

## ABSTRACT

Childhood in Linked Family Systems – Connection and Separation.

Kristina Larsson Sjöberg

*Key words:* Childhood, Linked Family System, Negotiation

*Kristina Larsson Sjöberg, Department of Social Work, Göteborg University Box 720, SE-405 30 Göteborg, Sweden*

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The point of departure for this study is the linked family system – the two households where the natural parents are living, to which a child of a divorce and remarriage relates. The child has a central role in the study, and is regarded as a part of an extended family system. The position of the child as a link between the two households is unique. No one else except members of the same sibling group moves in the same way between the two households in a linked family system.

The main purpose is to identify, describe, and analyse the negotiations which serve to define the link child's family. The empirical data was obtained by qualitative semi-structured interviews with 27 children and adolescents, 17 mothers, 11 fathers and 14 stepfathers in 17 linked family systems. Topics in the interview guide were "your family", an ordinary day in the family, family routines and family rituals. The interviews have been supplemented with drawings and diaries.

In research on family negotiation, the family as a joint project and men's and women's individual project are strategic concepts for understanding how modern family life works. Three different family types can be distinguished: The "new" mother-child family, with mother and link child as negotiators, the "new" nuclear family where the negotiations take place within the mother-household and the "new" extended negotiation family where negotiations can cross household boundaries.

The principles for negotiations are both generation- and gender-specific. The motherhood is here unconditional, while the fatherhood is conditional. For many women this leads to an extended motherhood through acting as chief negotiator between and within the households in the linked family system. The natural father is at a distance from the family's mundane everyday life but he is expected to participate in decision-making in the child's life. The stepfather takes part in the child's everyday life but he seldom engages in a deeper relationship with his stepchild because – "there already is a father."

The boys create their own individual projects with free time and activities and disappear more or less from the linked family system. The girls, as network builders and moral agents, take over the family as a project. We can speak about the family as the project of the link child – above all the project of the daughter – who works to hold together the extended linked family system.