Abstract
This article, which employs a dyadic father-son approach, addresses the methodological and theoretical challenges involved in studying gender socialization and intergenerational transmission. The article is part of a longitudinal follow-up study of the Work-Sharing Couples Project, a small, experimental action research project for gender equality in the family in Norway during the first part of the 1970s; the project was designed to promote gender equality and a better work/life balance in families and was based on both spouses working part-time and sharing breadwinning, childcare and housework. The follow-up study was conducted by interviewing the original couples in 2005–2006. A sample of the sons of the work-sharing couples has also been interviewed as part of an ongoing follow-up study of intergenerational transmission. The background of the article consists of the findings so far relating to the fathers in the study: these findings provide little or no support for a model of father/son transmission; the work-sharing men did not refer to their own fathers as “role models”. Further, the father-son research design poses certain methodological, theoretical and ethical challenges which should be considered and weighed up against the possible analytical gains of this approach.
Against the background of these concerns, a single father-son case is explored based on a couple interview with the parents and individual interviews with both the parents and the son. Based on analyzing this case, methodological and theoretical implications for the study of intergenerational transmission, boys’ socialization and the origin of masculinity/(ies) are discussed.

Keywords
Gender socialization, intergenerational transmission, father-son, masculinity, gender equality
Fathers and Sons – Gender Socialization and Intergenerational Transmission Revisited

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Introduction

What are the consequences for children whose fathers play an active role in the daily care of their families? This question has been the subject of considerable theorizing and hypothesizing, and the idea of obtaining a lasting change in gender relations through interventions in families’ patterns of work and care, notably through promoting fathers’ participation in childcare, has become increasingly important in current family policy in the Nordic countries. A related concern has been the lack of fathers and male ‘role models’ for boys, which has been the subject of worry and concern among family researchers, professionals and politicians for almost a century (see Kimmel 1996/2006). Despite these high levels of hypothesizing and policy-making, which more or less take for granted that gender socialization is the result of specific gendered patterns and relations within the family, there are few empirical studies of intergenerational transmission of egalitarian family patterns.

This study is based on an in-depth analysis of a single case, chosen from a longitudinal follow-up study of a Norwegian experimental research project aimed at promoting gender equality in the family during the early 1970s. In order to address the methodological and theoretical challenges involved in studying gender socialisation and intergenerational transmission I shall employ a dyadic father-son approach. This discussion is particularly useful in explaining the power and limitations of a father-son design for such studies.

The article starts with a methodological section, and then I will briefly present the Work-Sharing Couples Project and the longitudinal follow-up study of the original participants thirty years later, in 2005–2006. In the next section I present the theoretical background of the original project and related approaches to studying gender socialization and in particular studying boys. In the second half of the paper I use an in-depth case study to explore the usefulness and explanatory power, as well as the limitations, of the father-son design.
Methodology

The main source of knowledge about the original project is the published material from the study, mainly based on detailed questionnaires. The follow-up study was carried out in 2005 and 2006: 15 of the original 16 couples were traced, and 14 consented to be interviewed, eleven of whom were still married and who were interviewed together. Three of the couples were divorced; in two cases both ex-spouses were interviewed separately, while in the third case only the wife responded and was interviewed. A sample of sons who had themselves established families, had had children and who were cohabitating with the mother of their children (7) was interviewed in 2007 as part of an ongoing study of intergenerational transmission.2 This article draws on data from one of the couple interviews and the son in this family; in addition, individual interviews with both parents were conducted in 2007.

The interviews with the parents and son are retrospective life-course interviews; they start with the informants’ childhoods and follow their life courses to the present day, covering their present life situation, and inviting them to self-reflect on the possible impact of the family of origin on their socialization and work/family adaptations. What kinds of facts do such qualitative interviews generate? Recently there has been a growing awareness of the need to distinguish between the story told and the experience of the informant (Wengraf 2001). The focus has increasingly been on the subjective, narrative and interpretative aspects of experience, whilst the realist approach has fallen somewhat out of favour. Manoeuvring between the two research traditions of realism and interpretivism, I take a pragmatic view; on one hand I acknowledge that the way in which the informants recount their life-course stories is the result of the informants’ active shaping of identities and constructions of self and that their stories derive their meaning from linguistic and discursive circumscriptions and historical experiences. Following Brannen et al. (2004, 6) and Nielsen and Rudberg (2006, 53–54), I combine the two approaches and treat the interview data as sufficiently reliable biographical evidence rather than focusing mainly on the subjective aspects and on possible discrepancies between the story told and the life lived. The interviews were semistructured, and an interview guide with relatively open questions was employed to encourage informants to tell their stories in their own words.

The Work-Sharing Couples Project

The Work-Sharing Couples Project was an experimental research project in Norway during the first part of the 1970s. The project was initiated by and carried out at the behest of the leader of the Norwegian Family Council,3 and led by the late sociologist Erik Grønseth. The project was designed to promote gender equality and a better work/life balance in families and was based on both spouses working part-time and sharing childcare and
housework. 16 couples were recruited to the project based on the following criteria: a co-
habitating couple with at least one child below school age (seven years old), with both
husband and wife gainfully employed in part-time jobs for 16–28 hours per week; normal
work hours at the time were 40 hours a week. Men working part-time was highly unusual
in the early 1970s, and still is. The time the couples spent pursuing the arrangement ran-
ged between one and a half and thirty years, with seven years as the mean (Bjørnholt
2009).

In addition to orchestrating the synchronous movement of women into the labour
market and men into the home, the Work-Sharing Couples Project’s broad, reformatory
ambition included bringing about a change in the next generation.

Thirty years later, one of the findings from the follow-up study was the active role of
the work-sharing men in initiating and implementing the work-sharing arrangement
(Bjørnholt forthcoming). This was the main reason for focusing on the men and for con-
ducting a sub-study about the work-sharing men and their sons.

**Studying intergenerational transmission**

Studying intergenerational transmission by following intra-familial, same-sex lineage is
rather common; Nielsen and Rudberg (2006), for instance, present three generations of
women without discussing the theoretical and methodological implications or the possible
limitations of this design. Brannen et al. (2004) combine a broad, historically infor-
menced biographical analysis in their study of a small sample of four-generational families
but their contextual approach is not fully reflected in the analysis, in which they study
same-sex chains within each family. Interestingly, as the chapter on fathers unfolds, the
focus is mainly on fatherhood in different families and different historical generations,
including sons-in-law, rather than on transmission from specific fathers to sons.

Brannen et al. identify different patterns of change and continuity, part of which has
to do with biography and part with the broader context. Some respondents reproduce
patterns from their families of origin, while others are seen as “repairers” who try to av-
oid repeating the negative experiences from their own up-bringing.

**The work-sharing men lacked paternal “role-models”**

My interest in the father-son research design arose while analyzing the backgrounds of
the work-sharing men (Bjørnholt forthcoming); few of these untraditional men had
themselves had fathers who deviated from the traditional male breadwinner role. Their
fathers were not their “role-models” – to use the term of that time. When explaining how
they came to promote egalitarian patterns of breadwinning and care in their own famili-
es, the work-sharing men referred to experiences from their families of origin; but the in-
fluence of their fathers was negligible. Rather, the work-sharing men shared other important biographical influences: their mothers were employed outside the home to a greater extent than was usual at the time, a majority had experienced the loss or illness of a parent, and they had had to assume responsibility for domestic work from an early age. The findings, that gender-equality minded men seem to share certain biographical experiences from their families of origin and that they mostly do not model themselves on their fathers, are supported by other research into feminist or gender-equality oriented men (see Morgan 1993, Holter and Aarseth 1993, Ekenstam 2007, Aarseth 2007).

The fact that the work-sharing fathers developed their gender-equal orientations and practices in contrast to, rather than as a transmission of their own fathers’ practices, represents a dilemma. With regard to choosing a father-son design in the study of the sons; focusing on fathers and sons as the main research unit takes for granted a model of gender socialization that is not supported by the fathers’ own biographies.

Sex-role theory and father absence revisited

The theoretical background of the Work-Sharing Couples Project was the inventive and subversive use of Parsons’ sex-role theory by the first generation of Norwegian family researchers, in particular Grønseth (1956, 1970) and Holter (1970). Contrary to Parsons, who regarded the gendered sharing of breadwinning and care in the post-war nuclear family as ideal to serve the needs of individuals and society, Norwegian family researchers focused on roles in a more socially constructive way (Ellingsæter 2000). Holter, Tiller and Brun-Gulbrandsen contributed to Dahlström’s now legendary Kvinnors liv och arbete (1962), which laid the ground for the Norwegian and Swedish research into gender relations for the next two decades.

Tiller (1958, 1962) and Brun-Gulbrandsen (1958, 1958a) were also influenced by psychological ideas of gender socialization which were expressed in the growing concern among psychologists about the socialization of boys. Revisiting a Swedish study of gender socialization carried out in 1959 (Marke and Nyman 1963), Bengtson (2001) concludes that this study, which was typical of its time, was infatuated with a strong fear of feminization.

A fear of feminization and the need for male identification or “role-models” were part of the theoretical background and inspiration when, in the 1950s, studies were initiated in Norway by Tiller and Grønseth to study socialization in different family settings. The families of Norwegian sailors were chosen to represent families with absent fathers. The studies focused in particular on boys, and the researchers concluded that personality traits such as compensatory masculinity and the development of feminine traits were more frequent in the sons of absent fathers than in boys from families in which fathers were present. The negative effects on boys’ socialization of the father’s absence were soon
established as a scientific truth and laid the ground for considerable worrying on behalf of boys in female-dominated families and institutions.

In a self-critical, retrospective article, Tiller (1985) revisited his own studies of the families of sailors and argued that they had erroneously been taken as proof of the negative effects of father absence. Tiller partly blames the media for warping the results, but also admits that they as researchers were limited in their view by their strong theoretical and ideological convictions. He concludes that they largely found what they were looking for due to not looking for anything else. In a self-critical passage, he recalls the uncomfortable meeting several years later with some of the research subjects who felt they had unjustly been stigmatized as producers of problem children and tearaways.

According to Tiller, the results as such were not wrong; a substantial (statistically significant) part of the boys from the families of sailors did develop certain personality traits such as a compensatory masculinity or feminine traits compared to boys from families in which the father was present. In retrospect, however, Tiller criticizes the fact that they as researchers took for granted that the presence of certain personality traits in boys would have particular negative effects on their future development. Tiller points out that context is crucial. These boys were sons of sailors and officers at sea, growing up in highly respected and mostly well off families, living in well-functioning neighbourhoods in small coastal villages. Personality traits that might have had negative effects in a totally different context did not have any negative effect on boys growing up in a beneficial environment such as that of the families of Norwegian sailors.

The Work-Sharing Project was inspired by ideas that differed from traditional psychoanalytical ideas of gender socialization. Instead of fearing the loss of traditional masculinity, Grønseth (1970) criticized the male breadwinner model for limiting men’s human capacities, and he advocated the expansion of both male and female repertoires to develop both men’s and women’s full capacities as human beings. In his argumentation, the influence is heard both of the feminist pioneer Margarete Bonnevie (1932), and of his great source of inspiration, Wilhelm Reich.

Grønseth turned Parsons’ role model theory upside down; rather than a need for a traditional father who served as a model of traditional masculinity for boys, he argued that children needed close relations to parents of both sexes and that more equally sharing parents would provide a more beneficial environment for children’s development than traditional families. This argumentation anticipates the feminist object relations theory, which was later developed by Chodorow and Dinnerstein (below).
The reproduction of mothering and the reinvention of the need for fathers

The idea of the negative effect of exclusively female mothering and the corresponding positive effect of fathers on the socialization of children was taken up, or rather reinvented, by the feminist object-relations theorists Chodorow (1978) and Dinnerstein (1976). Their argument was based on the assumption that children identify with the parent of the same sex; according to this theory, girls who are mothered by women will develop relational selves based on identification with the mother at the cost of their autonomy. Boys will have to separate from their mothers in order to become men and thereby develop autonomous selves at the cost of their relational and emotional capacity. If fathers were also primary caregivers, both boys and girls would develop more balanced and less gendered selves in which autonomy and relational capacities would be equally present in both sexes.

Chodorow has been criticized for overemphasizing infantile attachment to the mother and under-emphasizing social and ideological structures and the multiplicity of social practices that separate boys and girls, and for blaming mothers for reproducing the gender system (Segal 1987, Kellner 1989, Rutherford 1992, Brittan 1989, Pease 2000).

Feminist object relations theory has been widely used within masculinity literature. McMahon (1993) is among the critiques of the “psychologization of sexual politics in the masculinity literature”. In the works of Farrell (1993), Blankenhorn (1995) and Popenoe (1988 and 1996), the critique of the male breadwinner role and of father absence, found an aggressive antifeminist and masculinist expression.

Both sex-role theory, traditional psycho-analytic object relations theory, its feminist reinterpretation as well as its masculinist inversion assume that children mainly or even exclusively identify with and learn from the parent of the same sex; from this the idea follows the need for parents of both sexes, as well as the idea of a negative impact on boys’ socialization of mother-care and the idea of the essential need for fathers and male “role-models”.

These ideas have been challenged by a growing body of feminist research into mothering; such as Silverstein and Raschbaum (1994) and Caron (1995), who criticize the negative view of the mother and son bond and argue for strengthening, rather than weakening, the mother and son bond as an important strategy for boys’ socialization into (good) men. Silverstein and Raschbaum argue that mothers were erroneously persuaded to retreat from boys to let them grow into men; in this way, Silverstein and Raschbaum argue, boys are bereaved of their primary care person, confidant and ally.

The idea that boys will have to distance themselves from their mothers to develop a proper, male gender identity is increasingly contested (see Pollack 1998, Dooley and Fedele 2001 and O’Reilly 2001). So is the idea that children only identify with and learn pa-
renting from the parent of the same sex. Rather the opposite seems to be the case; research into involved fathers finds that they, like the work-sharing men, mostly develop their caring practices in spite of and as a contrast to their own distant and traditional fathers (Ekenstam 2007, Holter and Aarseth 1993). Masciadrelli, Pleck and Stueve found that “highly involved fathers were less likely than other fathers to describe their own fathers as role models of any sort, to either imitate or compensate for” (2006, 30). Research into lesbian mothering also challenges the hegemony of the hetero-sexual family as the only and best environment for child development (Patterson 1992).

In search of father-son transmission

Using one case, I shall now explore intergenerational transmission and gender socialization. The case is fairly representative of the work-sharing couples. The father’s experiences from his family of origin, his agency in initiating the work-sharing arrangement, his career and his views of domestic work and breadwinning were common among the work-sharing men. This couple practised work-sharing for three years, which is in the lower half of the work-sharing couples, but still double the couple who maintained the arrangement for the shortest time. The son’s work/life adaptation is representative of the other sons, who were generally found to live in or opt for what could be regarded as neo-traditional work/care arrangements.

I shall begin by analyzing the father’s and the son’s narratives to search for intergenerational transmission between the father in my study and his father, and between the son in my study and his father. After summing up the advantages and limitation of this approach in explaining how father and son, respectively, became the men they did and chose the kind of work/family adaptation they did, I will discuss the mothers’ importance for understanding intergenerational transmission. Then I will gradually widen the scope towards a more contextual approach.

The father

John, born in the second half of the 1940s, grew up as the youngest of five siblings on a small farm. His father took over the family farm, but according to John, he never became a farmer. John thinks the family was probably worse off than they might normally have been due to his father’s unlucky investments in farm machinery. He also thinks that his own moderation and enthusiasm for using resources, such as picking and preserving wild berries, are due to experiencing scarcity during childhood.

When explaining why he promoted an untraditional family model in his own family in taking the initiative to work-share, John does not refer to his father. According to John, “It was a rather traditional pattern, my father never became a househusband”.

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John started working at a young age for a state agency, at which he gradually climbed the ladder from administrative to managerial positions, and at which he met his wife, who was working at the same agency. John took the initiative to start work-sharing and the couple pursued the arrangement for three years, working and staying at home every second week. John was criticized by his brother for doing female tasks which the brother found unmanly, but due to differences in standards of housework, John did not, however, do as much housework as his wife.

John was offered a promotion after three years of work-sharing and returned to full-time employment while his wife continued working part-time. He admits that after the work-sharing project, his wife did the lion’s share of domestic work; however, he often did the cooking at weekends and took a great interest in the garden. His motivation for work-sharing was mixed: he wanted his wife to return to work; but he also wanted to work less and have a say in the children’s upbringing.

The son

Gunnar is the eldest of John’s two sons. His parents started work-sharing when he was five, and for three years they both worked part-time and shared housework and the childcare for him and his younger brother. The children had to clean their rooms and participate in the weekend cleaning of the house, and his father was the one who administrated the children’s domestic duties; especially outdoors.

At college, Gunnar was uncomfortable with the “vagueness” of the school system and preferred having fun, but did nevertheless finish school and later pursued a military career. He now works as a pilot for a commercial airline. He enjoys action and adventure and has participated in United Nations’ operations abroad; he also greatly enjoyed the order and hierarchy of the military system, and doing his duty, which is currently “flying responsibly” as a commercial pilot.

He lives in a consensual union and has a two-year old daughter. Together with his partner, he works week-long shifts, she as a stewardess and he as a pilot. Due to his work schedule he stays away from home for periods of eight days in a row, while his partner is away for five days. They coordinate their work schedules so that at least one of them is at home. A flexible kindergarten, at which they book time according to their work schedules, and occasional help from grandparents are part of their adaptation to their long work-shifts.

He expresses great admiration for his partner as a mother and thinks that he cannot fully compensate for the mother. Accepting the strength of the mother/child bond Gunnar does, however, want to be part of his daughter’s life, and he has carried out certain adaptations to his family situation, such as reducing the large amount of freelance work he used to have; he has reduced his regular workload to 80 per cent in the last six months.
However, overall he still works a lot and probably considerably more than 100 per cent when his freelance work is included.

Planning for the future, he thinks his partner will be the one to reduce her work hours more permanently when they have another child. This is partly due to his view of the different parental roles of mothers and fathers:

I can see that father has a role and mother has a role, but I can see that the role of the mother is more important for the child than the father’s role. So I can see the advantage of her being at home more rather than me.

He also takes into account that his partner feels less comfortable than him about being away from home for several days. He himself is quite happy with his eight-day shifts. Finally, he thinks he enjoys his work more than his partner due to differences in job content and working conditions at the two different airlines for which they work.

Due to his work schedule, Gunnar stays at home for seven days and is then solely responsible for three to four days. The couple share domestic work and childcare, and he thinks he does more housework than other men, such as washing clothes, vacuuming and taking out the rubbish. She usually does the cooking when they are both at home and she also does more of the cleaning; he estimates they share housework 40/60. He attributes his household skills partly to what he learnt at home, but also to the military.

If we adhere strictly to the father-son design, there are some similarities between the practices of father and son, such as sharing paid work and care and doing parental shifts. Like his father, he works longer hours than his partner, and they plan a future work/family arrangement involving her working reduced hours. Finally, like his father, he also expresses admiration for both his mother and partner.

Compared to his father, however, Gunnar seems to perform a broader repertoire of household tasks, such as taking responsibility for washing clothes, which is still among the most gendered of household tasks in Norway (Klepp 2006), while leaving most of the cooking to his wife – this contrasts with his father and with current trends: cooking is one of the tasks which is shared more equally today (Vaage 2002). Gunnar and his partner also seem to share more equal standards of household work, while Gunnar’s father had a lower standard of housekeeping than his wife. In his view of parenting, however, Gunnar more explicitly expresses a view of mothers as more important than fathers, and emphasizes difference, which his father did not.

There are also other differences; Gunnar finds their current sharing of household work fair as he earns more and thus contributes more to the family finances. This contrasts with his father, who was rather annoyed when I asked if he felt he was the main breadwinner; he insisted that the unpaid work at home was of equal value, which is interesting in view of the substantial difference which probably did exist in earnings between
him and his wife due to his working full-time in a managerial position while she worked in a part-time, shop-floor job.

The father-son analysis thus reveals elements of similarity between father and son, but also of differences. One important question is whether the similarities may be interpreted as evidence of father-son transmission. The father-son analysis leaves unexplained important aspects of the father’s as well as the son’s actual life-courses, values, identities, adaptations and constructions of masculinity, and I shall now explore what happens if mothers are added to the analysis.

Adding mothers – filling out the picture

The father and his mother

John’s mother had a clerical job in addition to running the farm with her husband and commuted to work in town everyday. From the age of twelve it was his duty to cook dinner for the family. He greatly admired his mother:

My mother more or less did everything, even though she had the cows and worked at an office, (she) ran the house with five children and commuted a long way to work. It was inhumanly hard work.

Similar to the way in which he spoke highly of his mother, he praised his wife as a strong and hard-working woman.

John’s mother working outside the home and his own household duties seem to be important factors in John’s socialization, his view of women and gender relations and his adult work/family adaptation.

The mother

Karen, John’s wife, who is also Gunnar’s mother was the only child of a lower middle-class family, and her mother was a housewife, and Karen never had to participate in domestic work.

Karen started working when she was seventeen years old. Although she had wanted to go to college, her mother advised her to start working since she would in any case get married and have children. During the interview for her job she was asked if this job was what she really wanted: “I said yes, but looked down at the floor and felt like I was lying. I have never enjoyed my job even though my colleagues were nice and it was ok socially”.

Karen and John married and had two children while in their early twenties, and Karen stayed home with each of them for a year. When the children grew older, she wanted to stay home longer; John however, was eager for her to return to work, persuaded her to
start working part-time and took the initiative to start work-sharing by applying for part-time work himself. She continued working part-time after her husband returned to full-time work after three years of work-sharing.

She had hoped to be able to get an education when the children grew older but never got that far. She has, however, enjoyed the slower pace of life and the leisure time she has had due to her part-time adaptation, and she is rather active in sports and leisurely activities and in their local community.

The son and his mother

After the work-sharing period Gunnar’s parents returned to a more traditional arrangement. According to Gunnar, “my mother did most (of the household work), but he probably did more than other (old) men”.

When Gunnar grew tired of school, his mother became rather cross, finally giving him an ultimatum; if he did not straighten himself out, he could start working; he chose to finish school. In this situation the mother was hands-on, and her own experience of not getting an education was probably a motivational factor.

Karen does not think that she was any closer to the children than her husband and believes her husband to be a very good father and grandfather. Gunnar, however, felt closer to his mother. Speaking of the work-sharing period, he recalls:

Of course there’s a difference coming home to mum and dad, and my dad is a really good one, but if you’re feeling sad, you can see that it’s from your mum you seek comfort and I can see that here too, I can’t compensate for her mum if something sad is happening (...) it’s struck me, it’s just not possible, even though I...when I’m alone it’s like: ‘daddy, daddy mine’, but if she’s feeling a bit sad like and we’re both here then she goes to her mum. That’s probably the safest thing on earth.

In this quote, Gunnar directly links his own relationship with his mother to the relationship between his partner and their daughter. Just as he felt his mother was the one to do the comforting, he now accepts that his daughter is closer to her mother.

So how did adding mothers affect the analysis? In John’s case, adding his mother is vital to understand how he became the untraditional man he did. For the son, Gunnar, his relation to his mother is important too; she is the one to whom he felt close, and he directly links his own experience of his mother and the way in which he perceives his partner as a mother. During his own life-course, his mother also directly intervened to help him get an education.

But there are still elements in both John’s and Gunnar’s biographies and personal development which cannot be explained by adding the mother/son dyad to the father/son
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dyad. How for instance did John develop his strongly held values of taking care of and not wasting natural resources which have developed into a strong environmental awareness? How did Gunnar decide to become a pilot and develop his masculinity, combining traditional masculine virtues such as action and adventure, military order and discipline and traditional masculine interests such as machines and airplanes on the one hand, with his caring attitude and practices towards his partner and daughter on the other? To answer these questions, I will add the family level.

The family level

From the child’s perspective, parents will largely be perceived as a common unit. John mostly referred to his parents in the plural, except when he talked about his mother being very hardworking and admirable or when he mentioned his father’s lack of farming skills.

Gunnar also mostly talked about his parents in the plural, even though he cited examples of differences between them. He did not mention his father in particular as a model of identification; but neither did he distance himself from him. In Brannen et al.’s (2004) terminology, he is a “reproducer”, while his father is a “repairer” who actively tried to construct a family that differed from his family of origin.

Similarly, parents do not only foster individual relations with their children, and men in particular often speak in a shared parental voice (Stueve and Pleck 2001). This was true of the work-sharing men (Bjørnholt forthcoming) and both the father, John, and the son, Gunnar, spoke of raising children as a joint responsibility. Although John said he wanted to influence the children together with his wife, he rejected the idea of differences between his own and his wife’s parenting styles and tended to speak in a shared parental voice. His son, however, emphasized to a greater extent the special mother/child bond, but when talking of everyday practices he also spoke in a joint parental voice: “we were worried that she was too small” (referring to his daughter’s first months at kindergarten).

Adding the family level helps fill out the picture. In John’s home, financial constraints profoundly shaped his values. Gunnar’s military career becomes easier to explain against the background of a parental home in which duty and order reigned. Yet there are still elements left unexplained.

Gunnar also speaks highly of his grandparents. When he was small, he was looked after by his grandparents and they took trips to the nearby airport. He also had an uncle who was a pilot. Even though he does not see his choice of career as a direct effect of these influences, he thinks they might have been important. In his teens, peer relations, fun and parties were important, and he still flaunts a boyish playfulness and adventurousness when speaking of his work.

None of the approaches – the dyadic father/son approach, the triadic father/mother/son approach, the narrow or the extended family approach, or a broader network appro-
ach – fully account for John’s and Gunnar’s constructions of masculinity or work/life adaptations.

Beyond the family

In addition to the direct influences of parents, peers, other people and institutions, there is also a general social and historical context. John was born after the Second World War. During his childhood, life on a small farm was still extremely hard work and material goods were scarce, but he came of age at a time when economic growth and the expansion of the public sector and infrastructure of the welfare state opened new possibilities and career prospects for young men with little formal education. Like many of his peers he married young, and had children while still in a junior position.

In the early 1970s men were not expected to be directly involved in housework or childcare, but social movements such as the women’s and environmental movements, as well as political radicalism, provided ideological support for men who wanted to embrace a “modern” masculinity.

Gunnar grew up in the 1970s and 80s. Despite his parents working part time he does not report any personal experiences of scarcity. Whereas college was still an option only for the few when his parents were young, for Gunnar’s generation secondary education had become common. His feeling that college was too vague may be part of the general discomfort of the class traveller. When Gunnar entered the labour market, state agencies such as the one at which his parents worked had been restructured and downsized and they were less attractive to young, aspiring people. Another part of the public sector, however, the military forces, still offered career opportunities for young men who had not opted for an academic career. Like many others of his own generation, Gunnar was older than his parents had been, had extensive work experience and had reached what he thinks was a peak in his career before having children.

When Gunnar was a child, parental leave was short, childcare facilities were scarce, and mothers often stopped working to stay home with the children. He was looked after by his mother, his grandparents and finally by his parents in parental shifts. When Gunnar himself became a father, parental leave was one year, fathers had their own daddy quota and a kindergarten had become part of most parents’ care arrangements (Gulbrandsen 2007).

The existence of kindergartens and other welfare benefits for parents has changed the context of parents’ negotiations of care and work, and it can be argued that work/life choices have been privatized and reduced to a question of personal choice and taste, blurring the gendered character of adaptations to work and family. Gunnar’s partner’s desire to work less, he thinks, results from personal choice rather than from a necessity to fill the need for everyday care for their child. Further, the male breadwinner model has been
replaced by a dual-earner model and women no longer face the option of staying home as housewives for a prolonged period.

Over the last thirty years, a general modernization of masculinity has taken place, which has opened a broader repertoire for men’s conduct and changed the expectations held towards men as fathers and partners. While his father was criticized for doing female tasks, it is expected today that men share childcare and housework. Gunnar illustrates this expansion of the male repertoire by combining elements of traditional masculinity with a caring orientation and broad housework skills. His work/life adaptation demonstrates, however, that the current image of an involved father and good partner seems to be compatible with a neo-traditional arrangement of work and care at couple level.

On the other hand, while his father can be seen to have exercised a certain paternalism in persuading his wife to work, Gunnar referred to his wife’s own choice, which may be due to the erosion since the 1970s of male power in the family.

Discussion and conclusions

What conclusions can be drawn from this case study? First, it has been demonstrated that the analytical gains of the dyadic father/son approach are limited, with the qualification that only one single case was explored. Adding mothers helped, but did not provide an exhaustive picture. Adding the family level – a broader circle of kin, peers and institutions and other historical and contextual factors such as the expansion of and change in the welfare state – were important to explain how both father and son became the men they did, as well as their adaptations of work and care.

Is this new, one could ask? It is true that social scientists rarely keep to a purely dyadic design in analyzing intergenerational transmission, but mostly draw attention to important (m)others and the wider context. On the other hand, research designs built on dyads or chains of parents and children of the same sex are rather common, and there has been little discussion of the theoretical assumptions, implications and possible limitations of such a research design and its theoretical embeddedness.

In this article I have used an experimental analysis to disentangle the different elements involved in the socialization of one boy into a man. From the limited gains of the dyadic father/son analysis, I would draw the conclusion that there is a need to reconsider the status of context when studying intergenerational transmission. Rather than using context as a mere point of departure or a background for a dyadic approach, there is a need to pay attention to context in the design of studies of intergenerational transmission.

The father/son design bears the imprint of theories of gender socialization which are increasingly deemed scientifically obsolete but which are still widely used in other disciplines, the media and in politics. The lack of evidence for father/son transmission, in combination with the strong popularity of concepts from the role-model/object relations model.
toolbox, such as the dangers of father absence and the idea of an essential need for fathers, call for particular caution in the choice of fathers and sons as a research unit so as not to perpetuate and further naturalize popular concepts rather than produce scientifically valid knowledge.

The father/son design implies the risk of implicitly taking for granted, rather than exploring, the importance of the father/son relation in gender socialization and intergenerational transmission; this comes dangerously close to a tautology and constructing a false dyad which exaggerates the importance of the bilateral bonds between individual parents and children and of same sex relations in particular. Drawing on this case, as well as on the research literature, the dyadic, same-sex approach is not warranted in the study of intergenerational transmission from father to son.

What are the theoretical implications of these findings? The limited analytical gains from the dyadic father/son approach may have implications for the study of socialization and intergenerational transmission, in particular for studying the development of boys into men and the origins of masculinity/ masculinities. Mothers emerged as important for both father and son; it is tempting to paraphrase Reay (2005) and ask if mothers have a greater part to play in doing not only “the dirty work of class”, but also of gender. It emerged, however, that a wider circle of kin, as well as peers and not least institutions, such as the military, were important in Gunnar’s account of how he grew of age and became the man he is today.

I would also ask whether gender socialization and the reproduction of masculinity – and femininity too – should be studied primarily as the result of intrafamilial, intergenerational transmission.

I would suggest seeing gender socialization as the outcome of more complex interrelations and interactions in which fathers, mothers, families and institutions are important, but in which the influence of society in a more general sense, in terms of cultural beliefs, images and expressions, as well as peer relations and peer communities, is also important. This is not to say that families do not matter; families are certainly vital for children’s development and well-being, as well as for the intergenerational transmission of culture and the development of gendered and class-adequate selves, identities and habitus (Bourdieu 1990), as well as learning specific skills, but not in a simple, unilateral way. Rather than taking for granted that gender socialization takes place along narrow, fixed and gendered paths in the family as well as in society, families should rather be seen as nodes in a complex web of society and culture, and we should study how the socialization of boys into men and girls into women actually takes place at the intersection of parents of both sexes, families, institutions and society at large.

An intriguing question which can be raised on the basis of this case study is how much participation of fathers is needed for an intergenerational change of gendered patterns of work and care to take place. Gunnar’s parents shared paid work and care equally for
three years, which is in the lower half among the work-sharing couples, but which is a rather long time compared to the current focus on sharing parental leave which amounts to only some months during the child’s first year. In view of the high expectations which underpin current daddy policies regarding the lasting effects on gender relations, the lack of effect on the work and care patterns of the son of parents who were sharing work and care equally for three years is thought-provoking.

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Notes

1 The study was carried out by the author and partly funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Children and Family Affairs.
2 The study is being carried out at the Department of Sociology and Human Geography at the University of Oslo and is funded by the Research Council of Norway.
3 The Norwegian Family Council was established and led by Ola Rokones, and was state funded from 1969–79.
4 Grønseth studied sailors’ wives and the effect of husbands’ long work-related absences from home.
5 I am indebted to Kari Stefansen for drawing my attention to this paper and to Agnes Andenæs for the full reference.
6 Reich criticized the bourgeois negative view of sexuality, leading to the impediment of natural life forces and to fascism and suppression, and advocated sexual freedom, gender equality, contraception and abortion rights. After fleeing from Nazi Germany, Wilhelm Reich stayed in Norway between 1934 and 1939 and had a lasting influence on the Norwegian psycho-therapeutic field and on the sociologist Erik Grønseth, who was surrounded by prominent Reichians. His brother Rolf Grønseth was active in the development of Norwegian Reichian psychoanalysis. Reich’s student Nic Waal, the founder of Nic Waal’s institute for child psychiatry, was Grønseth’s colleague at the Institute of Social Science (ISS). Grønseth’s wife and colleague
at ISS, Bjørg Grønseth, specialized in (Reichian) character analysis as a psychologist at Nic
Waal’s institute.

He uses the Norwegian word gUBE, meaning ‘old man’, which has a slightly negative conno-
tation, and used to refer to a young man it can even be an insult, but in Gunnar’s dialect it
may also be used more neutrally and mean just ‘man’.

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