



UiT The Arctic University of Norway

Faculty of Health Sciences

Child-Inclusive Mandatory Family Mediation in Norway

A sociocultural exploration of children's participation

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A dissertation for the degree of Doctor Philosophiae, June 2024



Picture: "Barndom i Tidsskrift for norsk psykologforening

Acknowledgements

This PhD project has its origin in the work done by Gjertrud Jonassen at Grenland Family Counselling Office and her development of the Children in Mediation model. She was inspired by the writings of Astrid Strandbu, who later established the Hearing Children in Mediation project together with Renee Thørnblad. They laid the groundwork for this PhD project.

I am thankful to the Regional Centre for Child and Mental Health and Child Welfare – North (RKBU Nord), UiT the Arctic University of Norway, for financing this PhD project through university grants. I am also thankful to the Wøyen Foundation who supported the Hearing Children in Mediation project in its initial phase. Part of the data material used in this PhD project (Article II) was collected thanks to this grant.

My supervisors Renee and Gry Mette have been incredibly supportive through the process of this PhD, which most likely became a much longer process than initially anticipated. They provided me with guidance on scientific writing, challenged me with theoretical understandings and applications, convinced me to at least consider some of the key sociological figures, and accepted my wish to navigate instead within the concepts of cultural psychology. I am humble for the time they have spent in the very long-lasting finishing stage through working hours, evenings, weekends, holidays, and nighttime.

I want to also give special thanks to Bjørn Helge Handegård and Jeanette Skoglund for valuable contributions on the articles. I am thankful to Susanne Witte and the German Youth Institute in Munich who welcomed me as a guest researcher in the beginning of 2020. The writing and collaboration of this manuscript has taken place over three pregnancies (of which two were mine), and I am thankful and content that we brought the work over the finishing line. I would also like to thank Marit Ursin, who guided me into some new and necessary directions during the pre-reading of the synopsis.

I have been lucky to have had friendly colleagues and competent members in the project and research groups. My fellow PhD students have been supportive and have made me feel like I belong. It would have been a lonesome journey without you.

I have felt welcomed during my visits at various family counselling offices and I appreciate the insight that the mediators have given me into their practice. Thanks to the mediators,

parents, and children who contributed to the data collection. A big thanks goes to the adolescents who shared with me the narratives of some critical experiences in their lives.

The work in this PhD project has an emphasis on adolescents. Trine Eikrem is conducting a PhD project on children under the age of 12 and their participation in family mediation. Perhaps our works, although carried out separately, together can yield valuable insight into the future development of child-inclusive practice at the family counselling offices.

This dissertation is a product of the effort I have made during the process of this PhD. But it is only part of the narrative. It is a result of the interactions I have been part of in my professional work, the supervision and advice I have received, and also the relationships I have been part of that are not visible in the written dissertation. The emotional and practical support from Preben, our siblings (and sibling-in-law) and parents, throughout the PhD-project (and some other significant projects...), particularly the final year, have been overwhelming. Particularly the co-creation of moments of laughter, joy, and the feeling of calmness together with Preben, Nelle, and Edmund, have been the necessary fuel for being able to finish this project.

Tromsø, June 11, 2024

Lovise Grape

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Abstract

Introduction: Family mediation should help separating parents make agreements that attend to the best interest of the child. Children can be included in this process. The aim of this dissertation is to explore the practise of child-inclusive family mediation in Norway on three interdependent planes: a personal, an interpersonal, and a cultural and institutional plane. These planes follow a sociocultural analytical framework for sociocultural activities.

Method: The dissertation is a multimethod study, consisting of four sub-studies: 1) A comparison of parental separation policies in Norway, Germany and the Netherlands. 2) An analysis of the messages to parents from 356 children, that shows the extent to which children express living arrangements in the child conversation that happens in the Children in Mediation model. The analysis uses qualitative and quantitative research data from the Hearing Children in Mediation project, of which this PhD project is part of. 3 and 4) An analysis of 11 adolescents' narratives, shared through qualitative interviews, of their parental separation processes and their participation in their parents' family mediation process.

Findings: The support measures in Norway target separating parents broadly with an aim to support parents to consider the best interest of the child during parental separation processes, e.g. through preventing escalation of interparental conflicts and through ensuring children's right to be heard. During participation in family mediation, children are likely to share living arrangement preferences. The explorations of the narratives of adolescents show that adolescents negotiate loyalty and fairness, closeness and distance, and concealment and revealment of private information in their relationships with parents, but also with the support (or the lack-thereof) from mediators.

Discussion and conclusion: The interconnectivity of involved institutions, activities, and social partners, that together make up the practice of child-inclusive family mediation, can create and enact relational agency that can transform the everyday lives of children after parents' separation. Negotiations that children take part in shows the relevance of talking about, exploring, and making meaning of living arrangement preferences.

Sammendrag

Introduksjon: Mekling er ment å hjelpe foreldre som går fra hverandre med å lage avtaler som tar hensyn til barnets beste. Barn kan ta del i denne prosessen. Målet med denne avhandlingen er å utforske involvering av barn i mekling ved familievernkontor i Norge på tre gjensidig avhengige plan: et personlig, et mellompersonlig og et kulturelt og institusjonelt plan. Disse planene følger et sosiokulturelt analytisk rammeverk for sosiokulturelle aktiviteter.

Metode: Denne avhandlingen er en multimetodestudie og består av fire understudier: 1) En sammenligning av retningslinjer og lover knyttet til samlivsbrudd mellom foreldre i Norge, Tyskland og Nederland. 2) En analyse av 356 barns budskap som viser hvor ofte barn uttrykker bostedsønsker i barnesamtalen som er del av Barn i mekling modellen. Analysen benytter seg av kvalitative og kvantitative data fra Høring av barn i mekling prosjektet, som dette Ph.D. prosjektet er del av. 3 og 4) Analyser av 11 ungdommer sine narrativer, fra kvalitative intervju, om foreldres samlivsbrudd og deres deltakelse i foreldrenes meklingsprosess.

Resultater: Tiltak i Norge som retter seg mot foreldre som går gjennom et samlivsbrudd har som mål å støtte foreldre til å ta hensyn til barnets beste, for eksempel gjennom å forebygge eskalering av konflikt og ved å styrke barns rett til å bli hørt. I løpet av barns deltakelse i foreldremekling er det mange barn som deler et bosteds- og samværsønske. Utforskning av ungdommenes narrativer viser at de forhandler med foreldre om lojalitet og rettferdighet, nærhet og distanse, og tilbakeholdelse eller deling av informasjon om privatlivet i relasjoner til sine foreldre. I disse forhandlingene kan de få støtte (men også manglende sådan) fra meklere.

Diskusjon og konklusjon: Institusjonene, aktivitetene og de sosiale partnerne som sammen utgjør barneinkluderende foreldremekling er sammenvevd i hverandre på en måte som kan skape og spille ut et relasjonelt aktørskap som kan endre hverdagslivene til barn etter foreldrenes samlivsbrudd. Forhandlinger som barn tar del i viser relevansen av å snakke om, utforske, og gi mening til bosteds- og samværsønsker.

List of articles

Article I: Witte, S., Grape, L., López, M. L., & Walper, S. (*manuscript ready for submission*). Children's Best Interest in Divorce Proceedings and Post-Divorce Arrangements – A policy comparison between Norway, the Netherlands, and Germany.

Article II: Grape, L., Thørnblad, R., & Handegård, B. H. (2021). Children sharing preferences on contact and residence arrangements in child-inclusive family mediation in Norway. *The International Journal of Children's Rights*, 29(1), 31-53.

<https://doi.org/10.1163/15718182-28040008>

Article III: Grape, L., Skoglund, J., Haugen, G. M. D., & Thørnblad, R. (*in review*). Adolescents' Negotiations of Loyalty and Fairness in Relation to Parents' Separation Process.

Article IV: Grape, L., Haugen, G. M. D., & Thørnblad, R. (2024). Adolescents' Narratives About Parents' Separation Processes and Participation in Mandatory Family Mediation: Exercising Agency Through Managing Privacy Boundaries. *Childhood*.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568224126116>

1 Introduction

In this dissertation I address various aspects of the participation of children in mandatory family mediation (henceforth family mediation) in Norway. The dissertation consists of four sub-studies that appear here as four articles and a synopsis. I have applied a sociocultural perspective to bring together these sub-studies in an exploration of child-inclusive family mediation. I focus on the broader Norwegian context that parental separation is situated in. I also analyse children's living arrangement preferences, and further use the narratives of adolescents to illustrate and discuss current practise. These different approaches to understanding children's participation in family mediation are brought together and discussed in terms of how we can understand this practise as a temporally and culturally specific activity.

The context for the study is, among other aspects, related to the ratification of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC; UN General Assembly resolution 44/25, 1989) that came into force in 1990, which strengthened children's rights as individuals. This, together with a general emphasis on children worldwide, with Norway often as being viewed as being at the forefront of upholding the rights of children (see e.g. Hennem, 2014). Originally, prior to Marriage Act came into force in 1993, the aim of family mediation had been to prevent divorce (Kummen, 2016; Vollset, 2011, p. 211). After 1993, the main purpose of family mediation is to have parents come to an agreement that will protect "the best interest of the child" (Children Act, 1981, Section 52; Marriage Act, 1991, Section 24), with the hope being that future conflicts or relational problems can be prevented (NOU 2019:20, 2019). The change may be understood in relation to the goals of the UNCRC and changed family demography (Dommermuth et al., 2015; Finnvold et al., 2020).

Today, parents in Norway apply for divorce at the County Governor (not through court proceedings). Family mediation is mandatory for all separating parents with children under 16 years, regardless of the level of conflict and disagreements between parents (Children Act, 1981, Section 52; Marriage Act, 1991, Section 24). In the past decade, there has been a push to increase the participation of children themselves in this service (the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs; Bufdir, 2023a; NOU 2019:20, 2019), and recent Official Norwegian Reports have suggested codifying children's participation into law (NOU 2019:20, 2019; NOU 2020:14, 2020). At the same time, there has been a recent emphasis on

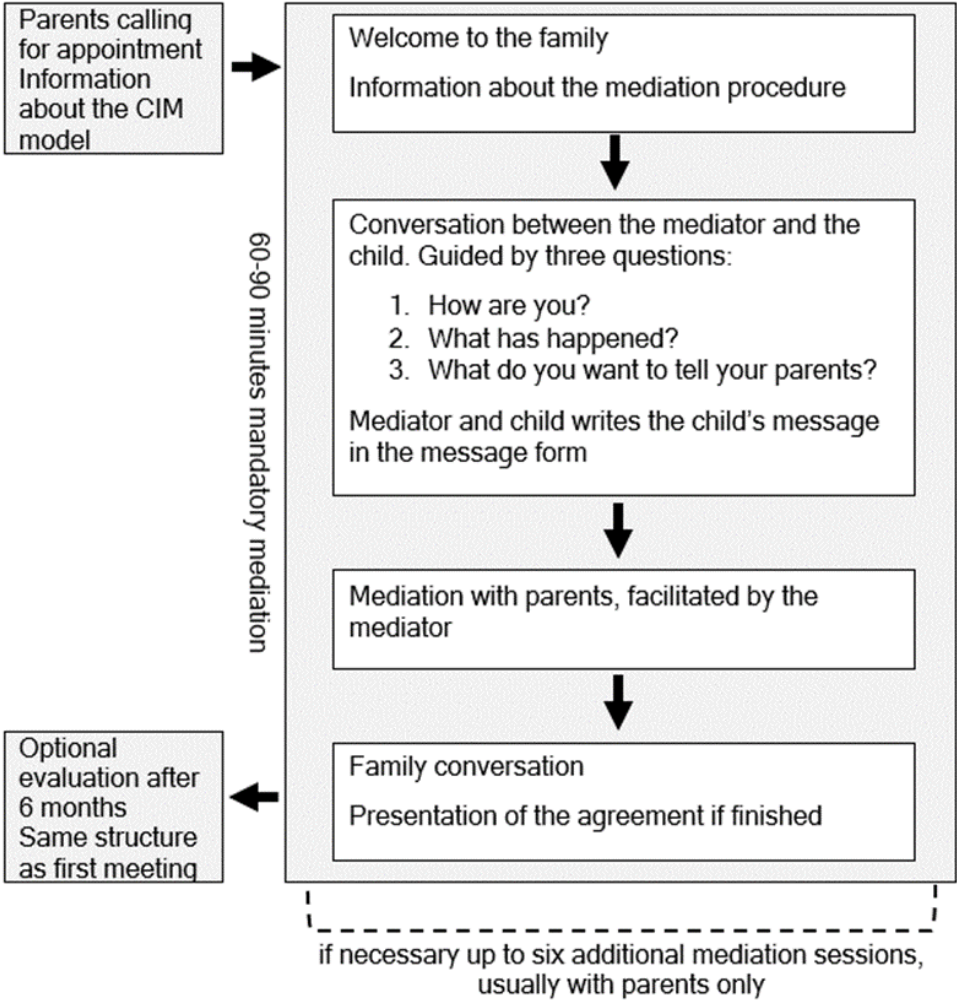
improving the service for families with high levels of interparental conflicts, and supporting and protecting children's participation in this regard (NOU 2019:20, 2019). In the Norwegian context, Strandbu and Thørnblad (2015) argue that the purpose of including children, and the reasons that it is considered beneficial to know a child's own ideas, must be made explicit. Eikrem and Andenæs (2021, p. 59) adds to this by describing the conversation between the mediator and the child as currently "overloaded."

This PhD project is part of the Hearing Children in Mediation research project. The Hearing Children in Mediation research project was established after the development, trial, and extended implementation of the child-inclusive Children in Mediation model (see figure 1) in most Family Counselling Offices. The Hearing Children in Mediation research project was then established at the Regional Centre for Child and Adolescent Mental Health and Child Welfare (RKBU North). The focus has been on examining various aspects of children's participation in family mediation and is not limited to the Children in Mediation model.

The Hearing Children in Mediation project has taken a pragmatic approach (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017), aiming for data to "complement, nuance or "correct" each other" (Thørnblad & Strandbu, 2018, p. 193). Publications in the Hearing Children in Mediation research project have built on data based on answers to questionnaires given to mediators and children and children's messages that were written as part of the Children in Mediation model (Strandbu & Thørnblad, 2015; Strandbu et al., 2016; Strandbu et al., 2020; Thørnblad & Strandbu, 2018), focus group (Salamonsen et al., 2022) and qualitative interviews (Strandbu et al., 2019; Thørnblad et al., 2019) with mediators, and qualitative interviews with parents (work in progress).

I became part of this project through a PhD position in 2018 and was given the task of building on work already in the project and exploring how children experienced their own participation. Born in 1992, I grew up in a time when divorce was becoming more common and some of my peers were dealing with their parents ending their marriage. At the time, I remember that I and other kids I knew were concerned about two things in particular: 1) would my friends or schoolmates alternate between parents' residences every other week? and 2) would they have a say in decisions about where to live when they turned 12, or when they turned 16, and would they be allowed to make these decisions themselves? These aspects have persisted in the society as central for children who experience parental separation.

Figure 1 The Children in Mediation model



Note: Figure from Article II (Grape et al., 2021, p. 35).

As a clinical psychologist I am interested in the psychological life of individuals. Though, I am even more interested in how our psychological lives are interconnected and co-created. I have a genuine interest in how families create practises and differ in their communication across cultures. I am part of a family with origin in Northern Troms, in Northern Norway, where Sami, Kven, and Norwegian cultures co-exist and together create the culture in Northern Troms. My curiosity about culture is not limited to the macro differences, but includes the nuances of how every single family create practises and narratives of their common family lives that they experience as their own, and that are likely to differ from their neighbours, or from the ideas of new partners. Although Norway is a child-centred society, there are variations in terms of the position of children in different families. Like my peers (and everybody else), I negotiated and quarrelled with my parents during childhood and early

adulthood; however, the autonomy and ways *I* had of negotiating with *my* parents were not the same as those of my peers. And when family life takes new form, such as after parental separation, I assume that these practises and narratives become more fluid, nuanced, and malleable, and can take new directions.

When I started this project, I familiarised myself with the field of family mediation and found that it could be difficult to differentiate the interconnected fields of children's rights studies, family studies, childhood studies¹, and sociocultural perspectives. On the other hand, I have found these perspectives as complementary into the child perspective that I have applied. I adhere to the child-centric perspective outlined by Skivenes (2011, p. 171): an emphasis on children's rights, an adult recognition of children as individuals, and the use of children's views² in order to better understand the meanings that children ascribe to the world.

At the start of my time with this project at RKBNU Nord, I was allowed to be a visiting clinical psychologist at the local family counselling office one day a week for about six months.

There, I had some clinical cases. I was also allowed to sit in on mediators' family mediation cases, both with children present and absent, at three different family counselling offices. My observations of the practises and discussions are not directly part of the data material in this dissertation, but they are certainly part of my development as a researcher. The impressions I got, and the reflections I made, of how the practise of family mediation was carried out, was important for my understanding and research questions. A genuine interest in giving children a space to share their views was common among the mediators I talked with. However, the mediators (and the offices) differed in their focus on the extended family network.

Importantly, however, I got the impression that conversations with children were brief, and that there were considerable differences in the degree to which children spoke freely and whether a reciprocal dialogue between the child and the mediator was established.

¹ I prefer to use the term "childhood studies" instead of "the new sociology of childhood", because the former implies an interdisciplinary field with contributions from different disciplines.

² Children's perspectives and children's views are used interchangeably throughout this text. However, I generally find the word "views" as most applicable because it implies a higher level of interpretation, situatedness, and temporality. "A child's perspective", on the other hand, has a stronger connotation to a child's inner thoughts and feelings, which may not be easily communicated, nor easily interpreted by others.

In began my project work by familiarising myself with and analysing and analysing data from the Hearing Children in Mediation research project (Article II). I later planned and conducted interviews with adolescents, which Articles III and IV build on. Article I is the result of a collaboration after a research stay at the German Youth Institute, for which we did a policy comparison between parental separation policies in Norway, the Netherlands and Germany. These sub-studies that together comprise a multimethod study (on which this synopsis is built) are summarised below (Table 1).

1.1 Aims

In the overall PhD project, I have aimed to combine two aspects: 1) a focus on children and adolescents as those who receive, and those who should benefit from, the service of child-inclusive family mediation, 2) a sociocultural psychological perspective of children's participation as a relational and sociocultural activity. Rogoff (1995) describe three planes that can be used in an analysis of such an activity. These planes are therefore included in the aim of this synopsis:

To explore the practise of child-inclusive family mediation in Norway on three interdependent planes: a personal, an interpersonal, and a cultural/institutional plane.

In this synopsis, I outline, explain, and discuss the work that I did as part of my PhD project. The work has been carried out pragmatically, and I will take up the following points in relation to the processes of parental separation and family mediation:

1. To ask how aspects of the Norwegian cultural context yield a framework in which children's participation can be understood.
2. To explore the extent to which children's living arrangement preferences may be expressed, and how these preferences may be created and negotiated in the relationships that children are part of.
3. To examine how adolescents describe their own efforts in, and understandings of, being part of the processes of parental separation and family mediation.

The first point is primarily examined in Article I. The second point is primarily explored in Article II and III. The third point is primarily examined in Articles III and IV. However, the three planes are interconnected and reciprocally dependent on each other. This interconnection will be discussed in chapter 8.

Table 1 Overview of articles.

Title	Children’s best interest in divorce proceedings and post-divorce arrangements – a policy comparison between Norway, the Netherlands, and Germany	Children sharing Preferences on Contact and Residence Arrangements in Child-inclusive Family Mediation in Norway	Adolescents’ Negotiations of Loyalty and Fairness in Relation to Parents’ Separation Process	Adolescents’ Narratives About Parents’ Separation Processes and Participation in Mandatory Family Mediation: Exercising Agency Through Managing Privacy Boundaries
	(Article I)	(Article II)	(Article III)	(Article IV)
Journal	<i>Manuscript ready for submission</i>	<i>The International Journal of Children’s Rights</i>	<i>In review</i>	<i>Childhood</i>
Questions and topics to be investigated	<p>1) Similarities and differences in relation to each country’s social, historical, and economic context.</p> <p>2) The procedural aspects of decision-making in relation to the divorce and the children involved and on the decisions regarding the children’s post-divorce arrangements.</p>	<p>1) To what extent children want the mediator to share their living arrangement preferences with the parents when they participate in the Children in Mediation model in Norway.</p> <p>2) Whether children who prefer an equal time-sharing arrangement differ significantly in terms of age, sex, or the level of parental conflict bet from those who have other preferences.</p>	<p>1) What adolescents emphasise as important when relationships and living arrangements are renegotiated.</p> <p>2) How adolescents negotiate closeness and distance with their parents, and how they justify their loyalty to parents when their views diverge from symmetry and fairness between parents.</p>	<p>1) How adolescents’ agency is expressed in their narratives in which they describe management of personal and collective privacy boundaries during the parental separation process.</p> <p>2) How adolescents use opportunities, such as meetings with the mediator, to affect and negotiate the rules that regulate privacy boundaries to influence aspects of their everyday lives.</p>

Theoretical framework	UNCRC	UNCRC	The theory of invisible loyalties (Boszormenyi-Nagy, I., & Spark, G. M. 1973).	Communication Privacy Management (CPM) theory (Petronio, 2002, 2008).
Years of data collection	2020–2024	2013–2014	2020	2020
Data/ participants/ analysis	Policies and legal documents ^a , policy analysis	Questionnaires to mediators, and case files of children’s messages during the child conversation in Children in Mediation–model ^b , 213 families and 346 children, aged between 4–18. Content analysis and generalized linear mixed models.	Semi-structured interviews ^c with 11 adolescents aged between 12-17, narrative approach (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015)	Semi-structured interviews ^c with 11 adolescents aged between 12-17, narrative approach (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015)

^a I collected data from Norway, while my co-authors collected data from their respective countries.

^b The questionnaires and children’s messages were collected in the Hearing Children in Mediation research project prior to this PhD-project.

^c I planned, conducted, and managed the data processing (e.g. secure storage of sensitive data, contact with professional transcribers, etc).

Note: Author information can be found in “List of articles” (p. iii, this synopsis).

1.2 Key definitions and terms

1.2.1 Family and family practises

Throughout this synopsis, the term *family* is used pragmatically. It is a structural concept referring to members belonging to a household or close kin (e.g. parents, siblings) as one of the society's institutions (Solheim, 2016) to which the child belongs and in which the child develops (Hedegaard, 2009). It is also a verb referring to "doing family" (Morgan, 1996, 2011). As a structural concept, however, *family* is defined thusly in Norway:

Married couples with and without children, cohabiting couples with and without children, same-sex couples with and without children, single parents with children, non-custodial parents, families with foster children, and single persons living alone. After parental separation, new family constellations are created, with children of a spouse with a former partner, or with children with a new spouse. (Barne- og familiedepartementet, 2003, p. 5, my translation)

1.2.2 Children and adolescents

According to Article 1 in UNCRC (UN General Assembly resolution 44/25, 1989), children are persons between 0 and 18 years of age. The term *adolescents* has been applied for those between 12 and 19 years old (WHO, 2023).

1.2.3 Legal custody or parental responsibility

Refers to who can make major decisions affecting the child's welfare (Children Act, 1981, Section 30), such as decisions concerning guardianship, medical treatment, issuance of passport, choice of school, marriage, membership in religious community, consent to medical surgery, and relocation abroad (NOU 2020:14, 2020, p. 167).

1.2.4 Living arrangements

A general term referring to agreements concerning contact and residence/physical custody. It is also used as a concept of family practises in everyday life after parental separation.

Physical custody or *residence*³ refers to registration of whom the child lives with. *Sole*

³ The terms physical custody/residence were used differently in the four articles and will be used interchangeably in this thesis.

physical custody means that the child is registered at the residence of one of the parents. The other parent is then usually referred to as a “non-custodial” parent.

Joint physical custody (JPC) or dual residence means that the child is registered as resident at both parents’ residences. *Symmetrical dual residence or symmetrical JPC* refers to children who spend equal amount of time at each parent’s residence⁴. *Asymmetrical dual residence/JPC* refers to children spending 30–49 per cent of their time at each household (Steinbach & Augustijn, 2021). Resident or custodial parents have responsibilities such as domestic relocation and decisions in day-to-day life (NOU 2020:14, 2020, p. 167).

Contact, visitation or access arrangements refer to the time spent with a non-custodial/non-residential parent. This person has the responsibility to ensure food, clothing, regular bedtimes, follow up on contact with friends, to follow-up with school, and for daily provision and care (NOU 2020:14, 2020, p. 167).

Shared parenting refers to general practises in parenting in which both parents are involved in the child’s life, and parents share care responsibilities approximately equally.

1.2.5 Child-inclusive family mediation

Child-inclusive family mediation means that children are included directly or indirectly in the mediation process and that they can talk directly with the mediator or another adult who can communicate the child’s views (McIntosh et al., 2008). Child-inclusive family mediation is different from *child-focused* practises, which mean that parents consider and talk about children’s needs, without directly including them in the process (McIntosh et al., 2008).

1.3 Structure of the synopsis

I apply these points to synthesise the methods, the findings, and the discussions in Articles I–IV. In the following, I will outline aspects of the Norwegian context of family mediation and present previous research in order to show the research gaps that the sub-studies help fill in. Next, I will present methodological considerations and the strategies applied, including ethical reflections of being and becoming a researcher. A short summary of the findings in the articles will be provided before I apply theoretical framework to show how this dissertation

⁴ In Article II I use the phrase *equal time-sharing arrangement* (ETSA).

accomplishes its aims. Finally, I conclude and point to some possible limitations in the research, and give suggestions for future research and for practice.

2 Theoretical framework

The inclusion of children in family mediation has many purposes, and various research traditions have influenced the current practise and research. In this dissertation, I have found it useful to combine theoretical perspectives from different traditions (cultural psychology, children's rights and legal perspectives, and childhood studies) pragmatically.

I have applied a cultural psychological approach as a “metatheoretical premiss” (Ulvik, 2007, p. 43), which acknowledges that Norwegian children are individuals who interact with significant others (parents and professionals) and within the overall context in which they live (their immediate environment, their country, and general tendencies that characterise “Western culture”), in a given time and place in history.

2.1 Cultural psychology and the philosophy of science

According to Ulvik (2007, p. 49), cultural psychology can be described as a “meta psychology”, meaning that it addresses psychology on the level of philosophy of science. It is not a particular branch within the study of psychology but is rather a positioning in which researchers claim that “all human phenomena must be studied as cultural phenomena” (Ulvik, 2007, p. 50). A culture is part of a relational reality that is created and negotiated among human beings (Shweder, 1990). Cultural psychology is, according to Shweder (1990, p. 1), the study of

(...) the way cultural traditions and social practices regulate, express, transform, and permute the human psyche, resulting less in psychic unity for humankind than in ethnic divergences in mind, self, and emotion. Cultural psychology is the study of the ways subject and object, self and other, psyche and culture, person and context, figure and ground, practitioner and practice live together, require each other, and dynamically, dialectically, and jointly make each other up. (Shweder, 1990, p. 1)

A relational ontology implies a view of the person and societies as reciprocally constituting each other – that is, not as separate autonomous entities that influence each other, but rather phenomena that cannot be understood without the other (Rogoff, 1995; 2003, p. 51; Toverud et al., 2002, p. 20). In that way, this “meta theoretical” perspective is closely connected to a certain positioning within research ontology. According to Ulvik (2007), the Norwegian approach to cultural psychology has been influenced by sociocultural theory, social constructionism and post structuralist theory. My ontological positioning is that an objective

reality exists independently of those who experience it. However, the only way we come closer to a true knowledge about this reality is through interpretation and interactions with others and objects. I therefore understand human experience as relational.

For instance, “the child’s message” that is written down during the conversation with the child in the Children in Mediation model, may exist objectively on paper in written format. Importantly, however, the only way to understand the meaning of this text is through applying the cultural tools one has available, such as knowledge of cultural concepts like “shared residence”, in the interpretation of the text. In the following, I will explain the theoretical framework that I apply in this synopsis.

2.2 Relational agency

I may have used the concept of agency differently in the articles upon which this dissertation is based. My understanding and interpretation of agency has been a process that is still ongoing, in a manner similar to the process of becoming a researcher, which I have not yet reached the endpoint of. I have found the concept of agency somewhat abstract in research literature, and it is difficult to grasp how this concept may be expressed and interpreted in real life. In the following, I will elaborate on different views of agency that the concept of relational agency is at least partly built on.

During children’s participation in decision-making after parental separation, the agency can be said to be relational (Abebe, 2019; Hammersley, 2017; Raithelhuber, 2016; Spyrou, 2018), resulting from interactions between children and their social partners in these processes, and the context in which participation occurs (see e.g. Alminde, 2024; Smith, 2002; Smith et al., 2003). Raithelhuber (2016, p. 96) claims: “one can say that agency can only exist in interconnectedness and be brought about in relations.” He draws on Sax (2006) in explaining that the agentic potential is distributed among individuals, institutions and practises, and can thus be ascribed to non-human beings as well as persons.

The current acknowledgement of children’s agency as a relational concept builds on past perspectives. James (2016) sums up changes across the disciplines of developmental psychology and sociology. For instance, prior to the 1970s, developmental psychology was highly influenced by the works of Jean Piaget. It emphasised the universal processes that lead to the adult and rational way of thinking. Sociology also emphasised the “becoming” perspective, by how children were transformed and informed into becoming members of

society (James, 2016). These perspectives left little room for a child's own agency: children were understood as dependent and incomplete, and depended on society's investment in care, training, and upbringing as a means to invest in the social world of the future (Lee, 2001).

The paradigm shift in the 1970s and 1980s changed the perspective on children into an emphasis on the social context and the child's agency (James, 2016). L.S. Vygotsky, a Soviet psychologist, was one of the scholars in psychology who recognised the child as a social actor in the sense of having an active role in internalising the skills and competencies of others that the child interacted with (Vygotsky, 1978). His childhood studies built on previous notions of the social construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1967) and the connection between agency and structure (Giddens, 1979) in the task of exploring children as social actors. Subsequently, in the 1990's, James and Prout (1990/1997) played a significant role in claiming that children are active in the construction of their own lives and those of others, in addition to the societies they live in. In this recognition lies also an acknowledgement of social relationships and cultures that children are part of and contribute to, as worthy of study in their own right (James & Prout, 1990/1997). Agency can result in, from individual actions, "an effect, either to a decision, to social assumptions, or to social constraints" (Mayall, 2002, p. 21), and thus contribute to reproduction of the social and the cultural (Mayall, 2002). The structure of society that forms our everyday lives consists of institutions like peer relationships, the school, the family, and the legal system (James, 2016). The view on children as agents places children in a generational and a hierarchical position vis-à-vis adults in the social order, providing both opportunities and constraints (Alanen, 2016; James et al., 1998; Mayall, 2002).

A more recent development is the emphasis put on a relational understanding of agency. The previous conceptualisation of social agency, and children as agents, reflect the stance that children can exercise and possess agency (Raithelhuber, 2016). Raithelhuber (2016) claims that scholars applying an agentic view on agency often aim to investigate how agency can be expressed under constraining and enabling conditions. Further, an agentic view on agency reflects a dualistic view that is typically a Euro-centric perception of the world (e.g. mind and body, macro and micro, etc.). Thus, the agentic view on agency actually reflects an individualistic conceptualisation of agency (Raithelhuber, 2016). An alternative view is a relational conceptualisation that, theoretically and empirically

(...) has to start from the dynamic processes through and in which relations are brought about in time and space, and which from time to time result in the empirical production on the level of everyday life that allocates “agency”, as a differentiated capacity, to human beings. (Raithelhuber, 2016, p. 99)

I find the sociocultural perspective on children’s participation useful because it adheres to a relational view on participation, while simultaneously recognising the power and authority that are embedded in practices, and that cannot be untangled from our interpretations, listening and actions (Fitzgerald et al., 2009).

2.3 A sociocultural analysis on three planes

I am inspired by the analytical framework provided by Rogoff (1995), who suggest an analysis of sociocultural activities on three planes: the personal, the interpersonal, and the institutional plane. This approach is deeply relational, viewing the three planes as inseparable, and mutually constituting each other. Taking this approach allows for an exploration of children’s participation in family mediation on each of the planes, while simultaneously keeping the other planes in the background, and avoiding separating them from each other.

2.3.1 Apprenticeship – an institutional plane

Rogoff (1995) describes apprenticeship⁵ as “a culturally organised activity that has as part of its purpose the development of mature participation in the activity by the less experienced people” (p. 142). This definition can correspond to the purpose of family mediation – that is, the point is to facilitate and support parents’ considerations of the child during the process of parental separation, in which the mediator is the “experienced” person, and the parents are “the less experienced persons.” Viewing child-inclusive family mediation as a form of apprenticeship, both the child and the parents may be “the less experienced persons” who, together or in parallel with each other, may develop more mature ways to, for instance, communicate and negotiate and enable the child’s participation in activities during the process of parental separation. I will also consider the extension of the metaphor of apprenticeship to other activities within, for example, family relations, suggested by Rogoff (1995). *Negotiating families* (Gulbrandsen, 1998; Sommer, 2019) is therefore a relevant concept in relation to apprenticeship, referring to a general tendency in Western societies for children and parents

⁵ Rogoff uses the term “community plane”, but I have used the term institutional plane.

talk together to create a shared agreement about how decisions are made. This negotiation is done through actions, interactions and communication (Gulbrandsen, 1998, p. 110).

Negotiating family means that children have increased their opportunities to influence the parent-child relationship; in this view, children are recognised as unique and with individual needs and rights (Gulbrandsen, 1998, p. 109; Sommer, 2019).

Apprenticeship focuses on the nature of the activity and how the activity relates to aspects such as economic, political, spiritual, and material aspects of practices and institutions (Rogoff, 1995). I apply this plane of analysis in this synopsis by emphasising relevant aspects of Norwegian society and its relevant policies and legal frameworks (particularly the UNCRC). The cultural aspects, policies and legal frameworks guide the process of parental separation and the active practise of child-inclusive family mediation: parents' family mediation process, the conversation between the child and the mediator, and everyday activities connected to the ways of doing family in a parental separation process.

2.3.2 Guided participation – the interpersonal plane

Guided participation is described as “the processes and systems of involvement between people as they communicate and coordinate efforts while participating in culturally valued activity” (Rogoff, 1995, p. 142). The idea is that people participate in sociocultural activities and institutions in a particular historical time, and that such participation creates reciprocal meaning-making processes (Smith, 2002; Ulvik, 2009). Interactions and negotiations between children and adults are therefore central in participatory activities (Ulvik, 2009), perhaps particularly so in an activity when children are “being heard”.

Guided participation refers to not only the direct interactions, but also the joint activities that happen parallel to each other with either co-presence (e.g. parents who quarrel in front of a child) or distal arrangements (e.g. choice to include children in family mediation and how they will be included, Rogoff, 1995). Children participate concurrently in several institutions in society, such as the family, extended family, and school (Hedegaard, 2008). Institutions create implicit frames for interpretation of how humans should behave and psychologically react (Hundeide, 2017; Rogoff, 1995). My point of departure has been that an isolated inquiry into the participation context of family mediation would risk losing sight of how this institutional practise was connected with other forms of (more or less) organised activities, or “ways of doing family” (Morgan, 2011) in a child's everyday life during parents' separation process. “Doing” family focuses on practices that families do, rather than on merely *being* a

family (Morgan, 1996, 2011). When doing family after parental separation, for instance, one may refer to communication processes, or ways of practising and negotiating living arrangements in day-to-day life. Importantly, the activity is guided towards something, a purpose or a goal, with the people (and the institutions) involved trying to accomplish something (Rogoff, 1995).

While working towards a goal, the involved social partners may engage in negotiations. Negotiations can be understood as every interaction between, for example, children and their parents, that concern ways of being and which social positions are available in each situation (Gulbrandsen, 2008, p. 248). Additionally, it can be extended from the specific content of a specific case to the more general notion about which cases can be negotiated (Gulbrandsen, 1998, p. 110). Viewing negotiations in relation to participation, each interaction forms a basis for negotiations and co-creation of meaning and understanding in the setting that children participate in (Ulvik, 2009). Interactions and negotiations can result in new understandings and makings of meanings. Working with meaning can, from a professional's point of view, for instance a family mediator, be support for a child's understanding, a foundation for decision-making, an exercise in participation, or a demand or request to be part of working with meaning (Gulbrandsen et al., 2012).

Additionally, according to Gulbrandsen (1998), negotiations are also done in relation to the cultural. When children achieve greater independence, it is not viewed as the result of individual processes, but rather as collective processes between the child and its environment (Gulbrandsen, 1998, p. 136).

Due to the dialogic nature of participation (Graham & Fitzgerald, 2010), theories within relational dialectics have been used in Articles III and IV. The Communication Privacy Management (CPM) theory (Petronio, 2002, 2008) and the theory of invisible loyalties (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973) have been helpful in analysing and interpreting adolescents' narratives about interactions, negotiations, and meaning-making of various aspects of the parental separation process. Baxter (2011) argues that sociocultural life is deeply relational, and that relationships are deeply sociocultural. Traces of sociocultural discourses are intertwined into every utterance made by someone in joint conversation with another person, with third parties (including strangers such as an interviewer), or in our inner dialogues of intrapersonal communication (Baxter, 2011, p. 9). The idea is that such traces

may influence children's choices of what to disclose to parents and family mediators, and also how they interact with and belong to their parents during the process of parental separation.

2.3.3 Participatory appropriation – the personal plane

Rogoff (2003) defines development through cultural and community events that occur as individuals change their roles in their community's structure. Development is understood as a lifelong project, and a procedural perspective that can be used to understand a child at each time point throughout the childhood. This view on development can also be relevant for adults (Gulbrandsen, 2008, p. 245). The idea is that one does not become a "finalised", coherent and stable person at any specific time in life (Gulbrandsen, 2008). This view on development merges the perspectives of childhood studies that emphasise children as human *beings* or human *becomings* (Lee, 2001; Prout, 2011). This mergence acknowledges the process that the child experiences at a given point in time ("being"), while also being interested in the transformations that happen through various forms of participations. The emphasis on transformations proposed by Rogoff (1995) is an alternative to the traditional developmental psychology that focus on the process of acquiring new competences. Building on previous experiences and engagements in activities, individuals change their goals and manage future situations in new ways.

Transitions are often marked by chronological age in Western societies, but there are also concurrent responsibilities and new cultural expectations for children as they grow older. The activities that people take part in change, and thereby people will change through their changed participation (Rogoff, 2003, p. 11). According to Rogoff (2003), rights and privileges can be connected to age, and turning older can affect the relationship between privileges and responsibilities within parent-child relationships and in meetings with public institutions. The same can be said about how sociocultural, economic, and living circumstances may change and affect individuals' participation, which may become more relevant during the process of parental separation. For example, in Norway, the emphasis on age in relation to a child's right to be heard and a gradually increasing right to have a say in decisions concerning their everyday life may influence expectations and interactions in parent-child relationships, or in children's interactions with professionals. "Being heard" can therefore be considered a sociocultural activity (other terms used by scholars are "situated action" (Bruner, 1990, p. 19) and "organised activities" (Gullestad, 1989)) that children and their social partners contribute to, together with historical traditions and materials that change

over time (Rogoff, 1995). Being part of new forms of practises within different institutions, for instance child-inclusive family mediation, children draw on previous experiences of being heard, for instance in the history of their relationships with their parents.

2.4 Some reflections on the term *adolescents*

Because I have used the term *adolescents* in several of the articles in this dissertation, I find it necessary to provide some reflections on the term because my usage may not be considered to follow the principles of the theoretical framework. The terms adolescence/adolescents have (universal) biological connotations and are connected to the changes that one endures during puberty. However, the “storms and stresses” that some ascribe to adolescence in particular can occur throughout one’s life course, not just through one’s youth (Morrow, 2015).

“Adolescence” might also have culturally specific connotations that are not universal: for instance, in some cultures (but not all), this time in life is associated with particular risky and deviant behaviours (see for instance Bernays et al., 2018), and some cultures have extensive rituals, for instance, in relation to menstruation (Mead, 2004). There are also uncertainties about what exactly is the age range encompassed by the terms (Sawyer et al., 2018). The term is seen as dominated by (traditional) developmental psychology with an emphasis more on the individual child than on the social context (Morrow, 2015). I find it important to highlight that my use of the word does not refer to a phase in the human development that has a universal progress. Instead of referring to the participants in Articles III and IV as children, I chose to call them adolescents and specify the ages of the participants in these sub-studies (12 through 17 years old). One common term that could have been used, *young people*, has a specific definition as persons between 15 and 24 (United Nations, 2023), and so its use here would have been misleading.

3 The Norwegian context

In 2023, the population of Norway was 5.5 million people (Statistics Norway, 2024a). Between 2020 and 2022, 44 per cent of the adult Norwegian population reported that they were married, 20 per cent were cohabiting, and 36 per cent lived alone (Andersen, 2023). In 2023, there were 1,096,857 children living in Norway, 52 per cent of whom lived with their married parents, 25 per cent of whom lived with their cohabiting parents, and 23 per cent of whom lived with one of their parents (Statistics Norway, 2023). In 2022, there were 8204 divorces in Norway, which is the lowest number since 1986 (Statistics Norway, 2024b). There are no public registration of break-ups between cohabiting couples. In 2022, 7716 children under 18 years experienced parental divorce (Statistics Norway, 2024b) and 6858 children under 16 years experienced break-up between their cohabiting parents (Bufdir, 2024).

In Norway, changes in the demography of families, gender equality, and the position of children in families and societies have coincided, perhaps especially since the 1970s.

3.1 The change in family demography in Norway

Starting in the early 1970s, divorce has been becoming more common in many Western countries, although this trend has stabilised or, recently, even slightly reversed (Eurostat, 2022; Kennedy & Ruggles, 2014; Raley & Sweeney, 2020). Concurrently, marriage rates have declined and cohabitation has increased (Eurostat, 2022). These trends are part of what has been called the second demographic transition, and refers to families' increased flexibility in ways of living (Lesthaeghe, 2014). These changes happened quickly in the Nordic countries, and represented a change from the family "as we knew it", which consisted of a nuclear family with a heterosexual couple who practised traditional division of work and tasks (Aarseth, 2018, p. 86).

In a Norway, the trends have been and are similar to that of other European countries: marriage rates have generally decreased (or somewhat stabilised in recent years) and cohabitation is more common (Dommermuth et al., 2015). Cohabitation might seem to be less binding for couples than marriage (Wiik et al., 2009), but the state is given equal status to marriage in most social and legal aspects, for instance in terms of social acceptance, tax legislations, and welfare benefits and duties (Noack, 2010). Generally, it is not expected that children would experience divorce and dissolution of cohabitation very differently. Because

persons live longer in cohabitation before they choose to marry, children with married parents are generally older compared to those of cohabiting parents (Dommermuth et al., 2015).

Cohabiting parents with children are less likely to break up than cohabiting parents without children. Yet, cohabitating partners with children dissolve their partnership twice as often as married parents with children get divorced (Golpen, 2015).

The number of children who experience parental divorce is decreasing, and is currently at its lowest number since registration began in 1996 (Bufdir, 2024). Selected numbers for divorces and dissolution of cohabitation for the previous decade (the time of data collection for this dissertation) are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Annual numbers of children who experienced the separation of their parents

	2013	2014	2015	2020	2022
Divorces in the general population	9736	9556	9306	9355	8204
Children under 18 years experiencing parental divorce	8965	8608	8743	8920	7716
Children under 16 years experiencing parents' dissolution of cohabitation	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	6982	6858

Numbers from: Bufdir (2024); Statistics Norway (2024b)

3.2 Gender equality and shared parenting in Norway

The shift in family demography must be seen in relation to increased gender equality. The Nordic countries typically have regulations that are intended to support both working mothers and working fathers (Pascall, 2012). Norway is considered a socio-democratic or universalistic welfare state (Esping-Andersen, 1990) with a gender egalitarian welfare approach that generally supports gender-equal participation in work and care through earner-carer policies (Ellingsæter & Leira, 2006; Neyer, 2021; Ray et al., 2010). In particular, the focus on fathers' involvement in care for children is seen a central feature of family policies in welfare states that encourage gender equality (Saraceno, 2015). Individualised earner-carer regimes can apply policy measures, referring to official guidelines and principles. In Norway, such measures are universal, high-quality daycare, access to reduced work hours, and publicly funded parental leave schemes. The latter consist of individualised parental leave and non-transferable "father's quota" of parental leave time following childbirth (see for instance Kvande, 2022). Such measures are thought of as contributing to equality between parents and important for dual-earner/dual-caregiver societies (Sainsbury, 2000). However, some mothers may still experience more stress than fathers, for instance because they are often responsible for "the invisible tasks", such as being the "project leader" and "coordinator" for the family

(Egeland et al., 2021). This double focus on women's participation in work and fathers' participation in care for children (Ellingsæter & Leira, 2006) differs from that of many other Western countries (Aarseth, 2018).

Gender egalitarian parenting practices are reflected in the ways of doing family after parental separation. Symmetrical JPC between parents after parental separation has become common in Norway. In 2020, 43 per cent of separated parents practised JPC, which mean that children (on average) spend about equal amounts of time at each of their parent's households, most often alternating between households every week (Wiik, 2022). The number of children living with their mother has decreased from 62 per cent in 2012 to 49 per cent in 2020, while over the same time period, the number of children (7 per cent) registered as living with their father was stable at 7 per cent (Wiik, 2022).

In Norway, parents who shared the childcare more equally while living together practised symmetrical JPC more often (Wiik, 2022). This may be because of fathers' involvement in childrearing and the quality of the father-child relationship (Vrolijk & Keizer, 2021). Importantly, gender equality and fairness have become values that are part of parenting ideals of symmetry after parental separation in countries like Norway (Bertelsen, 2021; Westerling, 2016). Norwegian children may also emphasise symmetry in terms of fairness between parents, implying that they want to share their time equally between parents after parental separation (Kitterød & Lidén, 2021).

According to Wiik (2022), families that practise symmetrical JPC differ on several socio-economic and demographic measures from families that don't. For instance, in Norway, parents with the lowest income, lower education, a shorter duration of partnership, poorer health (particularly among fathers), and lower levels of interparental conflict practise symmetrical JPC less often than parents scoring higher on the same measures. Similar differences have also been found in other countries (for a literature review, see Steinbach, 2019). It has therefore been suggested that these families represent a selected group in society (e.g. Steinbach, 2019; Vrolijk & Keizer, 2021), and a possible 'class dimension' has therefore been ascribed to families practising symmetrical JPC (Haugen, 2020).

In Norway, parents have contractual freedom after parental separation, and can agree on living arrangements that will mean that children are registered as residing with one parent or with both parents. If parents are unable to settle an agreement through family mediation or

court-connected mediation, the case can proceed to court. The court was given admission to pass a judgement of JPC in 2010, although only if there are special reasons for doing so (Children Act, 1981, Section 36). In an Official Norwegian Report about a new Children Act (NOU 2020:14, 2020), the majority of the board suggested removing the criteria of ‘special reasons’ needed for the court to judge JPC. One of the reasons was because of the small practical differences between the court’s opportunity to judge symmetrical JPC or sole physical custody with considerable contact with the non-resident parent. Yet, these two alternatives have important implications for the responsibilities and privileges to make decisions about day-to-day life and domestic relocation. Compared to countries like The Netherlands (see Poortman & van Gaalen, 2017) and Sweden (Blomqvist & Heimer, 2016), Norwegian legislation has been less progressive in terms of legislating and making equal time-sharing the legal norm. One reason is the importance of considering each child in each individual case. At the same time as relationships between men and women have become more democratised and subject to negotiations, the same applies to relationships between parents and children (Gullestad, 1996; Sommer, 2019).

3.3 Norway – a child-centred society

A “child-centred society” perceives children as target groups for social measures as citizens of the future and as social actors in their own right, for example by making their views heard and listened to (Hennum, 2014). The child-centred focus is strong in Norway and is exemplified by a generous child welfare system and a general prioritisation of children’s rights (Skivenes, 2011). While the UNCRC has been important for an increased emphasis on children internationally, the child had a special position in the Norwegian society even before ratifying it in 1991 and implementing it into Norwegian law in 2003. For instance, children’s right to be heard was already part of national legislation when Children Act came into force in 1981. Norway was also the first country with a Children’s Ombudsman in 1981, who’s task was to promote children’s interests and paying attention to conditions for childhoods in Norway (Barneombudet, 2024).

Despite the general emphasis on children in the Norwegian society today, and historically, the UNCRC stands as a framework of which children’s participation in institutions and practices can be understood. The UNCRC builds on four principles: provision, participation, protection, and the right to non-discrimination (Kipperberg et al., 2019). The three formers are of main interest in this dissertation and are often referred to as the three P’s.

3.3.1 Provision

Provision concerns the right to be cared for, the access to services, and measures that protect children's economic and social rights (Revheim, 2023). For instance, in the context of parental separation, provision can both concern the various welfare benefits that aims to support parents and parents' ability to care for the child (e.g. Article 27 in the UNCRC) and the child's right to family life, according to Article 9 in the UNCRC (Köhler-Olsen, 2019). Article 9 no. 3 states that

State Parties shall respect the right of the child who is separated from one or both parents to maintain personal relations and direct contact with both parents on a regular basis, except if it is contrary to the child's best interests.

This part of the UNCRC is central to post parental separation decisions about residence and contact, and is part of the discourse of actors who argue that (symmetrical) JPC is in the best interest of the child.

3.3.2 Participation

Participation concerns the child's right to be heard and that their views are given weight, in addition to children's participation in society more generally. For instance through democratic decision-making processes or freedom of speech (Revheim, 2023). Article 12 of the convention that concern children's right to be heard, has been written as follows in Children Act (1981, Section 31):

As and when the child becomes able to form its own point of view on matters that concern it, the parents shall consider the child's opinion before making a decision about the child's personal situation. Importance shall be attached to the opinion of the child according to his or her age and maturity. The same applies to other persons with custody of the child or who are involved with the child.

Article 12, Section 1, of the UNCRC states that the views of the child should be "(...) given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child." This part of the article has been translated differently in various jurisdictions internationally in terms of age requirements (Mol, 2021). In Norwegian legislation, level of maturity, together with physical age, is applied in order to mark differences in weight given to children's views. Children older than seven, and younger if they are able to express views, should be provided with information and given opportunities to express their own views about matters concerning them. Their views

should be given due weight according to age and maturity. However, from *the age of 12*, their views should be given *considerable* weight (Children Act, 1981, section 31). After age 16, children should be allowed to make decisions about residence and contact (which is probably why parents are obligated to attend family mediation only when they have children younger than 16 years old). Because children's views, starting at age 12, are supposed to be given considerable weight, the associated negotiations are likely to be affected by children's increased privileges and responsibilities and ability to influence their everyday lives.

Importantly, the right to be heard and to share one's views freely imply that the child does also have a right to not exercise this right, meaning that the views are not being shared (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009; UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 2009).

3.3.3 Protection

According to Revheim (2023, p. 45), "protection concerns children's right to be protected from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation." It is based on the emphasis on "the best interest of the child", formulated in Article 3 in the UNCRC. One way to approach "the best interest of the child" is to understand how the individual child is in a dynamic and contextual interplay with time and place (Kipperberg, 2019). Understandings of the best interest of the child can stand in conflict towards each other across and within the different approaches to the best interest of the child; the society's child perspective, adults' child perspectives, and the child's own perspective (see also Skivenes, 2011). Kjøs and colleagues (2015), for instance, showed that parents can connect their opposing arguments to the best interest of the child as an effort to achieve impact in the decisions.

The principles in the UNCRC mentioned above are often connected to certain views on children. Viewing children as competent, for instance, imply that they have an authentic core that they can communicate in the participatory activity they take part in. However, children may also be viewed as vulnerable, and thus being in the need of protection and thus participate within the boundaries set by adults (Warming, 2019). These views are often shifting within the institutions and practices children may participate in. they are also individualistic, and thus holding a potential of giving children the responsibility for the consequences in their everyday life of which they have little, if any, power to impact (Warming, 2019).

3.4 Family Mediation in Norway

Family mediation is a form of conflict resolution, like several other traditions within this field (e.g. restorative justice, victim offender mediation, court-connected mediation or custody mediation; Nylund et al., 2018). Family mediation in Norway differs from alternative dispute resolution processes internationally, even from other Nordic countries (Nylund, 2023). The mandatory aspect is the key aspect: all divorcing parents with children under 16 years must attend family mediation, *regardless of whether the parents have disputes or not*.

Family mediation can either take place at one of 41 local family counselling offices, or by appointment with an external family mediator who have a mandate from the Office for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Bufetat; Regulation on Family Mediation, 2007, section 3). This PhD project focused on the family counselling offices and did not include external family mediators. However, the findings here are highly relevant for their practise also, because they must follow the same regulations and policies as Family Counselling Offices.

The Family Counselling Service is a specialised service provider for family-related problems, where families with difficulties, conflicts and crises can receive treatment and counselling (Family Counselling Office Act, 1997; NOU 2019:20, 2019). This service provides a first-line support service with a low threshold, and at no cost, for receiving help without needing a referral, and a second-line service based on the service's high competence and professional specialisation (NOU 2019:20, 2019). The Family Counselling Service aims to prevent relational problems from taking hold in the first place, or from developing further, using "measures with the aim to hinder or limit damage, illness, or problems" (NOU 2019:20, 2019, p. 25). Family counselling offices give courses and lectures, work with clinical cases, and do interdisciplinary collaborations, *in addition to* performing family mediation. To be a family mediator, one must have a professional background as, for instance, a psychologist, family therapist, social worker, teacher etc., who has been certified as a family mediator by Bufdir.

In Norway, married parents can either register their separation and be separated for a year, or live away from each other in two years, before applying to the county governor for a divorce (Marriage Act, 1991, Section 19 and 22). The criterion of one year of separation does not apply in cases of assault or forced marriage (Marriage Act, 1991, Section 23). There are no regulations for persons to be eligible to dissolve their cohabitation. However, both married and cohabiting parents who break up and have children under 16 years old are obligated to attend family mediation, which makes them eligible for certain benefits from the Norwegian

Work and Welfare Administration (Family Allowance Act, 2003, section 9). Married parents will only be eligible to register their separation if they can present a mediation certificate (Marriage Act, 1991, section 26). Also, if parents wish to petition the District Court about residence/physical custody, contact/visitation, parental responsibility/legal custody, or relocation, they must present a mediation certificate that has been issued within the past six months (Children Act, 1981, section 51). In table 3, I show the distribution between mediation initiated due to divorce, dissolution of cohabitational partnership, and parental disputes.

Table 3 Annual numbers of mediation cases in Norway

Types of mediation	2013	2014	2015	2020	2022
Marriage Act	5763	5906	Ca. 5600	6045	5611
Break-up between cohabiting parents	5330	5640	Ca. 5400	5510	5310
Pre-court mediation	5706	6048	Ca. 5800	5571	5907

Sources: Statistics from Bufdir (Bufdir, 2015, 2016, 2024)

It is only the first session that is mandatory, and the parents can choose to attend six additional (voluntary) sessions if needed. If a parent is found guilty of child abuse, family mediation is no longer required (Children Act, 1981, Section 56). The aim of family mediation is that parents make an agreement about parental responsibility, residence and contact, and the mediator should help the parents that attend to the best interest of the child (Regulation on Family Mediation, 2007). The mediator is also obliged to inform parents about children’s right to be heard in the decision-making process (Regulation on Family Mediation, 2007).

The voluntary aspect of continued mediation, and that the parents posit authority to write their own agreement, distinguish family mediation from that of court-proceedings, in which a judge or a child-expert has the authority (NOU 2019:20, 2019). Thus, one can say that family mediation is situated between the private and the public in regard to who is responsible for the children in a family (Haugen & Rantalaiho, 2010). However, Norwegian scholars have emphasised that such considerations can result in tensions among the various factors that must be taken into account, such as protection of children, children’s right to be heard, and children’s competence (Barlund, 2015; Haugen & Rantalaiho, 2010; Salamonsen et al., 2022; Strandbu, 2011; Strandbu et al., 2019). Such tensions are also emphasised by other scholars as

characterising children’s participation in family law proceedings in other international contexts (Birnbaum, 2009; Birnbaum & Saini, 2012; Landsdown, 2011).

One of the aims of family mediation is to de-escalate interparental conflict and prevent court proceedings. Earlier evaluations of family mediation have shown that these aims have proved difficult to fulfil (Gulbrandsen & Tjersland, 2013; Ådnanes et al., 2011). To better help parents with their disagreements and improve satisfaction with the service, a strategy called differentiated mediation was initiated in 2017 and fully implemented in all offices in 2018 (NOU 2019:20, p. 113-115). When parents call to schedule a mediation session, they go through a short assessment carried out by an administrative employee. Parents have separate conversations, and are asked the following questions (NOU 2019:20, 2019, p. 114):

- Do you require mediation according to Children Act (i.e. is it “break up”-mediation or pre-court mediation?), or according to Marriage Act? (i.e. is it a divorce)
- Are there any disagreements about residence, contact and parental responsibility?
- Are there challenges and conflicts in parental cooperation? How long has your conflicts been going on?
- Do you trust the other parent?
- Have you been to court earlier due to parental disputes?
- Are there problems related to violence or substance abuse? Are these problems known to the other parent, and have these problems been considered in the planning of residence and contact for the child?

Based on answers from both parents, the level of conflict will be estimated as A: low conflict; B: some conflict; C: high conflict; or Risk (i.e. there is a risk to the child). The subsequent mediation process will be adapted accordingly. Parents receive a standardised invitation letter with information about the family mediation process. Important changes in differentiated mediation are that in the cases of “high-conflict” or “risk”, parents will meet two mediators, and children will not be included before the mediators have assessed the situation. Parents are strongly encouraged to initiate a mediation *process*, meaning that parents should attend more than one session (NOU 2019:20). Process mediation means that parents can attend a mini-course about conflict and its consequences for a child’s development and well-being, get help for reducing level of conflict, get help and guidance about listening to children’s views, and get guidance about how to come to an agreement about residence and contact that is in the best interest of the child (NOU 2019:20). Children are included after the mediators have met

the parents and the appropriateness of including them has been assessed (NOU 2019:20, 2019). The initial screening depends on parents' reports about conflict and challenges in parental collaboration. Parents have been found to report less conflict and fewer challenges in the pre-mediation screening compared to what they report in a research survey (Dittman et al., 2021), and hence, pre-screening does not necessarily prevent children's early participation in conflict cases when parents have withheld information in their responses to the questions.

Children's participation in family mediation in Norway may differ from such processes in other countries on several aspects such as level of parental conflict, involved professionals who meet with the parents and/or the children, and the availability of private or legal decision-making authorities. Norwegian family mediation is free of charge, although in other countries, there might be payment to lawyers, professionals, and other legal costs. Many overall contextual aspects may also be of importance in other countries, such as gender equality, tendency of shared parenting in the country, welfare benefits, etc., but discussing all possible factors is beyond the scope of this thesis.

3.4.1 Child-inclusive practice in family mediation in Norway

Children's participation in decision-making during parents' separation can take many forms. It is possible for there to be a complete lack of participation, and decisions can be made in the day-to-day life by parents without considering children's views. Participation in family law proceedings can be both court-connected (e.g. court-connected mediation, trials) or handled by out-of-court services (e.g. alternative dispute resolution processes such as mediation, counselling; see for instance Mol, 2021). Participation can be direct (e.g. by talking about the child's wishes with people with decision-making authority) or indirect participation (e.g. by talking with a separate child consultant who writes a report of the views of the child; Mol, 2021).

An evaluation of family mediation in Norway from 2011 showed that mediation was functioning differently in different offices and in different parts of the country. Some mediators only occasionally included children in parents' mediation processes, and several mediators did not inform parents about their children's right to be heard, or that parents had an obligation to ensure that children had this opportunity (Ådnanes et al., 2011). Several models for child-inclusive family mediation were applied at that time, such as "Sandvikamodellen" (Ribe-Anderssen et al., 2007) and extended mediation/"The Østensjø model" (see Ask & Kjeldsen, 2015).

Strandbu (2011) suggested ways to improve child inclusion, for example, by reducing the gatekeeping function of parents and mediators (see also Haugen & Rantalaiho, 2010), and by putting more emphasis on meaning-making. An important point to be made is that a child is not responsible for difficult decisions, even if they are allowed to share their own views (Strandbu, 2011). The Children in Mediation model was developed by Gjertrud Jonassen at Grenland family counselling office. Children’s participation in the mediation process has increased gradually during the 2010s (Bufdir, 2022b, p. 33), and one possible reason is the increased application of the Children in Mediation model (Strandbu et al., 2020). Table 4 that children’s participation in the mediation process has been fairly stable since the implementation of differentiation mediation in 2018. According to Strandbu and colleagues (2020), this may be because children’s participation was considerably reduced in some of offices which, prior to differentiation, had about half of children attending their parents’ family mediation process. The differentiation might have the consequence of being an additional barrier to participation for children in families characterised by possible risk (e.g. families in which there is conflict, substance misuse, lack of trust between parents, etc.), and may represent a ‘discursive move’ from that of participation and back to that of protection (Salamonsen et al., 2022). This is a development that contrasts a suggestion made in the Official Norwegian Report (NOU 2019:20, 2019) of ensuring children’s individual rights to participate regardless of parents’ gatekeeping (Salamonsen et al., 2022). As previously mentioned, children’s participation varies between offices (Bufdir, 2021), and the articulated aim of including 30 per cent participation for children has not yet been accomplished (see for instance Bufdir, 2023a, p. 30).

This development of differentiated mediation may reflect the possible challenges that the Family Counselling Service might face. From the perspective of Tjersland and Gulbrandsen (2010), such challenges can be weighting the therapeutic aspects against the case-oriented

Table 4 Percentages of children who participated in their parents’ separation process

2010	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
4	14	16	22	26	25	22	24	23

Percentages retrieved from annual reports (Bufdir, 2021, 2023a) and an evaluation (Ådnanes et al., 2011).

aspects, the voluntary aspect against encouragement to continue the mediation process if there are disagreements, and the level of social control, as mediators sometimes feel uncertain

about how parents care for the child. Nylund (2023) described the Norwegian model as weighing the therapeutic aspects more heavily than the case-oriented aspect, exemplified by the ‘differentiated’ mediation.

Guidelines for child conversations. Bufdir has developed a comprehensive guide with recommendations for carrying out conversations with children (Bufdir, 2022a). Among other recommendations, the guide says that even if a child conversation should be focused on subjects that have relevance for everyday life post-parental separation, the child should not be put in loyalty conflicts. Thus, it is *not* recommended that a mediator ask who the child would like to live with (Bufdir, 2022a), which is in line with guidelines for child experts who are appointed in court proceedings (Domstoladministrasjonen [National Courts Administration], 2019). In child conversations a family counselling office, it is just as important to ask how the child feels and what the child wonders or is worried about, as it is to find out what the child thinks about contact and residence (Bufdir, 2022a). It is also important to inform them about the right to *not* share their views, and to respect indirect indications that the child does not wish to answer, such as when the child changes topics or answers “I don’t know” (Bufdir, 2022a). This recommendation demonstrates that mediators should both attend to children’s democratic right to be heard on matters related to decisions, but also emphasises meaning-making and understanding of the child’s everyday life. In chapter 4, I will outline research that is based on children’s views of their own participation in family law proceedings internationally, and also in the Norwegian context.

3.4.2 The Family Counselling Service and the Child Welfare Service

Professionals can initiate interdisciplinary collaboration, exchange guidance, or determine whether mediators or family therapists have an obligation to report a case to the Child Welfare Service (CWS). Both family mediators and CWS often manage cases in which they must balance parental conflicts or collaboration with the best interest of children, and sometimes determine whether there is need for children to be protected from a parent. For instance, in the Hearing Children in Mediation project that this PhD project is part of, the mediator had made a note of concern to the CWS in 7.9 per cent of mediation cases, whereas 26.3 per cent of the cases were characterised by at least one condition that may pose risk to the child (such as substance misuse, violence, etc.; (Strandbu & Thørnblad, 2015). In cases handled by the CWS, parental conflict was identified as a reason for notes of concerns in 18.5 per cent of the cases in the project ‘Child welfare investigations’ (Lauritzen et al., 2019).

The balance between the parental conflict and the emphasis on the child can be a challenging dilemma for case workers in CWS (Sudland, 2020). CWS workers are often unable to provide good enough help to parents who struggle with accusations about one another that relate to possible risks, such as alcohol and substance misuse, violence, and/or insufficient care (Jevne, 2017; Sudland & Neumann, 2021). When family mediators become concerned about the impact of the conflict on the involved child(ren), the family mediators may prefer to do the work themselves instead of referring the families in these cases to the CWS (Heggdalsvik & Samsonsen, 2022). This seems to be because they feel more competent in this kind of work (Heggdalsvik & Samsonsen, 2022). Thus, the CWS workers and family mediators may have many similarities in the tasks and challenges they encounter, though there are no established canals or venues for them to integrate their work with families.

A key difference between the CWS and the Family Counselling Service is that the CWS workers can have decision-making authority, while the family mediators do not.

In this chapter, I have outlined and elaborated on some of the key aspects of the Norwegian context of which children's experiences of parental separation are situated. The central aim of family mediation is to support parents to ensure the best interest of the child. In order to be sensitive towards any biased views on the context I live in and are part of, I found it useful to apply a comparative approach to an examination of the Norwegian context. Thus, to better understand how the Norwegian context for parental separation processes aims to support children's best interest, I⁶ have asked the following research question in Article I:

How do policies and legal frameworks, that regulate procedural aspects of parental separation and post-separation living arrangements, emphasise the best interest of the child, in three European countries: Norway, the Netherlands, and Germany?

The policy comparison was initiated by Dr. Susanne Witte, the first author of Article I, in relation to stay as a guest researcher at the German Youth Institute in 2020. Dr. Witte is involved in the HESTIA research project (2024). Findings in this project lead to questions regarding children's well-being and risk of significant harm in relation to parental separation. This was due to characteristics of families in which children were suspected as being victims

⁶ Articles I–IV are results from collaboration with co-authors. In this synopsis, however, the articles will be referred to as *my* contributions to this synopsis and the pronoun *I* will be used.

of maltreatment in child protection cases. For instance, Witte and colleagues (2022) identified single parenting and complex family constellations as being more frequently reported to child welfare and protection services than other types of families. The article suggested that the involvement of state authorities in relation to parental separation and single parenthood may make it easier to detect any risk of harm. However, in Norway, children living with single parents had lower odds for referrals than children living with both parents (Lauritzen et al., 2019), which may be due to having specific services that manage conflicts that concern living arrangements after parental separation (Rustad et al., 2022). Thus, Norway, as representing a country with a well-developed welfare state, could provide a valuable case of comparison in regard to how parental separation cases generally emphasise the best interest of the child.

Article I is a policy comparison (Witte et al., manuscript), in which my co-authors and I investigated how divorce⁷ policies attended to the best interest of the child in three European countries, namely Norway, the Netherlands and Germany. This analysis situates the Norwegian Family Counselling Service in the Norwegian context of parental separation policies, and situates the Norwegian parental separation policies within the broader context of other European countries.

⁷ Divorce was used as the key term in this article. Any laws or policies that related to dissolution of cohabitation were specified.

4 Previous research on children, parental separation, and family mediation

In this chapter, I will show that research have changed from viewing parental separation as an event that pose risk to children into a view on parental separation as a process, and how this process may impact the context that children's experiences of parental separation are situated. I have a particular focus on interparental conflict and living arrangements, before I move on to presenting research that is based on children's views of their participation.

Worldwide changes in family demographics have not gone unnoticed by researchers, who have examined predictors of divorce, remarriage and re-partnership, and aspects concerning stepfamilies, in addition to the adjustment of families and children (Amato, 2000; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Moxnes et al., 1999; Raley & Sweeney, 2020; Sbarra, 2015). Related aspects such as interparental conflict (Harold & Sellers, 2018; van Dijk et al., 2020; Warmuth et al., 2020; Zemp et al., 2016), and potential outcomes of various living arrangements, such as JPC, have been examined across Western societies in relation to potential benefits and detriments to children's well-being (Augustijn et al., 2023; Blaasvær et al., 2017; Nielsen, 2018; Steinbach, 2019; Turunen, 2017). These latter aspects may be understood as a shift in the international literature from viewing divorce as a harmful event, to an emphasis on the associated transitions (Zartler, 2021), challenges, and possible resiliency for children (Flowerdew & Neale, 2003; Moxnes, 2003; Smart, 2003). The emphasis on parental separation as a *process* consider the number and type of transitions that follow after parents have split up, and also how parental separation brings with it new ways of interacting with people that children may experience as difficult (Moxnes, 2003; Smart, 2003). Part of this change in perspective includes knowing what the children think and feel about their experiences (Smart, 2003), which is in line with a child-centred perspective.

Another type of transition is changes that parents endure (and that also affect the everyday lives of children). For instance, an international literature review points to adults who have separated as being more likely to experience a decrease in perceived well-being, such as in economic situation, which perhaps single mothers are more likely to experience than fathers (Raley & Sweeney, 2020). This tendency is often explained by the reduction in recourses or the view on separation as a crisis (Raley & Sweeney, 2020). The negative effects of divorce may be weaker in social contexts where welfare systems are stronger, or societies place less emphasis on marriage (Kalmijn, 2017), such as the Norwegian context. Thus, contextual

aspects must be considered, such as welfare benefits and gender differences in the workforce in terms of possible negative outcomes (Raley & Sweeney, 2020).

4.1 Interparental conflict and collaboration

Research from Western societies has also pointed to the potential risk that parental divorce can pose to children (Amato, 2000; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Moxnes et al., 1999). Most research has been carried out in the context of legal divorce, as it has been more difficult to identify families in which separated parents were not married.

Since interparental conflicts can continue or arise after parental separation, interparental conflict has been studied and identified as an important aspect of parents' separation process in terms of children's adjustment (Borren & Helland, 2013; Ghazarian & Buehler, 2010; Harold & Sellers, 2018; Nilsen et al., 2012; O'Hara et al., 2019; Rejaän et al., 2022; Rhoades, 2008). Parental stress can influence whether children internalise or externalise problems, their school performance, physical health, etc. (Bøe, 2015). One reason is that parents may not understand the extent to which children are exposed to interparental conflict or violence, or they may not be fully aware of the problems that children may experience (Rudd, Hotzworth-Munroe, et al., 2015). Interestingly, a Norwegian study suggests parents particularly high levels of conflict may be more attentive to their children's well-being than low-conflict parents (Holt et al., 2021), which may point to a need for low-conflict parents to become more aware of their children's reactions. Various forms of parental stress call for interventions with the aim of preventing problems for children or improving their resiliency, including parental separation or interparental conflict (Skogen et al., 2018).

Parental cooperation, for instance, may be an important protective factor in terms of children's externalising and internalising problems (Lamela et al., 2016). Particularly older children seem to be more affected by conflict between parents, perhaps due to prolonged exposure and acquired maladaptive coping strategies which persist over time and increase their vulnerability (Rhoades, 2008). However, younger children can also experience parental conflict as stressful, and even quite young children can give extensive descriptions of the relational and domestic situations under which they live (Dahlberg et al., 2023). Parents with lower socioeconomic status are seen as being more prone to having untreated mental illnesses or interparental conflicts (Bøe, 2015), which make them more likely to exhibit inappropriate parenting behaviours (Krishnakumar & Buehler, 2000). Such parenting behaviours may be role diffusion or otherwise impair the parent-child relationship quality (van Dijk et al., 2020,

please note the important corrigendum), which in turn then affect a child's adjustment to parental separation.

Some scholars argue that interparental conflict risks children being put in loyalty conflicts between their parents (Afifi, 2003; Afifi & McManus, 2010; Amato & Afifi, 2006; Birnbaum & Saini, 2012; Buchanan et al., 1991; Rød et al., 2008; van Dijk et al., 2020). The issue of loyalty conflict has been connected to shared residence, as children can feel guilt or loyalty conflicts if they do not truly wish for a particular settlement, like equal time-sharing (Haugen, 2007a, 2010; Johnsen et al., 2018; Marschall, 2014). However, some studies also highlight the loyalty to a parent depends on the parent's investment in emotionally close relationships and "quality time" (Merson et al., 2023).

4.2 Living arrangements and parent-child relationships

While making decisions about residence and contact, scholars have argued that one needs to take into account the quality of a parent-child relationship quality (Kaltenborn, 2001; Neale & Flowerdew, 2007). Lower-quality parent-child relationships, together with lower parental support, less parental structuring, increased levels of hostility between parents, role diffusion (e.g. parentification), and intrusive parenting mediated the link between children's internalising and externalising problems and interparental conflict (van Dijk et al., 2020). The time spent with each parent has led to discussions about the benefits or potential drawbacks of various living arrangements. In particular, JPC has been emphasised as a way to practice family life after parental separation in a way that may improve parent-child relationship quality with both parents (Bauserman, 2002; Nielsen, 2018; Vrolijk & Keizer, 2021). Children often appreciate that relationships to both parents are maintained in such living arrangements (Blaasvær et al., 2017).

JPC have different definitions and cultural understandings across jurisdictions and cultures. In Norway, JPC usually refers to Norwegian: "delt bosted" (shared residence) which in spoken language often imply an equal time-sharing (symmetrical JPC). JPC may mean different thing in other cultural contexts in which it is practised, where there may be differences in type of welfare state, level of gender equality, and prevalence of egalitarian parenting practises. Additionally, according to some scholars, research on JPC and children's adjustment to parental separation often have methodological weaknesses, for instance, that choosing this particular living arrangement may be related to socioeconomic and demographic differences and therefore there may be bias in samples (Blaasvær et al., 2017; Steinbach, 2019; Wiik,

2022). It can therefore be challenging to draw any certain conclusions about the superiority of one arrangement over any other arrangement. Scholars have argued the need to consider the child's individual situation when making decisions about residence and contact (Andenæs et al., 2017; Berman & Daneback, 2022; Steinbach & Augustijn, 2021), for instance by allowing flexibility in the predefined scheme (Birnbaum & Saini, 2015; Carson et al., 2018; Haugen, 2010; Kitterød & Lidén, 2021). Other variables that have been suggested to be important are the parent-child relationship, family economy and interparental conflict (Augustijn et al., 2023). Importantly, in a Norwegian context, no differences have been found between children's well-being in different living arrangements (Augustijn et al., 2023).

In an Australian study, parent-child communication was emphasised by children and young people as important. Good communication could help them understand the new ways of doing family, help build strong parent-child relationships after the separation, and help children accept the changes that were happening (Carson et al., 2018). For instance, parents could contribute to strengthen relationships by listening to their children and being interested in children's lives, for instance by investing not only in time together, but in "quality time" together (Carson et al., 2018). The relationships that children are part of contribute to 'a feeling of home' which is created through the interactions that a child is part of in everyday activities (Campo et al., 2020). Campo and colleagues (2020) also argued that home is a useful concept in family law, as it is not only a physical residence to children, or a list of good parenting practices, but rather a relational experience and idea. Relational experiences are connected to a sense of ease and comfort, physical safety and emotional safety, and enjoying time spent with those to whom children had relationships (often the family). Lidén and Kitterød (2020) added to the understanding of home as having relational, emotional, and practical dimensions that may challenge the conception of sharing time equally between parents as the norm and the fairest solution.

During conflicts, parents can engage in manipulative behaviour towards the child, or there can be violence from a parent, and these can be reasons for children resisting contact with a parent (Fidler & Bala, 2010; Kelly & Johnston, 2005). Manipulation is here understood as "an intentional, underhand strategy used by the manipulator for egoistic purposes" (Warming et al., 2019, p. 44). Violence from a parent can result in a child deciding not to disclose their experiences (Callaghan et al., 2017). Yet, children surviving violence in close relationships may still want to share their views about living arrangements and have a say in decisions regarding contact (Holt, 2018). Research (and also adults) that labels a child as "manipulated"

risks undermining that child's experiences and view them as untrustworthy (Warming et al., 2019). Assuming that a child has been manipulated will lessen that child's ability to exercise agency and hinder their opportunities to share their views (Morrison et al., 2020).

4.3 Outcomes of including children in family mediation processes

Some studies in other Western contexts (e.g. Australia, USA) have tried to measure whether child-inclusive family mediation can have positive effect on aspects that may buffer or improve children's well-being directly or indirectly. The studies have compared child-inclusive practice with either "mediation as usual" or child-focused practice.

The results are mixed. For instance, child-focused mediation may be a better approach to solve financial issues (McIntosh et al., 2009). However, child-inclusive mediation resulted in fewer legal actions over care and living arrangements, fewer returns to mediation, more overnight stays with fathers, fathers' and children's higher satisfaction with living arrangements, reduction in parental acrimony, fathers having more confidence in their parenting ability, children feeling closer to their fathers, children feeling less caught in the middle, and more (McIntosh et al., 2009, p. 90-91). In the USA, Ballard and colleagues (2013) conducted a randomised controlled trial. The follow-up study showed that both child-focused and child-inclusive family mediation may be more beneficial compared to mediation as usual regarding re-litigations, and child-inclusive family mediation was more beneficial compared to child-focused in regards to legal motions, hearings and court orders (Rudd, Ogle, et al., 2015). A qualitative study from Australia by Bell and colleagues (2013) looked at how much mediation helped solve conflicts between parents. The authors suggested that child-inclusive mediation did not seem to be more beneficial for the parental relationship with the child and conflict resolution. However, child-inclusive mediation was experienced by parents as, in general, as a positive experience.

The results of these studies on the effects of including children in family mediation are often uncertain, and often there are also methodological weaknesses. For instance, McIntosh and colleagues (2008) did not include a control group or baseline in their analysis. Ballard and colleagues (2013) had unequally distributed samples in the groups being compared. Bell and colleagues (2013) had a small sample size and tried to look at effect through qualitative interviews. In addition, it is uncertain whether and how any of these studies are pertinent to

the Norwegian context. These forms of mediation can be considered pre-court mediation, and some differ in child consultants' professional backgrounds and mandates in the conversation.

A systematic literature review was delegated by Bufdir to examine the effect of involving children in family mediation on children's well-being (Ludvigsen et al., 2016, p. 4). Only the study by McIntosh and colleagues (2009) from Australia that had used children's well-being as an outcome variable, and there, the findings were inconclusive as to whether child-inclusive practises affected interparental conflict or ability to collaboration.

The wish from Bufdir to examine possible effects on children's outcomes may imply an ascribed purpose to child-inclusive practise in family mediation as enhancing children's well-being. Although it is not the only purpose, it is important to pay attention to such focus, as it may lead to implications for future development of the service. Hennem (2014), for instance, warned against child-centred services and policies must be proven to be effective if they are to be widely implemented. Such aims may result in policies that apply a universal and general child perspective rather than policies that view children as individuals with different needs.

4.4 Children's participation in decision-making after parental separation

Child-inclusive practice can also be explored through children's views, which bring forth the subjective experiences of children. A synthesis of the international literature examining children's experiences of different forms of participation in relation to parental separation shows that children emphasise rights, protection, capacity, authentic involvement, timing, methods for inclusion, and democratic aspects (Birnbaum & Saini, 2012). In the following, I will elaborate on some of these aspects.

4.4.1 Children sharing views that concern living arrangements

Strandbu and Thørnblad (2015) investigated the messages that children and mediators created and gave to parents when mediation was carried out according to the Children in Mediation model. Messages contained emotional reactions to the parental relationship breakdown, concern that one of the parents would be missed, and expressed a preference for the parents to live near each other and near the child's friends. Messages also expressed the need to preserve traditions and family practises, and improving cooperation and friendliness between parents. Children expressed that they were adjusting to new ways of doing family, such as deciding where their toys would be and how they would relate to parents' new

partners. Lastly, children used the opportunity to communicate matters related to security, such as reporting that their parent(s) had been aggressive or violent, that there had been severe conflicts between parents, that there had been substance and alcohol abuse, or that their parents suffered from mental or physical illness. Intertwined in the messages were also preferences about sharing time between parents' households and organising contact with parents after the parental separation. The variation in the content of the messages perhaps reflects what the child conversation should try to achieve, namely that the point is to get insight into the child's feelings, questions, and worries (Bufdir, 2022a). On the other hand, children who express living arrangement preferences may do so even though this is not mediators' main focus (Bufdir, 2022a).

Children's participation, as expressed in UNCRC Article 12, implies that children should have a say about decisions that affect their everyday lives. As I have outlined earlier, living arrangements are central to decision-making after parental separation. The topic of living arrangements is on the table, at least for the parents involved. For children, on the other hand, this topic may depend on many factors, such as their age, the level of conflict between parents, or the discretion of judgement made by the family mediator. However, it may also depend on the agency that is created for children to share views on living arrangements. I therefore ask in Article II (Grape et al., 2021):

How frequently do children convey living arrangement preferences in the 'children's message' during participation in family mediation, and how do children differ in types of preferred living arrangements in terms of their ages, sexes, and level of conflict between their parents?

4.4.2 Children negotiating decisions about residence and contact

I find it interesting that living arrangements is a topic that is connected with cautiousness from professionals in their encounters with children. I find the same interest in interparental conflicts and the preconsciousness with including children early in the parents' family mediation process. Such cautiousness seems to be, at least partly, based on the possibility of loyalty conflicts. Loyalty conflicts can be understood either as children feeling of being pressured to choose between parents, or as children feeling that they need to consider their parents' needs more than their own needs (Strandbu & Thørnblad, 2015). Children's messages, during participation that was part of the children in Mediation model, often expressed wishes for "fairness". Some messages seemed to care more for the parents and

express worry about how parents were going to cope with the separation. Strandbu and Thørnblad (2015) emphasised that it is important that parents know whether their children are concerned about them. Such topics can be subject for important reflections during the mediation. Occasionally, however, mediators feel unable to protect children from negative reactions from parents, so they sometimes nuance or even conceal some of children's messages (Salamonsen et al., 2022; Strandbu et al., 2019; Thørnblad et al., 2019).

My interest, then, is on the interconnectedness between the topic of living arrangements, interparental conflicts, and issues of loyalty. This interconnectedness is important, because some research shows that children generally want to be heard, for instance on matters relating to custody and contact, but they do not necessarily want to be responsible for making the decisions (Birnbaum & Saini, 2012; Johansen et al., 2023).

Another reason why I have this interest relates to how courts manage children's participation and children's views in contested matters. For instance, after new amendments in Norwegian (Skjørten & Sandberg, 2019) and Scottish legislation (Tisdall & Morrison, 2012), children's participation in court proceedings has increased: in these countries, children are now heard more often than not, and their views are often discussed as part of the decision-making and final court judgements. Aspects of parental disputes in family law proceedings are likely to include a certain level of acrimony and conflict between parents. Sometimes there are allegations of violence or manipulating behaviour from a parent towards the child, which might not be easy to reveal during children's participation (see e.g. Birnbaum, 2017). Morrison and colleagues (2020) argue, based on interviews with Scottish children and their mothers, that such difficult cases can pose a severe risk to children's participatory rights. They illustrate how a parent (in this article, mothers) support the child's wish for having a representative in court when the father has been violent, and how this support is taken as proof of manipulation from the mother towards the child. Accusations of a child being manipulated tend to position children as incompetent, as powerless victims, or as powerful egoistic or psychopathological agents (although research investigating parental separation has found that children are more often treated as incompetent than as agents when it comes to manipulation; Warming et al., 2019). Warming and colleagues (2019) argued that accusations of manipulation might explain why, despite the general acknowledgement that children have a right to participate, children have varying amounts of influence on living arrangements after parental separation (see also Cashmore & Parkinson, 2008; Haugen, 2010).

This leads to the third reason for why I find interest in the topic of living arrangements, a wish to protect children, and possible issues of loyalty. Although some children do not want to make the decisions, research on children's experiences, for instance in an Australian context, shows that some children in contested or conflicted matters may wish to influence the decisions (Carson et al., 2018; Cashmore, 2011; Cashmore & Parkinson, 2008). Children in Ireland who lived in families with abusive fathers haven an emphatic desire to influence decisions (Holt, 2018). The views of children with such experiences may be of particular importance, because their disclosures of violence from fathers risks being overshadowed by the presumption that contact between fathers and their children is inherently good for children, and an inherent right of the father (Macdonald, 2017).

Berman (2015) suggested, based on research from Sweden, that it is important to be aware of the different degrees to which children are enabled to participate in decision about residence and contact arrangements and everyday matters. Greater participation allows for new ways for a child to exercise agency within the family. She suggest that adolescents' exertions of agency is a sign of how privileges and responsibilities in relationships between adults and children shift, especially during the process of parental separation (Berman, 2015). It was found that power struggles and negotiations between children and their parents potentially resulted in children's wishes being adjusted to the frameworks that parents made (Johansen et al., 2023). Alternatively, children could choose to resist or comply with parents' demands for time-sharing and contact (Johansen et al., 2023). All possible reactions can pose new challenges in the practise of living arrangements and parent-child relationships. For some families, participation in decision-making can provide children with an opportunity to negotiate flexibility in parenting schemes, while also maintaining strong parent-child relationships (Graham et al., 2009).

Building on the findings from Article II (Grape et al., 2021), and other previous research, I wanted to explore adolescents' living arrangement preferences further. To accomplish this goal, I analysed parental separation narratives created by adolescents, in which they gave assertive descriptions of their negotiations with parents and mediators. In Article III (Grape et al., under review), I asked:

How do adolescents negotiate and justify closeness to and distance from their parents, and how may these justifications challenge the conception of loyalty to both parents?

4.4.3 Children's participation and the making of meaning

While children may want to influence decisions on and the way that the family practise living arrangements, their living arrangement preferences or views that relate to other aspects, may require further exploration and meaning making. This can be central to facilitating participation on children's premises, and on the relational agency that is created during participation.

In a Norwegian context, children participating through the Children in Mediation model seem to be generally satisfied with their participation, even when parents have conflicts or possible worrisome conditions (for an explanation of this term, see page 49) have been registered (Strandbu et al., 2016; Strandbu et al., 2020; Thørnblad & Strandbu, 2018). Some children were dissatisfied with their participation in mediation that followed the Children in Mediation model (7 children [6,3 per cent of the sample] were negative); 4 children [3,6 per cent of the sample] were neutral) in the study by (Strandbu et al., 2020). Some said that their participation had been unnecessary, that it was an adult task to solve, that they were not given the choice to participate, and that the mediator did not understand or did not trust them to report their (individual) situation (Strandbu et al., 2020). This was, however, the minority of participating children. Dissatisfaction with their participation has also been exemplified elsewhere, for instance in a Canadian context. Here, some children reported that their social worker got their views wrong, and that they were unable to correct mistakes in the written report (Birnbaum, 2017). This points to the importance of adults providing trusting, supportive and reciprocal relationships to facilitate children's participation, which has been encouraged by Smith and colleagues (2003).

Children can participate in court proceedings in Aotearoa-New Zealand (Orr et al., 2024); in Canada, they can have a conversation with a social worker who will write a report called "Views of the child report" (Birnbaum, 2017); in some states in the US or in Canada they can have a conversation with a parent coordinator (Quigley & Cyr, 2018); in Denmark, they can have a "child conversation" with a child consultant or be supported by a "contact person" in the Danish Agency of Family Law (Dahl & Eiberg, 2023). Across this wide range of empirical possibilities, children generally seem positively inclined to participation, though only if participation ensures that their views will be authentically included and at the same time balanced with their need for support in maintaining relationships with their parents (Birnbaum & Saini, 2012).

Focusing on what works in order to enable children's participation, some children in a Canadian context valued participation that was relaxed, such as having a conversation with a social worker who would talk about the child's views more broadly, not only the decisions about custody and contact (Birnbaum, 2017). Children didn't seem to have anything to add to the report at the time of the research interview, which was conducted weeks or months after participation in the separation proceedings (Birnbaum, 2017). Another aspect that might increase children's satisfaction with their participation is the level of preparations⁸ and amount of information that adults give to children prior to participation. This seemed to be a key factor for children's reported experience in a Danish context (Dahl & Eiberg, 2023).

Across studies in Western countries, it seems like children emphasise *how* professionals listen. This is also exemplified in the study of Orr and colleagues (2024). Children in this study emphasised the importance of "extraordinary-listening" during their participation in court proceedings. This type of listening can build trust with professionals, which make children feel respected and heard and thereby enable the professional to represent children's views in the subsequent decision-making. These results concur with what Alminde (2024) called "listening to open up" or "emergent listening", which are something very different from "listening to fit in" or "listening as usual". True listening can make visible the power structures that may privilege adult comprehension and undermine children's perspectives, which Alminde (2024) claims has sometimes happened in the Danish family court.

Salamonsen and colleagues (2022) draw on work by Foucault (1990) when claiming that power exist in (changing) relationships, arguing that mediators during family mediation in Norway have power through their knowledge about families and children, and that mediators can use this power to define the content of the conversations. As such, mediators will consequently affect parents' and children's understandings. How mediators contribute to new understandings of children's experiences is important because some children can use the conversation to test whether it is okay to share their thoughts and feelings with someone (Strandbu et al., 2019), and the participation of children can increase mediators' access 'backstage' to the private sphere of families (Thørnblad et al., 2019). The views that a child communicates to mediators can be perceived by mediators as valuable for the parents to

⁸ Note that this preparation is not about influence from or manipulation by a parent, but rather from the parent in support of the child so that they feel ready to participate.

know, as a form of feedback on their parenting, or that it is necessary to withhold the child's message from parents because of possible consequences (Strandbu et al., 2019). In the choices that mediators make, they bring with them their own ideas of children's competence, children's need for protection, and their ideas about children's right to share their own views in their interactions with the mediator, and their right of mediators to use discretion in that respect (Salamonsen et al., 2022).

Children's satisfaction with their participation in family mediation in Norway can be explained by individual aspects of the mediator, their understanding of their democratic right to be heard, or their opportunity to process their emotional reactions (Strandbu et al., 2020). The latter was most salient in qualitative interviews with children under 12 years old who had participated in parents' family mediation process in Norway (Eikrem & Andenæs, 2021). Talking about children's reactions can be an important goal of children's participation because doing so helps create a shared understanding of the children's situation and experiences (Sommer, 2019). Such a shared understanding between parents and their children can be particularly difficult to achieve during parental separation (Haugen, 2007b; Holt et al., 2021). Mediators' contributions to a shared understanding between children and their parents adds not only to the purpose of including children as a democratic goal of them being heard, but also to a purpose of meaning-making and in giving support to forming views (Strandbu et al., 2020). Such support in meaning-making can contribute to a more holistic assessment of what is in 'the best interest' of the individual child (Strandbu et al., 2020).

Most of the research on children's participation in family law proceedings that is conducted outside of Norway are more closely related to court proceedings. In Australia, Carson and colleagues (2018) point to the difference between court related proceedings and non-family law proceedings (e.g. post-separation counselling), where children seemed more satisfied with their participation in the latter. Family mediation in Norway can provide an example of an alternative dispute resolution process that emphasise more heavily on a therapeutic approach, both to the parents' family mediation process and the child-inclusive practice. Also, due to adolescents' particular right to have a say in decisions in Norway, an exploration of adolescents' experiences of participating in parents' family mediation process may illustrate how agency is created in relation to the involved adults. Communication and dialogue are key aspects if an adolescent's participation is to be meaningful. I have therefore asked in Article IV:

How can adolescents' agency be understood in the light of how they manage privacy boundaries when they participate in their parents' family mediation process?

5 Methodology

Based on a pragmatic approach, and the theoretical framework of sociocultural psychology, I have put emphasis on the context of parental separation processes (Article I). I have also examined children’s living arrangement preferences in their messages to parents in the context of the Children in Mediation model (Article II). Next, adolescents’ experiences of negotiating closeness to and distance from parents during a parental separation process (Article III), and their experiences of what it means to participate in the family mediation process as part of their larger narrative of the parental separation process (Article IV), are additional sub-studies in this dissertation. The methodological aspects of these sub-studies will be outlined and reflected upon in the following.

Table 5 Overview of the empirical material of the dissertation

	Participants	Families	Type of data
Article I	-	-	Policies and legal documents
Article II	169 girls 177 boys Total: 246 children	214	‘The child’s message’ (see description of the Children in Mediation model) Questionnaires to mediators
Articles III and IV	9 girls 2 boys Total: 11 adolescents	8	Qualitative interviews

5.1 A pragmatic point of departure

Epistemology, or the “theory of knowledge”, holds two central questions: 1) What can be known? and 2) What it means to know something? (Biesta, 2010, p. 111). Furthermore, there are two different views about knowledge: one that holds that objective knowledge is possible and therefore independent from the knowers, and the other that holds that knowledge is entirely produced by the knower and therefore is not at all independent (Biesta, 2010). However, there is also an in-between position that allows for at least a subjective element of what one views as knowledge, and this is where I am positioned (Biesta, 2010).

According to Morgan (2014), inquiry “is a process by which beliefs that have become problematic are examined and resolved through action” (p. 1047). A pragmatic approach can epistemologically justify and make logical the methodological choices for using methods from different paradigms (e.g. from both qualitative and quantitative research; Johnson et al., 2007) as long as it is appropriate for examining the intentions and practical implications of

questions being asked (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). Choosing appropriate methods for the question being asked has been central in this study of child-inclusive family mediation. The primary aim has been for the inquiry to have practical implications, that is, that we can learn things that will give new understandings of and improve child-inclusive family mediation.

Importantly, a pragmatic approach allows for ethical questions to be handled in the same way as other questions of inquiry, namely “what to do and about the difference it would make to act one way or another” (Morgan, 2014, p. 1050). For me, the questions I ask about children’s participation in family mediation is strongly connected to an ethical choice. I do not aim to ask about “evidence” in terms of possible effects of an intervention. An inquiry that targets “evidence” (very often) heavily relies on a view in which objective knowledge is possible and necessary for measures to be valid and reliable (even if this assumed objectivity can be highly questioned). An alternative may be the question that Morgan (2014) proposes, which downplays the emphasis on a one-sided position within ontology and epistemology: “What is the nature of human experience?” (p., 1048). In this thesis, I adjust this question to be “What is the nature of *the adolescent’s* experience of family mediation?”. By targeting adolescents’ subjective realities, one adheres to what the social sciences refer to as the principle of subjectivity (Skjervheim, 2000). Adolescents’ subjective experiences of their participation in family mediation may help improve a service that aims to support the best interests of children.

5.2 Policy comparison

The comparison of countries in Article I targeted each country’s social, historical, and economical context. This article also compared decision-making processes in relation to parental separation (including children’s participation), and how decisions were made about various arrangements after parental separation, such as maintenance and decisions regarding physical and legal custody. Any links between parental separation processes and child welfare and protection services was examined.

The policy comparison was conducted by filling out a table (Appendix 1) that was thematically related to overall trends in family composition and public discourse, legal frameworks for divorce, overall trends in child protection and discussions about child well-being, key concepts of child maltreatment, divorce and outcomes for children, divorce and domestic violence, and overall social system/society. As the data collection progressed, the

table expanded when it became clear that additional information should be gathered. The table was filled out by using both official statistics and surveys, policy documents, and legal documents, with the criteria of being directly relevant to families during parental separation.

5.3 A quasi-mixed design: Combining content analysis and statistical analysis

Article II used data that was retrieved from the Hearing Children in Mediation research project between 2013–2015. The Hearing Children in Mediation research project was categorised as not being subject to notification by the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (ref. nr. 33581/3/SSA; Appendix 2).

I have called the methods applied in this sub-study a quasi-mixed design (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006), because I convert qualitative data (children's messages) into quantitative data and apply this new variable in statistical analysis.

5.3.1 Data collection

During the time of data collection, all parents were invited to include their children in the first mediation session in line with the Children in Mediation model (Strandbu & Thørnblad, 2015). Parents and children who accepted the invitation were then invited to participate in this study, and the study is therefore based on self-selection. It was not possible to calculate a response rate per se, but the selection consisted of 12 per cent of all mediation cases at the four offices during the period of data collection (Thørnblad & Strandbu, 2018). Mediators filled out the questionnaire immediately after family mediation sessions were finished. Mediators had on average 11.3 cases each, and the variation was 1–46 cases. The mediators had a variety of professional backgrounds, and all of them had authorisation in line with regulations for mediators.

The differentiation and process mediation had not been implemented at the time of data collection. Thus, family counselling offices could invite parents to bring their children with them to the first (mandatory) family mediation session, regardless of level of conflict or other worrisome conditions that, at the time of writing this synopsis, would have led to a process mediation.

The questionnaire (Appendix 3) was filled out by 19 mediators at four family counselling offices (out of 41 offices), in two out of four regions. The mediator registered number of children and the children's age, type of mediation (cohabitation, marriage/divorce mediation

or pre-court mediation), the mediator's subjective assessment of level of conflict and level of agreement on a visual analogue scale from 0 to 100, and other worrisome conditions (related to alcohol and substances, violence, child welfare services, psychiatry, or "failure of care"). The "child's message" that the child had made together with the mediator was also written in the questionnaire.

5.3.2 Participants

During the initial familiarisation with the data set and structuring of the data files, I became aware of possible errors in the registration from the forms into the data file. Thus, I looked over the files (originally 217 mediation cases and 356 children) and corrected the errors. The quality check resulted in 213 cases and 346 children. Thus, 169 boys and 177 girls from 213 families were included in the analysis for this article. The children were aged between 4–18, on average 10.8 ($SD = 3.0$) years old. These changes did not lead to any significant changes concerning characteristics of the sample that has been described in earlier articles (Strandbu & Thørnblad, 2015, 2016; Strandbu et al., 2020; Thørnblad & Strandbu, 2018).

5.3.3 Analysis

Siblings could choose to attend the conversation with the mediator together or separately. Many siblings attended together and wrote the same message. However, not all siblings agreed. Thus, I organised the IBM SPSS Statistics file with each child as a unit. I separated identical messages in cases where the child's message had been duplicated automatically (e.g. because siblings had written their message in the same text box), but in which the content made different views between siblings explicit.

Next, a coding scheme was developed to identify different types of living arrangement preferences (Grape et al., 2021, p. 41). Test-retest reliability was calculated, all the children's messages were reviewed by at least two of the co-authors, and a shared interpretation of the messages was achieved in all cases. When a message was somewhat unspecific, it was child's message was interpreted by contextualising the message together with other available information (e.g. comments from the mediator or agreed living and contact arrangement).

The children's messages have previously been analysed (Strandbu & Thørnblad, 2015). However, I did a re-analysis of these messages with a focus on living arrangement preferences. The identified living arrangements were examined in Nvivo 14. The preferences were read, coded, and categorised into themes.

A generalised linear mixed model (GLMM) analysis was used to account for dependency across siblings' living arrangement preferences. The GLMM analysis was only conducted on parental separation cases (pre-court mediation cases were excluded). I applied a backwards elimination process to achieve the best model fit.

5.4 Qualitative interviews

The qualitative interviews were given in a separate sub-study, which was approved by the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research with ref. nr. 150314 (Appendix 4). The project was not categorized as 'health research' and have therefore not required notification to any Regional Ethical Committee.

Articles III and IV must be seen as continuations of the findings in Article II and other previous research that highlighted the particular position of adolescents' in negotiating relationships with parents. I targeted adolescents because of the specific legal implications of becoming 12 years old in Norway. When adolescents between 12 and 16 attend family mediation, assuming they are familiar with international and Norwegian legislations about a child's rights to be heard, they expect to have some influence.

Because professionals are encouraged to be cautious about talking with children about living arrangements after parental separation, this part of the PhD project aimed to question whether such caution is necessary. However, and also somewhat self-contradictorily, I did not do this by asking about living arrangements directly. Rather, I draw on the theoretical framework presented in chapter 7 about a sociocultural perspective. In the following, I will outline the methodological considerations and strategies, emphasising that ethical questions and considerations are inherently part of methodological choices. I have therefore chosen to discuss ethical considerations not as a single paragraph, but rather continuous throughout this chapter.

5.4.1 Sample, sampling, and participants

Defining the group of people to study. The research questions in Articles III and IV focused on adolescents' personal experiences of their participation in their parents' family mediation processes, and their relationships with their parents. Initially, the project was primarily focused on the latter aspect. The former question, about experiences of mediation, was developed throughout the interviews and during the analytical process of Article IV, and resulted from unexpected preliminary interpretations we made when reading the interviews.

My aim was to create a dialogue where the adolescents could narrate their experiences of how they utilised their participation in their parents' family mediation process (henceforth participation), and the impacted that participation had on their everyday life in one way or another. However, I suspected that such a short meeting with a professional would (often) fall short of actually providing any support, other than being an audience for the child's views. I used a strategic sampling (Flick, 2007; Mason, 2002) to recruit adolescents so that the narratives had varied on the following criteria:

- Recruit at both ends of the continuum of ages between 12 and 17. Adolescents may both expect and actually acquire more influence in decision-making as they age and there might be quite a difference between a 12 year old and a 17 year old in ability to negotiate and experience agency in their relationships.
- Variation in terms of *time and duration in the parental separation process*: that is, variation in how long they had been attending mediation, and number of meetings with the mediator.

Although some might be cautious about using any fixed numbers of appropriate sample sizes in qualitative interview studies (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015), it is still good to have some guidance about how many participants one needs to recruit. Scholars recommend that ideographic interview studies attending an individual's own experience may seek a sample size of 3–16 (see e.g. Smith et al., 2009). Guest and colleagues (2006, p. 65) defined saturation as “the point in data collection and analysis when new information produces little or no change to the codebook” and recommended 6–12 interviews. Others suggest that in the case of saturation, 9–14 may be sufficient for those with relatively homogenous study populations and research objectives being narrowly defined (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Nevertheless, in this study, the aim was not so much to reach saturation as it was to cover aspects of the phenomenon being studied (participation in family mediation) and acquire richness in the participants' accounts (being case oriented). Scholars may tend to recruit more participants than necessary to answer research questions (Sandelowski, 1995), and perhaps particularly in PhD projects (e.g. because the PhD candidate wants to be ‘on the safe side’; Mason, 2010).

My aim was to listen to adolescents' narratives and be open to the experiences they wanted to share in the research interview. The narrative approach was useful, because it gave rich accounts of what had happened, and what had been important to the adolescents. In the end, I

found eleven adolescents as satisfactory on the criteria of variation, and the richness of their narratives.

Non-clinical sample and diversity of childhoods. Because of the nature of family mediation, children who participate do so by virtue of the parental separation, and not because they have clinical symptoms of any kind. Thus, I did neither recruit nor exclude participants for this study due to any symptomatic criteria. In information meetings with the family counselling offices, I encouraged family mediators to recruit participants who represent *human variation* (Scotch & Schriener, 1997). Children whose voices are being heard in research tend to be the privileged ones with language skills whom it is easy for researchers to talk with (Richards et al., 2015). My encouragement to mediators was not because of theoretical purposes, but rather because of an intention of reducing possible barriers that may have existed if I had not been explicit about welcoming them into the study (see e.g. Coyne, 2010). I would argue that it is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure a safe and facilitative research context regardless of the vulnerabilities or diversities of participants. Still, I did not inform specifically about alternative ways to adapt the interview setting. The method applied was interviews, focusing on verbal communication. Some adolescents may have experienced this as a barrier to their participation.

Another aspect that I emphasised to the mediators was that of immigrants and the willingness to translate information sheets into the respective language and use interpreters in the research interviews. I have extensive experience from clinical work in which interpreters have been used.

These aspects were part of an aim of respecting the diversity of childhood experiences in relation to parental separation. My aim was to be reflexive about how I may (not) contribute to additional discrimination of certain groups of children (Feinstein & O'Kane, 2008). In addition to age, gender, human variation, language, and cultural backgrounds, the recruitment was done in bigger cities and rural areas.

Recruitment. Five family counselling offices (of 41 offices nationwide) three out of four regions contributed to the recruitment. I had a physical meeting, a digital meeting or a conversation by phone with leaders and/or employees to inform about the recruitment strategy and aims for the study. The family counselling offices and connected family mediators contributed to the recruitment of adolescents between August throughout December 2020.

Initially, mediators recruited adolescents based on the criteria that they were between 12-17 years and that they had their first meeting with the family mediator between four to 12 months prior to the research interview. However, after discussing with mediators who contributed to the data collection, the latter criterium was difficult to fulfil. The data collection was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic. Even though adjustments were made (e.g. interviews through video conferencing), it took time to recruit adolescents to the study. One reason may be the pandemic, because the family mediation was sometimes done only by phone, and sometimes during the intense period with restrictions, the mediation certificate was issued automatically. The changed criterium was that adolescents had participated in a conversation with the mediator during their parents' family mediation process. An overview of when in the parental separation process the adolescents had participated in family mediation can be seen in the figure 1 in Article IV.

I had developed different information sheets (Appendix 5-8); information sheet to mediators, information sheets about the study that mediators could provide to adolescents, in which they were asked if the mediator could provide me with contact information (Norwegian and Sami language), and formal information and consent sheets in line with ethical and privacy requirements and guidelines to parents and adolescents (Norwegian, Sami language and English). I asked for feedback on age appropriateness and comprehensibility of the information sheets from six adolescents in my family and friends-network.

The information sheets were translated to Sami language because one of the family counselling offices that contributed to the recruitment is located within Sápmi (a Sami language and administration area).

Table 6 Overview of number of girls and boys and age of participants

	Boys	Girls
Age 12–14	1	6
Age 15–17	1	3

Participants. The final number of participants whom the analyses are based on ended at 11, representing eight families (three sibling pairs), with both age groups, and both girls and boys being represented. Boys and girls may experience interparental conflicts differently (Harold & Sellers, 2018), and may differ in parent-adolescent relationships after parental separation (Vrolijk & Keizer, 2021). Both adolescent boys and girls in Norway are generally satisfied with their parents, however, with boys reporting more often than girls that they conceal most

of their private life from their parents (Bakken, 2022). One may therefore assume that it is more difficult to recruit adolescent boys to qualitative research projects that are based on personal talk, which might explain why there are only two boys in the sample.

Adolescents came from urban and rural districts, and two of the adolescents had an African country of birth. None of the participants had any disabilities that was apparent to me. None of the participants needed an interpreter.

The eleven adolescents gave variation of different ways that their participation was integrated into their parental separation process. I therefore considered these 11 interviews to have the necessary quality to answer the research question(s), which is one of the key considerations to make when deciding on the sample size in qualitative research (Sandelowski, 1995). Not to mention that it also had three additional benefits: 1) it was not limited to conflicted/disputed parental cases (which often has been the case in international research literature on children's experiences of their participation). However, by extending the time-criteria, I did achieve a variation in terms of troubles experienced by participants – both in terms of parental conflicts, *and* in terms of parent-adolescent conflict. 2) it was not limited to shared care as the context and point of departure for the overall data collection and focus. Nevertheless, symmetrical JPC was represented as living arrangement, and in different ways (a practise of the past, and a highly wished-for practise under certain circumstances). But sole physical custody was also represented and provided valuable variation into other aspects of how the participation in the family mediation had impact on their everyday life. 3) from what has been discussed and presented in research literature on living arrangements (and possible harm of loyalty conflicts), these narratives made me, and the co-authors, surprised by the level of agency that adolescents aimed for in meetings with adults, and particularly with their parents.

Eight participants wanted to be contacted to read the manuscripts. When the manuscripts were ready, two of these adolescents replied. One of them only wanted to read the published articles, and one met me together with one of the parents. I then went through the articles, and also had a short conversation with the adolescent alone, to provide space for any thoughts or feedback that the adolescent may not want to share while the parent was present. We agreed that I would send the articles when they were published.

The final number of participants were 11. I do not have an overview of the number of children who declined the invitation to participate. It was, however, three adolescents who ended up

not participating in the research project. One was due to the lack of consent from a parent, which reflects the gatekeeping that parents can enforce when children are under the age of 16. One may assume that some parents want to manage privacy boundaries to prevent revelation that make parents less in control of private information.

In a second case, I had to end one adolescent's participation. The interview with the adolescent had to be performed remotely via video conferencing and with support from an interpreter, who was in a third location. The interpreter had prepared in advance for the questions, but they did not have some necessary equipment (specifically, a good microphone) nor were they working in quiet surroundings. Because of these technical problems, I did not feel confident that I could acquire truly informed consent from this adolescent. I ended the interview and apologised for not being able to make the participation happen. Unfortunately, the interview with this adolescent was unable to be rescheduled. This example is a classic demonstration of what is a well-known pattern (see e.g. Richards et al., 2015), that persons with minority backgrounds have fewer opportunities to be represented in research generally, and, in this case, shows why we lack knowledge about these children's lives.

The third example was an adolescent who chose to participate, conducted the interview, but later decided to withdraw from the study. Even though I felt like I lost an important interview, I also felt good about how I had achieved an informed and *voluntary* consent from this adolescent. Also, the narrative that she told was unique because it reflected her personal experiences, but important themes were covered in the other narratives. I was therefore not concerned that the withdrawal affected the saturation of the total data material.

5.4.2 The role of the interviewer and the interview context

Because people create meanings in their talk, language, and communication through interactions with others, the best way to access people's meanings and meaning-making is through people's own words (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). I have included adolescents' perspectives in the research project by conducting qualitative interviews. Through interactions between adolescents and myself in the role of a researcher, adolescents created a narrative that they felt was appropriate for them to tell me, in which new knowledge can be created (Svendby et al., 2019). It was important to invite adolescents to share their experiences, because these can differ from the experiences of adults (Strandbu, 2011), particularly during a divorce process (Haugen, 2007b; Holt et al., 2021). Thus, it is necessary to listen to

adolescents' own experiences when trying to improve a service that has the purpose of promoting the best interest of the child.

When talking directly with adolescents, one must acknowledge their position in society as more vulnerable than others in the society. Therefore, one must consider their need for protection, their right to participate and the benefits of their participation, and assess how their competence may affect the interviews and whether special consideration might be required (Backe-Hansen, 2023; Graham et al., 2013; Strandbu & Thørnblad, 2010). In the context of parental separation, adolescents who experience high parental conflict can be considered as particularly vulnerable, for instance because they might have loyalty conflicts, or because they have been talking with numerous professionals over time and may have become “tired of talking” (Norwegian: “snakketrett”). They can also be a difficult group to access for researchers (see for instance Alminde, 2021). I have therefore had the intention of being aware of my position as an adult, a clinical psychologist, and a woman. I have aimed to be sensitive towards any possible emotional reactions that could appear during research interviews. Tissues was present if adolescents became emotional. In one of the interviews I had to validate the adolescent's feelings and give time and space for the adolescent to calm down. When this happened (particularly in one of the interviews), I did not engage into their emotional reaction in a “clinical manner” through further exploring their reaction. Instead, I made a note of the reaction, validated their feelings, and kept focused on the narrative they were narrating.

Interview guide. In the interview guide, I applied some of the principles of the life mode interview developed by Haavind (1987, see Appendix 9); a first question that opens up to talk about processes within a specified time frame, transitions of events that was situated in the daily life of an individual, and follow-up questions to understand the details of the events.

The interview guide was structured in five sections. The first section was an introduction; included aspects such as establishing contact and a safe atmosphere, informing about anonymity, confidentiality (except of the information that was going to be published in anonymous form), obligation to report, and (ongoing) consent (see e.g. Backe-Hansen, 2023; Graham et al., 2013; Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees, 2021). Consent was explained as voluntary consent to participate, choose what they would like to tell and which questions they would like to answer, and the choice to withdraw from the study at a later point in time, as long as it was practical, meaning that it was still possible to identify their

contributions (after anonymisation of the interviews, one must assess whether it is possible to identify the correct narrative to enable withdrawal).

Section 2 concerned the parental separation narrative. The time frame I applied was the parental separation process; from when they got to know about the divorce and until they participated in the research interview. I also applied a timeline as a tool to help myself and the adolescent to have a shared understanding of how events connected to each other in time. The timeline was simply an arrow on a paper where I or the adolescent wrote events that was part of the narrative.

The interviews concerned a long time frame, and I chose to build on narrative principles as outlined by McAdams (1993). This meant that I asked for a highlight, a low point and a turning point, particularly if the adolescent gave signals of needing some structure of the conversation. This was part of the end of Section 2 in the interview guide.

Section 3 concerned their participation in their parents' family mediation process. Even though their participation in family mediation is the central focus of the study, I postponed the question about their participation: I asked follow-up questions about this when they introduced their participation or the mediator themselves. If they did not mention their participation, I asked directly about their conversation with the mediator (see section 3 in the interview guide). Thus, during the recruitment, adolescents were informed that the topic of the interview was parental separation process in general and decision-making practises. This was important, because the topic of the study may have significant impact on recruitment (Kristensen & Ravn, 2015). Asking primarily about mediation during recruitment and the interview, the adolescents would perhaps have prepared an opinion and a meaning about the impact it may have in their everyday life. A similar approach has been conducted by Jansen (2019), about the child welfare service's place in young people's stories.

Section 4 concerned future scripts; talking about how the future might look like.

Section 5 closed the conversation. I summarised my understanding of their narrative, and they got the chance to correct the information and the chronological ordering of events. They were asked if they wanted to be contacted before publication to read the manuscripts. This was done to ensure that their anonymity was protected, and to give them an opportunity to see what they had contributed to. This kind of practise is specified in the national ethical

guidelines in Norwegian research in social sciences and humanities (Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees, 2021, p. 26).

The interview context. They did not receive any material compensations. Adolescents chose the venue and the time for the interview (except in cases during Covid-19 pandemic restrictions). Interviews were conducted in the homes of two adolescents, at my workplace for one adolescent, at the family counselling office for one adolescent, and through video conferencing for seven adolescents. Video conferencing was used due to the Covid-19 pandemic and connected restrictions that prevented me from travelling and meeting the adolescents.

Conducting qualitative interviews through online videoconferencing can pose challenges such as deficits in the full guarantee of confidentiality and privacy of the interviewees and possibilities of family members to hear the conversation (Meherali & Louie-Poon, 2021). However, the faces of the interviewer and the adolescent are visible, thus facial expressions are part of the non-verbal communication in the interview. This form of interviewing can also create opportunities (Keen et al., 2022). It gives the adolescent the opportunity to regulate herself or himself if they do not want to show their face, and they can have a person for support present without having to let the interviewer know. In one of the interviews conducted digitally, the video did not work properly, and I could not see the adolescent. This did not stop the adolescent from talking, and the adolescent could still see my face and my expressions, which hopefully contributed to a feeling of being heard and understood.

5.4.3 Analysis: content and form

The analysis of Articles III and IV draw on interpretive approaches explained by Magnusson and Marecek (2015). They call it interpretative instead of qualitative because interpretation is “at the heart of the research methods” they describe (p. 1). The goal is to interpret meanings in three ways; how people ascribe meanings to events and actions, how people take ownership of these meanings, and how meanings are negotiated through interactions with others. Further, they argue that interpretive research is a uniting concept through emphasising that most research (both qualitative and quantitative) is based in interpretation in one way or another through the qualitative choices and judgements that are being made.

Both analytical approaches that I have applied uses excerpts of adolescents’ narratives. This is a contrast to what may be seen as more traditional forms of thematic analysis (Braun &

Clarke, 2006) or the line-by-line coding in Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2017), in which one stays close to the content of the text, but also breach it into smaller text segments (Riessman, 2017). Doing that, one may lose an individual's intentions and individual actions if the goal is to find general understandings across individuals' stories (Riessman, 2017). The choice was therefore made to keep longer sequences of text in the analysis, and also consider the narratives as a whole, when analysing content and form of the stories (Mason, 2005; Riessman, 2017).

Article III. The analytical process begins already at the outset of the research project and throughout research interviews, reading of transcripts, and the procedural steps of analysis. Because I and the co-authors discussed in the very beginning of the project, what our assumptions and attitudes were towards adolescents' participation, the view on adolescents as agents were present all the way. Additionally, because the outset of the qualitative part of this PhD project had an interest in living arrangement preferences, I had a parallel interest in the content in adolescents' stories that could inform the understanding of such preferences. However, through the analysis to article IV, I interpreted the narratives as telling compelling stories about negotiations about living arrangements. In our initial interpretations, I drew on existing research literature that points to parents who emphasise symmetry and shared parenting after parental separation, children who are concerned about fairness between parents in regard to living arrangements and time spent at each household, the weight given to children's best interest, and scholars who worry about loyalty conflicts in conflicted cases. Assuming that such findings illustrate shared meanings in the Norwegian and Western culture, I analysed the stories for implicit cultural meanings (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). I extracted text excerpts from the narratives that concerned adolescents' descriptions and reflections about their relationships and interactions to parents. Next, I followed the suggested steps described by Magnusson and Marecek (2015); identifying subjects and verbs, identifying textual subjects that seem to disagree and agree, and then discussing how these may illustrate implicit cultural meanings in the narratives; that is, how they give meaning to changes in their relationships to parents. This is exemplified in Article III. I found the theory of invisible loyalties (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973) helpful in explaining how adolescents justify the loyalty they show to parents, and how they justify the fairness in the contact they have with parents.

Article IV. I applied an analytic approach to adolescents' stories by examining trouble, the teller's theory of the event, the teller's evaluative perspective about the moral stance of

involved persons and the teller, and canonical narratives, in which the latter refers to “socially accepted, common, and routine accounts of an occurrence” (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015, p. 106). By analysing these aspects of the stories, one examines both form and content as they intermingle in order for the teller to make meaning to their experiences. One of the central assumptions is that it is through stories that people re-present, give meaning to, and experience their reality (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). Stories are understood as

accounts of what happened – in particular circumstances and with specific consequences. Narrative, in other words, is a basic human strategy for coming to terms with time, process, and change (Herman, 2009, p. 2).

This approach was described in article IV. Through the steps described above, a recurrent topic in the organisation of the extracts was management of private disclosure, and how this management was dialectically balanced and also in tension between choices to disclose and conceal. The analysis was then carried out abductively between reading and interpreting the transcripts, and finding relevant theoretical frameworks that could inform our interpretations (Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2017).

5.4.4 My contribution in the adolescent-researcher relationship

I invited the adolescents to participate, and I formed the interview guide and asked the questions. Being a stranger, a woman, and an adult, I told the adolescents briefly about myself, my own personal (lack of) experience with parental separation, and my professional background as a clinical psychologist. I brought the professional background into the conversation, by explaining how the research interview was different from any clinical consultations. Still, the clinical psychologist profession might have influenced how they talked with me, as all of them had an experience of talking with a mediator with competence in talking with children and understanding mental, social and family issues. Although I was the adult person in the relationship, the “expert-novice” relationship was not that fixed. I emphasised the adolescent’s experiences as expert knowledge which I did not have. Although I did not bring it up as a topic, my age, 30 at the moment, may have influenced their views on me as a dialogue partner. Perhaps they talked with me in similar ways as they would have talked to a peer, or someone who represented a “young adult” close to their age. I cannot exclude the possibility that they talked with me is an equal, someone who would understand their experiences during the parental separation process, and perhaps particularly in their relationship to the parents, as an ally in their justifications.

6 Results

6.1 Article I – Policies and legal frameworks' emphases on the best interest of the child

6.2 Article II – Children’s preferences about contact and residence arrangements

This article draws on data collected in the Hearing Children in Mediation project. Mediators filled out a short questionnaire and wrote “the child’s message” that the child and the mediator had written together in the child conversation. I examined to what extent children want the mediator to share their living arrangement preferences with the parents when they participate in family mediation that follows the Children in Mediation model, and whether children who prefer a symmetrical JPC arrangement differ significantly in age, sex, or level of conflict between the parents from those who prefer to live more of the time with one of the parents.

I did not identify a preference for living arrangement in 55.1 per cent of children’s messages. However, 44.9 per cent did share a living arrangement preference, and a symmetrical JPC arrangement was most frequently requested (23.4 per cent of the total number of messages). Less than 5 per cent of the children preferred to spend most of their time with their father (“mostly father”, $n = 9$, “only father” $n = 8$). In comparison, 11.3 per cent ($n = 39$) preferred to live mostly with their mother, and 7.5 per cent ($n = 26$) preferred to live only with their mother. I often found explanations for children’s preferred living arrangements when doing the content analysis. Themes identified concerned the relationship to each of the parents, and children’s views of the convenience of the arrangements.

During the backwards elimination process that was part of the GLMM analysis, age was the only independent variable that was significant after a stepwise procedure. Age was then

applied in the final model in which symmetrical JPC was compared to other living arrangement preferences. In this analysis, mostly father and only father were grouped together due to low *n*. It was assumed that these children had some characteristics in common. In this model, a one-year increase in age resulted in children having 40 per cent greater likelihood of having a message with a preference for living only with their mother. Age was not significant in the comparisons to the other living arrangement preferences.

This article showed that, despite that mediators are generally recommended not to ask directly about children's living arrangement preferences, such preferences is a topic that many children are concerned about. This points to the importance of further investigating how living arrangement preferences are included in guided participation during child-inclusive family mediation.

6.3 Article III – Negotiations of loyalty and fairness

This article is based on 11 qualitative interviews with adolescents. In this article, I asked how adolescents negotiated closeness to and distance from their parents during the process of parental separation. This question was examined through the theoretical lens of (invisible) loyalty between family members (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973). I understood the narratives as illustrating tensions between loyalty to parents and the ideals of symmetry between parents, and adolescents' own views of fairness. I interpreted a core implicit cultural meaning as parents' obligations to their children during parental separation, which adolescents illustrated through parents' efforts to care for their child(ren), to create a feeling of togetherness, and thus being entitled to emotional closeness and togetherness. The other core implicit cultural meaning was reciprocity of expectations to each other, realised through emotional closeness and time spent with each parent, and how this reciprocity could be negotiated between parents and adolescents. These negotiations might illustrate how children and parents try to coordinate their individual goals as a form of guided participation.

6.4 Article IV – Relational agency and the management of privacy boundaries

This article is based on 11 qualitative interviews with adolescents. In this article I drew on concepts of privacy boundaries (Petronio, 2002, 2008) when exploring how adolescents exercised agency in their narratives about parental separation, and particularly examined how adolescents utilised the conversation with the mediator in this regard. Results were presented through three aspects of the narratives that were named; "Being kept and keeping oneself

outside the privacy boundaries of parents”, “Family practices that change, create changes in privacy boundaries”, and “Mediators’ exclusive access to adolescents’ private lives.” The guided participation that adolescents, parents, and mediators engage in becomes particularly salient in this article. The directedness that each social partner brings with them, and the possible tensions that may exist in the directedness (e.g. being close while also being autonomous in relation to a parent), is what makes the guided participation complex.

7 Discussion

In this section I will discuss the dissertation as a whole. I address the practise of including children in family mediation in Norway on the three planes outlined by Rogoff (1995): the institutional plane (apprenticeship), the interpersonal plane (guided participation), and the personal plane (participatory appropriation). I have addressed these planes of analysis pragmatically, through four sub-studies that resulted in four articles. In this discussion, I bring together the findings from these sub-studies to show how we may understand the practise of including children in family mediation from a sociocultural perspective.

Dividing child-inclusive family mediation into connected sociocultural activities, three activities become salient. The first is the mediation process, where parents, together with the family mediator, are social partners. The second is the activity of “hearing the child”, where the mediator (together or without parents being present) is the ones “hearing” the child shares his or her views. The third activity is everyday practices where children are being heard by parents. In the following, I will elaborate on how these activities are connected to the three planes of analysis. After that, I will discuss how the planes of each activity may be interconnected.

Contextual aspects that characterise the institutional planes of the different activities may sometimes be more prominent in some of the activities. However, because the cultural context permeates all activities, institutions, and relationships, I view these aspects as, collectively, contributing to and being part of the different planes of analysis. The cultural aspects that I emphasise in this sociocultural exploration of child-inclusive family mediation is parenting autonomy, gender equality and egalitarian parenting practices, child-centred parenting, a therapeutic culture, and the UNCRC and related Norwegian legislations. Additionally, a process perspective is taken, because people and activities change through their participation in sociocultural activities that themselves take place in a particular time and place (Rogoff, 2003; Rogoff et al., 1995). This process perspective is also in line with a relational view on agency (Raithelhuber, 2016).

7.1 The conversation with the child during their parents’ family mediation process

The child conversation consists of at least one physical attendance of the child together with the mediator, either with or without siblings present, and either with or without parents

present. Mediators can apply various models (Ask & Kjeldsen, 2015) to include children, for example the Children in Mediation model. I have included in my conceptualisation of this activity the first meeting with the mediator, and also any previous meetings (either previous family mediation processes or clinical appearances with the mediator), any follow-up meetings during the family mediation process (e.g. an evaluation session in line with the Children in Mediation model), and any clinical follow-up meetings.

7.1.1 Apprenticeship: institutional purposes, expert-novice dyads, and connected cultural values

Children's participation in parents' family mediation processes is not mandated by law, although it follows a democratic argument founded in Article 12 in the UNCRC and appearing in Norwegian legislations for children's right to be heard. In Article 12 of the UNCRC it says that a purpose of the article is to provide the child with information. It has been stated in guidelines and annual reports that the goal is to include 30 per cent of children in the process of family mediation (Bufdir, 2023a). Notably, the annual report from 2023 does not state the percentage of children who participated, mentioning only that the percentage in 2023 is "somewhat lower compared to 2022" (Bufdir, 2023b, p. 47) and it is not stated whether the practice of 2023 fulfils any aims set for the service in 2023. Other purposes that may not be explicitly stated in any policies or laws follow, for example, a sociocultural perspective on participation that might supporting a child's meaning-making as a way for them to have (and express) their views (see e.g. Gulbrandsen et al., 2012).

In these purposes lie some assumptions about the mediator as an expert who the child, as a novice, can engage in a dialogue with. The mediator can, by being a competent professional, say something about how things may turn out to be in the future, how it may be possible to practice family life during the process of parental separation, and who can validate the feelings and opinions of the child (Articles III and IV). At the same time, the child may have some information that the mediator does not know but perhaps want to know as a means to strategically work with the parents (Thørnblad et al., 2019). Although parents are usually absent in a child's conversation with a mediator, parents are supposed to get insight into the views of the child because these views might improve the living arrangements that parents make (i.e., this can be an instrumentalist understanding of participation). The child's views can also confirm or correct the parents' interpretations of the child's thoughts and feelings (Eikrem & Andenæs, 2021), which may be necessary because parents' understandings of their child's thought are not always correct (Holt et al., 2021). Thus, the child can also be the

“more experienced person” for the simple reasons that they know best how it is to be that child living in the current time and place.

Some of the cultural values that are particularly relevant to this activity, is the UNCRC and Norwegian laws concerning children’s right to be heard. However, because children’s participation is not stated by law, children’s right to be heard becomes a practice that depends on 1) the gatekeeping of parents and mediators, 2) the child’s ability to form views about their own participation, 3) the level of co-creation of views between the child and the mediator (and possibly the parents if they are present in the child conversation), and 4) the child’s choice to reveal views. From the perspective of the democratic right to be heard, the intention is that the child should be given the opportunity to share their views on decision that may affect their everyday life, which in this case concerns the post-parental separation living arrangements. A considerable number of children share a living arrangement preference with their parents when the Children in Mediation model is used (Article II). The level of influence the child has on decisions may depend on the age of the child (Haugen et al., 2015), and the results of Article II do indicate that views that diverge from symmetrical JPC (only living with the mother) are more likely to be expressed by children when they are older. This likelihood may reflect adolescents concern about changes to their everyday lives that make it more preferable to refrain from moving between residencies. Articles III and IV demonstrate that adolescents are concerned about creating comfortable everyday lives. This emphasis may reflect the cultural notion of a child-centred society that is connected with the best interest of the child, with certain expectation of fostering children’s well-being (Kitterød & Lidén, 2021).

7.1.2 Guided participation: understanding the directedness of the social partners

Children’s recalling of their participation in their parents’ family mediation processes varied in terms of richness of the narrative and the impact that their participation had on the narrative. Article IV shows that the goals and motives that the adolescents expressed in their narratives about the parental separation process, where not always reflected in the achieved communication and coordination during the conversation with the mediator. These differences were sometimes due to whether the mediator had invited them to talk freely, or declined to, or invited them to, take part in a process to give meaning to experiences and support them in the troubles they experienced. Children need information about the purpose, process, and possible consequences of their participation. The latter includes the mediator’s

possible inadequacy in preventing unwanted reaction from parents (see for example Article IV). The importance of how mediators facilitate and contribute to participation on the child's terms have also been illustrated in other studies examining children's experiences of participating in family law processes (Orr et al., 2024). Similarly, Johansen and colleagues (2023) highlighted the importance of information and support after the mediation process had ended (which is perhaps one of the key findings in Article IV). Thus, if the mediator is acting in certain ways, he or she can be a "more experienced person" who can guide the child who is "the less experienced person", who then might benefit from sharing their views, and of making meaning of previous experiences.

Living arrangements and contact between parents and their children is primarily a decision that parents are privileged to make. It is generally not advised to ask children directly to choose between parents, or express an opinion about the residential arrangements, as I outlined in chapter 4 in this synopsis. Yet, allowing children to share their views on the parental separation process may concern future living arrangements (Article II). The messages created during the child conversations in the Children in Mediation model, for instance about their living arrangement preferences (or the lack thereof) presented in Article II, can be affected by several aspects like rules that guide the management of collective privacy boundaries between the child and the parents. Other more immediate and contingent factors can also play a role, for instance if there had been a stressful morning with conflicts between the child and a parent before going to the meeting, or other aspects that might not be salient to the mediator, parents, or others who interpret their messages (such as myself and the co-authors of Article II).

In Article I it became salient that practice in the Netherlands put a stronger emphasis on identifying common grounds for intervention through grouping divorce and child protection cases in the same screening process. Such combined screening across services does not happen in Norway. However, the Family Counselling Service does have a focus on identifying high conflict cases and other aspects of family life that may pose a risk to the child (i.e. differentiated mediation). Strandbu and Thørnblad (2015) showed the variation in terms of messages from parent, including aspects that are thought to require supportive measures. Children gave positive feedback regarding their participation, regardless of conflict (Strandbu et al., 2016; Strandbu et al., 2020). In Article III, adolescents described difficulties in their contact with their parents, which also included considerable conflicts, parents having anger management issues, and substance (ab)use that impaired parenting capacity. The narratives in

this article showed that the mediator had the potential to contribute to a turning point, either by supporting a child's wish to strengthen the parent-child relationship, or by empowering the child in their preference to create distance in the relationship. The mediator also held a "neutral" position in regard to the interparental relationship. The mediator can thus nuance and perhaps also communicate the child's views in a way that does not expose the child to discomfort due to disagreements with the parents, or feelings of being disloyal to one of the parents (Article IV).

It is important to notice, however, that a child can be considered "the expert", who holds power by choosing to disclose or reveal information to the adults they interact with. The choices by adolescents to reveal certain information (or not) may provide mediators with information and a starting point in clinical cases where there is a need for children and their parents to reach a common understanding, and in that way transform the parent-child relationship (see for example Article IV), or by how mediators can work strategically in the family mediation process to improve parenting abilities during parental separation (Thørnblad et al., 2019). The way that the conversation between the mediator and the child might impact on the other sociocultural activities shows how guided participation can be interconnected across these activities, and together bring about relational agency to transform and improve parent-child relationships.

7.2 Everyday activities

The everyday activities that I refer to here concern the ways parents and children communicate and negotiate, perhaps particularly about how to do family life during the parental separation process, and including creation and development of their parent-child relationships. These activities have been going on since the birth of the child, and build on each other, for instance through the child's "bookkeeping" of merits and demerits (Article III; Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973), which may impact how these activities proceed. Included in these activities are those who are currently part of the family structure as well, the establishment of new homes and relationships, and these activities may also pertain to the network and institutions in which the child lives. However, my emphasis was primarily on activities between the child and parents.

7.2.1 Apprenticeship: institutional purposes, expert-novice dyads, and associated cultural values

The apprenticeship of everyday activities that create constitute ways of doing family, is characterised by what is called “negotiating families” (Gulbrandsen, 1998; Sommer, 2019). Families who fit into descriptions of such families might be prepared to engage in negotiations with each other. The activity of hearing what children have to say, and perhaps particularly children older than 12, is interconnected with the cultural expectation of allowing the child, to some extent, to take part in decision making. For some children, their participation does not necessarily challenge the generational power balance between themselves and their parents, because it is expected that they may share views and request influence.

One way to understand the critical tone of some of the adolescents in Article III, is the strong emphasis on children’s rights and the emphasis on negotiations between parents and children. Thus, in Norway, adolescents’ justifications of fairness (Article III) may be considered apposite. Their narratives can be understood as expressions of their right to be heard, and to have a say in decisions, and their entitlement to receive care from their parents (i.e. child-centred parenting practises). The practise of including children in their parents’ family mediation processes is interconnected with cultural expectations of negotiations between parents and their children (i.e. negotiating families). However, in other cultural contexts, participation can hold different meanings (see for instance Liebel & Saadi, 2012), and emphasise aspects other than “the three P’s” (protection, provision and participation). For contrast, in African countries, “the three R’s” (reciprocity, respect, and responsibility) are given importance (Twum-Danso, 2009). Duties and rights are interconnected concepts in the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC, 1990) which emphasises the child’s contribution to an African culture in the relationships they are part of, contribution to family cohesion, and respect for parents, superiors, and elders. Thus, in some African countries (or persons identifying themselves in relation to the context), perhaps particularly those who have ratified the charter, children’s justifications of fairness in the parent-child relationship may be based on expectations other than children’s justifications in a Nordic context.

The child-centred parenting that is valued in a Norwegian context puts some expectations on parenting that adolescents, at least partly, could base their justifications of parental loyalty on (Article III). The nature of a child-centred society implies an adult recognition of children as

individuals. Punishment in parenting is forbidden by law and there is a general acceptance of parents' responsibility to foster children's well-being (Article I). In parent-child relationships, children are, perhaps, more likely to take on the role of "the more experienced person", through their views on their own best interests.

7.2.2 Guided participation: understanding the directedness of the social partners

Children may initiate or share wishes to increase contact, but also to create distance in relationships (Article III), although they do not have formal decision-making authority or the right to initiate any formal proceedings on the matter. From the analysis of children's narratives in Article III, their views seemed to be based on arguments and meaning-making that is, at least partially, founded on past experiences connected to the parent-child relationship. Nevertheless, the parent-child relationship has not been identified as an explicit focus in family mediation, although the relationship may be one aspect that can ameliorate interparental conflict (van Dijk et al., 2020). Struggles in the parent-child relationship may indicate challenges in the family that is associated with impaired parenting, such as economic and emotional well-being of parents (Bøe, 2015; Bøe et al., 2014). Thus, for some families, the economic situation of each of the parents may be part of the dynamic in the parent-child relationship in several ways. Children may be aware of the economic consequences of time-sharing between parents, or the amount of contact one has with each parent (Haugen, 2005). However, children may also be aware of the monetary motives of parents' behaviour (Article III), or children may find that parents who include the child in economic decisions is acknowledging their maturity and contributions in the new family practices (Article III). How monetary issues are integrated into the negotiations between children and parents may, together with material aspects (Lidén & Kitterød, 2020), contribute to feeling of home and belonging to parents. Thus, economic aspects may be implicitly and explicitly intertwined into the negotiations between children and their parents. This points to the relevance of economy in the other sociocultural activities that are part of the practice of child-inclusive family mediation; whether economic issues are brought up as a topic in the child conversation, or to what degree economic issues are brought up in parents' family mediation process.

Another aspect is the fact that adolescents do have duties in their everyday lives. They may be assigned with housework of various kinds and magnitudes (e.g. in Article III, it was mentioned that adolescents do vacuum cleaning, make dinner, help with house renovations,

giving opinions on economic priorities, etc.). Siblings could be a source of emotional support and help in creating meaning out of changes that were happening, or support in negotiations with expressions of loyalty to parents. Interwoven in this sibling support is also a dynamic responsibility to care for each other during the process of parental separation. While parents lived together, the responsibilities mentioned here were nested within one home, and one residence. In the process of parental separation, these responsibilities were spread between (but also pertained within each of) the residencies. New responsibilities during the parental separation process may contribute to a feeling of growing up faster (Lidén & Kitterød, 2020). Then, the ways that each parent includes children in the decisions and negotiations of integrating responsibilities into new ways of doing family might be important. The feeling of being part of such negotiations can, for some adolescents, be an acknowledgement of experience and competence, and thereby contribute to a child's loyalty to parents or justification of fairness (Article III).

Viewing negotiations as one way that relational agency may be expressed, the resulting decisions or actions may be the outcome of relational agency. Thinking of negotiation as an *expression* of relational agency has allowed me to have a dynamic and dialectical view on agency and related aspects of the nature of relationships. As I showed in Article IV, a child's silence – that is, *not* sharing their living arrangement preferences with their parents – is *not* a necessarily contradictory to autonomy and determination. By postponing their disclosure of living arrangement preferences to their parents, and instead disclosing those preferences in a different context where other cultural values become more salient, children can be strategic and creative by choosing whom to create agency with. Skagestad and colleagues (2023) had a similar point, where parents contributed to the relational agency between young adults with disabilities and involved professionals.

7.3 Parents' family mediation processes

Parents' family mediation processes include a mediator, or two mediators in cases with high interparental conflicts or anticipated risk (i.e. differentiated mediation), and the parents. The activity of parents' family mediation processes consists of the mandatory family mediation session, any additional voluntary mediation sessions, and any clinical follow-up sessions if necessary. The activity may also include any previous contact with the family counselling office.

7.3.1 Apprenticeship: institutional purposes, expert-novice dyads, and connected cultural values

The statutory purpose of family mediation is that parents receive support in making a living arrangement that attends to the best interest of the child. It is also to provide parents with information about the child's right to participate. The institutional purpose is to prevent interparental conflict and future court litigation, and to initiate a process to solve a conflict if it is present. These purposes rely on the presence of a competent family mediator who can fulfil the aims through conversations with parents, or other means that the family counselling offices have available (e.g. a mini course to manage collaboration issues and conflict). Thus, the mediator becomes the "more experienced person" in apprenticeship, while the parents become the "less experienced persons." On the other hand, the general focus on children's best interest and children's right to have a say implies that the mediator must rely on the parents' descriptions and understandings of the child. The parents know their child, and thus become the experts who help the novice mediator get to know the child in question. Thus, the relationship is reciprocal, with the social partners involved being able to guide and be guided during the activity.

Focus on the co-parenting relationship, processing of any emotional reactions, or therapeutic intervention needed to solve any conflicts that have been created reflect the therapeutic aspect of family mediation (Ekeland, 2010; Tjersland & Gulbrandsen, 2010) that targets, primarily, the parents' relationship. The case-oriented focus (Ekeland, 2010; Tjersland & Gulbrandsen, 2010) is reflected in the living arrangement agreement and the practical matters that are to be solved.

The cultural values particularly salient in this activity may be the therapeutic culture that emphasise the processing of emotions and prevention of a decrease in well-being, e.g. by targeting the parents directly or the child indirectly by buffering severe effects by reducing the level of conflict (see for example Article I). The statutory aim is founded on the best interest of the child. Despite the aim of including children in the mediation process, the means given most attention seem to primarily target children through working with the parents, e.g. differentiated screening and process mediation. This imbalance is particularly visible in the most recent annual report for the Family Counselling Service (Bufdir, 2023b), in which children's participation is no longer reported with percentage or figures, even though the percentage is reported to be lower than 2022. As can be seen in Table 4, the percentage of

participating children has been decreasing since its peak in 2018. This decrease is mentioned without any detailed elaboration.

The ethos of therapeutic culture assumes that it is good to have someone, for instance a mediator, to talk to (Madsen, 2017), and it follows the idea of individuation, self-realization (Madsen, 2017). These ideas are related to the emphasis on how one may strengthen the development of children to become productive adults in a capitalist society (see e.g. Warming, 2018). However, the emphasis on talk and processing of challenging life-events can be very different from the preferences of people in other cultures (see e.g. Smørholm, 2016). And without any support or implications ascribed to the child's views in such approaches, any therapeutic or brief "recollection" of children's views may, in contexts where the therapeutic conversation does not necessarily have the same position, lead to children feeling powerless because of the established power structure between children and parents (Wong et al., 2019). A culturally sensitive approach may therefore be pertinent and necessary in a Norwegian context. Although the family mediation is mandatory for *all* separating parents, regardless ethnic background, some workers within the Family Counselling Service claim that the typical user is "a person like us" (Aarset & Rosten, 2023, p. 52), implying a normative understanding of users as someone with high education, Norwegian majority background, and an openness towards letting therapists get to know the family. Mediators might experience it as easier to work with a "typical" Norwegian family, rather than one that belongs to one or several minorities in the Norwegian society (e.g. ethnic or religious minorities, Sami background, national minorities, or LHBT+; Aarset & Rosten, 2023). Thus, the mandatory nature of family mediation is likely to invite a broader spectre of families compared to the general clinical cases (Aarset & Rosten, 2023).

The therapeutic approach to family mediation (Ekeland, 2010) may also lead to a subordinate emphasis on the democratic aspects of children's participation, which may imply a right to be heard *and* have a say according to age and maturity.

An important aspect of the activity of family mediation is that policies connected to parental separation often privilege adults' decision-making authority. For example, parents have the right to petition the court to increase contact with a child (children cannot initiate such court proceedings) and the right to decide whether a child should be included in the family mediation process. Thus, both mediators and parents can be gatekeepers for children's participation in the family mediation process.

7.3.2 Guided participation: understanding the directedness of the social partners

The goal of the family mediation is for the parents to make a living arrangement. However, parents and mediators may have separate goals that are explicit or implicit in the dialogue, and these different goals might affect how children may be represented and brought into the dialogue and decisions in focus. Mediators, for example, might apply a discretion of judgement regarding which aspects of the child conversation are communicated to the parents, e.g. through protecting the view on parents as child-focused parents. At other times, the mediator might communicate and emphasise the views of the child as a means to influence the dialogue with parents (Thørnblad et al., 2019). Parents, on the other hand, might have an agenda that is not in accordance with that of the children, and they might be surprised by information disclosed by children without their acceptance of or preparation for it (Article IV). According to the adolescents in Article IV, some information might be concealed by both the parents and the child, which was exemplified in the narrative of Ellinor. Thus, concealment of parents (that is, when they do not reveal, or perhaps are not aware of troubles) contributes to upholding the status quo in the parent-child relationship. Revelation and concealment in dialogue between mediator and parents are therefore mechanisms and tensions in play for how agency that affects the child's everyday life is enacted and created.

I assume that it is not easy for a mediator to explore differences in the relationships between a child and each of their parents, because starting that exploration may lead to discussions of which parent is more capable of ensuring the best interest of the child (see for instance Kjøs et al., 2015). A parent, on the other hand, might want to conceal any issues they have with the child, because it might put them in a weaker position regarding negotiations or conflicts with the other parent, or because it simply discredits them as “child-focused parents” (Thørnblad et al., 2019). Adolescents' experiences of parents' wishes to conceal such information was explored in Article IV. Thus, one may understand a child as the more experienced person because they can direct the activity of a family mediation process (even though not being physically present in the activity) into other topics not established within the framework of the activity. In fact, mediators do report change in focus after including a child in a conversation (the child conversation) during the mediation process of that child's parents: the focus on parenting comes to the fore rather than on disagreements and conflict (Thørnblad et al., 2019).

As was discussed in Article I, welfare benefits may lessen against economic hardship for separated parents, which can indirectly ensure a child's right to provision. The decisions that parents make concerning living arrangements may have economic consequences, e.g. in terms of child maintenance. Notably, however, the provision and economic aspects may be kept in the background of the mediation process in high conflict cases because this topic may fuel the interparental conflict (Gulbrandsen, 2013). Or a parent may disguise economic motives or arguments into considerations of the best interest of the child, because the parent may believe that they can have more influence in the separation process that way (Kjøs et al., 2015).

Monetary issues do seem to be an issue that is (implicitly) integrated into the three activities, but perhaps not integrated so much into the communication that is part of these activities.

7.4 Children's appropriated participation

Appropriated participation is the personal plane of the sociocultural framework proposed by Rogoff (1995), and this plane concerns how children may act because of previous experiences, and thus create new understandings of their parent-child relationships and relationship with the mediator.

From a Western perspective and UNCRC Article 12, participation is typically expected to be an event, resulting in a stated view or opinion, that can be formulated or written down, and sometimes is used in a decision-making process, often led by adults. Ulvik (2009) suggest that professionals explore the making of meaning that children engage in while being part of and contributing to this type of participation. In regard to children's living arrangement preferences, or other concerns they bring into the conversation with a mediator, mediators may promote reflections and making of meaning. Children may engage in such making of meaning based on the past experiences of how the child has been heard and have had a say in the parent-child relationship.

The view on participation as a process is not new. It is, in fact, a key element of participation as it is formulated in Article 12 in the UNCRC and explained, which stresses that participation should not be a momentary act (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009).

The process perspective on participation means that one can also show interest for children's relational agency in parent-child relationships before a child turns 12. The activity of being heard by parents has likely been going on for a long time as was emphasised by adolescents in

Article III. Adolescents' narratives illustrated how the balance in how relational agency was enacted shifted when they "became old enough", which is why mediators may pay particular attention to the views of children younger than 12. The living arrangement preferences that children share may have solid explanations that justify fairness between children and their parents, regardless of whether a child is 10 or 15.

An understanding of children's participation in their parents' family mediation processes as "participatory appropriation" (Rogoff, 1995) implies that their participation can lead to changes in how they take part in and contribute to future similar activities. Some adolescents seemed to understand their participation as potentially making it easier to receive future support. Importantly, this potential is not necessarily identified at the moment they engage in dialogue with the mediator, but the dialogue becomes an experience that could be useful for future meaning making and agency. NOU 2019:20 (2019) recommends to "establish by law that children can make contact with the Family Counselling Service directly". The NOU 2020:14 (2020) goes somewhat further and recommends that children should have a right to call parents into a parental conversation if the child wants to change the living arrangement agreements.

These recommendations may address the intergenerational power imbalance that current policy and legal frameworks maintain. As I showed in Article I, parents are the ones who hold the *legal* privileges. Parents can either reduce or increase contact, while children do not have the same privileges as current laws and policies are formulated. A change in policy and law would challenge the emphasis on respect for adults and responsibilities within the family that some families may value (such as families from countries adhering to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child; ACRWC, 1990; Twum-Danso, 2009). It may be questionable whether such a change would be applicable to the diversity of parent-child relationships, knowing that some children may not have the same willingness or desire to challenge the intergenerational power imbalance in a manner that such a policy change may imply (see for instance Ursin & Lyså, 2024). Still, it is also possible to interpret such a policy change as actually having the potential to support values like reciprocity and responsibility. Some of the adolescents in Articles III and IV did not engage in negotiations or seek support from the mediator as a means to achieve *less* responsibility in the process, or to act *disrespectfully* towards their parents. On the contrary, the aim was often to build a foundation for improving the relationship quality in ways that are valued in Norwegian culture: to be able to spend time together in a way that fostered a feeling of belonging and closeness. It remains

to be seen whether a policy change that would give children the authority to initiate proceedings would be used in practise.

7.5 Relational agency in the core of the framework: rituals as a promising perspective

I have found the theoretical frameworks of a sociocultural analysis (Rogoff, 1995) and a perspective on agency as relational (Abebe, 2019; Hammersley, 2017; Raithelhuber, 2016; Spyrou, 2018) as helpful in the interpretation of the work that is part of this dissertation. I will discuss briefly how rituals might enable the potential in relational agency.

Raithelhuber (2016, p. 95) drew on anthropological research that showed that agency can be distributed among various participants in action, and does not have to be restricted to one human body. Through the interconnectedness, agency may have the potential to transform the world (Sax, 2006). Rituals become relevant because transformations are often both the aim and result of the activity, for instance in therapy or conflict resolution (Sax, 2006, p. 476). Family mediation is a practice that can be placed within these two activities because it has both therapeutic and case focused purposes (Ekeland, 2010; Tjersland & Gulbrandsen, 2010).

In the context of a ritual, both connectivity and collective accomplishments are important for creating agency. It is not only human beings that are endowed with agency, but also inanimate objects or spiritual instances (Raithelhuber, 2016). An example of an inanimate object is the form where the child and the mediator write the child's message to their parents. Spirituality was also mentioned by Rogoff (1995) as one of the key aspects of the cultural context of which practices are situated. The spirituality that relates to rituals may be the component that is missing in the practice of child-inclusive family mediation. The mediator (a person), the family counselling office (a place), or the living arrangement agreement (a text) do not have the same spiritual associations with that are enjoyed by, say a priest, a church, and a wedding contract examples provided by Raithelhuber (2016). Thus, an important component – namely, a spiritual connection – might be what is missing from the agentic potential that lies in the practise of child-inclusive family mediation.

“No one brings flowers to the divorced”, said Sanna Sarromma in a newspaper article (Sarromaa, 2017). It is certainly not given any flowers to children involved in parental separation. Rituals exist as a universal concept around the world and across times. We have

rituals for births, deaths, entering adulthood, entering religious communities, and so on. A divorce, however, has not been provided with such a ceremony.

Although divorce has become more common in Western societies, and ways of doing families have multiplied since the increase in divorce rates began, divorce may still be a sensitive topic. Even within families, there may be ways of managing privacy boundaries that lead to silences during parental separation. Perhaps rituals, as a concept, could help integrate the sociocultural activities that is part of child-inclusive family mediation, and the various purposes these activities hold. Which may also make the child an inevitable social partner in the practice in a way that allows for the child's views to be silent and concealed, or voiced and revealed.

8 Conclusion

The aim of this dissertation was to explore the practise of child-inclusive family mediation in Norway on three interdependent planes: a personal, an interpersonal, and a cultural/institutional plane. The sub-studies that this synopsis is based upon are situated in a context where the society values, among other things, children and gender equality.

Mandatory family mediation and child-inclusive practises in cases of parental separation are aspects that differentiate Norway from Germany and the Netherlands, although these three countries are generally considered different from each other in relation to the global context. The institutional barriers between the Family Counselling Service and the Child Welfare Service may create challenges if children need protection during parental separation processes.

The main purpose of family mediation is to support parents to make a living arrangement that attends to the best interest of the child. The practice of including children in parents' family mediation processes does not articulate such a specific purpose. For instance, children are generally not asked directly about their preferences for post-parental separation arrangements. Yet a considerable number of children share such preferences when included in a child conversation with a mediator, for instance when the family mediation is done in line with the Children in Mediation model.

By analysing different activities connected to the practice of child-inclusive family mediation, I have shown how agency is created and enacted in different settings at different times between social partners. The concept of relational agency offers a new way to understand the processes where children and adults (parents and mediators) negotiate closeness and distance, loyalty and fairness, and management of privacy boundaries, during parents' separation process.

The sociocultural approach to my study on children's participation yields a new way to understand the central goal of parents' family mediation process: the making of a living arrangement. An exploration of living arrangement preferences across the three sociocultural activities can create new understandings of parent-child relationships that children can build on in future interactions with parents, such as ways to understand and negotiate loyalty and fairness in their parent-child relationships.

8.1 Limitations

The participants in the Articles III and IV were a self-selected group of adolescents and they may have all been the type of adolescents who enjoy talking about their lives. Participants in the study were adolescents who accepted an invitation to talk with a mediator, and also accepted an invitation to talk with a researcher. Thus, the adolescents who shared their narratives in the interviews may adhere to some particular social values in society: the emphasis on sharing one's views. The research interviews resulted in narratives that put a strong emphasis on sharing views, being heard, and being recognised as autonomous individuals in relationships with adults. But the reciprocity and the dialectical tensions they mentioned showcased the complexity of parent-child relationships, particularly during the time of parental separation.

Another limitation of this dissertation, particularly for Articles II–IV, was that there was probably gatekeeping behaviour on the part of both mediators and parents. I do not know exactly why children (Article II), adolescents (Articles III and IV), and parents (Articles II–IV) declined participation, but I do know that mediators regularly made discretionary judgements in regard to children's participation. Parents may also try to control the privacy boundaries by declining to sign a consent sheet for the child's participation. Nevertheless, narratives in Articles III–IV showed that some parents do give permission to their children to share their views and experiences in a research project, although the adolescents may share private information that compromise the parent.

Aspects such as leisure activities, closeness to school and friends, etc., would have provided a broader understanding of the children's everyday lives. Perhaps other methods or approaches could have provided more information on some aspects, for instance a “mosaic approach” (Clark, 2001) that would have combined several methods of data collection, such as using photos or drawings from children's everyday lives. Here, qualitative interviews were used because they have the potential to create rich data while minimising interference in the participants' lives. Additionally, such methods may have made it easier to recruit adolescents who are not so “talkative”, and thereby enabling more diversity among the participants.

Socio-economic aspects were not emphasised in this study. I did not have this information readily available for the analysis of Article II, and I did not apply any criteria that targeted socioeconomic aspects in the sub-studies for Articles III and IV. Listening to the adolescents in the interviews, I got an impression of variation in terms of economic privileges or

disadvantages on behalf of the separated parents and the children. Such information was not the primary consideration in the analysis. Nevertheless, it became relevant in various ways, for instance through how adolescents regarded such aspects as more or less important in their justifications of fairness and loyalty.

A final point that I would like to reflect upon is the analysis in Article II. This analysis may appear to be closer to an individualistic child perspective (Warming, 2019), assuming that the child's message may reflect the child's actual and true opinion. This would contrast with my overall emphasis on participation as interconnected with the context and relationships that children are part of and contributes to. However, my intention in Article II has been to show that children may apply this participatory opportunity to communicate living arrangement preferences that are not always encouraged to share, nor easy to reveal. This point becomes even clearer in Articles III and IV, where negotiations about loyalty and fairness and closeness and distance shows the relevance of talking about, exploring, and making meaning of living arrangements.

8.2 Implications for practice

The participation of children in family mediation can potentially affect how parent-child relationships both during and after the parental separation process. I therefore find the recommendation from the two reports of an improved family service (NOU 2019:20, 2019) and a new Children's Act (NOU 2020:14, 2020) promising, because they ask that children's participation be established by law. However, it is reasonable to ask whether family mediators, parents, and policy makers have been and are aware of the implications of including children in a systematic manner, as was recommended in the two reports. As I have discussed in this synopsis, the participation of children might require that mediators acknowledge the relational nature of participation in a way that also attends to the *process* of participation in the parental separation process. Parents may be prepared to lose some control over the management of the collective privacy boundary during children's participation, which may lead them to engage in negotiations with their children in new (and hopefully positive) ways. Lastly, policy makers and the administrative board of the Family Counselling Services must be aware that children's participation may not be a one-time event. Instead, it might require follow-up, which will not be possible without additional resources.

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Article I

Manuscript ready for submission

Article II

Children sharing preferences on contact and residence arrangements in child-inclusive family mediation in Norway

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Abstract

Mediation is mandatory for all separating and divorcing parents in Norway with children under 16 years. The participation of children is voluntary. Living arrangement preferences presented by children attending child-inclusive family mediation in Norway (n = 346, aged 4–18 years) have been examined. 47.1% of children gave a living arrangement preference, and older children were more likely to express a preference for living primarily with the mother compared to an equal time-sharing arrangement. Children very often gave reasoned explanations for their wishes. Children's utilization of the potential in their participation support future inclusion of children in mediation processes. The best interest of the child needs to be examined on an individual basis as children present various preferences that is not in line with a presumption of fixed time-sharing following parental break-up.

Keywords

Custody arrangements, shared parenting, family mediation, children's rights, child participation, mixed method

1 Introduction

Parents have to make a decision regarding living arrangements following parental divorce and break-up. Children are supposed to be given the opportunity to participate in proceedings that lead to a reorganisation of the family. This is a right declared in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that children should have the opportunity to express their views, and their views should be given due weight according to their age and maturity (UN General Assembly, 1989). The issue of divorce and separation is specified in the general comment No. 12 (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009: 15), which states that children have a right to be heard in any judicial or administrative proceedings that affects the child, such as court proceedings or mediation processes.

One of the main decisions in such proceedings is the child's residence and contact arrangement. Joint physical custody (JPC), also referred to as shared parenting and shared residence, is becoming increasingly common in Western countries (Steinbach, 2019). Internationally, JPC refers to children spending at least 25-50% of the time with each parent (Smyth, 2017). However, the criteria of JPC vary in different countries and studies. For instance, Nielsen (2018) used a criterion of at least 35% of the time with each parent. In Norway, "shared residence" usually implies that the child spends approximately equal time with each parent, with both parents having an equal say concerning the child's everyday life (Kitterød and Lyngstad, 2014: 7). This meets the criteria of an equal time-sharing arrangement (ETSA). Research from Norway on the proportions of children with shared residence is therefore not directly comparable with other countries (Kitterød and Wiik, 2017). For instance, when Steinbach (2019) referred to Kitterød and Wiik (2017) as saying that the prevalence of JPC among Norwegian divorced families is about 30%, this was somewhat misleading. With a considerable proportion of families reporting sole custody with one of the parents, there is at least 10 days contact with the non-resident parent each month (Kitterød

and Lyngstad, 2014: 40), implying a higher percentage of broadly defined JPC. A “normal contact arrangement” is considered by practitioners in Norway to be up to a 65/35 time-share between the parents, e.g. one afternoon every week, sleepovers every other weekend, three weeks in the summer holidays, and every other Christmas, Easter, winter and autumn holidays with the non-custodial parent (Kitterød, Lidén, Lyngstad, and Wiik, 2016). Taking this into consideration, there has been an increase in the use of JPC, in Norwegian terms, for children after parental divorce or separation, from 8% in 2002, and 10% in 2004 to about 25% in 2012 (Kitterød, Lyngstad, Lidén, and Wiik, 2015). JPC in international terms is far more common in Norway.

The main focus of research concerning JPC has been that of children’s well-being in various living arrangements (Steinbach, 2019) and their experience of living with a shared parenting arrangement (Birnbaum and Saini, 2015). There are several challenges with doing research on living arrangements, some of which relate to the lack of a precise definition of JPC, samples, methods, contexts, outcomes, control variables and selectivity issues (Steinbach, 2019). Although JPC seems to be a promising arrangement that meets the needs of modern families, its positive and negative effects need to be further examined (Steinbach, 2019). The research should serve the best interest of all family members, including the child’s interests which should also be taken into account (Steinbach, 2019).

International (Birnbaum and Saini, 2015) and Nordic (Lidén and Kitterød, 2019; Ottosen and Schwartz, 2013; Sigurdardóttir, Júlíusdóttir, and Pálsdóttir, 2018) studies on children’s perspectives have focused on their experience of living in, or previously living with, shared residence. Other studies have focused both on children’s experience of their ability to influence the arrangement (Berman, 2018; Gollop, Smith, and Taylor, 2000), or on what parents report about children’s influence (Haugen, Dyrstad, and Ådnes, 2015). Haugen et al. (2015) encouraged the inclusion of children in the decision-making process

where parents decide on residence and contact arrangements, as well as efforts to include children in studies assessing their influence on these decisions.

1.1 Child participation in deciding on living arrangements following parental separation

Some children do not want to participate in decision-making processes that relate to parents' separation and divorce (Birnbaum and Saini, 2012). However, many studies find that children want to be meaningfully involved in such decisions, including the creation of parenting plans (Birnbaum and Saini, 2012; Maes, De Mol, and Buysse, 2011; Thørnblad and Strandbu, 2018). This applies to some children in conflicted matters as well (Carson, Dunstan, Dunstan, and Roopani, 2018; Cashmore and Parkinson, 2008; Holt, 2018). Birnbaum and Saini (2012) pointed out that children emphasised a democratic process where their voices were equally weighted, their right for autonomy was considered, and where they were authentically involved as co-creators of parenting plans.

Children's feedback, when given in a formal setting, can give directions in further discussions between the parents following a divorce or separation, and it can help parents to learn something new about children's perspectives (Ballard, Holtzworth-Munroe, Applegate, D'Onofrio, and Bates, 2013; McIntosh, Long, and Wells, 2009). It can also contribute to achieving an agreement between the parents (McIntosh, Wells, Smyth, and Long, 2008). Some children perceive their participation as an opportunity to change and obtain flexibility in the parenting plans, and still maintaining strong relationships to both parents (Graham, Fitzgerald, and Phelps, 2009). Children can be highly capable of expressing what they like and dislike about the arrangements (Gollop et al., 2000).

1.2 The development of child-inclusive practice in out-of-court mediation in Norway

The Norwegian child custody dispute resolution system consists of three tiers (Nylund, 2018). The first two (family mediation and pre-court mediation), both mandatory, are referred to as

mediation in continuation and are carried out free of charge by the local Family Counselling Offices. The third tier is court-connected alternative dispute resolution processes, which in practice is mostly court-connected mediation (for a process overview, see James, Haugen, Rantalaiho, and Marples, 2010: 322; Nylund, 2018). This article concerns the first two tiers.

Mandatory mediation in Norway concerns families with children under 16 years. Parents have to meet for at least one mediation session in the case of separation between cohabiting or married parents, or in the case of pre-court intervention when parents wish to petition the court for parental responsibility, legal custody or visitation rights; or when parents disagree about relocation (The Children Act, 1981; The Marriage Act, 1991). Between 2014 and 2017, the Family Counselling Offices received about 16,000 new mediation cases annually, with about 6000 married couples wanting to separate, 5000 cohabiting parents breaking up, and 5000 pre-court mediation cases (Bufdir, 2018, 2019a). In mandatory mediation, parents must make a written agreement about parental responsibility, physical custody and contact arrangement, in addition to other practical matters relevant to the best interests of the child.

Children's right to participate in relation to family break-up is specified in Norwegian legislation (The Children Act, 1981; section 31; The Constitution, 1814; section 104.1). The rationale is that hearing children in mediation is a tool to ensure children's right to be heard in matters concerning them (Ministry of Children and Families, 2018). The number of children who participated in mandatory family mediation has increased substantially from 7% in 2014 (Bufdir, 2015) to 26% in 2018 (Bufdir, 2019b). The initial increase followed the implementation and application of the Children in Mediation (CIM) model in some local Family Counselling Offices that started in 2012. Child-inclusive mediation invites the child directly into the process (McIntosh et al., 2008), and it can involve the child by having the mediator or a child-specialist interviewing the child separately, or by supporting the child in a

conversation with the whole family (Birnbaum, 2009). The CIM model primarily introduces children between 7 and 15 years systematically into the mediation process in the first meeting.

Figure 1 illustrates the CIM proceeding.

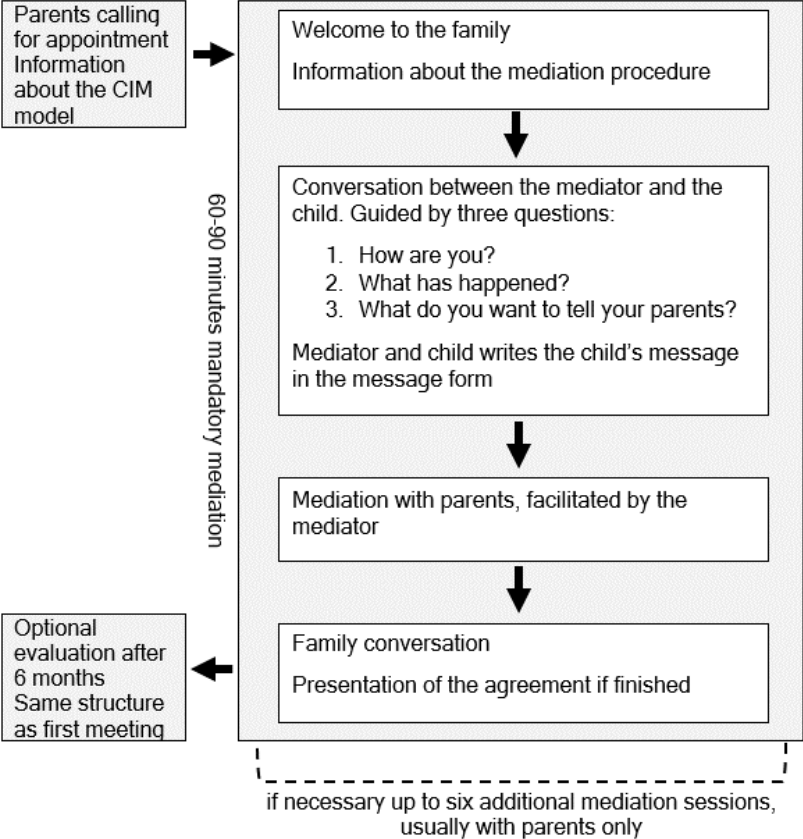


Figure 1 Procedure of the CIM model, as described by Jonassen (2016)

1.2.1 The Hearing Children in Mediation (HCIM) project

This paper is part of the HCIM project that carries out research on child-inclusive family mediation - specifically the CIM model - in a mandatory mediation setting in Norway. The research design has a convergent-parallel approach by combining qualitative and quantitative data (Thørnblad and Strandbu, 2018).

Previous project publications have examined children’s messages when participating in conversation with the mediator (Thørnblad and Strandbu, 2018), showing that children talk about their living arrangement preferences in relation to various topics. For instance, when commenting on ETSA, these are described as “fair”, as solutions that enable frequent stays

with each parent, with the emphasis on parents living near each other. Some talk about the difficulties with spending an equal amount of time at each parent's house due to a lack of friends at one of the places, and the difficulty of sharing themselves equally in a busy everyday life.

1.3 Aims of this paper

Children talked about their living arrangement preferences in the meeting with the mediator (Thørnblad and Strandbu, 2018), although this is not one of the guiding topics in the child conversation in the CIM model. To what extent children share their preferences when they attend mediation is generally unknown. This article aims to examine 1) to what extent children want the mediator to share their living arrangement preferences with the parents when they participate in the context of the CIM model in Norway, and 2) whether children who prefer an ETSA differ significantly in terms of children's age, sex, or the level of conflict between the parents from those who have other preferences.

2 Research design

The research design of this study (outlined in Figure 2) is similar to a "Quasi-Mixed design" or "Monostrand Conversion design" (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2006). The thick arrows indicate the main analytical path: how the child's message ends up as a quantitative outcome variable in the results section. The stippled arrows indicate how data constitute parts of the data collection, analytical, and inferential stages apart from the "data conversion". The analysis was conducted in two phases, a content analysis of children's messages and a generalised linear mixed model analysis of associations between children's living arrangement preferences and characteristics of the child or family conflict. The IBM SPSS Statistics 25 was used for the statistical work.

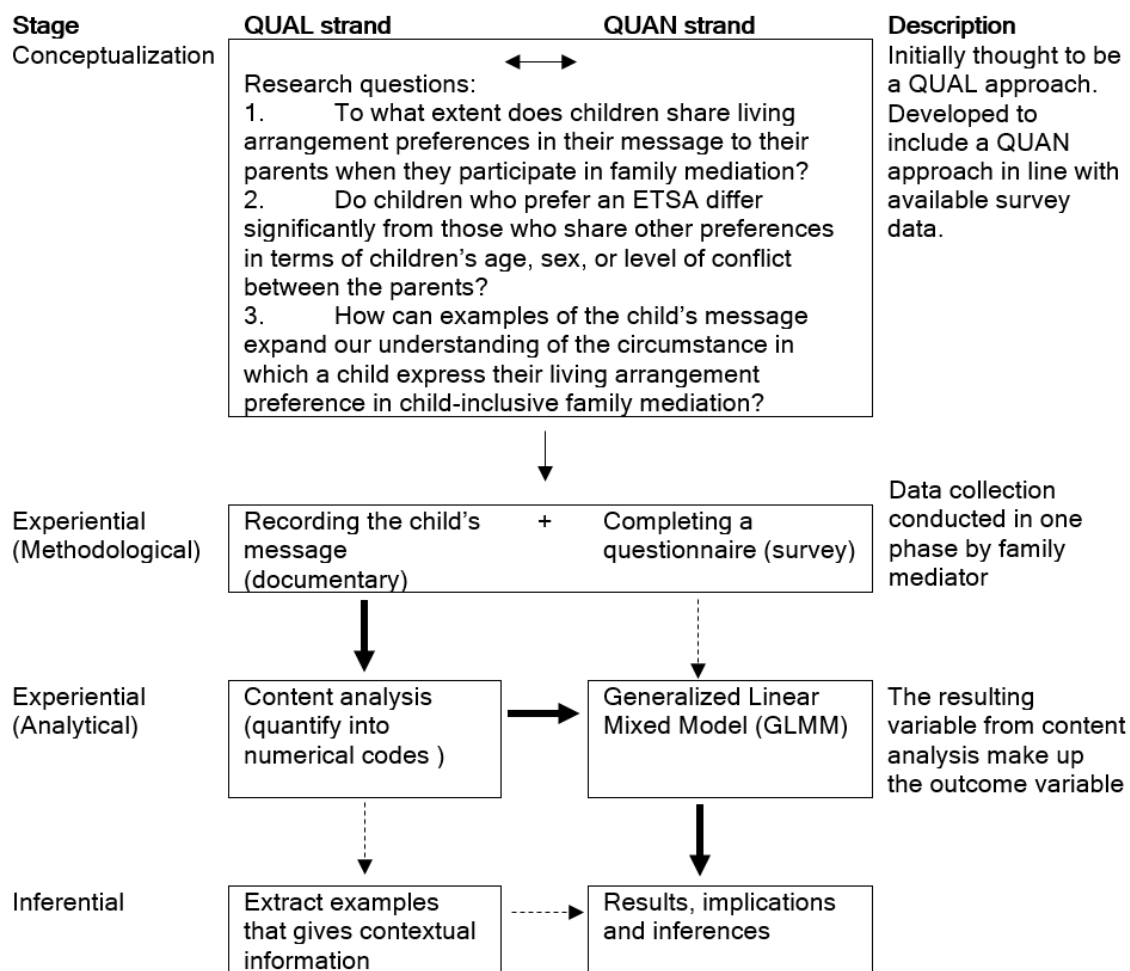


Figure 2 Outline of a Quasi-Mixed design

2.1 Data collection

The data collection followed the trial of the CIM model during the period of 2013–2015, where mediators at four Family Counselling Offices in two out of four regions in Norway contributed to the data collection of children's messages and questionnaires. All families obliged to attend family mediation at these offices in this period were offered child-inclusive mediation. Families who accepted the invitation were invited to participate in the research project. It was not possible to calculate a response rate due to the unknown number of families who were actually invited to bring the children with them and the unknown number of families who declined the invitation to participate in the research project. This is practice-

based research based on self-selection, with mediators completing the forms immediately after the first mediation session.

At the first mediation session, 19 mediators (13 women and six men) contributed to the data collection. The mediators had between one and 46 cases each (mean = 11.3). The occupation statuses of the mediators were: clinical psychologist, family therapist, social worker, child welfare officer, teacher, and theologian. All mediators had completed a formal mediator training with certification managed by the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs. All mediators had considerable experience in working with family mediation. The mediators had completed training in the CIM model.

Table 1 Questionnaire content for the mediators at the mandatory family mediation session

Time point	Measures and questions	
First mediation session	Child's message	Message from children to parents provided to mediator during child conversation
	Characteristics	Mediation type, children's age and sex, legal custody and visiting arrangement, important aspects (e.g. substance abuse, violence, psychiatry, child neglect, child protection service, other aspects)
	Single-item measure on a scale, percentage score	Level of conflict
	Descriptions	Agreement between the parents Key features of the agreement Decisions in line with child's message Comments on important aspects

Table 1 shows the data collected by the mediators after the first mediation session. The single-items were scored on a visual analogue scale by the mediators, and responses were transformed into a score between 0 and 100. The questionnaires are short with no standardised and lengthy measures in order to make it convenient and less time-consuming for the mediators, young children and adolescents to complete the forms.

Sampling and sample characteristics

All the families included in the study attended family mediation which was mandatory according to the statutory framework for parents who are separating, divorcing or in pre-adversarial proceedings. Parents are usually invited to bring children between seven and 15 to mediation applying the CIM model. Since these age limits are seen in light of children's maturation, they are not strictly enforced. In some cases, both older or younger siblings wanted to participate. Therefore, families were included in the analysis irrespective of the children's ages. A total number of 213 families, with 346 children participated. Both parents were present in 207 of these families.

The average age of children (169 boys and 177 girls) participating in the first mediation was 10.8 ($SD = 3.0$), ranging from four to 18 years with an average number of 1.6 ($SD = 0.7$) children in each family. Family characteristics can be found in Table 2.

Table 2 Characteristics of the families and children in the sample sorted by type of mediation

	n	Percent	Average age of children		Average agreement		Average conflict	
			N	Mean (SD)	N	Mean (SD)	N	Mean (SD)
Divorce mediation	94	44.1	167	11.4 (3.1)	88	84.7 (22.4)	92	22.8 (26.1)
Cohabitation break-up mediation	53	24.9	85	9.6 (2.8)	52	84.6 (21.5)	53	27.2 (28.8)
Pre-Court mediation	64	30.0	91	11.0 (3.0)	57	41.7 (37.7)	60	69.7 (30.0)
Total	211	99.1	343		197		205	
Missing	2	.9	3		16		8	
<i>Total</i>	<i>213</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>346</i>	<i>10.8 (3.0)</i>	<i>213</i>		<i>213</i>	

Table 3 shows the agreements that parents made during the first mandatory mediation session, reported by the mediator. Lack of residence and contact arrangement registration was often due to parents writing the agreement at home, parental disagreement or because parents needed additional sessions. "Mostly one parent" refers to the time spent at the parent's place (up to a 65/35 time-share rate), and corresponds to what practitioners usually consider "normal contact". "Only one parent" refers to no contact or less than normal contact with one of the parents. However only two children had no contact with the non-custodial parent.

Table 3 Registered residence and contact arrangements after the first mandatory mediation session

		Contact arrangement				Total
		Mainly one parent	Mostly one parent	Equal time sharing	Not registered	
Residence arrangement	Mother	29 (8.4 %)	77 (22.3 %)	24 (6.9 %)	4 (1.2 %)	134 (38.7 %)
	Father	2 (0.6 %)	18 (5.2 %)	17 (4.9 %)	2 (0.6 %)	39 (11.3 %)
	ETSA	0	0	111 (32.1 %)	0	111 (32.1 %)
	Not registered	0	0	0	62 (17.9 %)	62 (17.9 %)
	<i>Total</i>	<i>31 (9.0 %)</i>	<i>95 (27.5 %)</i>	<i>152 (43.9 %)</i>	<i>68 (19.7 %)</i>	<i>346 (100 %)</i>

2.2 Content analysis

The children’s messages consist of key points from the child conversation. This is what the child and mediator agreed to communicate to the parents. The text is short in nature (see Table 4 for examples), and some might say that it does not fulfil the criteria for “qualitative data”, which is supposed to be characterised by reported speech and rich with a person’s actions, expressions, intentions or perspectives (Thagaard, 2013). The text does not cover all aspects of the conversation, for instance topics discussed, but not written down.

However, for this purpose, the text represents an opportunity to gain insights into what children perceived as important for parents to know during the time of participation. The texts vary in how comprehensive they are. Living arrangements can be termed as ‘linguistically constituted social realities that are rooted in the kinds of conversations that produced the texts’ (Krippendorff, 2013: 80). Such a phenomenon is a good starting point for conducting content analysis. Content analysis is ‘a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use’ (Krippendorff, 2013: 24). By classifying qualitative data (in this case children’s messages), one assumes that the meaning which is being described is in fact present in the material (Schreier, 2012). This was done in order to calculate frequencies and to do inferential statistics. According to Schreier (2012: 239), it ‘does not make the method any less qualitative, [...] But one might argue that it turns the design of your study into a so-called mixed methods design’.

The coding process applied principles from quantitative reliability testing and qualitative assessment of the coding frame and coding process. The coding frame was made by using definitions of JPC and ETSA: no preference, only one of the parents, mostly one of the parents, or ETSA (see Table 4). The coding frame was tested by the first and second author and a project professor who scored 30 children’s messages from 20 families; refined criteria were then added.

Table 4 Coding frame of the content analysis

Preference	Coding instruction	Example
No preference	No explicit information about the child’s preference of residence or contact	‘Boy wish that mother and father shall live close to each other. Boy wants the family to celebrate Christmas together’.
Only mother/ father	Minimal contact with the other parent. Prefer to live with only one parent. Can visit/meet the other parent. Less than 25% of the time with the non-custodial parent.	‘Wants to visit father in daytime, preferably outside – eat and stuff, not staying overnights. Doing fine at mum’s’. ‘[Boy’s name] wants to live with father in [name of place]’.
Mostly mother/ father	Gives an example of more time with one of the parents. At least 25-49% of the time with each of the parents.	‘Live two weeks with mother and one week with father. Important that mother and father live close to each other’. ‘Want to stay with father more. Want to stay with mother also’.
ETSA	A specific preference of a shared time arrangement that equals to 50/50	‘Want to try one week with both [parents]. It requires a better relationship with his father. Otherwise he will live with his mother’.

The first and second author conducted a test-retest reliability analysis. The preferred agreement criteria are a combination of Cohen’s Kappa and percent agreement, as suggested by (McHugh, 2012). The criteria of the Kappa was set to .60, which according to McHugh (2012: 279) correspond to a moderate level of agreement. A sufficient level of percent agreement was 80 %. We used SPSS to do a random selection of 15% of the messages (apart from the 30 messages already assessed). The authors had all contextual information in the questionnaire (see Table 1) available in order to remove uncertainty. There was a moderate to strong agreement between the judgments of the two authors, $K = .70$ (95% CI, .50, .88), $p < .001$, raw percent agreement = 84.6%. The authors reviewed the disagreements to

establish a common understanding of the scores. The first author scored the rest of the messages.

The third step was conducted approximately seven months following the second step. The third author scored the messages that the first author scored alone ($n = 268$). The consistency was acceptable with $K = .75$ (95% CI, .68, .81), $p = <.001$, and raw percent agreement = 83.6%. There were 44 disagreements that were reviewed and agreed upon.

2.3 Applying generalised linear mixed models to assess associations between characteristics and preference

The mediator did not always distinguish between the living arrangement preferences of siblings. We used a generalised linear mixed model to account for dependency across siblings' arrangement preferences, assuming a multinomial distribution since living arrangement is categorical. Siblings share family and parent characteristics. Thus, a random intercept was included in the model to account for within family dependence. Children (level 1) were nested within families (level 2). The target variable was children's arrangement preferences. For the comparisons, a preference for an ETSA was used as reference target category.

The population characteristics of families in pre-court mediation cases differ from those in divorce and cohabitation mediation. Some of the differences relate to a higher level of conflict and a lower level of agreement, as can be seen in Table 2. Others relate to the time since the parents' break-up, and the time the children have lived with a certain living arrangement. Because the parents in these families are considering a court case, or possibly they already have been in court, it is less likely that these families have settled upon an ETSA (Andenæs, Kjøs, and Tjersland, 2017; Ministry of Children and Families, 2019). Because of these differences, we excluded families attending pre-court mediation from the analysis. Since

we do not have any indications that families in divorce and cohabitation mediation differ on the general level, we carried out the analysis on both groups together.

The overall model included children’s age and sex, level of agreement, and conflict. The method of variable selection was a backward stepwise selection process with the aim of finding significant contributors to the model. The variable with the highest significance probability of the fixed effects was removed in a stepwise order until there were only significant variables left. The significance level was set to .05.

3 Results

This part presents the findings from the content analysis, and the results from the generalised linear mixed model.

3.1 Extent of living arrangement preferences in the child’s message

Although children were not asked about where they wanted to live, 47.1% (163 children) wanted the mediator to communicate a living arrangement preference. Table 5 gives an overview of preferences sorted by mediation type. Children’s messages written in pre-court mediation cases differ in one important way. Of the messages in pre-court mediation, 26.4% stated a preference for shared care out of all categories considered as JPC. However, very few messages were identified as stating a preference for ETSA.

Table 5 Expressed living arrangement preferences in the children's messages, as reported by children at mandatory mediation session

		Frequency			Total	%
	Divorce mediation	Cohabiting mediation	Pre-court mediation	Missing		
Valid						
No preference stated in the child’s message	92 (55.1 %)	42 (49.4 %)	48 (52.7 %)	1	183	52.9
Only mother	4 (2.4 %)	5 (5.9 %)	17 (18.7 %)		26	7.5
Mostly mother	14 (8.4 %)	8 (9.4 %)	15 (16.5 %)	2	39	11.3
ETSA	48 (28.7 %)	28 (32.9 %)	5 (5.5 %)		81	23.4

Mostly father	4 (2.4 %)	1 (1.2 %)	4 (4.4 %)	9	2.6
Only father	5 (3.0 %)	1 (1.2 %)	2 (2.2 %)	8	2.3
<i>Total</i>	<i>167</i>	<i>85</i>	<i>91</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>346</i>

During the content analysis, it became clear that children very often gave an explanation or certain reservations in relation to the preferences stated. Material things and social relations such as closeness to school and friends, or more space where thematised. Also, justice, or what was fair, was given as an explanation, both for an ETSA and for justifying an unequal treatment of the parents.

The importance of maintaining strong relationships with both parents was a common explanation. Improvement of a relationship could be a requirement, or the concern that their wish to live more with one parent (often the mother) would harm the relationship with the other parent. A related theme, but somewhat distinct, was the behaviour of one parent concerning illness, harsh and vocal discipline, and issues with alcohol and other substances.

“The child’s terms” was another theme. This could relate to the organising of the time with the non-custodial parent, the importance of *convenient* agreements, and acting in a flexible way. The following examples emphasise the need to assess the agreements at a later time-point: ‘... but they need to change back to 50/50 for both, if it [the new arrangement] does not work’ (siblings, cohabitation mediation) and ‘... What will happen if I am not satisfied with the agreement?’ (adolescent, pre-court mediation).

3.2 Associations with children’s living arrangement preferences

Due to few occurrences in “mostly father” and “only father”, these categories were merged for the analysis. Table 6 shows the backwards elimination process based on the total sample. The variable with the least significant value was removed in a stepwise procedure. The final model included the age of the child. Table 7 presents the specific comparisons.

Table 6 Overall model of the total data set with fixed effects for included independent variables and backwards stepwise elimination procedure

	Overall model <i>F</i> (df1, df2)	1 <i>F</i> (df1, df2)	2 <i>F</i> (df1, df2)	3 <i>F</i> (df1, df2)
Corrected model	1.05 (16, 218)	1.30 (12, 222)	1.79 (8, 237)	2.90* (4, 244)
Age	2.62* (4, 218)	2.69* (4, 222)	2.72* (4, 237)	2.90* (4, 244)
Conflict	.63 (4, 218)	.62 (4, 222)	.81 (4, 237)	
Agreement	.54 (4, 218)	.55 (4, 222)		
Sex	.35 (4, 218)			

p* < .05 ** *p* < .01 * *p* < .001

As can be seen in Table 6, age was the only variable that was significantly associated with type of preference stated in the child’s message. Older children were more likely to state a preference for the majority of time at the mother’s place when compared to an ETSA, with one year increase in age resulting in a 40% increase in the likelihood of the child’s message including a preference for only living at the mother’s house. Age did not have a significant effect when comparing a preference for ETSA to the other categories.

Level of conflict was not significantly associated with children’s preferences. There was large variation in the level of conflict in each of the preference categories.

Table 7 Fixed coefficients viewed by prediction comparisons between categories in the target variable

Targeted reference category	Compared target categories	Independent variable	Coefficient			
			Est.	SE	<i>t</i>	OR
ETSA	Only mother	Age	.34*	.17	2.03	1.404
	Mostly mother	Age	.09	.09	.99	1.097
	Mostly and only father	Age	.25	.14	1.84	1.288
	No preference stated	Age	-.08	.06	-1.32	.919

Notes. **p* < .05

4 Discussion

Our study gives insights into the extent of children’s emphasis on living arrangement preferences while attending family mediation. A special insight is that “shared care” is

something different from an ETSA. As identified by qualitative studies on families living with an ETSA arrangement (see Birnbaum and Saini, 2015; Carson et al., 2018), children appreciate flexibility and being able to change arrangements, for instance to live longer periods with one of the parents if they think it is more practical or preferable. Adolescents especially seem to value flexibility, and are also more likely to obtain it as they become more independent and therefore able to move more easily between homes compared to younger children (Gollop et al., 2000; Lidén and Kitterød, 2019). Perhaps children, as they grow older, are more likely to view the arrangement of living more of the time with one parent as providing flexibility and enabling the child to continue with his or her developmental goals. From our rather small sample, we can find support for this tendency when looking at the effect of age in preferring to live “only” with mother. Although age was non-significant in the comparison between children preferring more time with their father and ETSA, it seems that the tendency is in the same direction for this group as well.

Our measures of conflict did not prove to have any effect on children’s preferences in the analysis relating to children attending the first mandatory mediation session following parental separation or divorce. This was somewhat unexpected because few children in pre-court mediation preferred an ETSA, and because researchers have argued that children are less satisfied with shared care arrangements when parents are in conflict (see Fehlberg, Smyth, Maclean, and Roberts, 2011; Lidén and Kitterød, 2019). One explanation might be that the broad definition of “shared care” was divided into sub-categories where ETSA is compared with mostly mother (different “shared care” arrangements compared with each other). A comparison between ETSA and “only mother” or “only father” might be more fruitful if the sample size were bigger. Another interpretation is that conflict between parents does not have an effect on children’s preferences of ETSA during the family reorganisation.

Rather, it might be the experience over time of living in two homes with conflicted parents that has an impact on where the child would like to live.

5 Implications for practice and research

We encourage family mediators to examine whether children want to share their preferences. After all, they are invited to a conversation that is part of a process where the parents are making an agreement about future living arrangements. They should not ask where the child wants to live. Being asked directly can put children in “a difficult position” (Cashmore and Parkinson, 2008). Rather, it is a question of whether to provide children with an opportunity to take a stand on this issue, which could clarify what having a say can be for that individual child. Although some mediators find it challenging to incorporate children’s contribution to the decision-making process (Thørnblad, Strandbu, and Salamonsen, 2019), this topic provides an entry point into the child’s life. Both an explanation for a preference and the lack of one provide an opportunity to engage in a dialogue that may later help the family in the reorganisation of post-separation family life.

Our findings do not suggest any “best arrangement practices”. However, few children in pre-court mediation in our study presented a preference for an ETSA. Any presumptions or hierarchical recommendations that suggest ETSA as being in the best interest of the child, risk to violate the views of children in contested matters’. Thus, children in our sample seem to support policy makers who favour assessments of the individual needs of children and families, and who argue against an ETSA for families characterised by conflict and where parents are unable to collaborate.

By applying a mixed approach to examining children’s messages when attending family mediation, we have been able to assess the written key points that resulted from the conversation between the mediator and the child. By quantifying the qualitative message into the operationalised living arrangements on three levels (equal, mostly and only), we were able

to show the diversity within each category of children's living arrangement preferences.

Future studies that focus on "shared parenting" could benefit from applying similar categories when comparing child outcomes, and when looking at children's experiences of various living arrangements. "Shared parenting" alone makes up a broad category of living arrangements, and risks simplifying the context under which researchers draw conclusions with implications for children.

5.1 Limitations

Future studies might consider using established measurements for inter-parental conflict (e.g. Helland and Borren, 2015) for a more robust assessment of its impact for children's living arrangement preferences. Also, due to the sample size, few children shared a preference for more time with the fathers compared with more time with their mothers, leading to lower power for analyses involving this category.

Caution is needed because our findings might be subject to selection bias as we have not measured control variables such as socio-economic status and response rate. However, the size and composition of the selection make it probable that the results based on this sample have relevance beyond those that took part in this study (Thørnblad and Strandbu, 2018). Additionally, the cases collected in 2014 constituted 12% of the total number of mediation cases, and the percentage of pre-court mediation cases was very close to the national number (Thørnblad and Strandbu, 2018). This assumption is applied to our findings.

6 Conclusion

We have pointed out that many children have an opinion of how family life following parental separation and divorce should be organised. We suggest that the CIM model provides a unique opportunity for the family and children to adapt arrangements to children's practical, emotional and psychological needs. Even though some children attending in the course of pre-

court mediation preferred shared care, few children shared a preference for ETSA. Older children were more likely to prefer living primarily with the mother compared to an ETSA. When these associations are seen in relation to the reasons and premises provided by children, and the analysis conducted by Thørnblad and Strandbu (2018), we can understand children's living arrangement preferences in terms of children's need to be cared for and to belong to both parents and at the same time avoiding being forced into a fixed arrangement. This is in line with other research suggesting that it is the parenting styles and the quality of the parent-child relationship that have a bigger impact on children compared to the living arrangement (Smart, 2002; Smart and Neale, 2000). It is the emotional space, and not a shared time arrangement that provides security for children (Sadowski and McIntosh, 2016).

Because existing knowledge does not give any clear answers as to which living arrangement is in the best interest of the child, and because children have individual preferences and needs that cannot be fulfilled by a single solution, future policy making should avoid recommendations about any fixed percentages in living arrangements, especially for those proceeding to court. A focus on how practitioners can work with parents to increase flexibility and individual adjustments as the child's needs changes might be the most beneficial direction. And finally, many children do have the capacity to participate in decision-making processes, including the creation of parenting plans, if adults make adjustments for it to happen.

7 Acknowledgements

Astrid Strandbu, Professor, Department of Education, UiT The Arctic University of Norway

Anita Salamonsen, Professor, RKBU North, UiT Arctic University of Norway

Amy Holtan, Professor, RKBU North, UiT Arctic University of Norway

8 Funding

The data collection carried out in 2013-2014 was partly financed by Wøyenstiftelsen. The PhD-position is funded by RKBU North and the Faculty of Health Sciences at University of Tromsø. There were no dependencies or interest parties identified at the outset of the project.

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Article III

Under review

Adolescents' Negotiations of Loyalty and Fairness in Relation to Parents' Separation Process

Abstract

Research on children's experiences of parental separation highlight equality and fairness between parents as one explanation for why children wish a symmetrical time-sharing between parents. In this paper we analyse adolescents' narratives and ask how adolescents negotiate closeness and distance with their parents, with a specific emphasis on issues of loyalty when adolescents' views diverge from symmetry and fairness. Narratives from qualitative interviews with eleven Norwegian adolescents aged between 12 and 17 were analysed. Ideas from the theory of invisible loyalties were applied to analyse the interviews, resulting in two topics, namely 'Bookkeeping of parents' fulfilled and failed obligations' and 'Negotiations of obligations between parents and adolescents.' According to the adolescents in this study, fairness does not necessarily mean equal time-sharing. Fairness is subject for negotiations, and adolescents' loyalty to parents are justified by fulfilled and failed obligations.

Keywords: Divorce, family mediation, invisible loyalties, parent-child contact problems, shared parenting, joint physical custody

Introduction

The dynamic aspect of family life is particularly salient during parental separation. Parental separation refers to the union dissolution between cohabiting and married parents. During such a process, relatively taken-for-granted routines and family practices become subject for negotiations (Morgan, 2011). In this article we examine how adolescents make sense of and negotiate their relationships with their parents following parental separation in a Norwegian context. While we refer to children in general as persons between the ages of 0 and 17, the term adolescents specify the ages between 12 and 17.

Parental separation in a Norwegian context

About 44 per cent of the adult population is married, while 20 per cent is cohabiting (Andersen, 2023). Based on current trends, the divorce rate is on 37,1 per cent (Statistics Norway, 2024), and cohabitation is considerably less stable (Golpen, 2015). About 77 per cent of children live with both parents in the same household, while about 23 per cent is registered at a one-parent household¹ (Statistics Norway, 2023). About 24 000 children experience parental separation each year (Bufdir, 2024).

In the following, we will present some of the key aspects of the Norwegian context for parental separation; children's right to be heard, mandatory family mediation (henceforth mediation) and the practising of joint physical custody (JPC). JPC refers to an agreement in which the child is registered with physical residence with both parents. *Symmetrical* JPC refers to equal time-sharing, while *asymmetrical* JPC refers to the child spending at least 30-49 per cent of the time at both places (Steinbach & Augustijn, 2021).

¹ Based on the National Population Register in which it is only possible to be registered with one residence. Thus, these numbers include children with JPC and children who live with one parent due to other reasons, e.g. the decease of a parent.

Norwegian legislation has incorporated the UNCRC, Article 12 (UN General Assembly, 1989). According to the Children Act (1981, Section 31), children, from the age of seven (or younger if able to form views), should be given information and provided opportunity to share their views. From the age of 12, their views should be given *considerable* weight. Parents are the primary persons to look after children's right to be heard, and they are informed about this obligation during mediation (Regulation on family mediation, 2007).

Family Counselling Offices receive about 11 000 new parental separation cases annually, and the service is free of charge (Nylund, 2021). Mediation is one of several forms of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) processes (see Birnbaum, 2009; Newell, et al., 2009) which may be applied prior to commencing family law proceedings (Taylor et al., 2021). In Norway, it is separate from court-connected mediation and court trials and does not involve lawyers or any appointed child experts (Nylund, 2021). It is mandatory for all parents with children under the age of 16 who separate (regardless of level of conflict), and parents who wish to initiate court proceedings. Its main goal is to promote co-parental collaboration and solve conflicts between parents. The family mediator should guide parents to ensure the best interest of the child in parenting arrangements about parental responsibility, residence, and contact (Regulation on family mediation, 2007). A mediation certificate that proves parents' attendance is a prerequisite for applying for a divorce, to receive child benefits following parental separation, and for court proceedings on custody, residence, and relocation (the Children Act, 1981; the Marriage Act, 1991). Less than 20 per cent of separated parents initiate court proceedings, which for most cases is court-connected mediation (Nylund, 2021).

Children's participation in mediation in Norway is not regulated by law, but we have witnessed a political focus on increasing this kind of participation. For instance, in 2022, the aim was to include 30 per cent of children in parents' mediation process (Bufdir, 2023). Today, around 25 per cent of children (usually aged between 7 and 15) participate in this

process (Bufdir, 2023). This is a considerable increase from earlier levels (e.g. 4 per cent in 2010, see Ådnanes et al., 2011). Research from Norway has shown that children, in general, want to be heard, regardless of level of conflict between parents (Thørnblad & Strandbu, 2018; Sunde et al., 2021). Additionally, children who participate in mediation often have opinions about living arrangements (Grape et al., 2021).

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), Article 9 (UN General Assembly, 1989), and Norwegian legislation (Haugli, 2013; the Children Act, 1981, Section 42), parents and their children have the right to maintain contact with each other even if they live apart. Shared parenting and JPC have become increasingly common in many Western countries (Steinbach, 2019). A tendency of more involved fathering practises can be placed within a framework of family welfare policies and legislations that emphasise gender equality in the Nordic countries (Andreasson & Johansson, 2019; Eydal & Rostgaard, 2018; Eydal & Rostgaard, 2011; Gíslason & Símonardóttir, 2018; Kitterød & Lyngstad, 2014; Forsberg, 2009). Although some scholars suggest that JPC has positive outcomes such as improving the father-child relationship or the child's well-being (see Nielsen, 2018; Sandberg, 2023; Vrolijk & Keizer, 2021), others are more cautious towards such conclusions due to methodological limitations and social selection among parents who practise these arrangements (see Johansen et al., 2022; Ottosen et al., 2018; Steinbach, 2019; Wiik, 2022).

In 2020, 43 per cent of separated parents in Norway practised symmetrical JPC, one in ten practised asymmetrical JPC, and about half of parents who had separated practised sole physical custody in which the child lived most of the time with one of the parents, most often the mother (Wiik, 2022).

Research on children's experiences of parental separation

Research on children's experiences of JPC has shown that they are often concerned about equality and symmetry and may treat their parents fair and equal in terms of how they share

their time between the two households (see Cashmore & Parkinson, 2008; Kitterød & Lidén, 2021; Neale & Flowerdew, 2007). Several studies find that children wish to have close relationships with both parents after parental separation (Berman & Daneback, 2022; Graham et al., 2009; Haugen, 2007; Kitterød & Lidén, 2021; Thørnblad & Strandbu, 2018). Closeness to parents is one aspect of the parent-child relationship quality, and may function as a protective factor during interparental conflicts (van Dijk et al., 2020).

The ideal of ‘intensive parenting’ is common in the Euro-American context (Faircloth, 2023), including Scandinavian countries (Forsberg, 2011; Hennem, 2014; Aarseth, 2018). It means that parenting is child-centred and attends to the best interest of the child. Children too can rely on a discourse of ‘the best interest of the child’ when they put forth their own wishes (Kitterød & Lidén, 2021), for instance by emphasising the need for flexibility in living arrangements (Birnbaum & Saini, 2015). Flexibility can be minor alterations of the parenting scheme or having the opportunity to stop by the other parent’s household (Berman, 2015; Graham et al., 2009; Grape et al., 2021; Haugen, 2010; Marschall, 2014). Particularly adolescents seem to prefer flexible arrangements that are adjusted to their everyday lives (Gollop et al, 2000; Kitterød & Lidén, 2021). The ability to influence living arrangements may depend on children’s and adolescents’ opportunities to share their views and have a say (Berman, 2018; Carson et al, 2018; Gollop et al., 2000; Haugen et al., 2015; Sunde et al., 2021).

If a living arrangement preference diverge from symmetrical JPC, children can experience feelings of guilt or loyalty conflicts due to a concurrent wish to have close relationships with both parents (Haugen, 2007, 2010; Johnsen et al., 2018; Marschall, 2014). Parent-child relationships are often subject for negotiations after parental separation (see Berman, 2015, 2018). Some children may resist or refuse contact with one of the parents due to violence, abuse, or behaviour from a parent who influence the child’s views (Garber, 2007; Geffner &

Sandoval, 2020). Others initiate changes because of practical matters, feelings of closeness to a parent or neighbourhood, or other reasons (see e.g. Carson et al., 2018). Living arrangement preferences that diverge from symmetrical JPC may point to the need for flexible living arrangements.

Research aim

The aim of this article is to provide new perspectives on adolescents' experiences of relationships with parents after parental separation in a Norwegian context. Adolescents are often thought of as standing at the crossroads of new forms of participation in both family and peer relationships (Giordano, 2003; Rogoff, 2003). Their interactions with parents are sometimes characterised by a move towards more egalitarian relationships and periodically more conflicts (Branje, 2018), and are therefore of particular interest. In this paper we analyse what adolescents emphasise as important when relationships and living arrangements are renegotiated. We ask how adolescents negotiate closeness and distance with their parents, and how they justify their loyalty to parents when their views diverge from symmetry and fairness between parents.

Theoretical framework

In a sociocultural perspective, adolescents are understood to be active agents, creating meaning in their interactions with the social and cultural contexts in which they live (Bruner & Haste, 1987; Rogoff, 2003; Valsiner, 1997). Their decisions to behave loyally (or not) must be seen in relation to their context, both the environment and the matrix of motivations, options, and (subjective) rights (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986). The theory of invisible loyalties (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973) views relationships as dialectical. We apply this theoretical framework for understanding the dynamic tensions between adolescents' ontological dependency on interactions with his or her parents and the development of autonomy. Loyalty is defined as 'a preferential attachment to relational partners who are

entitled to a priority of ‘bonding’ (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986, p. 418).’ According to this theory, people behave loyally due to external coercion, conscious interest in membership, consciously recognised feelings of obligation, and an unconscious binding obligation to belong (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973). Individuals keep track of past and present obligations among family members that contributes to an (invisible) ‘ledger of justice’. This ledger results in a perceived fairness of give-and-take that exist in the relationship (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986; Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973).

Family obligations can be understood as being negotiated through a process of allocating responsibilities (Finch & Mason, 1993). Negotiations between parents and their children have become normative in contemporary Western cultures (see Sommer, 2019). Failing to comply with obligations can result in guilt, which constitute a secondary regulatory force by giving input on the homeostasis of obligations or the loyalty system (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973). Viewing adolescents as negotiating with their parents during parents’ separation, we see them as agents interacting in ways that affect relationships and decisions (Mayall, 2002). In other words, they are agents within interdependent relationships in which loyalty is continuously negotiated (Abebe, 2019; Alanen, 1998; Spyrou, 2018).

Methods

This study is part of the Hearing Children in Mediation (HBIM) project, which examines aspects of child-inclusive practices at the Family Counselling Offices in Norway. The study was approved by the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (ref. nr. 150314).

Sampling strategy and participants

Family mediators from five Family Counselling Offices in all four regions in the country, in both rural and urban districts, contributed to the recruitment of adolescents. We used an illustrative (Mason, 2002) and purposeful sampling strategy (Flick, 2007). Participants were

invited based on past attendance in the mediation process, regardless of the type of mediation (divorce, previously cohabiting parents, pre-court mediation, and mediation due to relocation), and an age between 12 and 17 years at the time of recruitment.

Our aim was that the narratives would inform different ways for adolescents to participate in decision-making processes during parental separation. We were satisfied with the variation when the narratives had different starting points (for example parent-adolescent conflicts or no conflict) that took different paths into continuity or discontinuity (for example close relationships and frequent contact, or conflicted relationship and little contact). Eleven adolescents (two boys and nine girls) participated in the study. They had different living arrangements with different levels of stability of the arrangements.

Procedure, ethics, and interview guide

Participants received information about the study from family mediators who recruited families, through the phone and by e-mail, and in the beginning of the interview. Adolescents who were at least 16 years of age gave personal consent. Younger participants gave personal consent in addition to parents also consenting to their participation. The interviewer was sensitive to assessing consent throughout the interview and emphasised that it was possible to withdraw participation at any time. To protect confidentiality, the interviews have been anonymised, participants were given pseudonyms, and their ages are presented as intervals of three years (12–14 or 15–17).

Interviews were conducted by the first author between September and December 2020. Four interviews were conducted at a venue chosen by the adolescents, and seven interviews were conducted digitally via Zoom Video Conferencing due to Covid-19 restrictions. Interviews lasted between 45 to 90 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

The interviews were semi-structured and draw on Bamberg (2021) by viewing narratives as configuring the temporal dimension of human experience, such as past, present, and future, which has a privileged status for exploring stability, continuity, and change. Further, we view adolescents' narratives as ways of creating meaning and coherence (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009) of parents' separation process.

The interview guide comprised five sections. 1) Inform and initiate the process (giving informed consent, repeating the content of the information sheet, and presenting the interviewer). 2) Talk about the time from when they learned about the parental separation until the time of the research interview. Follow-up questions were asked about the adolescents' thoughts, feelings, and understandings of the events, in addition to narrative elements such as time and space. Follow-up questions regarding living arrangements were only asked if the topic had been brought into the interview by the participant. If a participant had difficulty giving examples, they were asked to elaborate on a highlight, a low point, and a turning point. 3) The adolescents' participation in mediation. 4) Their aspirations, hopes, and plans for the future. 5) The interviewer summarised the narrative to provide the adolescent with an opportunity to correct and elaborate. Participants were given opportunity to be contacted to read the manuscript before submission to a scientific journal².

Data analysis

The analysis takes an abductive approach, using both the empirical data and theoretical knowledge to build on each other and carry the analysis forward (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2017; Tavory & Timmermans, 2014). The authors discussed what we thought was as expected and what surprised us in the narratives. For instance, we expected awareness of children's

² Nine adolescents said yes to read the manuscript before submission to a scientific journal. When contacted by the first author more than two years after their research interviews, two adolescents replied. One wanted to read the final publications. The other attended a meeting with the mother and the first author and read through the manuscript.

right to be heard due to the emphasis on child centred parenting practices in Norway. We also expected that participants would reflect upon their living arrangements. However, what caught our attention was how informants engaged in explaining how family practices had changed, and how they evaluated the quality of parenting and parent-adolescent relationships during these changes. Most participants gave rich and detailed accounts. Two of the interviews were characterised by briefer accounts and more talk and questions from the interviewer. Nevertheless, these two interviews were informative by providing inconsistencies between how the adolescents presented both parents' fulfilment of obligations and the emotional closeness to each of the parents.

In the initial analytical process, we picked Anne as an index case (Timmermans & Tavory, 2022) to anchor our analysis, and used it as 'the point around which variation will be structured (p. 93)'. Anne's narrative seemed to capture central features of how adolescents in this study exercised agency in negotiations. Although Anne's narrative caught our attention and curiosity in the beginning, all eleven narratives have been subject to systematic analysis. For example, she was one of eight adolescents who wished less contact compared to one of the parents. Three adolescents agreed with their parents to spend equal amount of time with both parents, but this preference was not unconditional.

After picking Anne as our index case, we examined the total data material for excerpts that described aspects of the relationships between an adolescent and a parent. Narrative approaches to analysis tend to focus on the accounts of individual informants rather than general conceptualisations of saturation (Saunders et al., 2018). When emphasising experiences, smaller sample sizes can be acceptable (see for instance Sandelowski, 1995).

Once we were familiarised with the relational descriptions across interviews, we applied ideas from Magnusson and Marecek (2015) about how to analyse individual excerpts for implicit cultural meanings. The first author looked for textual subjects and actions in each transcript as

a tool for organisation. According to Magnusson and Marecek (2015), people (the textual subjects) are the actors in a narrative that say and do things (actions), and thereby channel how implicit cultural meanings (such as old and new norms) may influence or inform what is said in a conversation. The authors discussed contradictions within these textual subjects and actions within cases that helped identifying dialectical tensions. Agreements among textual subjects and actions helped identify taken-for-granted understandings and led to further discussions of implicit cultural meanings within and across each interview. See table 1 for illustration of this process.

In table 2 we present how we grouped the implicit cultural meanings together into two overarching topics: ‘Bookkeeping of parents’ fulfilled and failed obligations’ and ‘Negotiations of obligations between parents and adolescents’.

We acknowledge that the narratives can be interpreted differently. Instead of loyalty to one of the parents, some might see manipulative behaviour from a parent, abuse and neglect, or violence as reasons for possible ‘triangulation’. However, we have not engaged ourselves into making any assumptions, but rather stayed close to the content of adolescents’ narratives.

The relevance of the Covid-19 pandemic

Participants differed in terms of the overlap between the parental separation process and the progress of the Covid-19 pandemic. We acknowledge that, in general, some parents might have experienced increased stress during the lockdown (Helland et al., 2021), and that some children experienced lower well-being and higher levels of anxiety and depression during the early stages of the pandemic (Nøkleby et al., 2023). However, this was not a topic that adolescents emphasised, and our understanding is that negotiations were something that, according to their narratives, were ongoing throughout the separation process regardless of the pandemic.

Bookkeeping of parents' fulfilled and failed obligations

Adolescents' loyalty to parents seemed to be contingent on parents' fulfilled and failed expectations to care for the adolescent emotionally and in time and space. The former concerned relational feelings of closeness. The latter related to the feeling of home or feeling distance to a parent's household.

Parents' effort to care for the adolescent

Anne (15–17) lived permanently with her father and visited her mother. According to Anne, her parents were unfriendly with each other, and we interpret her narrative as describing two parents who struggled with high conflict. She primarily emphasised how her mother failed Anne's expectations. For example, when Anne was younger, she perceived her mother as a 'bear mama' who fought with authorities to safeguard her best interests. However, this previous protective action by her mother (the merits from the past) had less weight compared to the current demerits. Such demerits were lack of acknowledgement of Anne's feelings, priorities, wishes or maturity, having told Anne that 'when you get older you will understand.' Anne seemed to think that she was not getting through to her mother and was unable to initiate negotiations about how to understand the situation. The importance of having the opportunity to share their views and to have their views acknowledged are some of the essential expectations expressed by adolescents across the narratives. Also, adolescents seemed to expect that parents were open and gave necessary and appropriate information about the separation process. Adolescents could disapprove parents who told lies or tried to deceive them or the other parent through ulterior motives such as wanting to reunite with the other parent due to economic issues or talking about new partners to make the other parent jealous. Parents' communication and a adolescents' wish to have a say are in line with scholars arguing that as children grow older, they are more likely to value openness and co-

determination in their relationships with parents rather than specific opinions about living arrangements (Sunde et al., 2021).

Parent-adolescent conflicts might be adaptive for relational development because it can increase competence in negotiating relational changes, especially when parents and adolescents can switch flexibly between a range of positive and negative emotions (Branje, 2018). The adolescents in our study valued parents who were emotionally available, who avoided to become angry or react with other negative emotions, and who made them feel safe in the relationship. However, as Anne's narrative exemplifies, the relationship can suffer when parents (and possibly the adolescent) are unable to adjust to each other's expectations. Anne described a feeling of not being 'fought for', for instance, because of her mother's reluctance to attend additional mediation sessions. As part of the parents' separation process, Anne and her sibling attended several follow-up meetings with the family mediator, as did her father. From Anne's point of view, her father then became a fallible parent, meaning that he was willing to admit mistakes and do something about them. Her mother, on the other hand, became the infallible mother.

I am not able to have any good communication with mum now. Me and (*Anne's sibling*) have asked her to go to the Family Counselling Office to talk. Because we say things to her and try to make her listen to us without her doing so. So it was like 'If you go there, then she [the mediator] can talk to you. Maybe then you will bother listening', but then she refused going. And we have been frustrated. That is why we have been happy that dad have attended – also for his own sake – that he had someone to talk with so that he didn't have to talk with me or (*her sibling*), or especially me – that I should listen to things that my ears shouldn't hear. (...) But also for him to get more advice on how to cope with everything. Which is advice that my mum also could have benefitted from.

Anne viewed her mother's actions as egoistic because she thought her mother avoided to be faced with what she called a 'scapegoat', or a mother who had 'fucked up' the parent-adolescent relationships. The fluctuation in the quality and balance of Anne and her mother's relationship is apparent by how she and her mother have not yet acquired a common understanding of Anne's need of care and acknowledgement, and neither the reciprocity of caregiving between them.

Expectations that parents promote feelings of togetherness

In her narrative, Nora (12–14) described recurrent conflicts between her parents during the whole process of parental separation. She was, however, more concerned about her father's inability to create a feeling of a home that took care of her everyday needs, such as a general sense of stability, help with schoolwork and transport to school. Her mother, in contrast, made Nora feel as if she had the opportunity to be part of decisions that concerned her living arrangements, and in matters concerning family life. She was included in financial questions, contributed to maintenance work on the house, and gave her opinions on the new kitchen, and thereby acquired 'a feeling of being at home.' Nora talked about what had been most important for her to make decisions about:

That I have been allowed to participate in and in a way starting a new home, because it was as if I lost a home, when we moved away from dad. As soon as all the stuff was taken out from there, as soon as the home disappeared, then it was like, you lost the feeling of home, the one at dad's.

The interviewees seem to appreciate to be part of the process of creating new homes through material aspects, such as furnishing their own room and new houses or apartments. One aspect is that they get a feeling of having influence, but also being part of a new 'we'. Feelings of belonging, alternatively referred to as family cohesion, family connectedness, positive family environment (see King et al., 2015), or perhaps 'family-we' (Dreier, 2011, p.

46; Marscahl, 2014), predicts several positive aspects of adolescents' well-being (King et al., 2018; Rejaän et al, 2022). Sense of belonging can be of particular importance during adolescence (Allen & Kern, 2017) when adolescents work to balance independence and autonomy with connectedness to significant others in their context (Rogoff, 2003).

Benjamin (12–14), who stayed with his mother following his parents' separation, said that his father was not present, nor involved in their lives. Prior to the parental separation, the father already seemed to be peripheral in everyday practises. The father left the house on several occasions throughout the separation process without informing Benjamin and his sibling, and they were not told that the father decided to establish a new family. Benjamin described himself and his sibling as 'guests' when they visited their father and described this as being 'a little bit strange to say [chuckle]' but also 'a little bit nice actually'. As if he pointed out the distance within the relationship to his father and made his father responsible for 'thinking about things alone.' Becoming 'guests' in one of the households can be reasoned by a change in the emotional and physical distance.

In some narratives, explicit statements about how the adolescent acquired a feeling of being at home referred to how the parents adjusted and facilitated such a feeling. Loyalty can perhaps be explained by positive aspects in one of the homes or the lack of them, such as the relationship with the parent who lives there and the feeling of belonging to that home, which is also exemplified in the study of Lidén and Kitterød (2020). Therefore, parents can earn merit by being devoted to the creation of a (new) home. Prior research has shown that the dimensions of 'home', in addition to the physical dwelling, include a place to retreat, a site of psychological and emotional wellbeing, and meaningful relationships, routines, and rituals (Campo et al., 2020; Lidén & Kitterød, 2020; Natalier & Fehlberg, 2015). The children who participated in the study of Campo and colleagues (2020) emphasised the willingness and capacity of parents to focus on their children and create a new space with them. This

contributed to closeness in time and space. We assume that such willingness and capacity contribute to the loyalty to parents.

Parents' entitlement to emotional closeness and togetherness

When both parents fulfilled expectations that made the parent-adolescent relationship quality good enough, the adolescent seemed to stay loyal to both of them, both in terms of emotional closeness and a sense of togetherness while spending time together. The narrative of Sara (15–17) is a contrast to Anne's, by exemplifying how her parents cared for her:

At least I hope that we can do something together all the four of us. Because they [Sara's parents] are good friends and such, so they said that it wouldn't be any problems for them, in a way. And they said, 'we just want you [the children] to do well, and we will do everything to ensure that you are doing well.'

Sara appreciated that both of her parents cared for her by being friendly towards each other and ensuring that Sara was doing well. As several scholars have shown similar examples of (see Kitterød & Lidén, 2021; Marschall, 2014; Haugen, 2007; Grape et al., 2021), Sara was more concerned about making sure that her parents knew that she loved both equally, and therefore wanted to spend equal amounts of time with them: 'It is like, I don't want to spend more time with one of them compared to the other (...), because then I feel that one might think that 'Wow! She loves the other parent more than me.''' Interpretating this in light of the theory of invisible loyalties (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973), Sara expressed a consciously felt interest to belong to both parents. However, she did also refer to the possibility that the amount of time she spent will influence the parents' feeling of being loved by her. Scholars have pointed to time as having emotional significance (Haugen, 2010; Merson et al., 2023) by being valued as a symbol of love, caring, and loyalty (Haugen, 2010), or something that children should give equally to their parents (Kitterød & Lidén, 2021). The emotional significance of time can therefore function as an indirect clue of love, and thereby

contribute to an unconsciously binding obligation to belong as part of being loyal to both. Such unconscious obligations are inferred from knowing one's parents well and knowing who are bound together in loyalty through each person's bookkeeping of merits (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973). However, the time-sharing might also function as an unconscious obligation as a result from cultural values of equality between parents. If adolescents, such as Sara, didn't share their time equally when they thought that parents cared for them, they said that they risked 'pushing away' one of the parents. Thus, perhaps they perceived an asymmetrical time-sharing as unjustified, leaving symmetrical JPC as the only reasonable choice.

The wish for emotional closeness to both parents can also be an expression of reciprocal care. One perspective is that children exercise agency by caring for their parents, for instance through staying close to both parents and have regular contact (Marschall, 2014), or by being aware of time and the economic consequences (Haugen, 2005). Such a perspective better acknowledges the reciprocal relationships between children and adults, in which both parties 'invest' into the invisible accounts of obligations (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973). Sara may experience this reciprocal care as empowering, as she described potential protective factors such as emotional support, age-appropriate roles, parental support and validation, and her positive appraisal of the love and care for her parents (Masiran et al., 2023). In contrast, Anne did not engage in caretaking for either of her parents. She supported her sibling through the parental separation process, and emphasised that her father and her mother had responsibility to be sensitive to her and her sibling's needs. Thus, her parents were not entitled to her loyalty.

Negotiations of obligations between parents and adolescents

In the narratives, adolescents described different strategies that adolescents and parents applied to regulate closeness and distance, both emotionally (the bonding between parents and

adolescents) or physically (by affecting the time that they spent together). Parents usually tried to increase closeness to adolescents, while adolescents tried to regulate it in both directions. Adolescents seemed to negotiate to make changes possible in the future.

According to Anne, she did not feel that she could express her true state of mind in case her mother became 'passive aggressive' or 'grumpy' and made Anne feel guilty. Her narrative exemplifies how parents' attempts to negotiate closeness between them can be experienced by adolescents. In some descriptions, parents communicate with emotional expressions that make guilt come into play as a regulatory force. According to Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark (1973), guilt has the function of regulating the imbalance in how persons within a relationship have fulfilled their obligations. The term 'grumpy' was frequently used by the interviewees, illustrating parents' negative emotional expressions. It seems like a 'grumpy' state of mind is perceived by adolescents as a strategic attempt by parents to change the balance of obligations in the relationships, since 'grumpy' parents can make adolescents feel guilty. Such reactions may be examples of what Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark (1973) described as external coercion, one of the mechanisms behind loyalty. However, Anne resisted this kind of coercion and felt supported by the mediator in this regard: 'Something of the most important besides of getting advice and (therapeutic) challenges is the feeling of being right'. She felt entitled to exclude her mother from activities such as her end-of-term celebration. A similar reaction was found in Nora's narrative. It became difficult for Nora to relate to her father's recurrent 'grumpy' expressions and persistent efforts to make her feel as if she was guilty (or had any responsibility) for what happened. She made efforts to 'repel' her father, to create distance to him. She was able to communicate this wish for distance with support from the mediator, but did not feel as if she really got to influence the contact with her father until she got 'old enough'. Unjustified blame or unreasonable responsibilities from parents seemed to affect the

adolescents' bookkeeping of merit. It added to the adolescent's sense of fairness and risked weakening the sense of loyalty to the 'grumpy' parent.

An asymmetrical living arrangement preference, or preferences diverging from a parent's wish, would for some adolescents require that they made an effort for it to be expressed. Such discomfort has also been found in other studies (Cashmore & Parkinson, 2008; Goldson, 2006; Haugen, 2010; Kitterød & Lidén, 2021; Neale & Flowerdew, 2007; Thørnblad & Strandbu, 2018). Haugen (2010), for instance, found that children seem loyal to the idea of symmetrical JPC, even if this solution is contrary to their personal preference. Even though it might have been uncomfortable, for instance due to parents' strategies, adolescents in our study often seemed determined in their justifications of fairness. Some used a strategy of making siblings, the other parent, or the family mediator an ally when sharing their preference. Others needed to create distance in the relationship. Our study provides examples of how adolescents negotiate with their parents and weight their own needs towards parents' needs, often in a personal favourable way.

In our study, adolescents could leave the door ajar for changes in the future. Both parents could be presented with favourable qualities, despite that the adolescent expressed a preference for one of the parents and his or her household, or emphasised in the interview that 'I don't mean to favour anyone, but it's just how it is *at the moment*' (Ida, 12-14). Such strategies can be understood as expressions of adolescents' consciously recognised feelings of obligation, both in terms of feeling connected to a parent, and in terms of how their parents are presented to others outside of the family. For instance, even though Anne chose to live with her father, she wanted her mother to buy a new house that had enough space for her and her sibling, so that they could feel welcome. Importantly, however, is that she put the responsibility on her mother:

We [Anne and her sibling] at least got to say that we wanted it to have enough space there in case we changed our mind. (...) Or if we wanted to come for overnight stays and such. Because... We did not want to shut her out. And if she had bought a house that was too small for us, she would have practically shut us out.

These examples can reflect the dialectical aspect between the sense of connectedness and autonomy in parent-adolescent relationships. Nora described challenges in her relationship with her father, thereby justifying the physical and emotional distance to him. Still, when asked about what the future may look like for her and her father, she expressed a hope for the relationship to improve: '[faltering] [...] to have a relationship to him so that I can stay with him every other weekend, but not needing to be very close to him. [...] To slowly build it up again.' Even if strong words like 'repelling' are used in narratives, reconciliation may still be possible.

Concluding remarks

The aim of this article was to examine loyalty issues in relation to how adolescents negotiate closeness and distance in their relationships to parents, and how they justify their views.

Our analysis shows how some adolescents' make a bookkeeping of parents' merits and demerits which their justifications are based upon. Parents are expected to consider adolescents' needs, acknowledge their autonomy and increased maturity, and promote a feeling of belonging. Failing them may justify distance. Adolescents describe strategies applied by themselves and their parents that reflect the ongoing negotiations of closeness to each other. From this analysis, loyalty is not something inherent in the parent-adolescent relationship, but rather something one acquires through entitlement. We argue that this entitlement may be expressed through adolescents wish for closeness or feeling of belonging.

Disloyalty, on the other hand, may be reflected through emotional or physical distance, or a feeling of being left out from a parent's engagement and care.

Further, the findings in this paper may contribute to nuance three themes in particular: First, research that emphasises children's wish for flexibility in living arrangements, perhaps symmetrical JPC in particular, typically explain flexibility as minor adjustments in living arrangements (see for instance Carson et al., 2018; Graham et al., 2009; Grape et al., 2021; Haugen, 2010; Kitterød & Lidén, 2021; Marschall, 2014). This kind of flexibility is often negotiated *within* established schemes of equal time-sharing. Flexibility can also mean to negotiate the formalities of the living arrangements, such as changing from a symmetrical JPC arrangement to only weekends at one of the parents' households.

Adolescents negotiate autonomy and interdependence within the context they live and persons they interact with (Rogoff, 2003). The responsibilities and power are reorganised in the parent-adolescent relationship and becomes more reciprocal (Branje, 2018; Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973). In this study, the relationships become subject for change and negotiations, and it is *the adolescents'* agenda that comes to the fore. Still, the bookkeeping of parents' merits is a continuous process. Flexibility can also mean that schemes are indetermined, or at least open for negotiation. Which, if time has emotional significance, imply that their emotional closeness and loyalty can change in the future. Parents, social workers, and mediators may pay attention to loyalty as a dynamic concept when hearing and giving weight to adolescents' views.

Second, our analysis may contribute to nuance previous research about children's experiences of symmetrical JPC as a symbol of equality and fairness between parents. The narratives in this study exemplify how adolescents' negotiations with their parents, to a larger extent, is based on their own needs in a personal favourable way. Fairness is not always perceived as equal time-sharing between parents. Instead, adolescents have their own agenda when

justifying the balance in the give-and-take in the parent-adolescent relationship. Aspects such as relationships with stepparents and stepsiblings (Afifi, 2003; Lidén & Kitterød, 2021), or leisure activities, friends, and connection to the neighbourhood, could further contextualise adolescents' experiences. Additionally, parents who practise symmetrical JPC, in general, have less conflict and higher scores on socioeconomic measures (Steinbach, 2019; Wiik, 2022). Such aspects can be essential for parents' ability to attend to children's views and needs (Berman, 2018; Rejaän, 2022). As more parents wish to practise symmetrical JPC, the differences that have been associated with the social selection of symmetrical JPC (e.g. interparental conflict, socioeconomic measures) may be obliterated. Thus, several parents may experience barriers towards a flexible management of the living arrangement and a reflective stance towards changes in their relationships with their children. We suggest an awareness towards how any rigid practise of JPC may hinder adolescents to exercise agency. This is important, because support for adolescents' autonomy seems to be important in their bookkeeping of merits. This concern may apply to other international contexts too.

Third, as this study illustrate conflicted dynamics between parents and adolescents, some would point to the possibility that parents have manipulated their children. Research with such assumptions tend to view children as untrustworthy (Warming et al., 2019). An early label of untrustworthiness can have severe consequences for children's agency. It may be more profitable to the improvement of parent-adolescent relationships if parents and professionals explore adolescents' meaning-making of fairness and loyalty.

In general, we underline the importance of the mediation system. Mediation may, especially if it is possible to return to the service after some time, provide early and low-threshold support for adolescents and parents. They may acquire new understandings and ways to negotiate loyalty and fairness before any relational problems take root or disputes proceeds to court.

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Tables

Table 1

Illustration of data analysis that applies ideas from Magnusson and Maracek (2015)

Disagreements	Agreements	Implicit cultural meanings
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Her no. 3: ‘The bear- mama’ VS Her no. 4: The mother ‘who ‘fucked up’ with her children’ + Her no. 5: The infallible mother	I no. 1: the daughter on her toes + Her no. 1: The moody mother + I no. 4: The daughter who is deprioritised by her mother + Her no. 4: The mother ‘who ‘fucked up’ with her children’ + Her no. 5: The infallible mother	Adolescents have the right to evaluate their parents’ effort to care for them
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Table 2

Summary of implicit cultural meanings that are grouped together into themes

Themes	Implicit cultural meanings	Empirical examples (quotes)
Bookkeeping of parents’ fulfilled and failed obligations	Adolescents have the right to evaluate their parents’ effort to care for them	I have funnier conversations with dad.
	Expectations that parents promote feelings of togetherness	We have started to make meatballs more often [for dinner] (...) we didn’t know that we liked it before we started making it.
	Parents’ entitlement to emotional closeness and togetherness	I don’t want to stay more of the time with one of them. Because then someone might think ‘Wow! She loves the other [parent] more than me!’
Negotiations of obligations between parents and adolescents	Adolescents evaluate parents’ strategies to be close to their child	He started nagging like ‘but can’t you stay Tuesdays too?’
	Adolescents regulate closeness and distance to their parents	(...) and I said ‘yes, but I’ll stay Mondays now until I have talked with the mediator’.

Article IV



Adolescents' narratives about parents' separation processes and participation in mandatory family mediation: Exercising agency through managing privacy boundaries

Childhood
2024, Vol. 0(0) 1–18
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DOI: 10.1177/09075682241261169
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Abstract

Children's participation in mandatory family mediation is an aspect of parents' separation process in Norway. In this article, we aim to explore what adolescents emphasise in their narratives about their participation. Eleven adolescents aged between 12 and 17 participated in qualitative semi-structured interviews. Drawing on communication privacy management theory, the results show that, during participation in mandatory family mediation, adolescents are provided with opportunities to exercise agency by managing privacy boundaries. Family mediators have the potential to assist adolescents during and after disclosures of private information.

Keywords

Family mediation, divorce, adolescents, interdependency

Introduction

In this article, we present narratives from adolescents about their experiences of participating in their parents' mandatory family mediation process. We show how adolescents as agents can negotiate the management of private information with adults, such

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as parents, family mediators (henceforth ‘mediators’), and the interviewer in this study. Seeing adolescents as social agents, we see them as “negotiating with others with the effect that the interaction makes a difference – to a relationship or to a decision, to the workings of a set of social assumptions or constraints” (Mayall, 2002: 21). Further, these interactions and negotiations are seen in relation to how they can improve adolescents’ everyday lives during their parents’ separation processes (referring to divorce and break-ups between cohabiting parents). The focus on process can be useful when exploring children’s co-construction of their social world, especially during the time of parental separation (Berman, 2015).

More than 20 years ago, Smart (2003) pointed to the shift in focus from how parental separation can be harmful for children, to research that highlights the complexity of such processes. Smith and colleagues (2003), for instance, emphasised facilitation of children’s participation in family and legal decision-making regardless of their competence as one aspect of such complexities. Since then, the discussion is no longer *if*, but rather *how* (italic in original), children should participate (Birbaum, 2009). Various modes of children’s participation in family law proceedings are generally available across jurisdictions (Mol, 2021), which also includes alternative dispute resolution processes, such as mediation. Depending on the country, alternative dispute resolution processes are offered or required, in which parents are encouraged to reach their own parenting agreements jointly (Mol, 2021). In Norway, mediation in relation to parental separation can be done in two ways; court-connected mediation and mandatory family mediation (henceforth ‘family mediation’, see for instance Nylund, 2021). Judges and lawyers are not involved in the latter.

Norway implemented the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Norwegian legislation in 2003. The best interest of the child is now the underlying principle for family mediation (The Marriage Act, 1991: Section 24; The Children Act, 1981: Section 52). Additionally, parental separation is seen as a process that need preventive actions on behalf of the children involved (Official Norwegian Report (NOU) 2019:20, 2019). Therefore, all separating parents and parents who disagree about parental responsibility, residence, contact, or relocation with children under the age of 16 must attend at least one mediation session (The Marriage Act, 1991: Section 26; The Children Act, 1981: Section 51). Family mediation in Norway is carried out by certified mediators at the Family Counselling Office (FCO), at no cost to the family. Mediators have professional backgrounds such as lawyers, clinical psychologists, psychiatrists, priests, social workers, or child welfare officers (NOU 2019:20, 2019). FCOs carry out about 15 000 mediation cases annually (The Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Bufdir, 2023)). The purpose is to help parents create a written agreement about parental responsibility, residence, contact, and practical matters that ensures that the best interests of the child are protected (The Marriage Act, 1991: Section 26; Regulation on Family Mediation, 2007: Section 1; The Children Act, 1981: Sections 48 and 52). It is the parents who own the agreement, and they are responsible for ensuring children’s right to be heard. The mediator should encourage, accommodate, and support parents’ capacity to safeguard this right (Regulation on Family Mediation, 2007: Section 2).

While there are no formal regulations of children's participation in mediation in Norway, which is generally the case for most alternative dispute resolution processes (Mol, 2021), the participation of children has, for the past decade, been given particular attention within the family mediation service (NOU 2019:20, 2019). Several researchers claim that the purpose of including children in family mediation is unclear (Eikrem and Andenæs, 2021; Strandbu and Thørnblad, 2015), and this ambiguity is apparent outside of Norway as well (Birbaum, 2009). How mediators choose to carry out the family mediation depends on their exercise of discretion (Salamonsen et al., 2022). Even if the annual participation of children has been between 22 and 26 % the past 5 years (Bufdir, 2023), the percentage of children's participation varies considerably between offices (Bufdir, 2021). It is therefore likely that the context of children's participation can vary across FCOs and across mediators' ways of meeting children in the family mediation process.

Children often emphasise to be listened to by parents and being able to have a say after parents' separation (see for instance Berman, 2018; Holt, 2018). What is an ongoing task during the process of parental separation, and perhaps particularly when family members meet with other professionals as part of this process, is to manage information about one's own and the other family members' private lives (Petronio, 2008). Children appreciate openness from their parents and can be more likely to do so when they grow older (Sunde et al., 2021). However, the management of private information during parental separation can sometimes be challenging, for instance because of inappropriate disclosures from parents (Afifi et al., 2007), or make children, parents or stepparents feel caught between family members due to the communication strategies that are being applied (Afifi, 2003).

Contextual factors regulate opportunities or constraints that can influence children's agency (see for instance Abebe, 2019). Adolescents' strategies for sharing information with their parents can differ according to how they view the support from parents (Baudat et al., 2022), or within the context in which different expectations and permissions exist, such as in interactions with social workers in child protection cases (Morrison et al., 2019). Importantly, children can be strategic when evaluating the possible risks and the appropriateness of how to disclose (Callaghan et al., 2017).

WHO (2023) defines persons between 10 and 19 years old as adolescents. Considering the participants in this study, the term 'adolescents' is used to distinguish them from children in general terms, who are everyone between 0 and 18 years old (UN General Assembly resolution 44/25, 1989: Article 1). In Norway, this distinction is particularly relevant in relation to the right to be heard, which state that the opinions of adolescents from the age of 12 should carry significant weight in decisions concerning them (The Children Act, 1981: Section 31).

Adolescents may, in particular, experience tensions between privacy and disclosure. Privacy is defined as "the feeling that one has the right to own private information, either personally or collectively" (Petronio, 2002: 6). Some researchers emphasise that being introduced to new forms of participation is a central feature of child development (see for example Haavind, 1987; Rogoff, 2003), that, particularly for adolescents, can involve new ways of balancing autonomy and independence in their close relationships (Gulbrandsen, 2008). When adolescents meet a mediator during the parental separation

process, they must decide what to say to the mediator and what to keep private about their personal lives, their parents, and family practices, and thereby balance the tensions in play. We aim to investigate adolescents' experiences of participating in family mediation as one of several processes taking place during parents' separation. We draw on the concepts of privacy boundaries and explore how adolescents' agency is expressed in their narratives in which they describe management of personal and collective privacy boundaries during the parental separation process. Furthermore, we examine how adolescents use opportunities, such as meetings with the mediator, to affect and negotiate the rules that regulate privacy boundaries to influence aspects of their everyday lives. We follow the summary by Somers (1994: 613–614) of narratives, "that social life is itself *storied* and that narrative is an *ontological condition of social life*". Adolescents' thus construct narratives to make sense of happenings in their lives (Somers, 1994).

Theoretical framework

We apply a sociocultural approach to explore how adolescents make meaning of their participation in family mediation processes. In line with Ulvik (2009) and Skivenes and Strandbu (2006), we see meaning as created through interactions and negotiations with others. Somers (1994: 618) argues that ontological narratives, the stories that social actors make to make sense of and act in their lives, are central in such interactions and negotiations. According to Somers (1994), narratives are constructed by bringing events together in a specific manner, by relationality, connectivity, and selective appropriation. The construction of narratives is basic to agency; agents adjust stories to fit their identities, and they tailor reality to fit their stories. Narratives are created in relation to others, in the specific time and context in which they live (Somers, 1994).

Viewing agency as relational, we acknowledge generational power issues between children and adults (Abebe, 2019; Alanen, 1998; Spyrou, 2018). In the context of this article, such adults can be parents, mediators, and researchers. One way to recognise relational agency is to include adults in the analysis (Wyness, 2012), for instance by identifying ways adults exercise generational power. As social agents, children develop and learn through participation in, contributions to and guidance by the values and practices of their cultural communities and social partners, which also change (Hundeide, 2002; Rogoff, 2003). Children's participation in family mediation is one way of engaging in a practice where children interact with adults, and thereby make generational power issues relevant.

We also use concepts and ideas from the Communication Privacy Management (CPM) theory (Petronio, 2002, 2008). The CPM theory is dialectical, building on concepts originally developed by Bakhtin (Bakhtin, 1981, 1987). In her theory, Petronio further draws on dialectical aspects in personal relationships described by Baxter and Montgomery (1996). Dialectical aspects in personal relationships are not viewed as simple polar oppositions, but rather contradictions seen as complex and overlapping and sometimes in tensions with each other (Montgomery and Baxter, 1998). Connectedness, for instance, cannot only be seen as the opposite of autonomy, but rather in dynamic and opposing associations with several forces such as autonomy, privacy, self-assertion, and

independence. Additionally, dialectical aspects are seen as ongoing and in indeterminant interplay. Openness and privacy, for instance, should be seen as an interactive unity (Montgomery and Baxter, 1998: 159). Context is one of several influencing factors in developing or changing rules that regulate such tensions (Petronio, 2002: 21–22).

A central premise in the CPM theory is that disclosing private information can yield benefits and lead to consequences for oneself or others (Petronio, 2002). Boundaries mark ownership lines for individuals' privacy on personal and group levels (personal and collective boundaries; Petronio, 2002). The dialectic between disclosing and concealing must be balanced in order to manage the publicness of the information and the possible vulnerability for someone in case the information is disclosed (Petronio, 2002, 2008). During parents' separation for instance, adolescents manage their personal privacy boundary in addition to the collective ones that they share with siblings, parents, friends and others in different constellations.

Rules regulate the permeability of the privacy boundaries; that is how easily, how much, and what type of information can pass through the privacy boundaries. These rules are negotiated and adapted, and can be explicitly stated or implicitly suggested (Petronio, 2002). The rules typically change when relationships change, which is often the case during parental separation processes. According to Petronio (2002), those inside of a collective privacy boundary might struggle to coordinate rules during such processes.

Methods

We recruited strategically by including participants according to deliberately selected criteria (Flick, 2007): age between 12 and 17 and attendance in at least one conversation with the mediator during parents' family mediation process. The preventative approach of family mediation in Norway means that a considerable number of cases are characterised as low or middle conflict cases (63 % in 2021; Bufdir, 2023: 30). In line with the intention of family mediation in Norway, we recruited participants regardless of conflict levels between parents.

Working towards ethical symmetry (Christensen and Prout, 2002), we aimed to reduce possible barriers for participation for underrepresented groups by providing translated information sheets, offering to use interpreters, and other adaptations if needed.

Initially, we aimed to recruit adolescents who had attended their first conversation with the mediator within the past 6 to 12 months. Because this criterion proved difficult to fulfil, we extended the time frame. An overview of the participants' timelines can be found in Figure 1 below, which shows that several participants had reasons to attend sessions at the FCO either prior to attendance in the family mediation process or through several follow-up meetings. The timelines were made together with the adolescents during the interview.

Personal consent was acquired from 16- and 17-year-olds. Personal and parental consent was acquired from those younger than 16. Participants were informed about their right to withdraw from the study, and provided the opportunity to read the manuscript before submission to scientific journals. The project was approved by the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research.

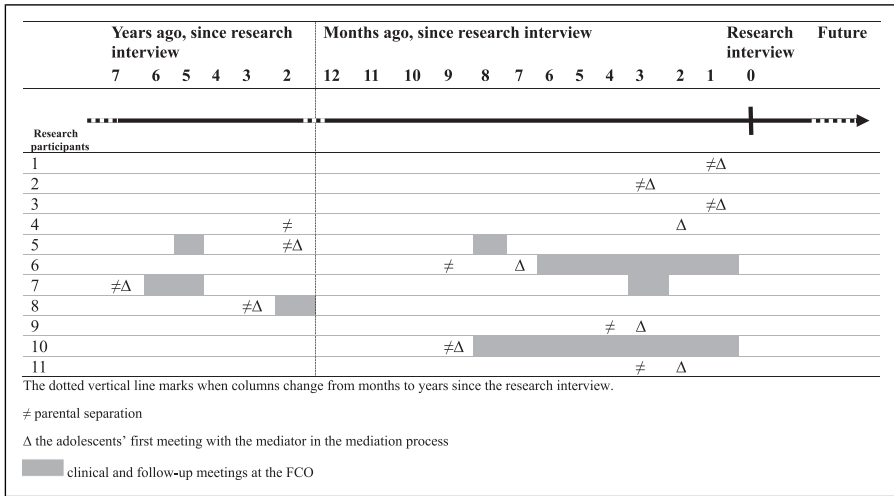


Figure 1. The participants’ timelines of the narratives, showing time ago since the parents’ separation, participation in the mediation process, and clinical and follow-up meetings.

Eleven adolescents (two boys, nine girls) aged between 12 and 17 were recruited by mediators from five FCOs in all four regions in Norway. We apply pseudonyms and 3-year age ranges (12–14 and 15–17) in the results to protect anonymity. Two of the participating adolescents were born in an African country.

The interviews lasted between 45 and 90 min and were carried out between September and December 2020. The interview guide was inspired by the life mode interview developed by Haavind (1987). This form of interviewing is well suited to acquire knowledge about children’s everyday lives. According to Gulbrandsen (2018: 3), such knowledge is useful for developing professional practices that aim to contribute positively to children’s lives.

The interviews were carried out at a venue chosen by the adolescent (in their homes, a meeting room at the local FCO or at the interviewer’s workplace, or digitally by Zoom). The interviewer asked the participants to talk about the time from when they came to know about their parents’ separation, and until the day of the interview. For some of the participants, this was a long timeframe. Ideas from narrative methods (see for instance McAdams, 1993) were used to help structure the interview by asking about a highlight, a low point, and a turning point. The aim was to explore the family mediation experience within the larger narrative of the parental separation process. The participants were only asked directly about their participation in the family mediation process if this was not mentioned in their narrative. The timeline helped to pin down significant events in the narratives and had the advantage of creating a common understanding and coherence of the narratives. Thus, it seemed to be a ‘research-friendly’ technique (Punch, 2002).

In some interviews, tensions between the interviewer’s curiosity and recognition of the generational power differences were in play. For instance, follow-up questions could be

seen as attempts to open collective privacy boundaries of adolescents and other adults, such as the mediator. Adolescents' evasion or explicit concealment were therefore understood and acknowledged as them exercising agency by managing the collective privacy boundaries they were part of.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim. To secure internal validity, the authors went through the interview transcripts together and discussed the findings.

Inspired by Magnusson and Marecek (2015: 104–106), we studied four dimensions of the narratives: trouble (TR; challenges encountered in the parental separation processes), the theory of the event (TH; understanding and explanation of the family mediation process), the teller's evaluative perspective (EV; evaluations of important persons in the narrative), and canonical narratives (CA) that refer to narratives that are "socially accepted, common and routine accounts of an occurrence" (Magnusson and Marecek, 2015: 106). Each narrative was seen in relation to these dimensions on a case-by-case basis. Excerpts were named and later compared and refined into codes across narratives. For example, we understood the following excerpt as trouble in Katrin's (15–17) narrative: "If we hadn't met with him, mum and dad would probably have been desperate to know how long time I would spend with each of them". The excerpt was included in the code 'Improve communication and relationships with parents.' The codes were then grouped together in three core themes, presented in Table 1. We found the CPM theory helpful in exploring these themes further.

In the following, we present our empirical findings that are structured within the three core themes. They will be exemplified by three aspects of the narratives that we have named 'Being kept and keeping oneself outside the privacy boundaries of parents', 'Family practices that change, create changes in privacy boundaries', and 'Mediators' exclusive access to adolescents' private lives.'

Being kept and keeping oneself outside the privacy boundary of parents

Ellinor's (15–17) family situation was initially characterised by strong privacy boundaries with little permeability of verbal information, and 'apparently' implicit rules that indicated respect for each other's personal and collective privacy boundaries. The conversations with the mediator were central in Ellinor's narrative and represented opportunities to negotiate and affect her and her mother's privacy boundaries, and thereby improve their relationship.

Ellinor introduced her narrative by describing how she became certain that her parents would separate. Her parents had been quarrelling and did not spend time together. They seemed to keep the upcoming separation secret, but as Ellinor said, "it didn't work, because I was there". When her father bought a new bed, she finally became certain that they would separate:

Ellinor: They quarrelled all the time, and sometimes one of them went out into the living room and slept there. And that was strange, because when I woke up and one of them was on the couch, I was just wondering, like, "why don't you sleep in your bed?" And then he [the father] just bought the bed, and then it just seemed logical, since they didn't sleep together anyway, they didn't want to sleep next to each other. And it was visible, even if they didn't say it.

Table 1. Grouping codes into core themes.

Codes	Themes
Give weight to adolescents' views – how much can they decide? (TR)	Expectations and efforts to acquire information and be listened to
Age – “when you get older you will be listened to” (TH)	
The adolescent as the (mature) responsible person (EV)	Changed family practices and relationships
I will be listened to when I get older (CA)	
Improve communication and relationships with parents (TR)	
Practical matters in two homes (TR)	
The moral of parents depends on the recognition of adolescents' views (EV)	
The family handles it on their own (TR)	A professional adult to share personal information with
Someone to talk to (TR)	
What happened, how are you, how will it turn out in the future? (TH)	
Mediator can offer help (TH)	
An awkward but a safe place (TH)	
Considering the content of mediator conversations as private (EV)	
A competent adult to talk to (EV)	
Talk about the difficult stuff with a professional and keep it secret for others (CA)	
Professionals' job in educating parents (CA)	

Interviewer: Hm. And then they bought the bed. What did they say then, when they had bought the bed?

Ellinor: They didn't say anything, and I didn't ask, really. So, it was as if everyone knew, and then no-one was asking or talking about it.

Interviewer: Okay. Why do you think it was like that?

Ellinor: I don't know, maybe they didn't want to believe it was true, so they refrained from talking about it. (...)

Interviewer: And you say that you didn't ask about it either?

Ellinor: No, I didn't dare.

It was something very visible, but at the same time not spoken of. As we interpret her narrative, Ellinor viewed the bed as a symbol of the fact that her parents did not enjoy spending time together, and that, in the words of Ellinor, “it was probably just before they divorced”. She came to this conclusion through her own observations and indirect

explanations from her parents. Ellinor's personal privacy boundary and her parents' collective privacy boundary seemed to be clearly marked. They did not welcome her, and she did not dare to ask about being invited inside of their collective privacy boundary. We assume that there were implicit rules that guided her and her parents' privacy boundaries since her parents had not explicitly told her not to ask any questions. Thus, when she was invited to a session with the mediator, she got the chance to influence and negotiate these rules. The atmosphere that the mediator created in their first meeting seemed important in this regard.

First, during the first conversation, I thought that I would probably not come back here, right? This is just a place for those who don't know – like, who need help. I don't need help. I needed help. I found that out later. So yes. (...) So, I said to dad [some months after the first conversation], because I knew I could tell him. I didn't dare to tell mum. I was scared she would get upset. So, then I told dad, and then he fixed it for me. So, I started going here [the FCO], and then I told the mediator about how mum was, and then she [the mediator] said that she would talk to mum if I was okay with it, and I was. And then we [Ellinor and her mother] started going. (...) It was something new because I hadn't done it before. And it was like really safe. So, I could just talk about how I was doing. And then I got help, and it was so strange. [laughter]. (...) Because she [the mediator] asked the right questions, and it was like – it was like safe, like really safe. This was what she was doing, and then it was like: she knows this.

This quotation shows how Ellinor at first did not identify herself as someone who needed help, but after meeting with the mediator and having some time to reflect on her situation and the possibilities of talking with the mediator, she felt safe enough to go back and ask for help. The mediator represented someone she could invite inside her personal privacy boundary, and who could help her give meaning to what was going on.

Ellinor said that the mediator wanted to talk with Ellinor's mother, and Ellinor was okay with it. They had conversations separately with the mediator and later had sessions together that were facilitated by the mediator. We see the mediator as assisting Ellinor with integrating her personal privacy boundaries with that of her mother, and thereby initiating a process that was previously hindered by how Ellinor and her mother communicated. We understand this process as providing an opportunity for Ellinor, as an agent, to negotiate and initiate processes that created improvements in her relationship with her mother. According to Ellinor's narrative, it made a difference. Ellinor and her mother were able to talk with each other, and they achieved a common understanding of each other's situation and then, according to Ellinor, became "best friends".

Family practices that change, creates changes in privacy boundaries

The narrative of Guri (12–14) describes parents who quarrelled much of the time. What was especially difficult for her was how information from her parents' discussions was not hidden from her. She was also frustrated by how they made the quarrelling visible to her friends, even though they had agreed to prevent that from happening. As a paradox, Guri said that when her parents told her and her sibling about the parental separation, she was

told to keep it a secret. Guri did not seem to agree with this rule concerning how to manage the collective privacy boundary related to the parental separation process. The following is an excerpt from the narrative to show how Guri, as an agent, rejected the rule suggested by her parents and instead did what she thought was best for herself:

I didn't start to cry or anything; I just left (...) to visit [my friend], right, I told her. mum said ... they said that I was not allowed to tell anyone. I said: "Why?" (...) I felt I had to tell someone. I couldn't keep it inside. I left ... It wasn't the first I said, but ... then I just said it (...). I thought it was stupid that Mom said that ... that I was not allowed to tell anyone. I understand it, because it was what would be best for them. But I think that they are not so good at thinking about how it would be for me (...) because I don't have any other ways to like ... than say it to someone (...) We [Guri and her friend] did not talk much about it, really. Her parents do not quarrel as much ... but we did not talk much about it. [I] just said it.

Guri's narrative demonstrates how some adolescents take an active part in challenging the 'rewriting' of rules that manage privacy boundaries. As the parental separation progressed and one of Guri's parents moved into a new apartment, the relationships with her parents changed, and disagreements arose. Guri found it difficult to talk with them and said that the parents' conflict was one of the reasons for this. Parental conflict during the parental separation process seems to generate situations in which new rules are about to be created. There are several examples of how participants manage collective privacy boundaries when family practices changed during the parental separation process. Frida's (12–14) narrative exemplifies how the conflict between her parents was defined as private while the parents still were married. When the parental separation was a reality however, Frida finally felt okay to talk to professionals about how things had been *in the past*, as if the rules that governed the collective privacy boundary had changed.

Guri did not mention her session with the mediator herself in her narrative and was therefore asked in the interview whether she had been at the FCO. She had participated in one session, but she had little to say about it. It did, however, offer her an opportunity to talk with someone other than her parents, who she felt uncomfortable talking with.

(...) I thought it was uncomfortable to sit there with mum and dad, because I actually hate talking with them, and that they listen to what I talk about. I just think it is unpleasant. So ...

(...) After that, mum, dad, and (*sibling*) were outside while I was in the room. And then I got to say how I felt and such. Not like too much, just a little bit. I was allowed to say what I wanted, but it was like ...

This excerpt seems to be characterised by ambiguity. Guri had the opportunity to talk about what she wanted, but at the same time, she felt restricted. Her struggles with her parents did not seem to be thematized in the session with the mediator, and thus the mediator was not presented as central in creating meaning or solutions to these challenges. We do not know whether Guri would need any more help from the mediator. Ellinor's narrative, on the other hand, shows how the first conversation with the mediator can

provide support in the future. The example of Guri might represent a missed opportunity to utilise the potential of the conversation. The same applies to Frida's narrative. Frida talked about her troubles to the mediator but got the impression that the FCO only offered further help for children under 12, and she was too old. These examples provide insight into different ways in which mediators carry out sessions with adolescents, and thereby differ in how they provide or limit opportunities to exercise agency.

The way Guri challenged the formation of new rules is an example of being an agent with her own agenda, but also of how parents might have less control of collective privacy boundaries during parental separation processes. Guri challenged these rules in other contexts outside of the family mediation setting. Other participants in this study used the conversation with the mediator to open up about challenges that previously had been undisclosed. Jakob (12–14), for instance, used the opportunity to tell the mediator about difficulties in his relationship with his father. At the same time, he asked the mediator to prevent his father's negative reactions when the information was disclosed, something the mediator was not able to. Jakob had talked with his father and tried to make his father change by becoming more interested in Jakob's and his siblings' lives and stop being angry. His father had, Jakob explained, not expected that Jakob would tell the mediator about the negative aspects of his father's behaviour.

Jakob: And, like, he [Jakob's father] said he didn't expect it.

Interviewer: Okay. He hadn't expected that you would say that you would live mostly with mum?

Jakob: Yes.

Interviewer: Was there anything else he didn't expect?

Jakob: Yes, and he didn't expect, like, in a way, that we would go and say very much negative [things] about him.

According to some participants, parents might be surprised that their children disclose information about the parents' behaviour to the mediator or make choices that not necessarily correspond to the parents' ideas. Additionally, when adolescents talk with the mediator, it might be an opportunity for them to make choices on their own behalf regarding whether to disclose or keep information about parents private.

Mediators' exclusive access to adolescents' private lives

Some participants described a friendly environment in the new family relationships that had been established, constructive cooperation in establishing new practices with the family members, and agreement about new rules that manage collective privacy boundaries between the adolescent and the parents. Iben's (12–14) narrative gave the impression that she and her parents managed the situation well despite complex relationships following the parental separation. However, even if the situation was presented as going smoothly, she had multiple sessions with the mediator over several years. One of

the reasons she gave during the research interview was that she and her parents had agreed to schedule a meeting with the mediator when they needed to discuss living arrangements.

But then I had to tell mum, because – I felt that I was old enough to at least let them know that I didn't want to spend my time there every other week. That I wanted to stay more at mum's. (...) I have told mum and dad – or (*the mediator*) have said to them that if they want to talk with me about it [the living arrangement], then they had to let (*the mediator*) know so that she could discuss it with me. Because I don't want to talk about it with mum and dad.

However, at one point, her father asked Iben to spend more time at his place, and this represented a violation of the rules they had agreed on. Iben then had to remind him about their agreement about meeting with the mediator before making a decision. This example from Iben's narrative shows how difficult it can be to discuss living arrangements with parents. The mediator represented a person who could assist Iben and her parents in a way that took Iben's views into consideration.

Some mediators seemed to have created a safe atmosphere for disclosing private information. What the participants had disclosed to the mediator, and the specific impact it had on their everyday lives, was not always disclosed in the interview. This can be understood as a choice to protect some aspects of family lives, but also the collective privacy boundary between the participants and the mediator. The following example from Iben's narrative shows how the mediator had a special position as a conversational partner for her:

Those things I don't talk with anyone about except the mediator; those things I didn't, in a way, mention [in the interview], because I don't want others to know about it, too. But I did say most things. But there are always some aspects that are a little bit more private, too. I don't think my best friend knows it.

While Iben had got to know the mediator through several sessions over some years, the interviewer represented an unfamiliar person. Additionally, because this was part of a research project, strangers that she did not know of would probably read some parts of her narrative. Perhaps she did not want all aspects of her parental separation narrative to become public in this way.

It seems that the participants created narratives explaining some of the troubles they experienced in the parental separation process. For some, participation in the family mediation process represented an integrated part of this narrative and made the mediator central to the private issues they struggled with, for instance by helping them negotiate a common understanding with the parents. We interpret tensions between disclosing and keeping private as central features of their everyday lives and participation in the family mediation process. Additionally, management of the privacy boundaries was exemplified, providing insight into possible potentials of the family mediation service. The mediator can become someone they rely on and disclose private information to, and thereby be provided exclusive access to their private lives.

Discussion

This article provides insight into the role adolescents' participation may play in the parental separation process when practices for managing privacy boundaries are negotiated. In their narratives, participation in the family mediation process was connected to an aspect of their everyday lives they struggled with and needed to change, or had been able to change in the past with the help from the mediator. Tensions between revealing and concealing private information illustrated possible power differences between adolescents and parents, and of how mediators can utilise the potential in the family mediation service during adolescents' participation. We agree with Abebe (2019: 9) about children having personal agency which shapes their individual actions, but at the same time being dependent on and largely regulated by familial contexts, opportunities/constraints, and interpersonal relationships. As underlined by Petronio (2002, 2008), others are central to balancing the dialectic between disclosing and concealing. In line with the CPM theory (Petronio, 2002), adolescents are aware that disclosures can have consequences for themselves and their parents. Adults are thus central to how adolescents make such choices, and they affect how adolescents exercise agency. The narrative approach helped us gaining insight into the troubles experienced by the adolescents in this study both prior to the parental separation and while family practises were about to change. How they dealt with these troubles informed us about ways to exercise agency in meetings with adults who hold different forms of power, and with different kinds of risks and benefits for the adolescents; relational consequences between the adolescent and parents, decision-based consequences, and unknown and impersonal consequences.

Agency aiming for therapeutic consequences and rights-based opportunities

In a study carried out by Thørnblad and Strandbu (2018; see also Strandbu et al., 2020), children report that they are satisfied with talking with the mediator as representing a neutral and unfamiliar person. Since children can emphasise that the sessions with the mediator provide opportunities for them to 'ease the burden' (Thørnblad and Strandbu, 2018: 202) and talk about their emotional reactions related to the parental separation (Eikrem and Andenæs, 2021), one of the potentials of family mediation lies in reducing discrepancy between children's and their parents' reports about children's well-being after parental separation. Such discrepancy can exist between children and their parents (Holt et al., 2021), and as our analysis has illustrated, these discrepancies may be sustained by the management of personal and collective privacy boundaries. Children's participation in family mediation can be considered as helpful by parents because it can provide them with feedback about their parenting (Eikrem and Andenæs, 2021). However, mediators can negotiate with children about what information can be passed on to the parents when they consider what's at stake (Strandbu et al., 2019). Also, because children's participation in family mediation can increase mediators' access 'backstage' into the private sphere of the families, some parents can 'lose face' as child-focused parents (Thørnblad et al., 2019). Children's disclosure of private information to different adults show how they can exercise agency with an aim of feeling supported in their emotional reactions or relational

needs, for instance by making the mediator a therapeutic ally, or by trying to improve parents' capacity to care for them.

Mediators can benefit from getting to know the rules that manage collective privacy boundaries between adolescents and their parents, and also how adolescents have been engaged in creating and negotiating these rules. As we have showed, the mediator plays a vital role through the atmosphere they create to support adolescents' agency. By making it possible to initiate processes for change, or by helping to sustain or negotiate the rules of privacy management, perhaps the mediator can create a context that reduces tensions between concealing and revealing. Adolescents' personal agency may, during a family mediation process, be given more space and made more prominent.

Also, the relational aspect of agency is exemplified by how mediators facilitate adolescents' agency. Their agency can become limited or restricted, depending on how adults exercise their generational power. Mediators who are less open to being part of future change processes, who perhaps focus on 'containing' adolescents' agency (Morrison et al., 2019), or who focus on 'the authentic voice' of adolescents (Wyness, 2012), might not utilise their potential. Parents, on the other hand, can exercise generational power through how they credit or blame the unexpected disclosures from adolescents.

Abebe (2019: 12) asks what kind of agency is deemed 'productive' for children and how children's relationships enable or restrict their agency. We suggest that adolescents' participation in a family mediation process can be helpful and lead to change if mediators' and parents' management of collective privacy boundaries are acknowledged and put on the table. In that way, adolescents' personal agency is not an expression of autonomy alone, but rather something seen in relation to their connectedness with adults.

The interviewer as an 'outsider' of collective privacy boundaries

Another interesting aspect of the interdependency in adolescents' agency is the role of the interviewer. They would only meet the interviewer once, while the mediator had proved their competence and left the door ajar and provided an opportunity to safely disclose information with possibilities of having influence on their everyday lives. In the interview, the adolescents could reflect upon their experiences from the parental separation process and the participation in the family mediation, while at the same time conceal aspects that were reserved for the dialogue with the mediator. In other words, the adolescents' management of collective privacy boundaries was adapted to the adults they interacted with and the contexts they participated in, and reflects how revealing and concealing are overlapping concepts. The contextual differences might explain why some mediators were invited inside privacy boundaries while the interviewer was not.

Even if interdependency also applies to siblings and other members of social networks (Abebe, 2019), this has not been the main focus of this article. However, we acknowledge that such relationships are important to adolescents' exertion of agency, for instance through teaming up with siblings when they negotiate and manage collective privacy boundaries, or by turning to a sibling when needing someone to talk to. This study applied a broad time frame, and perhaps that is why the troubles in the communication with their

parents and in their relationships seemed to be a common topic across the interviews. After all, the relationships to parents represented a continuity throughout the time frame given for their narrative. Also, because of the profession of the interviewer, the adolescents might have been more prone to emphasise relational aspects in their narratives.

Conclusion

Our study provides insight into some of the dynamics in play when adolescents participate in family mediation. Berman and Daneback (2022) suggest offering counselling to all parents going through a parental separation. Adolescents' participation in family mediation in Norway exemplifies how this form of support can be put into practice, and how adults can attend to adolescents' agency in the process. Some important potentials in the family mediation service are exactly these: to offer a site to share information and initiate dialogues when the parental separation process has started, and to be a haven that is easy to return to if rules of privacy boundaries are renegotiated and relationship turbulence appear.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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Appendix 1

Table of comparison: Policies regarding divorce and contact with both parents in three European countries (the Netherlands, Germany, Norway)

	the Netherlands	Norway	Germany
Overall trends in family composition and public discourse			
changes in number of marriages			
changes in number of divorces (with children and without children)			
changes in number of children growing up in certain types of families (never married parents, married parents, divorced parents, remarried parents)			
public perception of families (definition of families)			
public perception of divorce			
changes in the perception of family and divorce over the last 100 years (brief)			
frequent custody agreements after divorce/parental separation			
Legal framework for divorce			
institutions involved in divorce proceedings			
relevant laws			
laws relevant for children's participation			
changes in relevant laws			
statistics about characteristics of legal proceedings			
legal framework for custody proceedings (e.g., how long..?)			
importance of the children's well-being/best interest in custody proceedings			
costs of divorce			
Overall trends in child protection/discussion about child well-being			
overall orientation			
public discourse			
attitude towards the UN Convention on the rights of the child			
changes in the perception of the rights of the child			
Key concepts of child maltreatment			
risk of significant harm			
Are 'messy'/high-conflict divorces included in the definition of risk of significant harm?			
thresholds for state intervention			
structures of the child welfare system			
Divorce and outcomes for children			
number of 'messy'/high-conflict divorces			

discourse on 'messy'/high-conflict divorces and their effects on children			
discourse of 'messy'/high-conflict divorces as a risk of significant harm			
outcomes of children in terms of custody agreements			
research findings on the outcomes for children (health, mental health, interpersonal relationships)			
Divorce and domestic violence			
How is domestic violence handled in divorce cases?			
Is witnessing domestic violence considered a risk of significant harm to the well-being of the child?			
frequency of (witnessing) domestic violence			
Overall social system/society			
gender equality			
welfare state type			

Appendix 2

Reply from Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD), the Hearing Children in Mediation research project



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Universitetet i Tromsø
9037 TROMSØ

Vår dato: 21.03.2013

Vår ref:33581 / 3 / SSA

Deres dato:

Deres ref:

TILBAKEMELDING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 26.02.2013. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

33581 *Evaluering "Barn i mekling"*
Behandlingsansvarlig *Universitetet i Tromsø, ved institusjonens øverste leder*
Daglig ansvarlig *Astrid Strandbu*

Etter gjennomgang av opplysninger gitt i meldeskjemaet og øvrig dokumentasjon, finner vi at prosjektet ikke medfører meldeplikt eller konsesjonsplikt etter personopplysningslovens §§ 31 og 33.

Dersom prosjektopplegget endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for vår vurdering, skal prosjektet meldes på nytt. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, <http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/meldeplikt/skjema.html>.

Vedlagt følger vår begrunnelse for hvorfor prosjektet ikke er meldepliktig.

Vennlig hilsen

Vigdis Namtvedt Kvalheim

Sondre S. Arnesen

Kontaktperson: Sondre S. Arnesen tlf: 55 58 25 83

Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering



Personvernombudet kan ikke se at det i prosjektet behandles personopplysninger med elektroniske hjelpemidler, eller at det opprettes manuelt personregister som inneholder sensitive personopplysninger. Prosjektet vil dermed ikke omfattes av meldeplikten etter personopplysningsloven.

Personvernombudet legger til grunn at man ved transkripsjon av intervjuer eller annen overføring av data til en datamaskin, ikke registrerer opplysninger som gjør det mulig å identifisere enkeltpersoner, verken direkte eller indirekte. Alle opplysninger som behandles elektronisk i forbindelse med prosjektet må være anonyme. Med anonyme opplysninger forstås opplysninger som ikke på noe vis kan identifisere enkeltpersoner i et datamateriale, verken direkte gjennom navn eller personnummer, indirekte gjennom bakgrunnsvariabler eller gjennom navneliste/koblingsnøkkel eller krypteringsformel og kode.

Appendix 3

Questionnaire to family mediators in the Hearing Children in Mediation research project

Mekler	
År	
Nr.	

Fylles ut av mekler etter første meklingstid

1. Type mekling

- Ekteskapsmekling
Samboermekling
Barnelovsmekling

2. Barnet/barna i denne meklingen? (kjønn og alder)

Barn A: Gutt
Jente
Alder: _____

Barn C: Gutt
Jente
Alder: _____

Barn B: Gutt
Jente
Alder: _____

Barn D: Gutt
Jente
Alder: _____

3. Barnets/barnas budskap til foreldrene:

4. Barneavtalen:

Bosted:

Samvær:

Høytider:

Ferier:

Praktiske forhold:

Samarbeid:

Annet:

5. Var noe av det som ble bestemt i samsvar med barnets/barnas budskap?

Hvis ja, beskriv:

6. I hvor stor grad er foreldrene enige om sentrale spørsmål i barneavtalen?

Sett en loddrett strek på linja for det som passer.

Helt
Uenig

Helt
enig

7. Skal det være evaluering etter 6 måneder?

Ja
Nei

Eventuell avtale om flere meklingstimer: _____

8. Hvordan vurderer du som mekler konfliktnivået mellom foreldrene?

Ikke
Konflikt

Svært høyt
konfliktnivå

9. Andre betydningsfulle forhold ved saken.

Rusproblematikk
Voldsproblematikk
Psykiatri
Omsorgssvikt
Meldt til barnevernet
Annet: Hva? _____

Kommentar:

Takk for at du fylte ut skjemaet!

Appendix 4

Approval from Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research for qualitative research interviews

NSD NORSK SENTER FOR FORSKNINGSDATA

NSD sin vurdering

Prosjekttittel

Unge stemmer i familiebrudd

Referansennummer

150314

Registrert

21.04.2020 av Lovise Grape - lovise.grape@uit.no

Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon

UIT – Norges Arktiske Universitet / Det helsevitenskapelige fakultet / RKBU Nord

Prosjektansvarlig (vitenskapelig ansatt/veileder eller stipendiat)

Lovise Grape, lovise.grape@uit.no, tlf: 77645828

Type prosjekt

Forskerprosjekt

Prosjektperiode

27.04.2020 - 31.12.2022

Status

18.05.2020 - Vurdert

Vurdering (1)

18.05.2020 - Vurdert

Det er vår vurdering at behandlingen av personopplysninger i prosjektet vil være i samsvar med personvernlovgivningen så fremt den gjennomføres i tråd med det som er dokumentert i meldeskjemaet den 18.5.2020 med vedlegg, samt i meldingsdialogen mellom innmelder og NSD. Behandlingen kan starte.

MELD VESENTLIGE ENDRINGER

Dersom det skjer vesentlige endringer i behandlingen av personopplysninger, kan det være nødvendig å melde dette til NSD ved å oppdatere meldeskjemaet. Før du melder inn en endring, oppfordrer vi deg til å lese om hvilke type endringer det er nødvendig å melde:

https://nsd.no/personvernombud/meld_prosjekt/meld_endringer.html

Du må vente på svar fra NSD før endringen gjennomføres.

TYPE OPPLYSNINGER OG VARIGHET

Prosjektet vil behandle særlige kategorier av personopplysninger om helseforhold og alminnelige kategorier av personopplysninger frem til 31.12.2022.

LOVLIG GRUNNLAG

Prosjektet vil innhente samtykke fra foresatte til behandlingen av personopplysninger om barna. Vår vurdering er at prosjektet legger opp til et samtykke i samsvar med kravene i art. 4 nr. 11 og art. 7, ved at det er en frivillig, spesifikk, informert og utvetydig bekreftelse, som kan dokumenteres, og som den registrerte kan trekke tilbake. Barna vil også samtykke til deltakelse.

Lovlig grunnlag for behandlingen vil dermed være den registrertes uttrykkelige samtykke, jf. personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a, jf. art. 9 nr. 2 bokstav a, jf. personopplysningsloven § 10, jf. § 9 (2).

PERSONVERNPRINSIPPER

NSD vurderer at den planlagte behandlingen av personopplysninger vil følge prinsippene i personvernforordningen om:

- lovlighet, rettferdighet og åpenhet (art. 5.1 a), ved at de registrerte får tilfredsstillende informasjon om og samtykker til behandlingen
- formålsbegrensning (art. 5.1 b), ved at personopplysninger samles inn for spesifikke, uttrykkelig angitte og berettigede formål, og ikke viderebehandles til nye uforenlige formål
- dataminimering (art. 5.1 c), ved at det kun behandles opplysninger som er adekvate, relevante og nødvendige for formålet med prosjektet
- lagringsbegrensning (art. 5.1 e), ved at personopplysningene ikke lagres lengre enn nødvendig for å oppfylle formålet

DE REGISTRERTES RETTIGHETER

Så lenge de registrerte kan identifiseres i datamaterialet vil de ha følgende rettigheter: åpenhet (art. 12), informasjon (art. 13), innsyn (art. 15), retting (art. 16), sletting (art. 17), begrensning (art. 18), underretning (art. 19), dataportabilitet (art. 20).

NSD vurderer at informasjonen som de registrerte vil motta oppfyller lovens krav til form og innhold, jf. art. 12.1 og art. 13.

Vi minner om at hvis en registrert/foresatt tar kontakt om sine/barnets rettigheter, har behandlingsansvarlig institusjon plikt til å svare innen en måned.

FØLG DIN INSTITUSJONS RETNINGSLINJER

NSD legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene i personvernforordningen om riktighet (art. 5.1 d), integritet og konfidensialitet (art. 5.1. f) og sikkerhet (art. 32).

TSD er databehandler i prosjektet. I tillegg skal det brukes digital plattform for intervju (skype/Teams etc.). NSD legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene til bruk av databehandler, jf. art 28 og 29.

For å forsikre dere om at kravene oppfylles, må dere følge interne retningslinjer og eventuelt rådføre dere med behandlingsansvarlig institusjon.

OPPFØLGING AV PROSJEKTET

NSD vil følge opp ved planlagt avslutning for å avklare om behandlingen av personopplysningene er avsluttet.

Lykke til med prosjektet!

Kontaktperson hos NSD: Håkon J. Tranvåg

Tlf. Personverntjenester: 55 58 21 17 (tast 1)

Appendix 5

Information sheet to mediators

INFORMASJONSSKRIV TIL MEKLERE

Prosjektet Høring av barn i mekling ved RKBU Nord ved UiT Norges arktiske universitet gjennomfører nå et delprosjekt: *Unge stemmer i familiebrudd*. Dette er del av doktorgradsprosjektet til stipendiat og psykolog Lovise Grape.

I dette prosjektet undersøker vi hvordan unge forstår egen deltakelse i meklingsprosessen og deltakelse i endringsprosesser etter foreldrenes samlivsbrudd.

HVEM ØNSKER VI Å SNAKKE MED?

- Ungdommer mellom 12 og 17 år
- Ungdommer som har snakket med mekler i forbindelse med foreldrenes mekling. Intervjutidspunkt ca. 4 til 12 måneder etter ungdommens første involvering i meklingsprosessen.
- Det er ikke avgjørende hvordan ungdommene har blitt involvert i meklingsprosessen

HVA BER VI MEKLERNE GJØRE?

- Rekruttere ungdommer
 - ved evalueringssamtale
 - i familier hvor ungdommen og/eller foreldrene har oppfølging ved familievernkontoret
- Informere ungdommen og/eller foreldrene om studiet (levere ut kort informasjonsskriv) og spørre om samtykke til at Lovise kan kontakte dem og gi mer informasjon om prosjektet. Lagre navn og kontaktinformasjon som videreformidles til prosjektet.

ANNEN INFORMASJON

Forskerne i prosjektet har ansvar for å innhente samtykke i tråd med forskningsetiske regler. Når dette innhentes er det foreldre som har den daglige omsorgen for ungdommer under 16 år som må samtykke til ungdommens deltakelse. Der det er én forelder som har den daglige omsorgen, er det kun denne som trenger å samtykke, men det er å foretrekke at begge foreldre samtykker der dette lar seg gjøre.

Ungdommer over 16 år kan samtykke selv.

Vi vil tilstrebe tilpasninger slik at språk, nedsatt funksjonsevne eller andre egenskaper ikke skal være til hinder for å delta som informanter. Dersom dette medfører behov for endringer i hvordan informasjonsskriv eller annen kommunikasjon er utformet i deres rekrutteringsarbeid, ber vi om at dere tar kontakt slik at vi kan gjøre tilpasninger (eks. oversettelse av informasjonsskriv til ungdommens og/eller foreldrenes morsmål).

Ved spørsmål, ikke nøl med å ta kontakt:

Stipendiat Lovise Grape, e-post lovise.grape@uit.no, telefon: 776 45828, mobil: 95243785
Veileder førsteamanuensis Gry Mette Haugen, e-post gry.m.d.haugen@dmmh.no, telefon 73568352
Prosjektleder professor Renee Thørnblad, e-post renee.thornblad@uit.no, telefon 776 45859

Appendix 6

Information sheet to parents

Informasjon til foreldre om ungdommers deltakelse i forskningsprosjektet Unge stemmer i familiebrudd

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å samtykke til at din sønn/datter kan delta i et forskningsprosjekt som undersøker hvordan ungdommer opplever å fortelle hvordan de har det, og å få si sin mening om valg familier tar etter foreldres samlivsbrudd.

Denne delen av prosjektet inngår som en del av doktorgradsarbeidet til Lovise Grape, og er del av prosjektet «Høring av barn i mekling». Prosjektet startet i 2013 som følge av at flere barn ble invitert med foreldrene til mekling til en samtale med mekleren. **Mekling er et møte som foreldrene har på familievernkontoret for å bli enig om hvor barnet skal bo, når barnet skal være sammen med begge foreldrene, og andre forhold som er viktige for barnet.** Alle foreldre som skiller seg eller er uenige om barnas bosted og/eller samvær må møte til mekling dersom barna er under 16 år.

Vi vet for lite om hvordan barn og unge selv opplever å delta i avgjørelser som må tas i en familie etter foreldrenes samlivsbrudd. For å kunne hjelpe familier, barn og ungdom burde vi vite mer om dette. Blant annet for å kunne gi bedre informasjon og råd til foreldre, og for å tilpasse tjenester, slik som mekling, til barns behov. Din ungdoms erfaringer og synspunkter er derfor svært viktige, og vi håper at din ungdom kan delta i prosjektet.

HVA INNEBÆRER DET FOR UNGDOMMEN Å DELTA?

- Ett intervju som varer ca. en time
- Ungdommen får velge tid og sted til intervjuet som passer for seg

Intervjuet handler om hvordan ungdommen har opplevd å ha blitt involvert i beslutninger i tiden fra foreldrene valgte å gå fra hverandre. Det blir tatt notater og lydopptak av intervjuet. Vi vil lagre opplysninger om ungdommens navn, telefonnummer og/eller e-postadresse slik at vi kan kontakte ungdommen.

Følgende tema vil styre samtalen: ungdommens hverdagsliv etter skilsmissen, viktige hendelser, viktige personer, og ønsker for fremtiden.

PERSONVERN – HVORDAN VI OPPBEVARER OG BRUKER DINE OG UNGDOMMENS PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Resultater fra intervjuene vil presenteres i artikler og i presentasjoner, men ingen vil kunne vite hva akkurat din ungdom har fortalt. De som får lese det som er sagt i intervjuet er medlemmene i forskningsprosjektet (vi er nå seks personer).

Vi behandler opplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med lover og regler. Det som blir fortalt i intervjuet vil lagres et annet sted enn navnet og kontaktopplysningene til ungdommen og foreldrene.

Prosjektet skal etter planen avsluttes desember 2022. Personopplysningene knyttet til din ungdom vil da slettes.

DET ER FRIVILLIG Å DELTA

Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Hvis ungdommen velger å delta, **kan hen når som helst ombestemme seg og trekke seg uten å oppgi noen grunn.** Ungdommen kan også velge at vi skal slette det han/hun har sagt i intervjuet, så lenge det ikke er skrevet i artikler som er publisert. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for ungdommen hvis han/hun ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg.

Så lenge man kan vite at det er ungdommen som sier noe (f.eks. i lydopptaket), så har ungdommen rett til

- Å ha innsyn i hvilke personopplysninger som er registrert,
- å få rettet personopplysninger om seg,
- få slettet personopplysninger om seg,
- få utlevert en kopi av sine personopplysninger (dataportabilitet), og
- å sende klage til personvernombudet eller Datatilsynet om behandlingen av sine personopplysninger.

Vi behandler opplysninger om ungdommen basert på ungdommens og forelderens/foreldrenes samtykke.

På oppdrag fra UiT Norges arktiske universitet ved RKBU Nord har NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

HVOR KAN DU FINNE UT MER?

Hvis du har spørsmål til studien, eller ønsker å benytte deg av dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:

- RKBU Nord ved prosjektleder Renee Thørnblad renee.thornblad@uit.no, 77645859
- Personvernombud ved UiT er Joakim Bakkevold, personvernombud@uit.no, 77646322
- NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS, på epost (personverntjenester@nsd.no) eller telefon: 55 58 21 17.

Med vennlig hilsen

Prosjektansvarlig

Stipendiat

Prof. Renee Thørnblad

Lovise Grape



UiT RKBU Nord

SAMTYKKEERKLÆRING

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet Unge stemmer i familiebrudd (del av prosjektet Høring av barn i mekling), og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til:

- At min ungdom ved navn _____ kan delta i prosjektet

Jeg samtykker til at mine opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet, ca. desember 2022.

(Signert av forelder/foreldre, dato)

Dieđut váhnemiidda nuoraid searvama birra dutkanprošektii Nuoraid jienat bearrašiid earráneamis

Dá lea jearaldat dutnje ahte mieđihat go ahte du bárdni/nieida oažžu searvat dutkanprošektii mas guorahallojuvvo movt nuorat vásihit dan ahte beassat mitalit movt sin dilli lea, ja go besset iežaset oaivila dadjat dan birra mii mearriduvvo bearrašis dan oktavuodas go váhnemat earránit.

Dát oassi prošeavttas lea oassin Lovise Grape doavttirgrádabarggus, ja oassin prošeavttas «Høring av barn i mekling» (Mánáid oaiviliid gullan soabahallamis). Prošeakta álggahuvvui 2013:s dan olis go mánga máná bovdejuvvojedje váhnemiid fárrui soabahallamii ja ságastallamii soabaheddjiin. **Soabahallan lea čoahkkin mii váhnemiin lea bearrašuodjalankantuvrras go galgaba soahpat gos mánná galgá orrut, goas mánná galgá leat ovttas goappáge váhnemiin, ja eará áššiid mat leat deatalaččat mánnái.** Buot váhnemat geat earránit dahje geat eai soaba das gos mánát galget orrut ja/dahje ovtastallama hárrái, fertejit čađahit soabaheami jus sudnos leat mánát vuollel 16 jagi.

Mii diehtit beare unnán dan birra movt mánát ja nuorat ieža vásihit dan ahte searvat mearrádusaide maid bearraš ferte dahkat go váhnemat earránit. Vai sáhtášeimmet veahkehit bearrašiid, mánáid ja nuoraid, de dárbbášit diehtit eambo dan birra. Earret eará vai sáhttit buorebut addit dieđuid ja rávvet váhnemiid, ja buorebut heivehit soabaheami mánáide ja nuoraide. Du nuora vásáhusat ja oaivilat leat danne hui deatalaččat ja mii sávvat du nuorra sáhtát searvat prošektii.

MII VURDOJUVVO NUORAIN GEAT SERVET?

- Okta jearahallan mii bistá sullii diimmu
- Son beasat ieš välljet goas ja gos jearahallan čađahuvvo

Jearahallamis šaddá sáhka dan birra movt nuorra leat vásihan beassat leat mielde mearrideame dahje dadjame iežas oaivila áššiid birra mat leat dáhpáhuvvan dan rájes go váhnemat välljiiga earráneigga. Mii čállit ja báddet jearahallama. Mii vurket dieđuid nugo nuora nama, telefovdnanummara ja/dahje e-poastačujuhusa vai beassat váldit suinna oktavuoda.

Čuovvovaš temát šaddet oassin ságastallamis: nuora beaivválaš eallin maŋgel earráneami, deatalaš dáhpáhusat, deatalaš olbmot, ja boahhteáiggesávaldagat.

DU PERSOVDNASUODJALUS – MOVV MII VURKET JA GEVAHIT DU JA DU NUORA PERSOVDNADIEĐUID

Bohtosat ovdanbuktojuvvojit artihkkaliin ja presentašuvnnain, muhto ii oktage beasa diehtit juste maid du nuorra lea mitalan. Sii geat besset lohkat dan mii lea daddjon jearahallamiin leat dutkanprošeavtta miellahtut (mii leat dál guhtta olbmo).

Mii doallat buot dieđuid čiegusin, nu go lágat ja njuolggadusat gáibidit. Dat mii mitaluvvo jearahallamis vurkejuvvo eará sadjái go nuora ja váhnemiid namat ja gulahallandieđut.

Prošeakta galgá plána mielde loahpahuvvot juovlamánus 2022. Du nuora persovdnadieđut sihkkujuvvojit dalle.

SEARVAN LEA EAKTODÁHTOLAŠ

Prošektii searvan lea eaktodáhtolaš. Jus nuorra vällje searvat, **de sáhtttá liikká vaikko goas geassádit, ii ge dárbbáš mitalit manne.** Nuorra sáhtttá maid mearridit ahte dat maid lea dadjan jearahallamis, galgá sihkkujuvvo, jus ii leat

juo čállojuvvon artihkkalii mii lea almmuhuvvon. Sutnje eai leat makkárge negatiiva váikkuhusat jus ii hálit searvat, dahje jus maŋgel geassáda.

Nu guhká go leat vejolaš gávnnahtit ahte nuorra lea dadjan juoidá (omd. jietnabáttis), de lea sus riekti

- oaidnit/diehtit makkár persovdnadieđuid mii leat registreren su birra,
- oažžut njulgejuvvot persovdnadieđuid iežas birra,
- oažžut sihkkojuvvot persovdnadieđuid iežas birra,
- oažžut kopijja iežas persovdnadieđuin (dataportabilitehta), ja
- sáddet váidaga persovdnasuodjalanáittardeaddjái dahje Databearráigehčču su persovdnadieđuid gieđahallama birra.

Mii gieđahallat dieđuid nuora birra su iežas ja váhnema/váhnemiid miehtama vuodul.

UiT Norgga árkálaš universitehta RKBU Nord jearaldaga vuodul lea NSD - Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS árvvoštallan ahte persovdnadieđuid gieđahallan dán prošeavttas čuovvu persovdnasuodjalannjuolggadusaid.

GOS OAČČUT EAMBBO DIEĐUID?

Jus dus leat gažaldagat dutkama birra, dahje háliidat iežat vuoigatvuodaid čadahtit, de sáhtát váldit oktavuoda:

- RKBU Nord prošeaktajođiheaddji Renee Thørnblad renee.thornblad@uit.no, 77645859
- UiT persovdnasuodjalanáittardeaddji Joakim Bakkevold, personvernombud@uit.no, 77646322
- NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS, e-poasta (personvertjenester@nsd.no) dahje telefona: 55 58 21 17.

Dearvuodat

Prošeaktaovddasvástideaddji

Stipendiáhhta

Prof. Renee Thørnblad

Lovise Grape



UiT RKBU Nord

MIEHTAMA DUOĐAŠTUS

Mun lean ožžon ja ipmirdan dieđuid prošeavtta birra man namma lea Unge stemmer i familiebrudd (Nuorra jienat bearrašiid earráneamis) (oassi prošeavttas Høring av barn i mekling/ Mánáid oaiviliid gullan soabahallamis), ja lean ožžon vejolašvuoda jearrat gažaldagaid. Mun miedihán ahte:

- Ahte mu nuorra gean namma lea _____ oažžu searvat prošeaktii.

Mun dohkkehan ahte mu dieđut gieđahallojuvvojit dassázi go prošeakta loahpahuvvo, birrasiid juovlamánus 20220

(Váhnema/váhnemiid vuolláičála ja dáhton)

Appendix 7

Information sheet to adolescents

Informasjonsskriv til ungdommer

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å delta i forskningsprosjektet Unge stemmer i familiebrudd som prøver å forstå hvordan ungdommer opplever å fortelle hvordan de har det, og å få si sin mening om det som bestemmes i en familie etter foreldres samlivsbrudd.

Denne delen av prosjektet inngår som en del av doktorgradsarbeidet til Lovise Grape, og er del av prosjektet «Høring av barn i mekling». Prosjektet startet i 2013 som følge av at flere barn ble invitert med foreldrene til mekling til en samtale med mekleren. **Mekling er et møte som foreldrene har på familievernkontoret for å bli enig om hvor barnet skal bo, når barnet skal være sammen med begge foreldrene, og andre forhold som er viktige for barnet.** Alle foreldre som skiller seg eller er uenige om barna må møte til mekling dersom de har barn under 16 år.

Vi vet for lite om hvordan barn og unge selv opplever å delta i avgjørelser som må tas i en familie etter foreldrenes samlivsbrudd. For å kunne hjelpe familier, barn og ungdom burde vi vite mer om dette. Blant annet for å kunne gi bedre informasjon og råd til foreldre, og for å kunne tilpasse mekling til barn og unge. Dine erfaringer og synspunkter er derfor svært viktige og vi håper derfor du kan tenke deg å delta i prosjektet.

HVA INNEBÆRER DET FOR DEG Å DELTA?

- Ett intervju som varer ca. en time
- Du får velge tid og sted til intervjuet som passer for deg

Intervjuet handler om hvordan du har opplevd å få være med på å bestemme eller si hva du mener om ting som har skjedd i tiden fra foreldrene valgte å gå fra hverandre og frem til tidspunktet vi møtes. Det er ingen rette eller gale svar. Det blir tatt notater og lydopptak av intervjuet. Vi vil lagre opplysninger om ditt navn, telefonnummer og/eller e-postadresse slik at vi kan kontakte deg for å avtale intervju.

DITT PERSONVERN – HVORDAN VI OPPBEVARER OG BRUKER DINE OPPLYSNINGER

Resultater fra ditt intervju og andre ungdommers intervju vil presenteres i artikler og i presentasjoner, men ingen vil kunne vite hva akkurat du har fortalt. De som får lese det som er sagt i intervjuet er medlemmene i forskningsprosjektet (vi er nå seks personer). Forskerne i prosjektet har taushetsplikt.

Vi behandler opplysningene konfidensielt (slik at andre ikke får vite hva du har fortalt) og i samsvar med lover og regler. Det du forteller om i intervjuet vil lagres et annet sted enn navnet ditt og kontaktopplysningene dine.

Prosjektet skal etter planen avsluttes desember 2022. Personopplysningene om deg som er lagret vil da slettes.

DET ER FRIVILLIG Å DELTA

Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Hvis du velger å delta, **kan du når som helst ombestemme deg og trekke deg uten å oppgi noen grunn.** Du kan også velge at vi skal slette det du har sagt i intervjuet, så lenge det ikke er skrevet i artikler som er publisert. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg.

Så lenge man kan vite at det er deg som sier noe (f.eks. i lydopptaket), så har du rett til

- innsyn i hvilke personopplysninger som er registrert om deg,
- å få rettet personopplysninger om deg,
- få slettet personopplysninger om deg,
- få utlevert en kopi av dine personopplysninger (dataportabilitet), og
- å sende klage til personvernombudet eller Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger.

Vi behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt samtykke.

På oppdrag fra UiT Norges arktiske universitet ved RKBU Nord har NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

HVOR KAN DU FINNE UT MER?

Hvis du har spørsmål til studien, eller ønsker å benytte deg av dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:

- RKBU Nord ved prosjektleder Renee Thørnblad renee.thornblad@uit.no, 77645859
- Personvernombud ved UiT er Joakim Bakkevold, personvernombud@uit.no, 77646322
- NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS, på epost (personverntjenester@nsd.no) eller telefon: 55 58 21 17.

Med vennlig hilsen

Prosjektansvarlig

Professor Renee Thørnblad

Stipendiat

Lovise Grape



UiT RKBU Nord

SAMTYKKEERKLÆRING

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet Unge stemmer i familiebrudd (del av prosjektet Høring av barn i mekling), og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til:

- å delta i prosjektet

Jeg samtykker til at mine opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet, ca. desember 2022.

(Signert av ungdom, dato)

Diehtočálus nuoraide

Dá lea jearaldat searvvašit go don dutkanprošektii Unge stemmer i familiebrudd (Nuorra jienat bearrašiid earráneamis) mas geahččalit gávnnaht movt nuorat vásihit dan ahte beassat mitalit movt sin dilli lea, ja go besset iežaset oaivila dadjat dan birra mii mearriduvvo bearrašis dan oktavuodas go váhnemat earránit.

Dát oassi prošeavttas lea oassin Lovise Grape doavttirgrádabarggus, ja oassin prošeavttas «Høring av barn i mekling» (Mánáid oaiviliid gullan soabahallamis). Prošeakta álggahuvvui 2013:s dan olis go máŋga máná bovdejuvvojedje váhnemiid fárrui soabahallamii ja ságastallamii soabaheddjiin. **Soabahallan lea čeahkkin mii váhnemiin lea bearašsuodjalankantuvrras go galgaba soahpat gos mánná galgá orrut, goas mánná galgá leat ovttas goappáge váhnemiin, ja eará áššiid mat leat deatalaččat mánnái.** Buot váhnemat geat earránit dahje geat eai soaba mánáid dáfus, fertejit čađahit soabaheami jus sudnos leat mánát vuollel 16 jagi.

Mii diehtit beare unnán dan birra movt mánát ja nuorat ieža vásihit dan ahte searvat mearrádusaide maid bearaš ferte dahkat go váhnemat earránit. Vai sáhtášeimmet veahkehit bearrašiid, mánáid ja nuoraid, de dárbbášit diehtit eambo dan birra. Earret eará vai sáhttit buorebut addit dieđuid ja rávvet váhnemiid, ja buorebut heivehit soabaheami mánáide ja nuoraide. Du vásáhusat ja oaivilat leat danne hui deatalaččat ja mii sávvat don sáhtát searvat prošektii.

MII VURDOJUUVVO DUS GO SEARVVAT?

- Okta jearahallan mii bistá sullii diimmu
- Don beasat ieš válljet goas ja gos jearahallan čađahuvvo

Jearahallamis šaddá sáhka dan birra movt don leat vásihan dan go leat ieš beassan leat mielde mearrideame dahje dadjame maid don oaivvildat áššiid birra mat leat dáhpáhuvvan dan rájes go váhnemat válljiiga earránit ja dan rádjái go mii deaivvadit. Ii oktage vástádus leat riektá ii ge boastut. Mii čállit ja báddet jearahallama. Mii vurket dieđuid nugo du nama, telefodnanummara ja/dahje e-poastačujuhusa vai beassat soahpat goas mii čađahit jearahallama.

DU PERSOVDNASUODJALUS – MOVT MII VURKET JA GEVAHIT DU DIEĐUID

Bohtosat du ja eará nuoraid jearahallamis ovdanbuktojuvvojit artihkkaliin ja presentašuvnnain, muhto ii oktage beasa diehtit juste maid don mitalit. Sii geat besset lohkat dan mii lea daddjon jearahallamiin leat dutkanprošeavtta miellahtut (mii leat dál guhtta olbmo). Dutkiin geat servet prošektii lea jávohisvuodá-geatnegasvuota.

Dat mearkkaša ahte mii doallat buot dieđuid čiegusin (vai earát eai beasa diehtit maid don leat mitalan), nu go lágat ja njuolggadusat gáibidit. Dat maid don mitalat jearahallamis vurkejuvvo eará sadjái go du namma ja gulahallandieđut.

Prošeakta galgá plána mielde loahpahuvvot juovlamánus 2022.

Du persovdnadieđut mat leat vurkejuvvon, sihkkujuvvojit dalle.

SEARVAN LEA EAKTODÁHTOLAŠ

Prošektii searvan lea eaktodáhtolaš. Jus válljet searvat, **de sáhtát liikká vaikko goas geassádit, it ge dárbbáš mitalit manne.** Don sáhtát maid mearridit ahte dat maid leat dadjan jearahallamis, galgá sihkkujuvvo, jus ii leat juo čállojuvvon artihkkalii mii lea almmuhuvvon. Dutnje eai leat makkárga negatiiva váikkuhusat jus it hálit searvat, dahje jus maŋjel geassádat.

Nu guhká go leat vejolaš gávnnaht ahte don dajat juoidá (omd. jietnabáttis), de lea dus riekti

- oaidnit/diehtit makkár persovdnadieđuid mii leat registreren du birra,
- oažžut njulgejuvvot persovdnadieđuid iežat birra,
- oažžut sihkkojuvvot persovdnadieđuid iežat birra,
- oažžut kopijja iežat persovdnadieđuin (dataportabilitehta), ja
- sáddet váidaga persovdnasuodjalanáittardeaddjái dahje Databearráigehččui iežat persovdnadieđuid gieđahallama birra.

Mii gieđahallat dieđuid du birra du iežat miehtama vuođul.

UiT Norgga ártalaš universitehta RKBU Nord jearaldaga vuođul lea NSD - Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS árvvoštallan ahte persovdnadieđuid gieđahallan dán prošeavttas čuovvu persovdnasuodjalannjuolggadusaid.

GOS OAČČUT EAMBBO DIEĐUID?

Jus dus leat gažaldagat dutkama birra, dahje háliidat iežat vuoigatvuođaid čađahit, de sáhtát váldit oktavuođa:

- RKBU Nord prošeaktajođiheaddji Renee Thørnblad renee.thornblad@uit.no, 77645859
- UiT persovdnasuodjalanáittardeaddji Joakim Bakkevold, personvernombud@uit.no, 77646322
- NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS, e-poasta (personvertjenester@nsd.no) dahje telefovna: 55 58 21 17.

Dearvuodat

Prošeaktaovddasvástideaddji

Stipendiáhhta

Professor Renee Thørnblad

Lovise Grape



UiT RKBU Nord

MIEHTAMA DUOĐAŠTUS

Mun lean ožžon ja ipmirdan dieđuid prošeavtta birra man namma lea Unge stemmer i familiebrudd (Nuorra jienat bearrašiid earráneamis) (oassi prošeavttas Høring av barn i mekling/ Mánáid oaiviliid gullan soabahallamis), ja lean ožžon vejolašvuođa jerrat gažaldagaid. Mun miedihan ahte:

- Searvvan prošeaktii

Mun dohkkehan ahte mu dieđut gieđahalloyuvvojit dassáži go prošeakta loahpahuvo, birrasiid juovlamánus 20220

(Nuora vuolláičála ja dáhton)

Letter of information for adolescents (English)

This is a request for you to participate in the research project “Young voices in family break-ups” that seeks to understand how adolescents experience to share their feelings and opinions regarding decisions in the family after the parental break-up.

This is part of the phd-project of Lovise Grape, that is part of the project “Hearing children in mediation”. The Hearing children in mediation-project started in 2013 due to the increase of children who took part in mediation together with their parents. **Mediation is a meeting for parents at the Family Counselling Office (Familieverntjenesten) to make an agreement about where the child should live, when the child should spend time with each parent, and other aspects important for the child.** All parents who separate or disagree about their children must attend mediation if they have children under 16 years.

We do not know enough about how children and young people feel that they can participate in decisions in families after parents’ relationship break-ups. We need to know more to be able to help families, children, and young people. This will help us to provide better information and advice to parents, and to adapt and adjust mediation to children and adolescents. Your experiences and views are therefore extremely important, and we hope that you would like to participate in this project.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO PARTICIPATE?

- One interview/conversation of about one hour
- You get to choose time and place for the interview that suits you

The topic in the conversation will be about how you have been involved in decisions, or how you have been given the opportunity to share your opinions about what has happened since your parents separated. There are no right or wrong answers. It will be taken notes, and the conversation will be recorded. We will store information about your name, phone number and/or e-mail address so that we can contact you for the interview.

YOUR PRIVACY PROTECTION – HOW WE KEEP AND USE YOUR INFORMATION

Results from your and other adolescents’ conversations will be presented in articles and presentations, but no one will know exactly what YOU have told us. Those who can read what you have said in the interview is the members in the research project (we are currently six persons). The researchers in the project have duty of confidentiality.

We treat your information confidentially (so that no one will know what you have told us) and according to legislations and rules. What you tell us will be stored separated from your name and your contact information.

The plan is to end the project in December 2022. We will delete your personal data when the project ends.

PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY

Participation is voluntary. Even when you chose to participate, **you can still change your mind at any timepoint and withdraw without giving any reasons.** You can also say that we should delete what you have said in the conversation. We cannot delete it if it is written in any published articles. There will be no negative consequences if you chose to withdraw.

You have the following rights when you can be identified (e.g. in the recording):

- Access to your personal information,

- To correct your personal information,
- To delete your personal information,
- To be provided a copy of your personal information, and
- To send a complaint to the data protection officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority about how your personal information has been handled.

We treat your information based on your consent.

On request from UiT The Arctic University of Norway, RKBU North, the NSD – Norwegian centre for research data AS has approved that the project handle personal information according to the regulations.

WHERE CAN YOU ASK QUESTION?

If you have any questions regarding the study, or want to make use of your rights, you can contact:

- RKBU North with project manager Renee Thørnblad renee.thornblad@uit.no, 77645859
- The data protection officer at UiT Joakim Bakkevold, personvernombud@uit.no, 77646322
- NSD – Norwegian centre for research data (personvertjenester@nsd.no), 55 58 21 17.

Best regards,

Project manager

PhD-candidate

Professor Renee Thørnblad

Lovise Grape



UiT RKBU Nord

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have received and understood the information about the project Young voices in family break-ups (part of the Hearing children in mediation project). I have had the opportunity to ask questions. I consent to the following:

- To participate in the project

I consent to the handling of my information until the project ends, about December 2022.

(Signed by the adolescent, date)

Appendix 8

Information sheet to adolescents about the study

UNGE STEMME I FAMILIEBRUDD

Det er mye som blir annerledes i en familie etter en skilsmisse. Jeg ønsker å snakke med ungdommer for å finne ut hvordan de opplever disse endringene. Dette må vi vite mer om for at ungdommer og foreldre kan få bedre hjelp etter foreldrenes skilsmisse. Vi er derfor avhengige av å lytte til ungdommers erfaringer, og jeg ønsker å snakke med DEG for å høre hva DU mener. Hvordan opplever du å bli lyttet til, eller å få si din mening når foreldrene ikke lengre skal bo sammen?

Hvordan kan du bidra?

Jeg ønsker å snakke med DEG fordi hver ungdom har en unik opplevelse.

- Du bestemmer hvor vi møtes
- Samtalen varer i cirka en time
- Jeg ønsker å høre om din opplevelse av hvordan din familie har endret seg siden foreldrene dine skilte seg, og hvordan du har blitt involvert i endringer som har vært
- Når vi treffes vil du få mer informasjon om prosjektet og om dine rettigheter som deltaker i et forskningsprosjekt
- Ved behov vil jeg gjøre nødvendige smitteverntiltak opp mot Covid-19 (Corona-viruset)

Kan jeg kontakte deg?

Dersom du synes det er greit, ønsker jeg å fortelle mer om prosjektet og svare på eventuelle spørsmål som du har. Jeg ber om din tillatelse til at terapeuten/psykologen på familievernkontoret kan dele din kontaktinformasjon (navn og telefonnummer/e-post) med oss i prosjektet, slik at jeg kan kontakte deg. Det er fint om terapeuten/psykologen får vite om det er noen tidspunkter du ønsker at jeg kontakter deg på. Jeg vil uansett gi beskjed før jeg ringer.

Du kan også kontakte meg eller mine kollegaer dersom du har spørsmål eller ønsker å snakke med oss. Du finner kontaktinformasjon under.

Med vennlig hilsen,



*Forskerstudent og psykolog Lovise Grape, e-post
lovise.grape@uit.no, tlf 776 45828, mobil 95243785*



UiT RKBU Nord

Veileder førsteamanuensis Gry Mette Haugen, e-post gry.m.d.haugen@dmmh.no, 73568352

Prosjektleder professor Renee Thørnblad, e-post renee.thornblad@uit.no, 776 45859

NUORRA JIENAT BEARRAŠIID EARRÁNEAMIS

Olu rievdá bearrašis go váhnemat earránit. Mun háliidan ságastallat nuoraiguin vai beasan diehtit movt sii vásihit dáid rievdadusaid. Mii fertet beassat diehtit eambo dan birra vai mánát ja nuorat sáhttet oažžut buoret veahki dan oktavuodas go váhnemat earránit. Danne dárbbášit mii diehtit movt nuorat leat dan vásihan, ja danne háliidan mun DUINNA ságastallat ja gullat maid DON oaivvildat. Movt lei du mielas go guldaledje du oaivila, dahje go besset mitalit iežat oaivila dan oktavuodas go du váhnemat eaba šat áigon ovttas orrut?

Movt sáhtát don veahkehit?

Mun háliidan ságastallat DUINNA danne go juohke nuoras lea su iežas erenoamáš vásáhus.

- Don mearridat gos moai deaivvadetne
- Ságastallan bistá sullii diimmu
- Mun háliidan gullat movt don leat vásihan rievdadusaid bearrašis dan rájes go du váhnemat earráneigga, ja movt don leat váldon mielde mearrideapmái
- Go moai deaivvadetne de oaččut eambo dieđuid prošeavtta birra ja iežat vuoigatvuođaid birra dutkanprošeavtta oasseváldin.
- Dárbbu mielde áiggun čađahit dárbbášlaš njoammuneastadandoaimmaid Covid-19 (koronavirusa) oktavuodas

Oaččun go váldit oktavuoda duinna?

Jus du mielas lea ortnegis, de háliidan mitalit eambo prošeavtta birra ja vástidit gažaldagaid jus dus leat. Mun bivddán dus lobi dasa ahte terapauta/psykologa bearašsuodjalankantuvrras oažžu addit midjiide prošeaktaoasseváldiide du gulahallandieđuid (nama/telefonnummara/e-poastta), vai mun beasan duinna váldit oktavuoda. Livččii buorre jus terapauta/psykologa oažžu diehtit goas dutnje heivešii ahte mun válddán duinna oktavuoda. Mun goitge dieđihan dutnje ovdal go ringen.

Don sáhtát maid ieš váldit oktavuoda muinna dahje mu bargoskihpáriiguin jus dus leat gažaldagat dahje háliidat minguin hupmat. Gulahallandieđuid gávnnat vuollelis.

Dearvuodat



*Dutkistudeanta ja psykologa Lovise Grape, e-poasta
lovise.grape@uit.no, tlf 776 45828, mobiila 95243785*



UiT RKBU Nord

*Bagadalli vuosttašamanueansa Gry Mette Haugen, e-poasta gry.m.d.haugen@dmmh.no,
73568352*

Prošeaktajodiheaddji professor Renee Thørnblad, e-poasta renee.thornblad@uit.no, 776 45859

Appendix 9

The interview guide

The interview guide

Section 1: Initiating, presentation and ethical principles

- Ask for consent to do audio recording.
- Something I can do with the room we are in, or something I can tell about myself that will make you feel safe and comfortable during the interview?
 - o Explain why I would like to talk with him/her, present the project, the aim of the project, the importance of listening to young people who have this experience and know how it is to be young today. Emphasise that I appreciate that him/her is talking with me, that him/her is the expert on being themselves, and that I am the one to learn during the interview. Say thank you for taking time to help me with this project.
- Read the information sheet, ask if there are any questions, ask for consent, and write a signature.
 - o I will ask questions, but him/her choose what to tell. Him/her is not obliged to answer, and can end the interview anytime.
 - o Duty of confidentiality and anonymity
 - o If him/her say something that make me worried about him/her experiencing something difficult to handle one their own, I will ask if any adult persons know about it and will talk with him/her about how to acquire help.
 - o Provide contact information
 - o Questions?

Section 2: beginning the interview.

Script: I will ask some questions to understand how it has been for you since your parents decided to divorce. We will talk about the time since you understood that your parents would divorce. I know, through talking with many children and adolescents, that a lot of things may happen after parents decide to divorce. Many aspects of an adolescent's life may change. How has this been for you?

Let the adolescent talk freely. Use the timeline as a structural tool. Write key words that may need to be elaborated after the adolescent is done with his/her narrative. E.g. thoughts, feelings, what is normal/new, is there a decision that is relevant to elaborate on to better understand how the adolescent has been listened to during the divorce process?

Try to get details about significant events:

- a. What the adolescent did
- b. How it happened
- c. When it happened
- d. People who were present
- e. Transitions, how an event began and ended
- f. Where was his/her conversational partner during these events?
- g. How does the adolescent explain, reason, understand and experience events or relations that are being described?
- h. How does the adolescent believe that other people experience this event?
- i. How did things end up like this?
- j. How things might look like in the future?

If it is challenging for the adolescent to talk freely, use the technique of "life chapters":

Script: if we imagine a book that begins with the moment you understood that your parents would divorce, and ends with this interview, then the different chapters tell the story of events and phases during this time. The book is not finished yet, you still have many years left. But you have acquired some important chapters in your book. Would you try to tell the story of a highlight, a low, and a turning point?

Section 3: Family mediation

If the adolescent's participation in the family mediation process was not part of the narrative above, continue with the following script:

One of the reasons that I have invited you to this interview, is because you went to family mediation together with your parents. Family mediation is the meeting at the Local Family Counselling office where your parents talk with one or two persons about how the family will do things after the divorce. They talk about the future residence of their children, how to organise holidays, among other things. I heard that you had a conversation with the mediator. How can this event be put into the story you just told me? What role did the mediator play in your story/book? How do you think that this conversation affected your story? And are there other ways that this conversation could have affected your story?

Try to get details about the participation:

- a. What the adolescent did
- b. How it happened
- c. When it happened
- d. People who were present
- e. Transitions, how an event began and ended
- f. Where was his/her conversational partner during these events?
- g. How does the adolescent explain, reason, understand and experience events or relations that are being described?
- h. How does the adolescent believe that other people experience this event?
- i. How did things end up like this?

Section 4: future scripts

We have been talking about what has happened in the past and how you and your family are doing today. What about the future? What is your plan for your life? What are your dreams? How may the mediator affect your plans?

Section 5: closing the conversation

- Summarise the interview. Reflect and repeat the narrative so that the adolescent can correct and supplement it.
- Are there any questions?
- Did the adolescent feel like something was not appropriate to bring up during the conversation?
- A follow-up conversation is possible: when the manuscripts are ready to be submitted to a scientific journal, the adolescent can read through it in order to feel safe that their narrative remains anonymous, and to know their research contribution.
- Emphasise that the adolescent has done a great job to help the researcher understand how adolescents might experience parents' divorce, and how adolescents might take part in the process of making decisions.

