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“Who Cares? A Study on Fatherhood after Separation in  
Sweden and Germany”

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## **Abstract**

Within the theoretical framework of caring masculinities, the integration of care values in men’s identities is emphasized as an essential facilitator of gender equality. Men themselves have been dedicating more time and resources to care work within families. After parents’ separation, however, mothers are still commonly the primary caregiver. A major change though has been the introduction of shared residency models. While in Sweden shared residency is broadly adapted, in Germany, however, it is only rarely practiced. Drawing on these differences, the qualitative study uses data from 12 interviews to explore and compare experiences of fatherhood after separation in Sweden and Germany. It then discusses the implications of the fathers’ experiences for the concept of caring masculinities. The study discovered that, even though most fathers in the sample have shared residency models, there is great variation in how fatherhood is experienced. The relationship with the mother, legal regulations, socio-cultural norms, and personal networks were identified as decisive determinants for post-separation fathering. Especially sharing care and responsibilities equally after separation contributed to sharpening men’s understanding of care work.

**Keywords:** *father-child relationship, caring masculinities, fatherhood, separation, shared residency*

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## 1 Introduction

Once widespread across Europe and other Western societies, the importance of the nuclear family is diminishing and is replaced by diverse family forms and norms. Non-marital childbearing, cohabitation, and postponement of marriage and parenthood have diversified the picture of today's families (e.g., Mills & Blossfeld, 2013). Since the 1970's women in Western Europe have been entering the educational sector, the labor market, and other domains of public life that have previously been reserved for men (Trappe et al., 2015). Irrespectively, men have not entered the private sphere of the home symmetrically, leaving women with the vast share of unpaid domestic labor (e.g., Hochschild & Machung, 2012).

Nevertheless, gender role attitudes have been changing over the last 50 years, and gender egalitarian values are substituting traditional ones (Grunow et al., 2018; Müller et al., 2018). Thereby, expectations and norms of femininity and masculinity as well as mother- and fatherhood have changed considerably. Not only are men expected to take over caring responsibilities, but also men themselves want to take an active role in family life (Scarborough et al., 2019). In many European societies, an equal division of childcare and housework between couples is a constant topic of public, political, and academic discourses.

In addition, family dynamics in Europe are characterized by an increasing number of separated and reconstituted families, and single parents (Nieuwenhuis et al., 2020; OECD, 2011). Nowadays, about one out of two marriages are divorced and many children have not only one but several homes (Eurostat, 2020). After separation, families are facing profound changes in their living arrangements—e.g., relocation of parents, changes in frequency and quality of the parent-child contact.

Generally, there has been a development towards shared residency after separation in many European countries, meaning that children are residing equally with both parents (Nieuwenhuis et al., 2020). Importantly, the post-separation residency arrangements, and thus the quality and quantity of parent-child contact, are strongly influenced by the sociopolitical context (Kalmijn, 2015). Most of the children are still primarily living with their mothers, only seeing their fathers occasionally, in many cases every other weekend. This type of arrangement has been institutionalized in many European societies, building on a gendered idea of parenthood: mothers are the main and most important caregivers, while fathers only play a secondary role (Andreasson & Johansson, 2019). Thus, father-child relationships are

particularly affected by the consequences of separation, leading to extensive gender differences in parental involvement. The fear of losing contact among fathers has been associated with lower levels of emotional and family well-being, depression, and feelings of loneliness, frustration, and guilt (Köppen et al., 2018; Shapiro & Lambert, 1999).

Within Europe, there is a considerable variation in regulations and norms for custody arrangements which are impacting families' post-separation arrangements. Kalmijn (2015), for example, compares post-separation father-child relationships in England, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden. The father-child relationships in Sweden are found to be the strongest; in Germany, they are comparably weak. Indeed, while in Sweden more than one-third of the separated parents share residency equally, in Germany traditional arrangements, with the mother as the primary caregiver, are dominating and only around 10 to 15% share residency equally (Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach, 2017; Statistics Sweden, 2014).

Taking Kalmijn's (2015) comparative study as a starting point, this paper aims for a deeper understanding of fatherhood and male care work after separation in Sweden and Germany. The study uses data from 12 semi-structured interviews, 6 from each country. When looking at the experiences, the comparative perspective is an integral part of the study accounting for the impact of the socio-cultural context. For example, previous research from Sweden has pointed out that the emphasis on gender equality promotes a comparably strong involvement of fathers in care work within families (Andreasson and Johansson, 2019). By drawing on the theoretical framework of caring masculinities, the study sets out to investigate the incorporation of care values and activities in men's identities as fathers. Existing research has been extensively addressing the impact of separation on father-child relationships, the division of unpaid labor between couples, and the involvement of men in care work. Few studies, however, have combined those research fields. Consequently, this study sets out to fill that gap and include insights from family and gender studies, critical men and masculinity studies, and social policy research. Ultimately, building on a comparative perspective between Sweden and Germany, the main research questions addressed in this study are:

- *How are fathers experiencing fatherhood after separation?*
- *What are the implications of the fathers' experiences for the theoretical framework of caring masculinities?*

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: Section 2 goes over previous research on father-child relationships after separation and male care work in general. Section 3 outlines the theoretical framework *caring masculinities* and its background. After presenting the country-specific contexts in section 4, the method and empirical material are introduced in section 5. Lastly, section 6 presents the analysis and results, and section 7 concludes with a discussion, limitations, and suggestions for further research.

## **2 Previous Research**

This thesis is related to literatures on post-separation father-child relationships and male care work because, firstly, exploring fatherhood after separation requires an understanding of the determinants of father-child contact. Secondly, understanding male care work calls for insights on the relation of masculinity, fatherhood, and care work. This section is structured accordingly.

There is a lot of literature illustrating how the loss of co-residency and/or custody negatively affects father-child relationships. In the US, for example, Seltzer (1991) discovered that when parents shared social and economic responsibilities, children adapted better to the circumstances than when the mother solely bore all responsibilities. Interestingly, custodial mothers were identified as gatekeepers for fathers' contribution to childcare. Amato & Booth (1996) found that the contact with the noncustodial parent, mostly the father, is decreasing over time. This was true even when noncustodial parents have been involved before separation and led to lower levels of attachment in later life. Shapiro & Lambert's (1999) findings show that divorced, nonresident fathers reported a significantly worse father-child relationship quality than residing fathers. Interestingly, divorced fathers with shared residency arrangements reported similar levels of relationship quality than married fathers, suggesting that particularly the loss of co-residence has severe consequences for the relationship quality. Over time, however, fathers' involvement after separation increased. In a systematic review, Amato et al. (2009) looked into the changes of nonresident father contact since the 1970s and found that levels of weekly contact rose significantly across time. Until 2000, the share of uninvolved fathers decreased from 35 percent to 22 percent, which was

associated with the changing social norms emphasizing father's economic and social responsibility for their children.

Since the 2000s, research from Europe has been growing, supporting the development of fathers' increasing involvement after separation (Kitterød & Lyngstad, 2014). Köppen et al. (2018) show that in Germany, the father's partnership history, current partnership status, and sharing legal custody with the mother are decisive for nonresident fathers' regular involvement. Fathers without joint legal custody were more likely to lose contact with their children. Another German study by the Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach (2017) suggests that in 2016/2017 more than 75 percent of the separated parents were still in contact with their children, but more fathers than mothers lost contact (18 percent versus 3 percent). Not being in contact with their children was mostly due to conflict between parents. In conclusion, they identified a trend among separated parents in Germany: mothers still take over the main part of childcare, but both mothers and fathers wish for a more equal distribution. These findings highlight the importance of investigating the obstacles for reaching more equal distributions of childcare among separated parents and thereby allowing for a stronger involvement of fathers.

Overall, previous research identified socioeconomic resources, relationship with the mother, co-residency, sharing custody and responsibilities, and socio-cultural norms as important determinants of post-separation father-child relationships (e.g., Haux et al., 2015; Kalmijn, 2015). The importance of social norms also hints at the potential effect that institutions—which reflect and shape social norms—might have on father-child relationships. This will be investigated more thoroughly in the remainder of this thesis.

Besides increasing father-child contact, shared residency models have become more common in both Sweden and Germany (Fransson et al., 2018; Walper & Lux, 2016). In a meta-study, Nielsen (2014) showed that children primarily living with their mother and spending less than 35 percent of the time with their fathers had worse outcomes of emotional behavior and less close relationships with their parents. In conclusion, spending at least 35 percent with both parents is beneficial for the post-separation parent-child relationship.

In Sweden, in the 1990s about 20 percent of the children lost contact with their fathers; in the early 2000s, the number decreased to 10 percent (Johansson, 2012 cited after Andreasson & Johansson, 2019). Nowadays, especially in Sweden shared residency arrangements are

widespread. Fritzell et al. (2020) have looked at associations between family arrangements and parental health in Sweden. Overall, they found that two biological parent families report lower levels of worry than any other family type. Joint physical custody for children did not seem to decrease levels of worry for parents but even increased for mothers and single fathers. Fransson et al. (2015, 2018) found that Swedish children's well-being in shared residency arrangements is better than when primarily living with one parent. Lamb & Kelly (2009) even show that both parents and their children's well-being benefit from sharing residency equally. Drawing on interviews with separated fathers in Sweden, Andreasson & Johansson (2019) conclude that the strong desire for and incorporation of gender-equal family practices are the main drivers for shared residency models after separation.

Turning now to the review of the literatures on masculinity, fatherhood, and care work. For long, care work has been regarded as the natural domain of women, while men have been presented as poor caregivers diminished in their masculinity (Björk, 2015; Thompson, 2002). Even today, this assumption is widespread, and women take over most of the care work (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). While men have increased their involvement, caring often remains a choice for men and a social expectation for women. Being so deeply connected to femininity, performing care work requires men to adopt values that are antithetical to widespread forms of masculinity (Hanlon, 2012).

An interview study conducted by Björk (2015), explored men's involvement in elderly care in Sweden, finding both reproduction and renegotiation of gendered understandings of caregiving. Interestingly, when women were available, caring responsibilities were often transferred to them. If not, men took over caregiving but expressed a strong desire to renegotiate the understanding of masculinity and disassociate care work from gender. Previous work on paternal care was done by Suwada (2017) who looked at practices of fatherhood in Sweden and Poland. In comparison to Polish fathers, Swedish fathers preferred to define parenthood in terms of equality and were more aware of the cultural impact on parental roles. Besides the cultural differences, Suwada (2017) concluded that the biological difference between motherhood and fatherhood still has a great impact on the practice of fatherhood in both countries. Many used it as an excuse to withdraw from caring activities. Notwithstanding, Suwada (2017) also underlined that becoming a father might have a



transformative effect on male identity as it helps men to discover more sensitive and emotional aspects of their identities.

An ethnographic study on the emerging ideal of involved fathers in Germany concluded that contemporary normative discourses on fatherhood and policy reforms are re-signifying gender roles, changing representations of fathers, and facilitating new forms of caring masculinities (Joshi, 2021). Lastly, in a quantitative investigation with data from the US, Petts et al. (2018) explored how fathers are balancing hegemonic masculine norms with new fatherhood ideals. Fathers who were more closely attached to masculine norms were less involved in affectionate fathering but rather engaged in authoritarian ways. The authors concluded that hegemonic masculine norms are still considerably shaping fathers' behavior.

### **3 Theoretical Framework**

In the 1990s, critical studies on men and masculinities (CSMM) developed as a part of gender studies and feminist literature (Howson & Hearn, 2019). Not only focusing on the disadvantages women are facing but also including men in the development of gender equality is considered a strategically important part of feminist research. CSMM underlines the importance of neither considering men as the norm nor demanding women to become more like men (Elliott, 2016; Scambor et al., 2014). Instead, CSMM understands men and masculinities as socially constructed throughout time and space, and actively works against re-centering men's power (Hearn & Howson, 2019).

One of the first approaches to theorizing masculinity was the concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell et al., 1982). Hegemonic masculinity is constructed as the ideal of the gender hierarchy and presumes the subordination of women. Thereby only certain practices are as defined as truly masculine, leaving a narrow space for defining masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Hanlon, 2012). By demonstrating variation in masculinity, Connell, however, shows that very few men can live up to this ideal. Thus, many scholars argue that abandoning hegemonic forms substantially increases benefits for society, and men may profit from improved health and closer social relationships (Hearn, 2001).

In recent years, research on men and masculinities has become institutionalized and new concepts of masculinities are developed (Hearn & Howson, 2019). Hanlon (2012) was one of

the first to link masculinity and care work. Traditionally, certain values are identified as unmasculine, especially those relating to care, affection, and relationality which are regarded as female and subordinate. Hanlon (2012) argues that new forms of masculinities must integrate emotional values that emphasize care. Thereby, Hanlon paved the way for new theoretical approaches of masculinities such as *caring masculinities*, which will be the guiding theoretical framework for this study.

In the 2000s, the concept of caring masculinities entered the international discourse on men and masculinities. It is understood as a critical form of men's involvement in promoting gender equality (Heilmann & Scholz, 2017). In her account on caring masculinities, Elliott (2016) draws upon insights from CSMM and feminist care theory to construct a theoretical framework. The concept proposes that rejecting dominance and including care values in male identities improves the development towards gender equality dramatically. Building on the prominent distinction between *caring for* and *caring about*, Elliott (2016) argues that men's practice of care work can help them to develop non-dominant, caring forms of masculinities. *Caring for* is understood as the practical aspect of care, whereas *caring about* includes affection and relationality of care work. She argues that if men devote more time to caring for, they will also start to care about and incorporate care values.

While motherhood has always been an essential element of constructions of femininity, fatherhood has not played that role in existing constructions of masculinity (Ruby & Scholz, 2018). Nevertheless, in recent discourses caregiving is regarded as an essential element to developing less aggressive and more emotional forms of "new men" (Björk, 2015: 23). Thereby, parenthood is understood as an important point in life, whereby individuals have to become more mature, responsible, and interdependent (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001). Concerning the integration of care values, Suwada (2017) describes how fatherhood serves as a trigger for reconstructing male identity. It involves discovering an emotional, sensitive, and bodily part of the self which is difficult to combine with "orthodox masculinity values" (Suwada, 2017: 241).

Considering the theoretical framework of caring masculinities and changing expectations towards fatherhood, nowadays, fathers' active involvement in their children's lives after separation is expected to be pronounced in the interviews, in both countries. In this study, separation is considered as *another* turning point in fatherhood initiating paternal identity

reconstruction. Exploring fathers' practice of care work after separation promises valuable insights into the development of less dominating and more emotional forms of men's identities. Thereby, the study also investigates nowadays importance of nuclear family structures and romantic relationships for fathers' engagement in family life. This is highly relevant, as previous research has shown that fathers' involvement is often strongly tied to the romantic relationship between the parents (e.g., Amato et al., 2009).

#### **4 Country-Specific Context: Sweden and Germany**

Following the comparative angle of the thesis, this section broadly goes over country-specific characteristics, namely, the socio-cultural context concerning gender norms, referred to as gender regimes, and the societal and legal conditions of separated families in Sweden and Germany.

##### *4.1 Gender Regimes*

The configuration of post-separation family arrangements is considerably shaped by national legislation and country-specific norms about family life and gender roles. Both Sweden and Germany emphasize gender equality in their social policies, albeit to a varying extent. Building on Walby (2009: 301), gender regimes are understood as a "set of inter-related gendered social relations and gendered institutions that constitutes a system". Walby categorizes countries on a continuum between domestic and public gender regimes. In domestic regimes, women take over most of the unpaid work whereas in public gender regimes women are more involved in the public sphere. Additionally, public gender regimes are distinguished between social democratic and neo-liberal gender regimes. Broadly, the former is characterized by an institutionalized provision of public services such as childcare facilities, whereas the latter relies on market mechanisms.

Within the existing literature, Sweden is classified as a social-democratic gender regime because of its strong integration of women in politics and the labor market. Sweden is a "forerunner" in promoting egalitarian policies encouraging joint earning and parental caring (Grunow et al., 2018: 48). Making reconciliation of paid and care work possible, Sweden has not only institutionalized a strong basis of de-familiarizing policies, but also the involvement

of men in care work and childcare (Johansson & Klinth, 2008). Hence, caregiving and gender equality have been essential parts of discussing masculinity in Sweden. Nevertheless, traditionally masculine attributes such as the male provider role have not disappeared and are still widespread (Björk, 2015).

Germany, however, is considered as a “borderline” case in transition from a domestic to a public, social-democratic gender regime (Grunow et al., 2018: 49). The involvement of women in the labor market has increased considerably and paid parental leave policies have been expanded. Nonetheless, the one-and-a-half breadwinner model is still the dominating form of family arrangements, and policies such as joint taxation are still in place supporting the gendered separation of spheres (Müller et al., 2018). In Germany, gender equality is neither as strongly institutionalized nor understood as a fundamental characteristic of society. Family policies are slowly adapting to society’s changing attitudes, and not least the needs of modern families. More families than ever want to share paid and unpaid labor equally (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, 2020).

#### 4.2 *Separated Families and Legal Regulations*

Some terms applicable in both countries are clarified in the following. *Joint custody* means parents are equally sharing the right and responsibility for their children. Generally, parents maintain joint custody after separating (Familienportal, 2021; Skatteverket, 2021). Importantly, joint custody neither implies that parents equally share caretaking nor that the children equally live with both parents. Instead, *shared residency* means children equally live with both parents (Andreasson & Johansson, 2019).

Since the 1960s, Germany has experienced a de-traditionalization of family forms; separation, non-marital unions, and single parenting have become more common (e.g., Hochgürtel, 2017; Huinink, 2014; Walper et al., 2015). While in 1960 the divorce rate was about 11 percent, in recent years it ranges between 35 and 40 percent (Destatis, 2020). In 2016/17, about one-fourth of the parents with underaged children were separated (Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach, 2017). When separating, families individually decide how to divide up family responsibilities. If they have difficulties, they can use family counseling. However, if no agreement can be reached, family courts are involved (Familienportal, 2021). There are three common solutions. The *Residenzmodell* is the most common one, with one primary

caretaker, mostly the mother. In exchange, the other parent pays financial alimony<sup>1</sup> and has visitation rights, usually every other weekend. The second model is known as the *Wechselmodell* where both parents share everything equally. So far, there are no legal regulations for this model and in practice, it requires that separated parents can communicate peacefully (Deutscher Bundestag, 2018). The third model, *Erweiterter Umgang*, is intermediate; children primarily reside with one parent but meet the other parent regularly, more than every other weekend. Alimony is still paid but can be downgraded accordingly (Bundesverband alleinerziehender Mütter und Väter e. V. (VAMV), 2019).

Generally, similar demographic trends have occurred in Sweden. Postponement of parenthood, a high number of female employment as well as cohabitation or non-marital childbearing are widespread in Sweden (e.g., Oláh & Gähler, 2014). While in the 1960s the divorce rate was about 15 percent, it increased to about 50 percent over the last decades, leaving Sweden, overall, with higher divorce rates than Germany (SCB, 2021). As of now, about one-fourth of all children grow up with separated parents (Statistics Sweden, 2014).

Following separation, children mostly live with their mothers, but shared residency is slowly becoming the norm as more than half of the children with recently separated parents equally live with both parents (Fransson et al., 2015). In contrast to Germany, the popularity of shared residency can be linked to Swedish family policies strongly supporting dual-earner models. Among the OECD countries, Sweden has the second-highest proportion of female employment (almost 80 percent) making shared residency not only desired but also necessary (Fransson et al., 2016; OECD, 2015). Generally, families decide how to arrange family life after separation, and, if needed, municipal social services offer counseling (Statistics Sweden, 2014). If the parents are unable to decide, courts are involved to force legally binding agreements (Fransson et al., 2018). If the children alternately live with both parents, usually no alimony is paid. If the children primarily live with one parent, the other parent is obliged to pay alimony<sup>2</sup>.

With their respective social and family policies, both countries provide a different platform for families to arrange their living circumstances after separation. Besides the legal regulations,

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<sup>1</sup> The alimony is paid based on the Düsseldorfer Tabelle (see [https://www.olg-duesseldorf.nrw.de/infos/Duesseldorfer\\_Tabelle/Tabelle-2021/index.php](https://www.olg-duesseldorf.nrw.de/infos/Duesseldorfer_Tabelle/Tabelle-2021/index.php)).

<sup>2</sup> The alimony mostly resembles the amount suggested by authorities (e.g., Försäkringskassan see Statistics Sweden, 2014).

existing research has shown that the incorporation of gender-egalitarian norms in Sweden strongly impacts how families, and specifically fathers, engage in care work after separation (Andreasson & Johansson, 2019). Hence, the outlined differences provide an interesting background for a comparative study between Sweden and Germany.

## **5 Materials and Methods**

### *5.1 Research Design*

The qualitative study included 12 semi-structured interviews with separated fathers, six from each country. Additionally, one pilot interview has been conducted to test the interview guide and one interview with a mother to increase my understanding of the situation of separated families (for interview guides see Appendix I). During January and February 2021, the participants were recruited through Facebook groups—e.g., those targeting separated parents. Furthermore, participants were recruited through my network. Importantly, I did not know any of the participants personally. This way, I could approach family configurations neutrally, without being drawn to take a specific side which is often expected in separation conflicts. The interviews took place in February and March 2021 using the video conferencing software Zoom (Zoom, 2021). Except for one having German as his second language, all participants were interviewed in their native language, German or Swedish. The audio versions of the interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim.

All participants received an information sheet with the formalities ahead of the study (see Appendix II). Afterward, they were asked to sign a consent form and send it back before the interview (see Appendix III). The study was following the ethical guidelines provided by the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (ALLEA Member Academies, 2017). Participation was voluntary and anonymous; a withdrawal was possible at any time. During the project, the material was stored safely, on a password-controlled computer only available to the author. All quotes in the text are presented with fake names.

### *5.2 Description of the Participants*

The age range of the fathers was 38 to 58 years, with a mean age of 48 years in the Swedish and 50 years in the German group. Most of the participants were in their mid-thirties when

their first child was born, three of them were in their early forties. Since the 1970s, there has been a considerable increase in parental mean age at first childbirth in both countries, with most fathers being well above 30 when their first child is born (Dudel & Kluesener, 2016; Svensson et al., 2011). Thus, from a Western European perspective, the sample reflects a representative sample concerning the age of the fathers. The age range of the children in Sweden was between 1.5 and 26 years, in Germany between 4 and 17 years.

The living circumstances after separation varied considerably between participants (see Appendix IV for an overview of the participants). Most of the participants have a somewhat conflictual relationship with the mother and went through a troublesome separation, which largely affected the negotiations of responsibilities for their children. I considered six of the participants to have a conflictual, four a semi-conflictual, and the remaining two a non-conflictual relationship with the mother<sup>3</sup>. Those having a non-conflictual relationship both have a shared residency arrangement. Having a somewhat conflictual relationship, however, does not predict the families' living arrangements. Four of the conflictual and two of the semi-conflictual families have shared residency arrangements.

The study aimed to avoid exploring a specific group and take on an intersectional approach with participants from different ethnic, class, and religious backgrounds. Ultimately, the sample consisted of nine fathers from a middle-class and three from a working-class<sup>4</sup> background. Except for two, all participants were living in the country they were born. One was born in a third European country and moved to Germany with his family in 2015, he was included in the German group. Another was born in Germany but has lived in Sweden for 15 years. He was included in the Swedish group as his experiences took place in the context of Swedish society. All participants identified as male and heterosexual, except one who identified as bisexual. Seven out of 12 respondents identified as Christian, the remaining five did not consider themselves as religiously affiliated. All participants lived within 25km of a municipality with more than 150,000 inhabitants, were full-time employed, and had at least

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<sup>3</sup> I grouped the relationships in non-conflictual, semi-conflictual, conflictual cases. Non-conflictual means the parents can talk and discuss their children's well-being together, no external actors are involved. Semi-conflictual means that external actors are involved in the negotiations, but daily life somehow works out. Lastly, in conflictual cases, communication mainly happens through court orders and authorities.

<sup>4</sup> The participants' class position was defined in line with existing research in the field, considering income, education, and occupation (e.g., Björk, 2015; Gillies, 2009).

completed upper secondary school. In conclusion, the study is situated in an urban, White, middle- and working-class environment, reflecting heteronormative experiences of fatherhood after separation.

Lastly, although both Germany and Sweden are patriarchal societies, the willingness to reflect on topics of gender equality varied between the participants in the respective countries. Generally, most respondents seemed reluctant to answer emotional questions possibly because of the gender dynamics. Nevertheless, the Swedish fathers had fewer difficulties talking about emotions, vulnerability, and the hardships that they have experienced. They related more freely about their position as men in a gendered society.

### 5.3 *Analytical Approach*

Having the research questions and theoretical framework in mind, interviewing and transcribing were regarded as initial steps of the analysis (Kvale, 2007; Rapley, 2007). I considered myself as an active part of the analytical process, selecting relevant themes, concepts, and patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

During the interviews, I tried to emphasize a contextual perspective, avoiding a “one-size-fits-all” approach of interviewing but instead focusing on the respondents’ specific experiences (Mason, 2018: 112). Thereby the respondents were encouraged to speak freely and explore the meaning of their experiences. I frequently summarized what had been said, offering the opportunity to correct and clarify things. For that purpose, I used phrases such as “If I summarize the most important points here... is that correct?”. In this way, the respondents could constantly confirm and disconfirm my understanding of their experiences (Kvale, 2007).

The data analysis proceeded in two phases following the guide for qualitative data analysis by Dierckx de Casterlé et al. (2012). It offers a comprehensive, step-by-step process inspired by Grounded Theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). During an intensive preparation phase, general themes are reflected, and several rounds of rereading each interview prevented me from premature analytical closure. By combining a continuous within- and across-case analysis, I considered each interview as one case grounded in its context, looking for a “particular in the all-together” (Sandelowski, 1996: 525). Comparing across cases ensured that contradictions and tensions in the data were recognized.



Furthermore, I added elements from thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is considered a critical framework designed to interrogate patterns within social meanings. The experiences of the fathers often arose from conflictual circumstances heavily influenced by social norms about parenthood and gender roles. To be consistent with the terminology throughout the study, the terms *codes*, *themes*, and *core categories* are used<sup>5</sup>. Epistemologically, the study took on a constructivist perspective. Meaning and experience are social products that are constantly being reproduced. Thus, I paid particular attention to the sociocultural contexts, institutional, and structural conditions. The study aimed to mirror the respondents' reality but also disentangle the construction of reality. During the analytical process, I proceeded deductively, driven by a theoretical interest, and coded based on my research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In the preparation phase, all transcripts were read carefully only noting down initial impressions and significant phrases. Subsequently, I prepared a narrative report for each interview covering the key storyline, and subsequently a conceptual scheme grasping tentative themes. After rereading the interviews with the tentative themes in mind, I checked whether the conceptual schemes appropriately reflected the research questions. As the last step, I compared the conceptual schemes and identified a non-hierarchical list of themes that were used as preliminary codes in NVivo (NVivo 12, ORS International, 2021). While coding, I assessed the themes, particularly paying attention to the frequency across interviews and whether they help to identify relevant passages.

#### 5.4 *Positionality of the Researcher*

I used Mason's (1996) understanding of reflexivity as an analytical tool to increase the validity of my study. For this purpose, I kept a notebook to reflect on the social encounters (Macht, 2017). I always tried to consider the reciprocal nature of interviews whereby knowledge is constructed in the interaction between researcher and participant, not neutrally but based on the researchers' and participants' experiences, knowledge, and positions (Björk, 2015; Kvale, 2007; Mason, 2018). Most importantly, I am in a different life stage, neither having

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<sup>5</sup> Codes refer to the data extracts marked in the empirical material. Themes are broader ideas, capturing important and relevant features. Lastly, core categories are representing the main findings.

children nor being married, which provided me with a different starting point to talk about the topics.

Interviews are social situations shaped by social structures and the positionality of the researcher within a social context (Mason, 2018; Wojnicka, 2020). Being a female student in my mid-20s researching on men, I paid attention to the power relations arising from age, sex, status, and culture. With existing research in mind, I especially tried to be aware of gendered dynamics arising during the interviews (Macht, 2017; Wojnicka, 2020). For that purpose, I created a professional interview encounter by wearing neutral clothes, no jewelry or makeup. While I understood the participants as experts in their field, I tried to give little personal information and answered in a friendly, but neutral way.

Throughout the interviews, I was confronted with accounts of mansplaining, which is broadly understood as the act of men explaining things to women that are obvious to them. Explaining is not done to communicate but to take up a superior expert position (Solnit, 2016). I received not only questions but also suggestions on how to proceed and improve my project. Furthermore, some participants made critical comments about the role of women, feminism, and gender equality. In both cases, I decided to remain calm, not taking upon their comments or lecturing them.

## 6 Analysis

Throughout the analysis, three core categories emerged: *preceding circumstances, challenges and changes*, and *fatherhood and care work*. The former two describe the fathers' experiences surrounding, and—especially relevant for the first research question—after the separation. The latter core category describes the participants' perception of fatherhood and their thoughts on the interrelation of gender and care work—particularly important for discussing the second research question.

### 6.1 Separating: Preceding Circumstances

*Distributing Family Labor.* In both countries, the romantic relationship and the breakup thereof took up a considerable part of the interviews. Like Jens, many of the participants critically assessed the quality of the couple's relationship, especially the distribution of unpaid

household labor. Even if intending to share responsibilities equally, it was often passively adjusted to the living circumstances, producing rather traditional parenting roles whereby the father stands for practical things, and the mother for the social life and care work. Retrospectively, many expressed regrets about not having engaged themselves more at home. Furthermore, as expressed by Bengt, arranging paid labor and family life was repetitively named as an obstacle to be more involved in both countries.

“Unfortunately, we didn’t make an agreement. But it was definitely the case that I made dinner for example, and indeed changed diapers [...] but of course not as much as she did. But during the time we both were home I did at least half of it.”

JENS (50), Germany, 2 children

“Back then I had a quite time-consuming job and an additional business, so I didn’t take over so much responsibility for the children. But back then we both agreed with the situation. It must have been like that because my financial contributions were bigger... Yes, there was an agreement. You can think whatever you want but retrospectively that wasn’t so great maybe.”

BENGT (52), Sweden, 5 children

*Caring versus Paying.* While separating, particularly the German fathers named the alimony as a major obstacle for finding an arrangement with the mother. Like Alexander, the imbalance between the actual time spent on caring and the amount of alimony to pay was harshly criticized. In many cases, the German fathers want to spend more time with their children but are still obliged to pay at least the minimum alimony which they perceived as highly unfair and outdated.

“Equally cared for by both parents, that is what is best for my child. [...] But also, equally sharing care and alimony. There is an imbalance in the system. If I consider that I take care of my child for 1/3 of the time and but still must pay 100 percent of the alimony [...] that is maybe a reason for the refusal [of the mother] to cooperate in this system, the alimony [...] and that may also be an incentive to prevent the other parent from taking over more time to care.”

ALEXANDER (41), Germany, 1 child

## 6.2 *Being Separated: Challenges and Changes*

*Communicating.* In both Sweden and Germany, communicating with the mother was named as a major challenge for arranging family life after separation. Many described how the mothers avoided contact with them, even in meeting with authorities. Like in Per's case, having regular contact with the children was restricted—often regulated through the mother. The lack of willingness to communicate constrained their desired involvement in childcare. Many were especially upset about the interaction with the authorities always suggesting cooperation with the mother. As Jens described, many felt unfairly treated because the mothers often canceled without any consequences, while they had to carefully watch their behavior.

“This [the communication] is what makes it so complicated. The social authorities always say you must cooperate. This is a joke. After she left and I told them that I didn't know where she is and asked them if they think she was good at cooperating? And they were like, ja eh, maybe not...(laughs).”

PER (41), Sweden, 1 child

“I don't know how many people said it would be great if we would cooperate [...] Every counselor comes and says both parents are responsible, which I think is so annoying because during counseling I have never canceled while she canceled four times.”

JENS (50), Germany, 2 children

Despite a conflictual relationship, many German fathers emphasized the importance of avoiding talking badly about the mother. This was one of the most important norms they imposed upon themselves. By separating the personal conflict with the mother and the children's perspective, Ralf underlines the importance of both having a mother and a father who are involved in their children's life.

“The essential point is [...] first and foremost, never talk badly about the mother or something like that. Never. Because they have always been there, and if you see it from the children's perspective, both father and mother are... absolutely equal for the children.”

RALF (53), Germany, 2 children

*Coping and Sacrificing.* Like Bengt illustrates, going from being involved in daily life to only seeing the children occasionally was perceived as a great emotional burden. One must come up with great financial, social, and mental resources to overcome this situation. In Bengt's case, the suffering even affected his ability to perform paid labor. Generally, a supportive network was named as important to cope with the challenges after separation. Especially in conflictual situations, it helped to see things clearly and stay calm. Nonetheless, in both countries, many described their willingness to give up on their needs and dedicate themselves to the relationship with their children. Like Alexander, the participants put their children's needs above their life quality—e.g., moving to a place one does not feel connected to, or abstaining from career opportunities.

“Especially in the beginning, it was almost, it hurt so much [...] But I went from being a part of their everyday life to not seeing them at all. And that was more than half a year. During that time, it hurt as I remember it. I was even absent from work sometimes because I was just feeling so bad.”

BENGT (52), Sweden, 5 children

“I only did that for the sake of my child. I don't have any connection to the place I live, but I did it for my child because it is the center of [their] life [...] My child loves the mother as much as me. And that is okay. Therefore, I can cope with it. I can see that my child is happy when [they] are together with both mom and dad.”

ALEXANDER (41), Germany, 1 child

*Defining Family.* Another theme was the discussion of the term *family*. More Swedish than German participants explicitly highlighted that they still consider themselves as a family. Unsurprisingly, like Paul, both Swedish fathers with non-conflictual relationships explicitly expressed that thought, but also two German fathers with semi-conflictual relationships. In those cases, the family remained, but parenting was disassociated from the romantic relationship. In both countries, others emphasized the importance of both themselves and the mother for their children and wanted to guarantee a good relationship with the mother as well.

“Financially, everything is settled well, the contact with the children and how we still do certain things as a family... for example, things like birthdays or Christmas and so on,

we still celebrate that together as a family [...] That was very important to the children as well, that just because mum and dad are separating, we are still a family.”

PAUL (44), Sweden, 2 children

*Intensifying Fatherhood.* Besides rearranging the family situation during often onerous and tiring periods, fathers from both countries underlined positive outcomes of shared residency. Like Oskar describes, many experienced an intensification of their role as a father because they take care of all family responsibilities themselves. Without having the conflict of the separation around and spending more time together during weekdays, many described themselves as more present, relaxed, and genuine fathers. During the weeks without the children, they enjoyed focusing on their social life or catching up with work.

“Yes, I have become a more genuine father since we have separated. [...] During the weeks the children are with me, my focus is on them and managing daily life with the children. [...] I almost feel more like I am reduced to being just a father during those weeks. While I am Oskar, the person, during the weeks I am not with the children.”

OSKAR (42), Sweden, 2 children

Alexander, a German father without joint custody, however, experienced the time without his child as depressing. He is uninvolved in his child’s life until they meet next time. Concludingly, shared residency models seem to work on the condition that joint custody enables fathers to still feel involved even when the children are with their mothers.

“From the moment on my child is here, everything else stands still, and as soon as she is gone, it ends. It feels like I am falling into a deep hole [...] of course, I am happy because she is happy to see her mother again, that’s fine. But I am coming home, and my flat is so empty like a ghost town. And then this feeling of being a father ends as well because I know until my child returns, I am not a part of her life.”

ALEXANDER (41), Germany, 1 child

*Embracing Daily Life.* One reoccurring theme across all interviews was the wish not to be a weekend-father. Most of the participants were caretakers before separation and maintaining an active role in their children’s lives was taken for granted. Spending not only weekends and holidays but also daily life together was identified as crucial to maintain close bonds. Deep

and genuine parent-child relationships are believed to be built when tackling daily challenges as illustrated by Lars. Just because everyday life is full of obstacles it was regarded as indispensable for a close father-child relationship. Those fathers only occasionally seeing their children emphasized that they missed taking part in everyday life, and eventually, their relationship had suffered from living apart.

“Yes, but that is what I missed back then, spending everyday life together. Things like school and so on, I wasn’t involved at all [...] we have gotten to know each other so much better now. Before it was one weekend, XX came on Friday nights, and then we had to be happy and positive and do fun stuff, that is just a different life. We have more conflicts now, we must, it is just more.... it is more real, more genuine.”

LARS (58), Sweden, 2 children

*Dealing with Authorities.* The fathers being in contact with authorities made negative experiences in both countries. All of them described feeling left alone and powerless. Additionally, the German fathers felt discriminated because they were fathers, illustrated by Johannes’ experiences with the *youth welfare office* (Jugendamt). They described being confronted with higher behavioral expectations, such as stricter rules for their emotional involvement in court. Some suggested that emotionality among fathers is likely to suggest incapability and even aggressiveness in front of authorities. The German fathers criticized that conflictual behavior by the mother was not adequately sanctioned. Contrary to their emotions, many German participants described being forced to act loyal, calm, and subordinate to avoid being sanctioned by authorities. Most of the Swedish fathers involved with authorities did not explicitly feel discriminated as fathers, but they described that their parental capabilities were questioned, whether due to personality or gender remained unclear. In both countries, the fathers had to prove themselves as suitable parents. Like Oskar describes, fathers often had to fight for their legitimacy as a parent while the mothers’ ability was taken for granted.

“But sometimes I feel like, for example in school, that I almost have to fight for my position as a parent [...] that I have the same legitimacy as the mother, that my role as a parent is worth equally much as the mother’s.”

OSKAR (42), Sweden, 2 children

“As a father, one must engage quite a lot, especially in encounters with the authorities. There has been going on quite... a very negative, outdated concept. Back then, they have said things like, it would be totally fine with the youth welfare office if I would meet my children biweekly. And this is far from reality, how it was before, and how it has become now.”

JOHANNES (38), Germany, 2 children

### 6.3 *Fatherhood and Care Work*

*Caring by Doing.* Overall, all participants considered both parents as equally capable caretakers. Some of them were less involved in childcare and housework before separation, but as portrayed by Jens, along the lines of “learning by doing” it was generally argued that caring can be learned over time and through experiences. The necessity to have to take care due to post-separation circumstances assisted in understanding that they are equally capable caretakers.

“And those little things like... what do I do when I have to go to the washroom and my two-year child... can I dare to leave it for a moment even though it tends to stick its fingers in the socket? But only knowing that it will be fine... All those things, you must do it ten times and then you know, you can properly assess the risk. But in the beginning, you don’t know, right? [...] But of course, you learn it.”

JENS (50), Germany, 2 children

*Maternal Gatekeeping.* In both countries, the role of the mother as a “gatekeeper” was intensively discussed (Walper et al., 2020: 170). Many participants felt controlled and mistrusted by the mother when engaging in their children’s upbringing, even when sharing care equally. Often, as Oscar explained, feelings of being supervised started before separation and continued to shape their interaction afterward. Some participants described never been seriously considered as an equal parent but rather feeling like a side character. Whilst some got angry and felt misjudged, others started to question their abilities to care. Through being a primary caretaker in shared residency models, some of them could prove their abilities and overcome doubts.

“But there we just had to find a balance, where she also had to let go of things and accept that certain things are her own needs, not the children’s needs [...] But we had to talk



about this, she would have to let go of things so that I could also take the initiative to do some things more often.”

OSKAR (42), Sweden, 2 children

Secondly, by not being involved in primary caretaking or important decisions concerning their children, participants from both countries felt stuck in the role of the financial provider. In Bengt’s case, the geographical distance and the mother’s lack of cooperation hindered him from seriously taking over his role as an equally eligible caretaker.

“I did not take on any responsibility other than financially providing... or, well we still have shared custody. [...] But it contributed to me feeling very left out, I did not receive any information from the school, even if I had the right to. [...] It seemed like she [the mother] listened to me sometimes, but then, in the end, she did what she wanted anyway. So shared custody didn’t really have any significant meaning for me.”

BENGT (52), Sweden, 5 children

*Talking about Caring.* The question of whether fathers and mothers care differently was discussed thoroughly in both countries. Generally, the fathers talked about two aspects of caring: the practical aspect covering basic needs, and the physical-emotional aspect including meeting social needs, talking, or comforting. While all regarded both fathers and mothers as equally capable of practical needs, some differentiated between male and female physical-emotional caring. They suggested that female and male perspectives complement each other and form a balance, while the physical-emotional part is naturally female and harder to achieve for men. Thereby, the biological differences between men and women were considered as an essential element for these differences in caring and bonding. While many suggested that biological differences could not be overcome, Lars, a Swedish father, explicitly underlined that this is where the gender differences in parenting end.

“In my opinion, there isn’t anything like, that only mothers can take care of children, that is nonsense. Fathers can take care of children equally well. I think many focus on the fact that fathers cannot breastfeed but then, this is about where it ends. Of course, then, parents contribute with different things. There are different ingredients to parenting and growing up, both a male and female perspective is needed. There are differences, not

very big ones, but I think the differences between... I think it actually has more to do with the individual than with gender."

Lars (58), Sweden, 2 children

*Fathering and Parenting.* In both countries, for many fatherhood and parenthood were inseparable. A general view amongst the fathers was that parenthood is about rights and responsibilities. When defining parental roles, reoccurring themes across all interviews were stability, love, and unconditionality. Paul and Jens both describe the overarching goal of being solid and continuous support in their children's life, guiding them through life phases, setting boundaries, and assisting in developing their personalities.

"To me, it [being a father] means giving them a feeling of security, being an anchor, something that is rock-solid, unshakeable. That is very important to me. The aspect of what is called "unconditional" in English."

PAUL (44), Sweden, 2 children

"I want to show them, how to get through life smoothly [...] being a role model, of course preferably a role model where they can say that is how I want to become, or at least someone where they can say, I never want to become like that (laughs). Being like a lighthouse, either something they can target, but also walk away from. Anyway, something that is steady."

JENS (50), Germany, 2 children

A few fathers from both countries understood parenting as a continuous learning process rather than a static concept. They emphasized the aspect of growing with their children and constantly adjusting to their needs. Interestingly, Oskar, a father from Sweden, described how he has personally grown when meeting his children's needs, such as affection and emotional devotion.

"I have learned so much about myself, and I have been forced to do so. It is almost like going into therapy that you cannot avoid. I had to learn to pause and don't be so rational with XX, because it doesn't work like that. Instead, I had to accept that XX has some kind of feelings and wants to talk about it. That I have really learned, and I think the relationships with my friends have become stronger because of that as well."

OSKAR (42), Sweden, 2 children

In both countries, a majority had specific ideas about fatherhood. The wish to be a male role model for their children came up in several interviews. Some had difficulties pinning down what being a male role model means, others had concrete ideas such as passing on knowledge about practical things. Some of the Swedish fathers, such as Per, underlined the importance of teaching their children that men are vulnerable and emotional human beings, too.

“Then I am also a role model, a male role model of course. [...] I want to show that it is okay to have feelings, to talk about feelings, to ask people about difficult things. [...] This is something I want to pass on to my child, to dare to show vulnerability, to recognize others. Because then it becomes more real, more genuine. [...] This is something I haven't learned from my father.”

PER (43), Sweden, 1 child

Lastly, many participants from both countries resonated about whether parenting is predominantly formed by gender or by personality. While some underlined male and female aspects of caring, others attributed certain characteristics of parenting to personality. Günter expressed a reoccurring conclusion: an important impact on children's upbringing is the combination of two personalities to see different ways of living.

“I think that is important for a child, to have two parents, to be taken care of by two parents. To see the differences between the parents because there is not only one way of living. In their way, parents are different, and ideally, there are balancing out each other.”

GÜNTER (51), Germany, 3 children

## **7 Discussion and Conclusion**

This qualitative study used data from 12 interviews with fathers from Sweden and Germany to obtain a rich understanding of their experiences of fatherhood after separation. Additionally, fathers' understanding of parenting and care work within families was investigated. After separation, families are faced with profound changes in family life. In the past, separation has led to a considerable loss of father-child contact, and mothers are still more often the primary caregiver in both countries. Nevertheless, gender role attitudes have

changed, and fathers have become more involved in family life and care work. Based on the analysis, the study discovered that becoming a father contributed to a sharpened understanding and sense for caring activities. Taking over, even more, caring activities after separation, many described how they learned to care over time and through experience.

In line with previous research, I found support for an occurring gender revolution in family roles (Scarborough et al., 2019). All participants emphasized their wish to be actively involved in family life. For more than half of the fathers, most Swedish and two Germans, being equally involved in family life was unquestionable. The results support that father-child contact after separation has intensified over time, as all participants understood themselves as “salient figures” in their children’s life, equally important as the mother (Amato, 1994: 1032). But, as pointed out by Scambor et al. (2014), involved and caring men are not necessarily holding gender-equal values or vice versa. Although I suggested that the results indicate a movement towards gender egalitarianism, the findings are hardly generalizable. Many fathers had gendered assumptions about care work and parenting, supporting Petts et al.’s (2018) conclusion that traditional masculine norms are still considerably shaping fathers’ behavior. Often, the biological differences between men and women were drawn as an explanation for differences in male and female caring abilities. This supports Suwada’s (2017: 240) conclusion that the “naturalized” distinction between men and women continues to have a great impact on fatherhood, especially in intact relationships. After separation, however, biological differences lost significance either because the fathers’ had to take over responsibilities due to new arrangements or because withdrawing would have meant barely seeing their children at all.

A brief answer to the first research question: fatherhood after separation is experienced differently. A more detailed answer is, however, necessary to illuminate the individual experiences of fatherhood after separation. As expected, fathers with non-conflictual relationships made uncomplicated experiences. Nevertheless, most participants had semi-conflictual to conflictual relationships with the mothers and had gone through troublesome separations; their experiences of fatherhood after separation were characterized by feelings of powerlessness, injustice, and dependency. In both Sweden and Germany, they had to rely on external forces such as the mother’s willingness to cooperate, or the authorities’ support to

negotiate their role as a father. Often, they had to fight for their legitimacy as an equally capable parent in front of authorities but also their networks.

Turning to the second research question, looking at the implications of the fathers' experiences for the theoretical framework of caring masculinities. The framework proposed that gender equality can be facilitated by integrating care values and positive emotions in men's identities. Through the actual practice of care work, men learn to develop caring forms of masculinities. Even though many fathers in both countries were not very involved in emotional-physical aspects of caring before separation, they strongly emphasized the aspect of learning caring by doing. In many cases, the post-separation situation confronted them with having to take over all aspects of parental care work. This included both practical and emotional-physical aspects.

The results support the theoretical assumption that the value of care work can be learned and incorporated; when the fathers had to engage in caring practices, their understanding of it changed. Many not only learned caring over time but also realized the complexity involved. Many fathers profited from shared residency, especially when they were not as involved in childcare and housework tasks before separation. Shared residency arrangements are a particularly good example of how the theoretical framework of caring masculinities works in practice. The findings support the aspect of men who are spending more time on caring *for* will also start to care *about*, but also vice versa (e.g., Elliott, 2016). One German participant described how he realized that because he cares *about* his children, he must also care *for* them more than he anticipated. Eventually, he was very thankful for this opportunity; the relationship with his children has improved because of them spending more time together, not only occasionally but also during weekdays.

In conclusion, the practical approach proposed by caring masculinities can contribute to developing a more gender-egalitarian form of masculinity. Supporting Björk's (2015) conclusion, some of the fathers discovered caring sides and emotional aspects, especially when sharing care equally. This also supports Suwada's (2017) suggestion that fatherhood has a transformative effect on male identity by helping to develop more sensitive and emotional aspects of their identities. But as pointed out earlier, caring emotionally and practically for their children does not imply holding gender egalitarian values. Hence, caring forms of masculinities are not necessarily gender-egalitarian forms of masculinities. Thus, caring

masculinities can path the way for a richer understanding of care, relationality, and interdependence; but based on these findings, it can neither be regarded as a guarantor of gender equality nor as to the most gender-equal type of masculinity.

Regarding the country differences, my findings complement Kalmijn's (2015) results in several ways. Firstly, the author showed that socioeconomic characteristics significantly affect living arrangements—e.g., children from families with high socioeconomic status are more likely to have a co-parenting arrangement. Using a qualitative approach, I cannot confirm the results; nevertheless, many fathers mentioned the difficulty of affording shared residency arrangements. Especially, the German fathers often had to pay alimony while also taking care of their children. The financial aspect was perceived as an additional burden making it more difficult to be as involved as desired.

Secondly, as suggested by Kalmijn (2015), the more egalitarian understanding of gender roles in Sweden possibly provides a more favorable post-separation context, and thus a better basis for practicing shared residency. Sweden's social-democratic gender regime and thus position as "forerunner" in promoting egalitarian policies were visible in the study (Grunow et al., 2018: 48). The Swedish fathers showed more awareness about the interrelation of parenting, gender, and culture. They described how Swedish society strongly expected them to be active fathers, in some cases more than they wished to be. But having incorporated gender-egalitarian parenting ideals, seemed to contribute to a less conflictual post-separation outcome. As suggested by Björk (2015: 32), gender equality has successfully entered the discourse on the "good Swedish man", expecting an equal involvement in the household and caregiving of children. In Germany, shared and equal parenting was not equally incorporated in the fathers' understanding of parenthood.

Lastly, authorities, in general, were regarded as sources of conflict rather than solutions. Even though some Swedish fathers made unpleasant experiences with authorities as well, they did not explicitly accuse the institutions of acting against fathers. In contrast, the German fathers emphasized being discriminated by authorities because they were *only* the father and not the mother. Many German fathers described dual expectations towards fatherhood (after separation). They underlined how German society has moved past traditional parenting roles, but German authorities, however, are still promoting the mother as the primary caretaker counteracting new forms of fatherhood. Furthermore, finding a suitable family arrangement

in Germany was largely overshadowed by conflicts about alimonies. Most fathers expressed a strong desire for justice and equality in front of the authorities. Because they aren't regarded as equally capable parents in terms of caring, still having to pay full alimony provoked feelings of injustice. Their experiences raise the question of how gender equality between parents can be reached. As suggested by Joshi (2021), discourses in Germany have changed representations of fathers but after being separated, authorities did not support parents equally. Overall, the negotiations about new family arrangements after separation in Germany rather resembled a "gender fight" (in German known as *Geschlechterkampf*).

Due to the restricted sample of the study, future research should focus on including an intersectional sample with more variation across social categories such as race, class, sexuality, and religion to paint a more holistic picture of fathers' experiences after separation. Additionally concerning data saturation, the study would have profited from an extended timeframe to carefully recruit participants and thoroughly analyze the interviews and discuss the themes (Kvale, 2007). Time and space restrictions, as well as the ongoing pandemic, made it difficult to recruit a diverse group of participants.

In addition, further research would profit from including mother's and children's experiences to produce even richer insights into family dynamics after separation. From a parental point of view, separation always involves two perspectives, and couple relationships are characterized by power dynamics which considerably affect the outcome of separation. Involving the perspective of mothers could give worthwhile insights into fathers' caring practices and draw a richer picture of gender equality within families in contemporary societies. Moreover, many fathers underlined that it is often authorities who are contributing to the conflictual situation with the mother, rather than the mothers themselves. Thus, further research should explore the involvement of institutional actors in negotiating post-separation family arrangements. Most of the German fathers describe how German society has moved past traditional gender role attitudes, but when interacting with the authorities they realized that they have not. Taking part in counseling meetings with the social authorities or interviewing employers of social authorities could provide valuable insights into the lifeworld of separated families.

## Appendix A – Interview Guides

### Swedish Interview Guide

Tatjana Graf

Master Thesis:  
Interview Guide SWE

February 2021

Interview Guide Svenska (max. 1h)

#### 1. Familjesituation

Huvudfrågor	Stödfrågor (Uppf.)
Kan du berätta lite om din nuvarande familjesituation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Var bor barnen? Hur ofta ses ni?</li><li>• Hur har längtan efter barn sett ut för dig? När uppstod det?</li><li>• Har du en ny sambo/partner?</li></ul>
Hur gick det till med beslutet om barnen?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Vad hade du för förväntningar kring besluttagning?</li><li>• Hur känner du rent känslomässigt om det?</li></ul>
Hur är omsorgen om barn fördelat i det vardagliga livet?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Finns det ansvarigheter ni tar gemensamt?</li><li>• Vilka tar bara du/bara mamman?</li><li>• Hur kommer ni fram till viktiga beslut om barnet, t.ex. skolan/hälsa?</li><li>• Är du nöjd med fördelningen? Vad skulle du föräldrar?</li></ul>

#### 2. Faderskap

Hur skulle du beskriva faderskap?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Kan du, som pappa, uppleva till dina uppfattningar om faderskap?</li><li>• Vad är viktig för dig gällande att vara pappa?</li><li>• När känner du dig mest som "pappa"? Varför?</li><li>• Hur gick det till med föräldraledighet? Skulle du dela upp det annorlunda nu?</li></ul>
Hur skulle du beskriva omsorg?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Folk har olika uppfattningar om omsorg, några kan tycka att det är "kvinnlig/moderlig"? Vad tänker du kring det?</li></ul>

#### 3. Faderskap efter separation/skilsmässa

Hur har din roll som pappa förändrats efter separationen?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hur har din omgivning reagerat på separationen?</li><li>• Vad har du fått för stöd? Har stödet sett likadant ut hela tiden?</li></ul>
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<b>Hur har fördelning på omsorgen om barn förändrats?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Gör du mer/mindre? <input type="checkbox"/> Finns det någonting du skulle vilja förändra?
<b>Har relationen till dina barn förändrats?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Hur? Beskriv gärna positiva eller negativa aspekter?

- Huvudpoänger i intervjun?
- Demografiska uppgifter?
- Tack så jättemycket. Frågor?

Interview Guide Deutsch (Dauer max. 1h)

1. Familiensituation

<b>Leitfragen:</b>	<b>Untergeordnete Fragen:</b>
<b>Können Sie mir etwas über Ihre aktuelle Familienumstände erzählen?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wo wohnen Ihre Kinder?</li> <li>• Wie oft sehen sie Ihre Kinder?</li> <li>• Seit wann sind Sie getrennt? Sind Sie in einer neuen Partnerschaft?</li> </ul>
<b>Wie wurde der Umgang mit ihren Kindern geregelt?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wie haben Sie die Verhandlung des Umgangs wahrgenommen?</li> <li>• Was würden Sie ändern?</li> </ul>
<b>Wie sind familiäre Verantwortlichkeiten aufgeteilt?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welche Aufgaben übernehmen Sie/die Mutter? Welche gemeinsam?</li> <li>• Wie werden wichtige Entscheidungen getroffen?</li> <li>• Sind Sie mit der Aufteilung der Familienarbeit zufrieden?</li> <li>• Vorher?</li> </ul>

2. Vaterschaft

<b>Was bedeutet es für Sie Vater zu sein?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Können Sie diese Vorstellungen umsetzen/ausleben?</li> <li>• Was sind für Sie die wichtigsten Aufgaben als Vater?</li> <li>• In welchen Momenten fühlen Sie sich am meisten als „Vater“?</li> <li>• Wie haben sie die Elternzeit zu Geburt der Kinder aufgeteilt haben? Würden Sie es heute anders machen?</li> </ul>
<b>Was verbinden Sie mit Fürsorge und der Arbeit, die damit einhergeht?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manche Menschen empfinden Fürsorge/Erziehung als „weiblich/mütterlich“, was sind Ihre Gedanken dazu?</li> <li>• Väterliche vs mütterliche Fürsorge?</li> </ul>

3. Vaterschaft nach der Trennung

<b>Wie hat sich ihre Rolle als Vater verändert durch die Trennung?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Wie hat Ihr Umfeld auf die Trennung reagiert? <input type="checkbox"/> Haben Sie Hilfe/Unterstützung erhalten? <input type="checkbox"/> Haben Sie Möglichkeit Ihre Wünsche als Vater zu äußern/durchzusetzen?
<b>Wie hat sich Ihre Fürsorge/Erziehung verändert?</b>	
<b>Wie hat sich die Beziehung zu Ihren Kindern verändert?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> In welchen Momenten fühlen Sie sich ihren Kindern besonders nahe? <input type="checkbox"/> Haben sich diese Momente verändert seit der Trennung?

- Kernpunkte des Interviews?
- Demografische Daten?
- Vielen Dank für Ihre Zeit und Mühe. Fragen?

## Appendix B – Information Sheets

### Swedish Information Sheet



## GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET

Februari 2021

### SÖKES: Deltagare till intervjustudie “Faderskap efter separation”

Kära föräldrar,

för min Master uppsats i sociologi på Göteborgs universitet letar jag efter **deltagare till en intervjustudie** som handlar om **faderskap efter separation eller skilsmässa**. Uppsatsen ska utreda hur föräldraskap, men särskilt faderskap och faderlig omsorg, påverkas när föräldrar skiljas eller separera.

**Målgrupp:** Föräldrar, i synnerhet fäder (med barn mellan 0-18 år)

**Ämne:** Faderskap, faderlig omsorg om barn efter separation/skilsmässa

**Beräknad tid:** Max. 1h via Zoom/Skype/telefon

**Kontakt detaljer:** Tatjana Graf, Göteborgs universitet, [gusgrata@student.gu.se](mailto:gusgrata@student.gu.se)

Ert deltagande är mycket uppskattat, frivilligt och såklart anonymt. Intervjuns innehåll kommer att anonymiseras så att obehöriga inte kan ta del av dem. Materialet ska bara användas i vetenskapligt syfte och kan eventuellt senare bli publicerat i någon artikel i en akademisk tidskrift. Mer information om intervjustudie hittar ni i bilagan nedanför.

Ni är välkomna att höra av er med era frågor.

Vänliga hälsningar

Tatjana

#### **Kontakt detaljer:**

Tatjana Graf,  
Student vid Göteborgs universitet  
E-Post: [gusgrata@student.gu.se](mailto:gusgrata@student.gu.se)

#### **Ansvarig Handledare:**

Katarzyna Wojnicka, PhD,  
Forskare på Institutionen för Sociologi och  
Arbetsvetenskap vid Göteborgs universitet  
E-Post: [katarzyna.wojnicka@gu.se](mailto:katarzyna.wojnicka@gu.se)



GÖTEBORGS  
UNIVERSITET

Februar 2021

Teilnehmende für Interviewstudie gesucht  
"Vaterschaft nach der Trennung"

Liebe Eltern,

für eine **wissenschaftliche Interviewstudie** zum Thema "Vaterschaft nach der Trennung" suche ich aktuell Teilnehmende. Die Studie ist Teil meiner Masterarbeit an der Universität Göteborg in Schweden im Studiengang Soziologie.

**Zielgruppe:** Getrennte/geschiedene Eltern, insbesondere Väter (Kinder: 0-18 Jahren)

**Themen:** Elterliche und väterliche Fürsorgearbeit, Vaterschaft nach der Trennung

**Dauer:** max. 1h über Zoom/Skype, bei Bedarf auch telefonisch

**Kontakt:** Tatjana Graf, Universität Göteborg, [gusgrata@student.gu.se](mailto:gusgrata@student.gu.se)

Die Teilnahme ist anonym und die Ergebnisse werden ausschließlich für wissenschaftliche Zwecke benutzt. Weitere Informationen befinden sich auf dem Infoblatt weiter unten.

Bei Fragen gerne melden und gerne im Netzwerk teilen!

Beste Grüße

Tatjana

**Kontaktdaten:**

Tatjana Graf

E-Mail: [gusgrata@student.gu.se](mailto:gusgrata@student.gu.se)

**Kontaktdaten der Betreuerin:**

Dr. Katarzyna Wojnicka, Department of Sociology and Work Science

E-Mail: [katarzyna.wojnicka@gu.se](mailto:katarzyna.wojnicka@gu.se)

## Appendix C – Consent Forms

### *Swedish Consent Form*



GÖTEBORGS  
UNIVERSITET

Februari 2021

#### **Samtycke till att delta i forskningsprojektet**

„Fatherhood after Separation“

Jag har läst och förstått den information om studien som anges i dokumentet "04 Information Intervjustudie Faderskap SWE". Jag har fått möjlighet att ställa frågor och jag har fått dem besvarade. Jag får behålla den skriftliga informationen.

Jag är medveten om att mitt deltagande är helt frivilligt och att jag kan avbryta mitt deltagande i studien utan att ange något skäl.

Jag samtycker till att delta i studien som beskrivs i dokumentet "04 Information Intervjustudie Faderskap SWE".

Jag samtycker till att mina personuppgifter behandlas anonymt och som beskrivs i dokumentet "04 Information Intervjustudie Faderskap SWE".

Plats och datum	Namnförtydligande och Underskrift (medverkande)
Plats och datum	Namnförtydligande och Underskrift (student)



GÖTEBORGS  
UNIVERSITET

März 2021

**Einwilligungserklärung**

Interviewstudie „Vaterschaft nach der Trennung“

Personenbezogene Kontaktdaten werden von Interviewdaten getrennt für Dritte unzugänglich gespeichert. Nach Beendigung des Forschungsprojekts werden Ihre Kontaktdaten gelöscht.

Ich erkläre mich dazu bereit, im Rahmen des genannten Forschungsprojekts an einem Interview teilzunehmen. Ich wurde über das Ziel und den Verlauf des Forschungsprojekts informiert.

Ich bin damit einverstanden, dass das Interview mit einem Aufnahmegerät aufgezeichnet. Die Aufnahmen werden nach Beendigung des Projektes gelöscht.

Ich bin damit einverstanden, dass einzelne Sätze aus den Transkripten, die nicht mit meiner Person in Verbindung gebracht werden können, als Material für wissenschaftliche Zwecke genutzt werden können.

Unter diesen Bedingungen erkläre ich mich bereit, das Interview zu geben, und bin damit einverstanden, dass es aufgezeichnet, verschriftlicht, anonymisiert und ausgewertet wird.

Datum und Ort	Name und Unterschrift (Teilnehmende)
Datum und Ort	Name und Unterschrift (Studienverantwortliche)

## Appendix D – Descriptions of Participants

Participants								
<i>(Fake) Name</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Children's Age</i>	<i>Year of Separation</i>	<i>Residential Arrangement</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Employment Status</i>	<i>Employment Status: Mother of Children</i>	<i>Country of Residence</i>
Karl	47	11, 6	2018	Shared residency with one child, weekend visits with the other	Carpenter	Full-Time	Unemployed	Germany
Per	43	2	2019	No residential arrangement, occasionally sees child	Municipal administrator	Full-Time	Not available	Sweden
Gunnar	49	18	2003	No residential arrangement, not in contact	Logistic specialist	Full-Time	Part-Time	Sweden
Oskar	42	9, 7	2016	Shared residency with both children	Municipal administrator	Full-Time	Full-Time	Sweden
Paul	44	13, 10	2020	Shared residency with both children	Creative director	Full-Time	Full-Time	Sweden
Alexander	41	6	2014	Shared residency (30%)	Logistic specialist	Full-Time	Full-Time	Germany
Günter	51	17, 5, 5	2006; 2017	Occasional residency with oldest child; No residential arrangement with younger ones	Investor	Full-Time	Full-Time	Germany
Ralf	53	13, 9	2014	Shared residency with both children	Engineer	Full-Time	Full-Time	Germany
Bengt	52	17, 11, 9	2005; 2015	Occasional residency	Social Worker	Full-Time	Full-Time	Sweden



Jens	50	9, 7	2013	Shared residency with both children	Lawyer	Full-Time	Part-Time	Germany
Lars	58	26, 12	2014	Full residency with younger child	Industrial Worker	Full-Time	Unemployed	Sweden
Johannes	38	8, 4	20 19	Shared residency with both children	Researcher	Full-Time	Part-Time	Germany

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