changing times – fathers and sons from an experimental gender equality study

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### Abstract

The aim of this paper is to develop a conceptual framework for addressing intergenerational transmission, historical change and agency. The framework will be employed to analyse the findings from a longitudinal follow-up study over two generations of men, where couples from Norway participated in an experimental research study, the Work-Sharing Couples Project, which aimed to promote egalitarian work–family adaptations in the early 1970s. The original study was based on both spouses working part-time and shift parenting. The follow-up study concluded that the untraditional work–family arrangement had not been passed on to the sons. The article develops a multidimensional analysis of the work–family adaptations of men in two generations: the untraditional adaptation of fathers in the 1970s; and the neo-traditional adaptations of sons in the 2000s.

In developing a four-dimensional approach to intergenerational transmission and social change, the article contributes to the study of intergenerational transmission through the comparison of situated agency in different generations and time/spaces. Taking into account different aspects of time and space, personal biography, discursive and material structures of opportunity, and intergenerational dynamics at the family level as well as at social level, the article contributes to theorizing longitudinal qualitative research by linking the micro-level to the macro-level.

**Keywords:** dual-earner–dual carer, fathering, longitudinal qualitative study, men, neo-traditional couples, social change

### Introduction

This paper addresses the thriving field of qualitative approaches to studying social change, among them intergenerational and longitudinal qualitative research designs (Henderson *et al.*, 2006, 2007). It is part of a more general turn towards temporal and spatial dimensions in social research including studies of men and masculinities (Gottzén, 2013). It is also part of the recent developments in historicizing research and researchers and the application of biographical approaches to the social sciences themselves through studying

and linking the biographies, life stories and research agendas of social science pioneers (Brewer, 2004, 2005; Economic and Social Data Service, 2011).

Massey (1993, 1994) has argued for a four-dimensional sociology, which takes into account both time and space, the interrelations between them and, to move beyond this three-dimensional but static perspective towards a more dynamic one, Massey introduces movement as the fourth dimension. McLeod and Thomson (2009) see Massey's approach as 'opening up the possibilities to show the coalescence of place, time, subjectivity and the social' (p. 9). The present paper could to some extent be seen as a bid for such a four-dimensional sociology of intergenerational transmission. It revisits a piece of 'family silver' of Norwegian sociology of the family, an experimental research study for gender equality in the family, the Work-Sharing Couples Project in the early 1970s, and presents an analysis based on a longitudinal and intergenerational follow-up study of the men who participated in the project and their adult sons. The paper also revisits the project itself and its originators, trying to capture the whole within one conceptual framework that includes different aspects of time and space, as well as the movements involved in intergenerational transmission.

The Work-Sharing Couples Project was initiated by Ola Rokkones of the Norwegian Family Council, and led by the sociologist Erik Grønseth of the University of Oslo who had, since the 1950s, been a critic of the male breadwinner arrangement for its negative effect on gender relations. The aim of the project was to promote an egalitarian family model based on the reallocation of paid and unpaid work. The participants were couples with children below school age, and the design was for both spouses to work part-time and to share child-care and domestic work, on a parental shift basis (Grønseth, 1975).

Sixteen couples participated in the original study. They were recruited through the media and snowballing techniques, resulting in a predominantly middle-class sample, which was the subject of criticism at the time (Grønseth, 1975: 3). Bjørnholt (2010b) argues that such a sample is particularly fit for the study of men belonging to the 'service class' (Goldthorpe, 1987). Bjørnholt (2009a) also finds that the sample was more diverse than previously assumed in the original study.

Fifteen of the original 16 couples were retraced for the follow-up study, and 14 fully participated in the follow-up study, in addition to seven sons, five of whom had established their own families with small children. In the follow-up study both the parents and sons were interviewed using biographical, retrospective life course interviews. The selection of sons who were in the same life phase as were the fathers during the Work-Sharing Couples Project, was central to the comparative, intergenerational research design, although the small number of sons who filled the criteria is a limitation of the study.

In the follow-up study the men were found to have played a key role in initiating the untraditional arrangement in their families (Bjørnholt, 2009a, 2011). The sons of these untraditional fathers were, however, at the time of the interview found to be living in neo-traditional work-family adaptations

(Bjørnholt, 2009b, 2010c). This paper aims to explain both the fathers' untraditional work–family adaptations in the 1970s and the neo-traditional adaptations of the sons and, subsequently, the lack of intergenerational transmission of the untraditional work–family adaptation. The focus is on men's adaptation to work, as the fathers' part-time work was the innovative intervention in the original project, and it is still rare for men to work part-time.

The research that forms the basis of the paper covers a long time span, in which gender relations as well as theories of gender relations have undergone profound changes. So have the structures of opportunity and the welfare state benefits available to working parents in Norway. The longitudinal follow-up study of the Work-Sharing Couples Project provides a good basis for discussing intergenerational transmission in relation to the individual as well as the wider social, historical and theoretical contexts over time. It also taps into a core element in current Norwegian gender equality policies – namely the promotion of involved fatherhood in early child-care.

Biographical and life course research may be designed, carried out and analysed in several ways. Like many other studies of biography and intergenerational transmission the present study relies on semi-structured, qualitative interviews. This method produces rich data, and the analysis often relies on thick descriptions of selected cases and interview excerpts (see Brannen and Nilsen, 2011). In this paper what is foregrounded is not the individual informants but rather the historical and social realities in which they are enmeshed, including the genealogy of and social realities behind the experimental research project in which the fathers participated.

Fathers and sons in their respective contexts are the unit of analysis. To make such a generalization I will have to simplify and downplay the variation within the groups as well as the uniqueness of each case – and, in line with this choice, the material will not be directly employed here. Nevertheless, the present analysis relies on the close reading of the material, cut in several ways and analysed from different perspectives and with different focuses, including thick descriptions of selected cases and examples (Bjørnholt, 2009b, 2010c, 2010b, 2011), methods (Bjørnholt, 2009a, 2011; Bjørnholt and Farstad, 2012), policy development (Bjørnholt, 2010a, 2012) and theory development (Bjørnholt, 2014).

The following analysis is broadly informed by four different perspectives: first, a generational perspective. Elder (1974, 1985) showed how important historical events, such as the Great Depression and World War II, influenced the life courses of the generations who were exposed to them as children and adolescents, and he has continued to develop a contextual and historically informed perspective on the life course as embedded in social institutions and history, showing the importance of time and place for human development (Elder and Giele, 2009; Elder *et al.*, 2006; Shanahan *et al.*, 1997). Inspired by Mannheim (1997 [1928]), the concept of generation as something more than age cohorts has received increasing attention, drawing attention to the social, relational and technological factors that constitute a generational

consciousness and shapes the historical role of particular generations. Edmunds and Turner (2002, 2004, 2005) suggest that active or strategic generations which succeed in producing social change alternate with more passive generations, and that the success of one generation in achieving social change may limit the transformative potential and the opportunities of the next generation to form an active generation in that it will inherit the changes produced by the preceding generation. In the present work the parents belonged to the generation that was young during the 1960s. This generation has been identified as a strategic generation with a wide-ranging and continued impact, and in this generation gender relations as well as authoritarian relations in working life were challenged and reformulated. The sons were children during the 1970s, and subsequently belong to the generation following the strategic 1960s generation, inheriting the social changes initiated by the parental generation, among them a new gender regime.

Second, an intergenerational perspective shows how family heritage is taken up, shaped, transformed and resisted over generations, how the micro history of family links to broader social phenomena such as the reproduction of class and social mobility (drawing on authors such as Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame, 1997; Thompson, 1997; Brannen *et al.*, 2004; Büchner and Brake, 2006) and how socialization takes place within the broad context of socializing environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1974, 1986). A finding of the present study is that the innovative work–family adaptation was not passed on to the next generation and, further, that a broad, contextualized approach was needed in order to explain how the men in the young generation became the men they did (Bjørnholt, 2009b, 2010c). The ambition in this paper is to contribute to such a ‘thick’ contextual approach to intergenerational transmission in the context of social change.

The third perspective is a gender perspective seeing gender as constituted in relations between men and women and between men (Carrigan *et al.*, 1985; Connell, 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Bengtsson, 2001, 2007). Margot Bengtsson suggests the term ‘contradictory masculinity positions’ as a potential for men’s involvement in, and resistance to, changing gender relations. Bengtsson introduced and expanded on Connell’s work in a Swedish context. More recently, Nordberg (2005, 2007) analysed masculinity as fluid, contradictory assemblages of discourses as an alternative to Connell’s ‘hegemonic’ and subordinate masculinities.

The fathers’ agency will be discussed in relation to emerging and new ideals of masculinity in the 1970s, and I will also discuss the sons’ adaptations at a time when the once-radical masculinity of the paternal generation has become mainstream.

The fourth perspective is a genealogical, discourse analytical perspective drawing on Foucault, acknowledging how what is taken for granted in the present is constituted by the layering of discursive traces of the past, as well as how some ideas are taken up by, and become part of, the power apparatus and the governing of the self (Henriques *et al.*, 1998 [1984]; Rose, 1985, 1999 [1990],

2008). In the present work the analytical framework is based on a broad genealogical/discourse analytically informed approach, which involves integrating contemporary discourses in the analytical framework, as well as situating and historicizing the original research project and its founding fathers.

### **Towards a conceptual framework for tracing changing gender relations in Scandinavia from the 1950s and 1960s onwards**

The present study addresses the profound changes in gendered division of paid work and care and the change in the theorizing and politicizing of gender relations in Scandinavia from the 1950s onwards. Covering the same time period, Bengtsson (2001, 2007) has developed a conceptual framework for studying changing gender relations and changing gendered subjectivity, which has inspired the conceptual framework for the present paper. In her analysis Bengtsson explores three analytical dimensions.

1. Social gender appeals, including political appeals and psychological truth regimes at each point of time. I will use the concept scientific truth regimes, which cover the scientific ideas of gender relations at the time. The concept of social appeals includes political appeals and scientific knowledge regimes. It more or less equals that of discourse, but has the advantage that it reflects to a greater extent the fact that not all appeals are successful in the ongoing struggle for hegemony between competing appeals.
2. Lived experience in terms of upbringing and personal history. I will use the concept 'personal biography'.
3. Local context, which in Bengtsson's study was study area; in my study it is work–family adaptation.

*And* the relations between these three dimensions for each of the groups studied.

To Bengtsson's framework I add a fourth element:

4. Structures of opportunity for work and care in terms of welfare state benefits for working parents and parents' rights in working life.

This conceptual framework forms the basis of the rest of the paper; first, it broadly informs the presentation of the background of the Work-Sharing Couples Project and, subsequently, it forms the basis of a more structured analysis of the main findings in the follow-up study of fathers and sons from the Work-Sharing Couples Project.

### **Background of the Work-Sharing Couples Project**

During the 1950s and 1960s authoritarian relations were challenged in working life as well as in the family, and in Norway Erik Grønseth was among

the foremost advocates of a more egalitarian family model, drawing on the psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich and the Norwegian feminist pioneer Margarete Bonnevie (1932). The theoretical and ideological shift that took place in this period was part of the use in Scandinavia of sex-role theory in a critical and social constructivist way. Norwegian sociology was from the outset an oppositional science (Mjøset, 1991) – its pioneers studied institutions and organizations from within from a bottom-up perspective – against this background the topic and the experimental design of the Work-Sharing Couples Project may have appeared feasible and scientifically acceptable.

Although a pioneer in theorizing and studying work, gender equality and love, Grønseth was in many ways the odd man out in relation to the ‘scientific truth regime’ with respect to gender relations in Norway due to his inspiration from Wilhelm Reich and his reputation as a controversial advocate of sexual liberation. Grønseth also integrated his personal quest for liberation with his research agenda in a way that was unusual at the time, and openly admitted that he chose topics of research that were of personal interest to himself (Nordberg and Otnes, 2004; Sand, 2006). In the 1970s many of the ideas that Grønseth had advocated, such as egalitarian family arrangements and sexual freedom, became part of the political appeals of social movements at that time, and in political documents the male breadwinner model was replaced by a dual breadwinner model.

A parallel development took place in working life from 1960 with the cooperation of the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) and the National Employer Organisation (NAF) with the experiments that aimed at the democratization of relations in working life and were part of action research initiatives which involved Norwegian researchers in collaboration with the Tavistock Institute. They represented the outset of half a century of combined research and innovation, identified as the ‘Norwegian model’ (Engelstad *et al.*, 2010). This general spirit of cooperation and democratization probably served as a facilitating factor in setting up an experimental project aimed at democratizing the family, which included experiments about part-time work in the workplace.

The Norwegian Family Council and its founder, Ola Rokkones, who initially came up with the idea and took the initiative to launch the Work-Sharing Couples Project, represent an interesting part of the story. Rokkones, a civil engineer and physician, established the Norwegian Family Council in 1964 with the aim of promoting structures for a more caring society such as nursing homes for the fragile elderly, and architectural designs that favoured intergenerational relations. Its solutions to the perceived threat against the family as an institution were thus institutional, calling for the social provision of care and structures that supported family relations. The dual part-time solution in the Work-Sharing Couples Project was part of a modernization as well as a revaluation and a defence of the family against the increasing demands of paid labour implied in the emerging dual-earner model. From the first part of the 1970s, when 45 per cent of women were in paid employment,

women's paid employment reached 63.7 per cent in 1987 (Statistics Norway, 1994).

The Family Council obtained state funding from 1969, the same year the Work-Sharing Couples Project was launched. Although the project was famous in its time it was not so popular among those who formulated the Norwegian family policy at the time – the same government ministry that administered the Family Council's funding. After several initiatives, the ministry eventually succeeded in persuading the Storting (the Norwegian Parliament) to cut the Family Council's funding in 1979 (Vollset, 2011).

In summary, the Work-Sharing Couples Project was both the idea and the initiative of Ola Rokkones and the materialization of Grønseth's theoretical critique of the male breadwinner model. It was part of a general tendency towards liberatory research agendas in Norwegian sociology as well as of a social-democratic spirit of cooperation and a belief in social engineering, and a general change in gender relations. It was both a 'child of its time' and, in defending the family sphere and challenging the full-time worker norm and the institutionalization of child-care, it challenged the emerging model of work, family and gender equality, pursued by the political establishment at the time.

### **Work-sharing fathers and sons**

A brief description of main findings of the follow-up study is needed to facilitate an analysis of the work–family adaptations of fathers and sons.

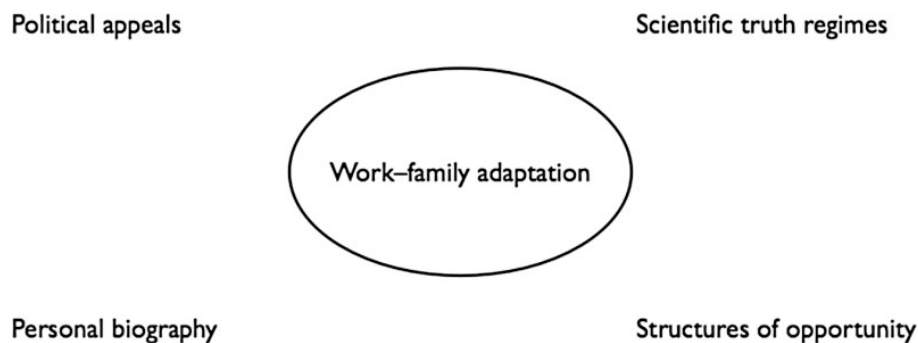
One of the findings from the follow-up study was the long duration of the work-sharing arrangement among the experimental couples – ranging from one and a half to 30 years, with seven years as the mean duration. The men played a key role in initiating work-sharing in their families and, when explaining their agency, biographical influences from their families of origin and domestic skills emerged as important factors, while promoting the careers of wives, along with elements of self-interest, emerged as important motivational factors (Bjørnholt, 2009a, 2011).

Twelve of 15 couples were still married, and the work-sharing arrangement has been regarded by the majority of participants to have had a positive impact on their marital relation, work/life balance and well-being (Bjørnholt, 2009a). The men were also found to have been rather successful professionally, and their experiences as work-sharers and house-husbands were mainly valued and seen as contributing to skills in their workplaces (Bjørnholt, 2010b).

The sons had predominantly positive memories of their childhood, although few remembered their parents' work-sharing, which mostly took place when they were below school age. The work-sharing families adhered to egalitarian and participatory principles, and both the parents and the sons reported that the children had to help out in the home on a regular basis. At the time of the interviews, the sons – themselves the fathers of young children – were all found to live – some comfortably, others somewhat uncomfortably

– in neo-traditional work–family adaptations: both partners had paid work, and both were involved in the care of their children, but the men worked slightly more and their wives slightly less, and there was a corresponding gender division of household work. Although the sons were found to be involved fathers, expressed egalitarian attitudes and took an interest in working reduced hours and sharing domestic work, their actual work–family adaptation revealed a lack of intergenerational transmission of the egalitarian work–family arrangements from the parents. The sons explained their work–family arrangement as the outcome of practical considerations and their wives’ choice (Bjørnholt, 2009b, 2010c).

I will now analyse the work–family adaptations of fathers and sons in relation to their contemporary contexts using the conceptual framework illustrated in Figure 1.



**Figure 1** *Conceptual framework*

## **Work-sharing fathers in their time**

### *Hegemonic social appeals in the 1970s*

#### Political appeals in the 1970s

In the 1970s second-wave feminism, along with other social movements, represented a strong political appeal for redistribution, justice and solidarity. The women’s movement triggered a pro-feminist response involving solidarity from men as well as a call for a certain male chivalry; namely, that men should actively contribute to dismantling patriarchy and promoting gender equality. The hegemonic masculinity related to the male breadwinner was challenged by alternative masculinity ideals. In the early 1970s the male breadwinner model had already come under strain due to theoretical critiques since the 1950s and to political struggles from the 1960s and also due to the increasing number of women who entered the labour market. The time was ripe for the formulation of a new gender contract and alternative masculinity positions, namely the partner-oriented, egalitarian masculinity identified in work-sharing men (Bjørnholt, 2011).



### Scientific truth regimes in the 1970s

The scientific truth regimes with regard to gender in the 1970s were in transition. They were still heavily influenced by early Norwegian family research in the 1950s and Nordic sex-role theory during the 1960s, which had firmly established a view of gender as socially constructed and changeable, but also took for granted a harmonious, consensus view of gender relations (Bjørnholt, 2010a, 2012).

The ‘man question’ was similarly split between old and new theories. Theories of patriarchy emphasized men’s role in structures of oppression and the exploitation of women, but despite the theorizing of patriarchy at system level, the ‘man question’ receded into the background in Norwegian research and theorizing of the 1970s when women and women’s lives were at the centre of research interest.

### *Personal biography of work-sharing fathers*

A higher proportion than was usual at the time had mothers who worked outside the home, and several of the work-sharing men had experienced some kind of childhood loss in terms of the illness or death of a parent. For these and other reasons, the vast majority had acquired substantial skills in domestic work from their home of origin, and many of them identified with their mothers. As adults, in explaining their agency in relation to the work-sharing arrangement, they referred to these childhood experiences, which they seemed to have transformed into an authoritative and caring attitude and way of being (Bjørnholt, 2011).

### *Structures of opportunity*

Men born in the 1940s were young during the period of the shift in the view of gender relations and the democratization of relations in the workplace that took place during the 1960s and 70s. It was also a period of rapid economic growth, and the expansion of higher education and the growth of the state apparatus opened new career paths for the highly educated as well as for young people with little formal education.

In the 1970s women entered education as well as the labour market in large numbers. The male dominance in higher education in Norway started to decline during the 1960s, though the share of women in higher education did not reach 50 per cent until 1986 (Statistics Norway, 1994).

As a group women in the 1970s still had less education than men and tended to be concentrated in the emerging professions of health and care, which also tended to be lower paid than male-dominated occupations. The work-sharing couples also reflected some of the general gender differences in educational levels and occupations as, to a greater extent, the men had higher levels of education that led a larger proportion of them into careers, while the women as a group had less education and predominantly worked in female-dominated professions.

Despite the increase in women's labour market participation, in the 1970s the one-earner family, relying on a male breadwinner earning a 'family wage' was still an option in the parental generation, including the work-sharing couples, although many of the work-sharing couples emphasized that the part-time adaptation involved financial constraint and was also part of a wider, anti-consumerist orientation.

Part-time work was not a right for working parents, nor were part-time workers' rights institutionalized in the early 1970s. With increasing numbers of working mothers, however, part-time work for women had become widely accepted.

The democratization of the relations in working life culminated with the Work Environment Act in 1978. The general tendency towards democratization and humanization of working life may have played a role in employer attitudes, which may to some extent explain why obtaining part-time work was uncomplicated for the work-sharing men as well as the lack of negative impact on their careers.

Welfare state benefits for parents were still scarce: paid maternal leave was three months, and fathers were not eligible for leave. From 1978 parental leave was made gender neutral as a first step towards more egalitarian parental responsibilities. Child-care facilities were also scarce.

### **The relations between discourses, personal biography, structures of opportunity and work–family adaptation of work-sharing fathers**

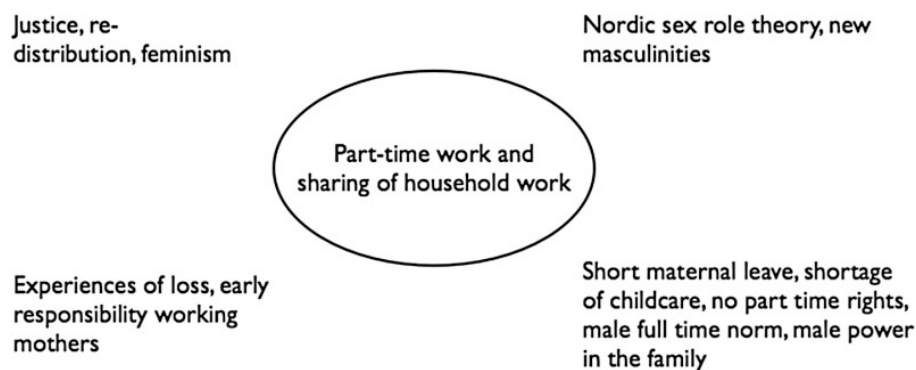
The work-sharing men established families and had children at the time when second-wave feminism and other social movements challenged previous gender relations. Claims of equality between men and women were raised as part of the political appeal for justice and redistribution, which was manifest at several levels of society: by social movements and new political parties as well as in academia and in the popular culture. The 1970s represented an ideological and political window of opportunity for men who wanted to embrace a position of modern masculinity and shape egalitarian relations with their partners.

In taking the initiative in actively contributing to the work-sharing arrangement, the work-sharing men promoted egalitarian work and care arrangements in their families, drawing on the discourses of redistribution and solidarity, using arguments of justice and also of self-interest. Contemporary social appeals to justice, redistribution and solidarity, the appeals from feminism, and the challenge posed by previous and contemporary ideals of masculinity to a modern (egalitarian) masculinity, have served as facilitating structures, while the scarce and insufficient welfare state benefits for working parents and structures of opportunity in working life may have served both as a constraint and as an incentive for egalitarian-minded couples to find solutions among themselves. For the parental generation, the

double-part-time solution also resulted in the family living on two half wages, summing up to one full wage, like many families at the time still did.

Positioning themselves against the hegemonic male breadwinner ideal of the past, which was already weakened after decades of critiques, and which was abandoned as a model for family policy in the same period, the work-sharing men could draw on strong counter-discourses within which they could position themselves as modern and egalitarian-minded men. Finally, male dominance in the family still persisted and, as argued elsewhere (Bjørnholt, 2011), also may have provided a scope of action for the constructive use of that power, as the work-sharing men's strong involvement in shaping egalitarian relations with their wives exemplified.

Although contemporary gender appeals and new masculinity positions were important, the biographical factor cannot be overlooked. The work-sharing men stand in contrast to other men in the 1970s who were exposed to the same discourses and offered the same possibilities in terms of new masculinity positions available at that time, but most of whom did not change their adaptations to work and care like the work-sharing men did. The most important factor in explaining these men's agency seems to have been the way they had integrated specific, sensitizing childhood experiences into a caring and authoritative way of being. Their work–family arrangements in relation to personal biography, contemporary discourses and structures of opportunity are illustrated in Figure 2.



**Figure 2** *Work-sharing men's work–family adaptation in relation to discourses, personal biography and structures of opportunity*

## **Work-sharing sons in their time**

### *Hegemonic social appeals in the 2000s*

#### Political appeals in the 2000s

In the 2000s gender equality is generally accepted by the majority of the population (Holter *et al.*, 2009). At the same time, interventionist family

policies, such as the paternal quota of parental leave, exert a strong ideological and financial pressure on men to take a greater share of the care of their children, also signalling that gender equality has not yet been achieved. In its current version, the vision that both parents should share breadwinning and care equally, has shrunk into a narrow focus on the sharing of parental leave, with an emphasis on the recognition of men as equal carers (Bjørnholt, 2010a, 2012). The fostering of father-care, the child-oriented masculinity ideal and the dual earner/dual carer model have become hegemonic in policy-making. As a result, alternative masculinity positions that could serve as the basis of changing gender relations are lacking.

### Scientific truth regimes in the 2000s

For the last two decades the focus has been on the performative aspects of gender, differences within gender and on the possibilities of destabilizing gender categories rather than on gender structures and differences in power and resources between men and women. Many of the core concepts and understandings from 1950s and 1960s family research have survived, such as a consensual view of gender relations (Bjørnholt, 2009b). The current scientific truth regime in relation to gender equality is perhaps that of gender equality as a consensual concept which is taken for granted, that does not demand any particular endeavour from men, other than using their state-provided paternal rights.

Despite the current political interest in men, and despite Grønseth's and other Norwegian researchers' pioneer work on men and men's role in the 1950s and 1960s (Bjørnholt, 2009b), the 'man question' is undertheorized in Norway today; this is in contrast to Sweden, where critical studies of men and masculinities are thriving, partly by involving Anglophone theories of masculinities, and partly based on home-bred traditions (Hearn *et al.*, 2012). In Norway, Haavind (1982) presented a model of the reproduction of gender power relations within modern, 'gender equal' couples, preceding – and to a certain degree anticipating – Connell. Subsequent Norwegian researchers of men, work and family, however, have largely distanced themselves from this research tradition (Bjørnholt, 2014), and alternative theoretizations of men and masculinities are scarce or lacking.

### *Personal biography sons of work-sharing men*

In contrast to their fathers, the majority of the sons grew up in relatively egalitarian families with two well-functioning parents. Like their fathers, but for different reasons, they also participated in domestic work from an early age. They were aware that their parents had been untraditional, and were proud of and identified with their fathers (Bjørnholt, 2010b).

### *Structures of opportunity*

For men born in the 1970s, secondary education had become common for everyone and, although unemployment reached higher levels than in the preceding stable growth period, in international comparison unemployment has remained low in Norway, and work opportunities were generally good for the sons' generation, too.

Norwegian women's labour market participation, and particularly that of mothers of young children is among the highest in Europe, and in the 2000s families rely on both partners' paid work and, due to higher costs of living – in particular housing costs, and higher living standards – few perceive living on one income as an option for families.

The 'working mother' model is, however, not uniformly embraced: in southern Norway – a stronghold of non-clerical Lutheranism – more traditional gender roles prevail (Ellingsen and Lilleaas, 2010).

The labour market has remained gendered, with a majority of women working in the public sector and in caring professions, and the gender pay gap between female-dominated and male-dominated occupations persists. A significant proportion of women (40 per cent) work part-time, while fathers of young children still work the longest hours.

Part-time workers enjoy equal rights with full-time workers in terms of holidays, sickness leave, unemployment benefits and job security. Furthermore, parents of young children have the right to additional unpaid leave or part-time work after parental leave and the right to paid time off with sick children.

At the time the sons were interviewed, parents had the right to nine and a half months state-paid parental leave, of which five to six weeks were reserved for the father and six weeks for the mother (today, 10 weeks are reserved for the father). The remaining leave may be shared by the parents. In addition to the paternal quota of parental leave, fathers have the right to two weeks off work at the birth of a child.

Child-care facilities have been steadily expanded, and full coverage of child-care facilities for children above one year was reached in 2008. Parents of children below three years who did not use publicly sponsored child-care were eligible for a cash-for-care scheme.

### **The relations between discourses, personal biography, structures of opportunity and work–family adaptation of sons**

When account is taken of the sons' personal biography of growing up in egalitarian and untraditional families, the current discourses on men and care, and the relatively lavish structures of opportunity in terms of workers' rights and welfare state benefits when compared with those of their parents, it is interesting that the sons ended up in neo-traditional work–family

arrangements. One explanation may be that the sons, as members of the generation to follow the active and strategic generation to which their parents belong, take gender equality for granted both as part of their personal biography and as part of the general discursive shift that has taken place since the 1970s; namely, from gender equality that is a challenge and part of a political struggle for justice, to gender equality that is taken for granted and something that has been achieved.

The sons explained their work–family arrangement as the outcome of practical considerations and of their wives' personal choice. It is important to point out that this 'choice' is taken within structures in working life, such as the gendered labour market and the gender pay gap, which still favour male breadwinner and female junior partner arrangements, as the debate over preferences in the United Kingdom and Norway has demonstrated (Crompton and Lyonette, 2005; Halrynjo and Lyng, 2009).

On the other hand, gender relations have changed and male dominance in the family has been weakened. The sons were egalitarian-minded partners and involved fathers, but for the majority their vision of sharing equally did not include the equal sharing of paid work. In this respect their work–family adaptations did not differ from the general picture in Nordic couples today. In referring to the wife's choice rather than seeing an egalitarian work–family arrangement as part of common family responsibility, they are in line with current discourses of individualism and personal choice.

The son's work–family adaptation takes place within the contemporary context of a dual earner model – with both parents engaged in paid work, more of families' total time is spent in paid work, leaving less room for manoeuvre, as well as less time for unpaid work in the family. The average weekly time spent in paid employment of men in Norway is approximately 41.5 hours, while that of women is 35.5 hours. The gendered outcomes and redistributive injustices over the life-course resulting from the subtly gendered pattern of men working slightly more, and women working slightly less than full time, with women taking slightly more, and men slightly less responsibility for domestic work, are less visible than what was the case for the clear-cut, gender specialized male breadwinner arrangement of the past. The rationale to actively reallocate paid and unpaid work is less obvious than it was for the parents.

Nevertheless, some of the sons expressed a preference for shorter working hours, and some had in fact worked slightly less than full time for short periods, but shorter working hours were often offset by taking on extra assignments or studies (Bjørnholt, 2009b, 2010c; Wetlesen, 2010, 2013). In expressing a preference for reduced hours, which is not realized in practice, they do not differ from their peers (Kitterød, 2007). Their emphasis on domestic work as an important aspect of everyday life as a couple, however, differs from what is found in other studies of Nordic couples (Magnusson, 2008). Maybe the passion for domestic work is part of the heritage that has been passed on from their parental homes?

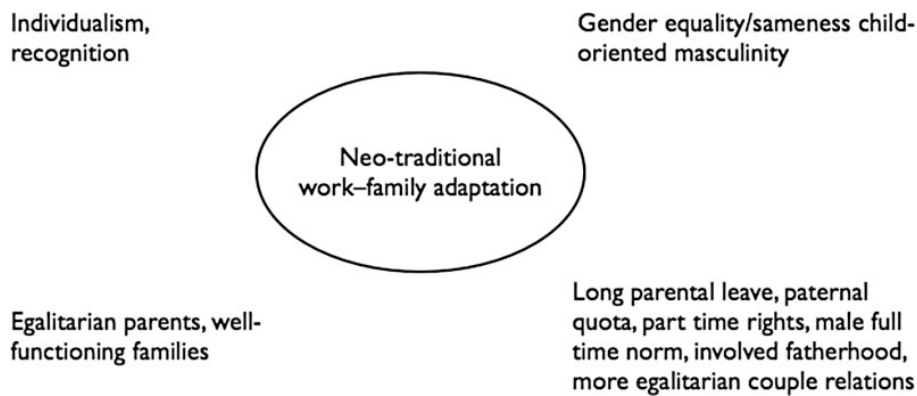
There was no trace of the most prominent current discourses on men and gender equality in the way the sons talked of their work–family adaptations. None talked of the need for them to be recognized as equal parents, nor of fathering as separate from their obligation towards the family as a whole. In this respect they reproduce the strong emphasis on the common family perspective from their parental homes.

The fact that all but one of the sons interviewed were recruited from families in which the parents were still married and the sons themselves all lived with the mother of their children means that family break-up is not an important part of their personal biography. The lived experience of family stability among the sons does not support current discourses on the exclusive father–child bond and men’s parental rights, which have to a large extent been shaped in the wake of rising divorce rates. The fact that the sons in this study do not draw on these discourses may be due to their experience of family stability. This might change if their life circumstances change, for instance in the case of divorce.

Today the once radical egalitarian masculinity appeal of the 1970s has become hegemonic, which may be seen as the effect of the heritage of the historically transformative parental generation. There are no strong discourses directed at redistributive justice and no evident alternative positions on masculinity available that could provide the ground for an active project of change for men. The contemporary egalitarian, hegemonic masculinity may thus be seen as part of a social closure (Edmunds and Turner, 2004) that serves to obscure persisting gender inequalities, thus preventing further change.

The work-sharing families provided beneficial environments for their children’s upbringing, and both the original project and the follow-up study concluded that the work-sharing arrangement led to a better family life, less stress and greater well-being for all family members (Bjørnholt, 2009a). One implication is that the sons were brought up within well-functioning family structures, in contrast to their fathers who, when explaining their agency and untraditional adaptation, referred to experiences of loss or deficit from their families of origin. Other studies, from the UK, of exceptionally egalitarian men have also emphasized the importance of such biographical influences of loss and childhood trauma. David Morgan (1992), drawing on the backgrounds of pioneering ‘male feminists’ (those *men* who supported the *suffragette* movement), and Harry Christian (1994), drawing on interviews with declared pro-feminist men, both find that similar experiences were important in the ‘making’ of pro-feminist men.

If such sensitizing experiences are still important for men to become genuinely egalitarian, not only with regard to attitudes but in practice, the work-sharing men’s sons may not be biographically predisposed to act untraditionally to the same extent as their fathers. The sons’ work–family arrangements in relation to personal biography, contemporary discourses and structures of opportunity are illustrated in Figure 3.



**Figure 3** *Sons' work-family adaptation in relation to discourses, personal biography and structures of opportunity*

The fathers' agency, as well as the lack of intergenerational transmission to sons, must be understood in terms of the complex interplay of individual life history and the specific historical contexts including social appeals, political appeals, and the social structures of opportunity in place during upbringing as well as in adulthood. The fathers' agency must also be seen in relation to the political calls and scientific truth regimes of the 1970s, which were available to members of the active generation they belonged to, but cannot be reduced to these; rather, individual biography seems to have been crucial in explaining their agency. The fathers' untraditional adaptation must be understood in view of historical timing, individual biographies and personal agency.

The lack of intergenerational transmission of an egalitarian work-family arrangement to sons must likewise be understood in relation to the discursive, political and material structures of opportunity within which the sons' work-family adaptation took place, and as part of the dynamics between active and passive generations. The structures available to the son's generation are to a large extent the result of the successful struggles of the active parental generation, and in becoming taken-for-granted structures of opportunity they also represent a kind of social closure. Further, at an individual level the work-sharing parents' work-family adaptation was only one among many other factors in the sons' life history, and not the one that dominated their choice of work-family adaptation in which contemporary concerns prevailed. The analysis of the fathers and sons in their respective contemporary contexts has shown that work-family adaptation in each generation has relied on the interplay of individual biographical factors and contemporary discursive and material structures of opportunity. Figure 4 summarizes the contemporary contexts of fathers and sons, the changes in discourses and structures of opportunity between the 1970s and the 2000s, and differences in personal biography between fathers and sons.



Fathers	Sons
Justice, re-distribution feminism	Individualism, recognition
Experiences of loss, early responsibility, working mothers	Egalitarian parents, well-functioning families
Nordic sex role theory, new masculinities	Gender equality/sameness, child oriented masculinity
Short maternal leave, shortage of childcare, no part time rights, male full time norm, male power in the family	Long parental leave, paternal quota, part time rights, male full time norm, involved fatherhood, egalitarian couple relations
Work sharing	Neo-traditional work/family arrangement
1970s	2000s

**Figure 4** *Work–family adaptations in two generations in relation to discourses, personal biography and structures of opportunity*

## Concluding remarks

This paper took as its starting point the idea of a four-dimensional sociology as proposed by Massey (1993, 1994) and the possibilities of this approach ‘to show the coalescence of place, time, subjectivity and the social’ (McLeod and Thomson, 2009: 9). The objective was to contribute to such a four-dimensional sociology of intergenerational transmission. To what extent is this ambition delivered?

In situating the research project, as well as the research subjects, within the Norwegian discursive and political contexts, as well as within the structures of opportunity offered by the Norwegian welfare state at the two points of time, the paper draws attention to time and space as well as to the interrelations between them. Space is here taken to mean the Norwegian nation state as a spatial, discursive and political entity, and as such subject to change over time. Certainly ‘Norway’ in the 1970s was different in many respects from ‘Norway’ in the 2000s, thus illustrating the fleeting boundary and interconnectedness of time and space. The positioning of the research project in time/space as well as the research subjects in their respective time/spaces, attending both to the biographical level as well as to wider social and historical level, offers the possibility of intergenerational comparison between fathers’ and sons’ situated agency.

The study also invokes a reflection on different aspects of time, in addressing research time, biographical time and historical time (Henderson *et al.*, 2006) and the links between them. Following Brannen’s distinction (2002: 2) the study is focused on *time as in the life course*, in that the follow-up study focuses on the same period in fathers’ and sons’ life courses and, comparing life course time in different times, it involves *time as framed by historical events and historical period*. With regard to Brannen’s third sort of time, *the present*

*time* of the research interview represents a different setting for exploring the work–family adaptation during early child-rearing years of the fathers and the sons. When the fathers were interviewed about their work–family adaptation as fathers of pre-school children, 30 years separated the present time of the research interview from the experience they were reflecting on. For the sons the present time of the interview and their work–family adaptation as fathers of young children coincided as they were reflecting on present practices in the present context of the research interview.

The conceptual framework developed in this paper was found to be useful for a multidimensional and dynamic approach to studying intergenerational transmission. The article contributes to theorizing longitudinal qualitative research in developing a framework for a four-dimensional approach to intergenerational transmission and social change that takes into account different aspects of the particular time and space, personal biography, discursive and material structures of opportunity, and intergenerational dynamics at the family level, as well as at the social level.

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