

# From Passive Voices in an Adult World to Active Participants in Their Own Lives

*Identifying Changes in Parental Values and Attitudes  
on Children in Norway 1945-2000*

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Master's Thesis in History  
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Department of Archaeology, Conservation and History  
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Trykk: Reprosentralen, Universitetet i Oslo

## **Abstract**

The goal of this thesis is to identify the changes in parental values that occurred both in Norway and internationally between the end of the Second World War and the close of the twentieth century, resulting in a new child-rearing paradigm towards the close of the century that in much greater part than before valued negotiation, the parental guidance of children, and their process of becoming oneself. This was in stark contrast to earlier parental values, where children were considered the property of their parents, supposed to be obedient to their family, and subject to a wish for children to be ‘seen but not heard.’

With a wish to identify the changing parental values and attitudes toward children in Norway, this thesis looks at how children’s emotional, judicial and political needs have changed in line with the cultural processes in which they exist. This thesis draws on a number of official state reports, government negotiations, and parenting manuals from the time period in question.

This thesis also seeks to understand how the consumer culture of the late twentieth century, combined with the growing number of child-rearing manuals written by experts, has contributed to the emergence of the concepts of intensive parenting and concerted cultivation, concepts that define the condition of modern parenting as much more expert-guided, time-consuming, emotionally draining, and economically staining than ever before.

## Foreword and Acknowledgements

As I thought about what I was going to write my thesis on, the inspiration was found in my large, opinionated, loud, annoying, and loving family. Being from a family where several generations live at the same time, I have been fascinated by the relationships within the family for many years. What really intrigued me, is how the relationship between the generations of the family is shaped by the times they are created in. It is with this I made the decision to write a thesis on the changing perceptions of children and childhood, and how parenting values are shaped by the cultural processes of contemporary society.

There are several people I would like to express my gratitude to for their support throughout my journey. First, I give my sincere appreciation and condolences to Klaus Nathaus, whom I have been lucky to have as my supervisor. Thank you for the eager encouragement, positivity, and guidance you have given me during my time working on this project. I want to thank my family for always being there for me, and especially my parents, Sissel Elisabeth Edvardsen and Øyvind Johansen, for always believing in my ability to reach the goals I set for myself. I also wish to thank my aunt, Hege Edvardsen, who during my years at the University of Oslo has always had an open door to her home and has cooked me countless dinners.

I want to thank all my friends who have been around through sunshine and rainy days. I am going to miss spending my days, evenings, and nights in the study hall with all of you. Most importantly, the many hours spent procrastinating in the break room creating memories that I will remember for many years to come. Lastly, I wish to express gratefulness for my close friend, Ingrid Hegre Grundt, and her lemon crumble cupcakes. As well as her mother, Hanne Hegre, for volunteering to proofread the thesis and provide useful input.

Despite all contributions, any possible inadequacies or faults are of my own responsibility.

Malin Elisabeth Johansen, June 10<sup>th</sup> 2022.

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## Introduction

In a journal from the end of the 1980s, a woman named Kari reflected on her upbringing in a Norwegian city during the 1930s and how she chose to raise her daughter in the 1950s. As she remembers her childhood and how she raised her child, she writes, "I continued to make her obedient, the way I was raised myself. This is the way it is, but today one knows better".<sup>1</sup> Kari's recollections of her own childhood and her daughter's upbringing give us valuable insights into the changes that happened in the culture of Norwegian child-rearing ideals during the twentieth century. As Kari was writing her journal as a woman in her 50s or 60s, she admitted that times had changed in the parental values of her contemporary society.<sup>2</sup> Where parental values of the 1950s were characterized by a wish for obedience, the parental values of the 1980s were characterized by a want for negotiation and guidance.<sup>3</sup>

On her own childhood, Kari tells the story of a young girl being raised by her grandmother. She underlines the essential values of her upbringing, where her grandmother taught her the expectations of being a housewife, the importance of respectability, and other moral values such as sharing what she had with others whenever she could.<sup>4</sup> She describes a community affected by the times in which she grew up, in a country that experienced the economic instability of the mid-war era, and a grandmother who shared whatever she could share with her uncle, who also went through a difficult time. She grew up in a period of hard times in society, and her family had no money to spare for leisure.

On the other hand, we have Cecilia, a woman who could have been Kari's granddaughter. As a young girl, she grew up in a small coastal city in Norway. She also wrote a journal at the same time as Kari but described a very different childhood. Where Kari's childhood seems to have been defined by the relationship she had with her family, Cecilia's childhood was also shaped by different institutions around her, such as kindergarten, the school she attended, and leisure activities involving other children at her age, such as youth camps.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gullestad, "From Obedience to Negotiation," 30.

<sup>2</sup> Duane F. Alwin, "From Obedience to Autonomy."

<sup>3</sup> Gullestad, "From Obedience to Negotiation."

<sup>4</sup> Gullestad.

<sup>5</sup> Gullestad, 32.

One could clearly see that times had changed. Cecilia's ability to attend leisure activities, both in her spare time and during summers, shows that the living standards had improved, as such activities are traditionally only prioritized if a family feels they have a good enough economy.

Cecilia describes a childhood where she was not directly ordered to follow the values of her parents, but where she was guided into acquiring their values through indirectly being influenced into doing so, with her parents voicing their opinion whenever she behaved good or bad. She recounts that even though her parents did not explicitly order her to follow their rules, they "influence her by setting some of the conditions for what kinds of experiences she can have."<sup>6</sup> While reading the story of Cecilia, it becomes clear that she is mainly concerned with the notion of "finding oneself" and the process in which she discovers herself.<sup>7</sup>

Several scholars have argued that the status of children and childhood in the global North underwent a paradigm shift. Arguably, this happened in the 1970s and 1980s, after the publication of Phillipe Ariès' *Centuries of Childhood*. Explained briefly, this shift is characterized by a change in the way adults consider children, from looking at them as passive voices in society to regarding them as active and valuable participants of society with the right to be heard and listened to.<sup>8,9</sup> This paradigm shift is the starting point for the present thesis, which seeks to understand how this shift has affected the way adults view children in contemporary Norwegian society, and how this paradigm shift has contributed to the emergence of a culture of "intensive parenting." As the term signifies, the idea surrounding the term intensive parenting is that it is far more economically straining, emotionally draining, and time demanding than what child-rearing used to be during the childhoods of both Kari and Cecilia.<sup>10</sup>

### **Historiography: The Historical Contingency of Childhood**

Childhood is a phase of life that all adults experience, defined as the period before adulthood, as the early stages in a person's existence. In most countries in the second half of the twentieth century, people were considered to be children until they reached the legal age defining their

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<sup>6</sup> Gullestad, "From Obedience to Negotiation."

<sup>7</sup> Gullestad, 33.

<sup>8</sup> James and James, *Constructing Childhood*.

<sup>9</sup> Schrumpf, "En tredje vending i barndomshistorien?"

<sup>10</sup> Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*.

adulthood. In Norway and most of the Western world, this age was set to eighteen throughout most of the twentieth century. Whereas childhood had come to be sharply separated from adulthood and identified as a particular developmental stage in contemporary societies, it took historians rather long to discover it as an object of study. Interestingly, it was work on medieval childhood that put the topic on the historians' agenda. Published in 1960, Philip Ariès' *Centuries of Childhood* argues that childhood did not exist as a distinct period in the life cycle in medieval times. Based on an analysis of paintings and diaries, Ariès found that people whom we would now readily consider children were not granted the same distinctive and unique status in the Middle Ages but were considered "small adults."<sup>11</sup>

Even though Ariès is widely applauded for putting childhood on the historiographical agenda, his arguments have also been criticized. Pat Thane, for instance, calls *Centuries of Childhood* simplistic.<sup>12</sup> Publishing her study on parent-child relations soon after Thane, Linda Pollock claims that Ariès overlooked the historical constancy of this relationship that was based on love and affection.<sup>13</sup> This argument echoes Lloyd deMause's earlier finding that even though responses to children have changed throughout history, childhood was not discovered in the way that Ariès argues but has always comprised a human universal.<sup>14</sup> However, Ariès' broader argument presented in *Centuries of Childhood* remains foundational for childhood studies.

Regardless of the critique that tries to rescue the emotional reality of medieval parent-child relations, Ariès' views on childhood as a social construct prove fruitful for historical studies on the period where childhood is already established. After the publication of *Centuries of Childhood*, several historians have used this theoretical framework to understand the social perception of childhood. In their wish to further understand the social perception of childhood in society, they have studied aspects of modern society that have contributed to this perception and gradual changes in society, such as the development of the modern welfare state, politics, and various medias and literatures.

On the perception of childhood as a part of the modern welfare state, historians such as Paula Fass have aimed to understand how the creation of the modern welfare state has affected the

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<sup>11</sup> Ariès and Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*.

<sup>12</sup> Thane, "Childhood in History"

<sup>13</sup> Pollock, *Forgotten Children*.

<sup>14</sup> deMause, *The History of Childhood*.

relationship between parents, their children, and the state.<sup>15, 16</sup> With the creation of the modern welfare state, more responsibility has been given to the state regarding children and the environment they grow up in, which has been observed as the case in the state of Norway as well.<sup>17</sup> The political development of children's rights has shown that the culture of what has historically been considered appropriate ways of reprimanding a child has gradually changed parallel to the growing awareness of a need to protect children from being treated too harshly. Here, Fass argues that the need to articulate the rights of children emerged because of horrific events of the twentieth century, such as the Second World War, but also because of the creation of several international treaties and organizations working to improve human rights.<sup>18</sup>

In recent years, there has also been a growing awareness of the relationship between the family, the child, and the media. As with the late realization of children as historical figures, the field of consumer studies has only recently realized that not only adults could be considered consumers, but children as well. Cook argues that even though there is a growing awareness of the child as a consumer, the study on children in consumer society is still understudied and needs improvement.<sup>19</sup> On the increasing number of child-rearing manuals published throughout the twentieth century, Paula Fass has contributed insight into the phenomenon in an American context, claiming that these books became essential in the knowledge acquisition process of American middle class-parents.<sup>20</sup> In the case of Norway, Thuen and Sommerschild have contributed to knowledge on how child-rearing manuals have had an essential position in Norwegian child-rearing as far back as the eighteenth century.<sup>21, 22</sup>

### **The Sociological Discovery of Childhood and its Foundational Value for the Popular Discourse on Children and their Needs**

If you ask any other grandmother, grandfather, great-grandmother or great-grandfather how their childhood was, they will most likely tell you that their upbringing was much different from the way children are being raised today. Even when comparing it to their own children's

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<sup>15</sup> Fass, *The End of American Childhood*.

<sup>16</sup> Fass, "The Child-Centered Family?"

<sup>17</sup> Seip, *Veiene til velferdsstaten*.

<sup>18</sup> Fass, "A Historical Context for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child."

<sup>19</sup> Cook, "Consumer Culture, Children's."

<sup>20</sup> Fass, *The End of American Childhood*.

<sup>21</sup> Thuen, *Om Barnet. Oppdragelse, Opplæring Og Omsorg Gjennom Historien*.

<sup>22</sup> Thuen, Sommerschild, and Foreldreveiledning (program), *Foreldre - til barns beste*.

upbringing, there are many differences between the generations that can be observed. This does not come as a surprise to most of us, as we are aware that the society changes constantly, and most people would subscribe to the view that the twentieth century underwent quite dramatic changes.<sup>23 24</sup> This is often explained as a consequence of the vast amount of technological and medical advances during the twentieth century.<sup>25</sup> Not surprisingly, this have affected not only how societies look but have also contributed to changing the relationship between parents and children.

Consequently, a child being raised in the 1950s had a much different childhood than another child raised in the 1970s, or 1990s. Not only can one argue that the reason for this is because of the advancements already mentioned, but one of the biggest reasons why the tradition of child-rearing has changed so much in such a short time period, is the growing number of academic literatures on child-rearing that was published throughout the century, in part due to the growing scientification of the act of child-rearing.<sup>26,27</sup> In this respect, it is important to note that this sociological discourse on childhood, characterized by academic influence and professionalism, is not to be confused with the popular discourse on children and child-rearing methods of the twentieth century. The latter is influenced by the former, and it is the sociological and academic discourse on children that the first chapter deals with.

Of course, academic books on children and child-rearing have always existed in some form or another, and especially the eighteenth century is recognized as a time where this theme was acknowledged amongst different thinkers and philosophers, with the birth of child-rearing literature set to the 1740s and the publication of John Newberry's "Little Pretty Pocket Books".<sup>28 29</sup> One of the most famous books on such is Rousseau's book *Emile, or On Education*, published in 1762. The book is a treatise on education, and deals with Rousseau's beliefs regarding the early physical and emotional development of the infant and the child, and other ideas Rousseau had on the importance of child-rearing and the education of children. He believed that the society and community should be much more child-centered than what it was

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<sup>23</sup> Frønes, *Den tapte barndommen - eller den nye?*

<sup>24</sup> Carr, Light, and Woodhead, *Growing Up in a Changing Society*.

<sup>25</sup> Frønes, *Den tapte barndommen - eller den nye?*, 5.

<sup>26</sup> Fass, *The End of American Childhood*.

<sup>27</sup> Whiting, "FOLK WISDOM AND CHILD-REARING."

<sup>28</sup> Thuen, Sommerschild, and Foreldreveiledning (program), *Foreldre - til barns beste*, 26.

<sup>29</sup> Thuen, *Om Barnet. Oppdragelse, Opplæring Og Omsorg Gjennom Historien*.

at that time in history.<sup>30</sup> In this respect, one can argue that Rousseau was far beyond several thinkers of his contemporary society, as the eighteenth century was still characterized by parental values where the child was considered sinful by birth in the eyes of the powerful religion.<sup>31</sup>

Norwegian historian Ellen Schrupf has argued that the reason why the new sociology of childhood emerged at the time it did, is partly due to the growing interest of social history and identifying invisible groups of society that happened during the 1970s.<sup>32</sup> The focus on social history not only did children well, but this new focus on forgotten groups contributed to the historical research on women, and the working class, as well as a number of other groups that had been forgotten until that point. This new discovery of children in the fields of both history and sociology inspired the interest in research on materials that mattered children, such as children in factory work, farm work, and so on. However, in a Norwegian and Nordic perspective, the breakthrough for the study on the history of children first arrived with the publication of the translated work of *Centuries of Childhood*.<sup>33</sup>

### **Theoretical Framework: The Social Construction of Childhood**

While *Centuries of Childhood* raised historian's interest in the subject, sociologists "discovered" childhood at about the same time. The number of articles and publications on the concept of childhood grew dramatically in the 1960s, and the former belief of childhood as something biological, unchangeable and unavoidable waned, in parallel to the awareness that other categories like race, gender, or class were also socially constructed. The terms "children" and "adults" themselves are results of a biological distinction, claiming that these two categories are unlike and based on the biological age of the person.<sup>34</sup>

According to Allison James and Adrian L. James, there are certain key features to the new paradigm of childhood: 1) to be different from the biological immaturity characterizing the traditional perception of children, 2) the admittance that childhood is intertwined with other social variables in society such as class, race, and gender, 3) children's own independent

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<sup>30</sup> "Rousseaus Emile."

<sup>31</sup> Skundberg and Thuen, "I kjærlighedens tjeneste".

<sup>32</sup> Schrupf, "En tredje vending i barndomshistorien?," 253.

<sup>33</sup> Schrupf, 253–54.

<sup>34</sup> Qvortrup, *Childhood Matters*, 6.

perspectives should be considered valuable in the study of children and childhood, 4) it is necessary that children are viewed as active participants not only in the construction of knowledge about themselves, but also in the construction of society as a whole, 5) due to the goal of direct involvement of children in the construction of knowledge about them, ethnography is a useful methodology in studying childhood, 6) the new paradigm of childhood sociology is to respond to the process of reconstructing childhood.

This thesis follows the theoretical framework of social constructivist views on childhood, defining it as something that has frequently been changed and reproduced. It is therefore important to understand the historical context in which childhood existed and exists, and the fact that the types of definitions and interpretations of childhood are shaped and reproduced by the cultural and historical contexts they are created within and therefore subject to change.<sup>35,36</sup> I also follow the theoretical framework of Sharon Hays, with her concept of “intensive mothering” as a phenomenon that emerged in the United States towards the close of the twentieth century. My aim is to place the changes in parental values in Norway within this concept, to shed light on how Norwegian child-rearing ideals have been affected by the same phenomenon. As an extension of intensive parenting, this thesis is also inspired by Anette Lareau’s concept of “concerted cultivation”, as a phenomenon characterized by a growing enthusiasm for enriching activities in the upbringing of children amongst the middle classes.<sup>37</sup>

I believe that the change in parental values happened in part because of the discovery of childhood in sociology from the 1960s, and the gradual improvement of children’s right that occurred during the 1970s and 1980s, both nationally and internationally. In my belief, this contributed to a new awareness of children and their needs and changed the perception that the adult population had previously had on children.

## **Research Questions and the Empirical Case**

The goal of this thesis is to identify the changes in parental values that occurred from the 1970s onwards, resulting in a new child-rearing paradigm towards the close of the century that in

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<sup>35</sup> James and James, *Constructing Childhood*.

<sup>36</sup> Kang et al., “Social Constructionism.”

<sup>37</sup> Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods*.

much greater part than before valued negotiations, the guidance of children, and their process of becoming oneself. While these changes took place throughout the Western world, I focus on Norway. This geographical focus promise to bring out an understanding of the changes in parental values that gradually took place in Norwegian culture towards the close of the twentieth century, further providing knowledge on the historical background for the emergence of a culture of intensive parenting in Norway.

At the same time, I am aware that Norwegian trends in attitudes to childhood were affected by developments outside this country. Childhood policies, the rise of consumer society and the sociology of childhood are phenomena that exceeds national borders and that need to be studied with an awareness of transnational influences. I concentrate the study on the period from the postwar years to the turn of the century, because these years are central in the understanding of the gradual emergence of the new paradigm that I seek to identify.

Based on the assumption that contemporary childhood is to a large extent shaped by policies and the knowledge that informs them, I concentrate my analysis of the changing role of the welfare state and changes in children's rights on the motivations behind the development and arguments used in the drafting of a new children's law in Norway. Further, my analysis is informed by the assumption of the child's needs provided by the self-proclaimed experts of the field and some of their published works from the relevant time period.

There is a need to understand how adults perceive children and their needs, and how these believed needs have affected the approach adults have had towards children from the 1970s and until the close of the twentieth century. It is also important to understand how the emergence of a more intense and cohesive consumer society have reinforced the impression adults have on what types of consumer goods that are necessary in order to provide the child with the right equipment in life. My argument here is that while intensive parenting is a phenomenon primarily focused on the parents' needs to make sure that their children are given the right amount of attention, guidance, and care, the consumer culture of the late twentieth century have intensified the beliefs regarding what is necessary to provide children within this process.



## Primary Sources

During my work on this thesis, I have collected a number of official state reports that was ordered by the Norwegian Government on different occasions. These reports are called NOU's, which in English stands for "Norwegian Public Investigation".<sup>38</sup> These types of reports are usually ordered by the Government in cases where the Government sees the need to present and evaluate the knowledge within specific fields.<sup>39</sup> Such reports are used as the basis for several changes and decisions that are made later, in order to develop what the state considers the best possible action for further improvements. These reports are usually one of the first steps in a more comprehensive decision-making process.

The most central NOU in this thesis, is the one published with the title *Law on children and Parents* in 1977.<sup>40</sup> As with NOUs most, the advisory group behind the report consisted of a mixture of independent academic contributors, and representatives from the Department of Justice. However, the most important aspect of NOU is that the academic rather than the political considerations are the ones that should be emphasized the most. Not only did this group of people draft a proposal for a new and modernized law that dealt with children in a way that was more culturally appropriate, but they also advised the Norwegian to create the position as *barneombud*, which had never existed in Norwegian or international history before.

To assess how policy changes may have affected the practice of child-rearing, I have also studied a selection of popular child-rearing manuals published during the period of study, such as books by Dr. Benjamin Spock and Thomas Gordon. While this literature should not be confused with the actual practice of child-rearing, books were nevertheless aimed at parents and had to engage with their concrete, everyday concerns to reach that audience. The growing genre of parenting books represents ideals more than actual practice, which is important to have in mind throughout the thesis. While I am aware of this, I still assume that these ideals impacted the way parents thought about the relationship with their children. We know that extended family ties became weaker during the period of study, and we have reason to believe that the public discourse about parenthood grew. In turn, parenting knowledge formulated by experts

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<sup>38</sup> NOU – «Norges Offentlige Utredninger» (my own translation)

<sup>39</sup> Hansen, "Norges offentlige utredninger (NOU)."

<sup>40</sup> Norge: Barne Lovutvalget and Beichmann, *Lov om barn og foreldre*.

and commercial promoters could inform the outlook of parents who were looking for social scripts to an increasing degree.

## **Disposition**

The thesis is divided into three parts: one focusing on the development of the welfare state, one focusing on the political recognition of the child, and one looking at the emergence of the term “intensive parenting” and how this gradually became the dominant paradigm in Norwegian child-rearing ideals.

The first chapter deals with the development of the welfare state after the Second World War and shows that the upbringing of children was a central tenet of it. The slow development of welfare benefits shifted the relationship between parents and children, where the state gradually began to take responsibility for issues that parents had previously been responsible for. The examples used throughout the chapter are the growing importance of kindergartens as the number of mothers going back to paid wage labor after giving birth rose, and the gradual expansion of mandatory schooling for all children.

The second chapter focuses on how the new awareness of children and their needs contributed to a change in the political views on the child. To highlight the particularity of the post-1945 period, it recounts how Norwegian law treated children before the twentieth century, and traces how these laws changed gradually in the contemporary period. The chapter provides us with knowledge of the process surrounding the making of a new children’s law, and how cultural processes of the 1970s affected the way policymakers thought about children’s needs. It also registers the international processes on children’s rights throughout the century, showing that children’s rights not necessarily were something people naturally thought about while drafting the Human Rights Declaration. Lastly, the chapter deals with the process of creating a spokesperson for all children in Norway, and the implementation of the world’s first *barneombud*, Målfrid Grude Flekkøy. It shows the importance of the office she created, and how the practice of *barneombud* has been important in the discourse on children’s needs.

The third and final chapter deals with the changing parental values of the late twentieth century. It shows how the parental values that characterized the middle of the century, such as obedience, were replaced with a focus on providing children with the right care and guidance,

meant in supporting their pursuit of finding themselves. The chapter also seeks to understand how the concept of intensive parenting is connected to this, and further explains how consumer culture has adapted to this perception of children's needs. The chapter also wishes to underline how this relates to the notion of individualization that has become central to current concepts of growing up.

## **Chapter One: Setting the Stage: Historical Background and the Development of the Welfare State**

This chapter seeks to shed light on ideas of children and childhood that existed in Norway and the Western current in the first two post-war decades and traces changes in the academic study on and understanding of children and their needs during the second part of the twentieth century, as discussed in the introduction. In this chapter, I argue that the new sociological theories on the child also affected how children came to be considered in the constantly growing welfare state of the post-war era.

As briefly mentioned, there were changes happening in both the political and social spheres of Norwegian society, provided in part due to the welfare state after the Second World War. The period saw the creation and expansion of the welfare state in Norway, where the welfare state took on more responsibility for children than previously. We can observe a development where there were a growing number of welfare benefits introduced as part of the welfare system, with the goal of taking greater care of mothers and their children. In the early stages of the creation of the welfare state, most of these benefits were strictly reserved for those in society considered as poor and needy, but as the welfare state became more comprehensive these benefits became available for a wider target group. In retrospect, it is possible to observe a shift in the mentality of the welfare state, where the Norwegian state from the 1970s believed its responsibility to be making sure that everyone was given the ability to live the life they deserved. With this, the state admitted its heightened responsibility to provide everyone with the necessary tools to live a life deemed worthy of living. Following this reasoning, it only became natural for the Norwegian state to take more responsibility for children and their families than they had done before.

Throughout the chapter, the widening of the responsibilities of the state is observed through the response it had to the end of the housewife era, characterized by the increasing number of mothers going back to paid wage labor after starting a family and giving birth to their children. As more women preferred paid work over traditional housewife duties, the need for kindergartens grew, a responsibility the state eventually took. The tendency of more women going back to work and uprooting many of the traditional manners of doing things, resulted in a debate on where the responsibility of providing families with available spots in kindergartens

lied. With the state taking on more responsibilities that had traditionally been reserved for the family of the child, the family also wavered some of their responsibilities as the primary caregivers to the state. However, it is important to underline the fact that even though the state took on more responsibilities in the care of children, the family remained as important in the child's life as ever.

This chapter also points out the changing size of the average Norwegian family that occurred towards the close of the century. This change in family size have also been explained by the growing number of women choosing to pursue careers and paid wage labor, and in some part due to a shift in the preferred age and reasoning for conceiving children. Reportedly, the average number of children per family fell below two, a number which obviously is not sustainable in the long run. The trend of falling birth rates continued until the twenty-first century and continues to be an issue that the Norwegian state struggles with to this day.

This chapter provides us with knowledge on how these changes in Norwegian society, with the growing welfare state, changing sizes of the average family, and the scientification of childhood have affected the relationship between parents and children, and the way in which the society and family tended to perceived needs of the child. It describes the notion of changing child-rearing practices and cultures in Norway before the 1970s and gives a brief introduction on how books on child-rearing have changed its content with the changing concerns of the family. From focusing strictly on basic notions of taking care of a child, such as ensuring its survival, the child-rearing literature have gradually become more aware of the emotional and cognitive needs of the child. This brief presentation of the views on childhood underlines the awareness of the socially constructed reality of childhood amongst most people. However, this introduction of child-rearing manuals is only a brief presentation of the reality of the relevant time period, as the third chapter of this thesis deals with the phenomenon of these types of publications on a more thorough level than this chapter.

### **The Norwegian Welfare State and its Effect on Family Life**

During the twentieth century, the Norwegian welfare state slowly began to emerge. While the emphasis on responsibility in situations surrounding social problems had previously been reserved for the family, the church and the individual parish, the end of the nineteenth century

and beginning of the twentieth saw the start of the gradual shift of responsibility from the individuals themselves to the state.<sup>41</sup> Certain welfare benefits, especially targeted towards the poor and needy, were introduced as early as in the nineteenth century. These welfare benefits would be forerunners for the modern Norwegian welfare state of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, most comprehensive reforms would be introduced after the Second World War. The problem with the few welfare benefits that were introduced during the nineteenth century, was that these benefits were restricted and highly stigmatized amongst people, which made it difficult for people to receive welfare benefits due to the stigma surrounding them, consequently ensuring that some of those in need of help never sought it out. These benefits were mostly implemented as an effort to fight poverty and social need and were only available for those in society who were at the bottom economically.<sup>42</sup>

In parallel with the growing literature on child-rearing practices that was emerging throughout the twentieth century, the world also experienced several major happenings and changes throughout the twentieth century, that in turn affected family life and the way adults regarded children in general, such as wars, economic crises, and political instability. The damaging horrors of the Second World War left many people with a heightened awareness of the importance of protecting fragile groups in society, such as children.<sup>43</sup> There was also a need to rebuild countries and communities after the damaging consequences of the Second World War. What happened in many Western countries, such as Norway, the other Nordic countries, and Great Britain, was that the situation was used to begin the process of creating welfare states with a goal of providing citizens with greater security and better living conditions than they had before.<sup>44</sup> With a growing welfare state, families and children would be considered key in order to maintain it and it would therefore be natural to invest economically in providing families with what they needed to grow bigger in size. The state would try to provide families with the right type of support from early in the history of the Norwegian welfare state.

With the case of Norway, the creation of the welfare state started with the formulations through a set of welfare laws that were gradually introduced during the 1950s and 1960s, building on

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<sup>41</sup> Christensen and Berg, "velferdsstat."

<sup>42</sup> Christensen and Berg.

<sup>43</sup> Fass, "A Historical Context for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child," 18.

<sup>44</sup> Seip, *Veiene til velferdsstaten*, 139–40.

the already existing benefits from the 1800s.<sup>45</sup> At this time, the Labor Party (“Arbeiderpartiet”) with prime minister Einar Gerhardsen was in power, and Norwegian politics would be largely dominated by left-wing parties for the next decades, aiming for the continuous work of improving the welfare state. The Labor Party was not alone in their wish to create a well-functioning welfare state and were met with little resistance from the right-wing parties of Norwegian politics. However, the political parties disagreed on some of the economic aspects of the welfare state.<sup>46</sup> The country experienced a strong increase in almost all areas of society, with a thriving economy, and at the same time there were big social and geographical changes, where many people moved from small towns to bigger cities such as Oslo, Bergen and Trondheim. Emerging from war, the Norwegian citizens were generally willing to make combined efforts on behalf of the society, together. This is something that later has been described as a Norwegian form of “dugnadsånd”, which can be translated to the “spirit of service”.

Social political benefits relating to, e.g., sick leave, pension, and unemployment became a part of the National Insurance (“foketrygden”) during the middle of the 1960s.<sup>47</sup> The National Insurance was officially implemented in 1967, but many of the benefits included here already existed. Also included in the National Insurance, was the child benefit (“barnetrygd”), that made sure that parents would have a monthly income related to their children for the first years after birth. Theoretically, it would make sure that families could afford the children they had by relieving some of the economic strain surrounding the act of raising children. This benefit would be given to every family, regardless of their economic standing, due to the political belief that every child should be given some of the same opportunities. This monthly payment was not big but became a symbolic sum that sought to recognize the tremendous efforts that parents, and especially mothers, contributed with in the upbringing of their children.<sup>48</sup>

The child benefit was one of many laws introduced after the war that would affect family life and the relationship between parents and children and was first introduced in 1946. The child benefit was a result of a debate surrounding the proposals of different benefits that had already existed for decades. The political goal of a welfare benefits targeted towards families therefore

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<sup>45</sup> Christensen and Berg, “velferdsstat.”

<sup>46</sup> Seip, *Veiene til velferdsstaten*, 143–45.

<sup>47</sup> Mæland, Hatland, and Pedersen, “folketrygden.”

<sup>48</sup> familiedepartementet, “Ot.prp. nr. 57 (2000-2001).”

already existed and went back in time as far as to the 1890s. Much of the wish for improving the condition of children was inspired by the work of parliamentary figure at the turn of the century, Johan Castberg, who worked for the improved legal status of children and their mothers. Castberg did succeed at some point, when the Castbergske children's laws were introduced to Norwegian law and society, as early as 1915.<sup>49</sup> These laws will be explained further in the next chapter.

The voices arguing for a public financial support of the care of children grew steadily in intensity, and in 1934, the parliament decided to create a committee with the task of figuring out how such a welfare benefit should be, and how it should be financed. The first proposal presented, was that this benefit would only be given to parents with low wages, and that it should be paid for through their place of work. This proposal was supported by the majority of parliament, but especially the Labor Party argued loudly against such restrictions to the benefit. Later, it was proposed that the benefit should be universal and therefore not based on factors such as income. This proposal had three main arguments: (1) that the benefit should be something available for everyone and not something exclusively for the poor, (2) that by also giving this benefit to those who paid most taxes, and not only the poorest in society, it would provide more acceptance of the benefit throughout society, and (3) that the cost of administering a benefit exclusively for one group of society would be too high.<sup>50</sup>

It is also important to note that the benefit would only be given from the second child, and not the first. The argument behind this decision was that the economic standard within the family should stay the same as people got more and more children.<sup>51</sup> However, it was deemed necessary to stress the fact that the goal of this benefit was not to guarantee the economic basis for having children, as it was believed that this should be the responsibility of the parents.<sup>52</sup> It was assumed that the child benefit would be of help in the goal of making sure that the birth rates would not fall due to the economic strain on families for having more children, which would hopefully maintain a positive trend in birth rates.

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<sup>49</sup> Lønnå, "Castbergske barnelover."

<sup>50</sup> familiedepartementet, "Ot.prp. nr. 57 (2000-2001)."

<sup>51</sup> familiedepartementet.

<sup>52</sup> familiedepartementet.



Twenty years later, during the 1970s, marks a point in Norwegian welfare history where the state went from considering its purpose and resources not as a gift for the poor and needy but as a goal for more fairness and universality throughout the Norwegian society. It was now the responsibility of the welfare state to make sure that all individuals were given the same rights and opportunities as everyone else, no matter the abilities or restrictions they already had in life.<sup>53</sup> This goal made it necessary for the state to involve itself in private matters in much greater sense than ever before. This was justified through the implementation of the several welfare laws that were created, as it gave the state a responsibility for everyone in society in much bigger part than previously.

### **Improved Schooling Through Welfare State Initiatives**

As briefly mentioned earlier in this thesis, the creation of the welfare state and the following expansion of mandatory schooling also affected the relationship between parents and children. Following the lead of other Western welfare states, the years of mandatory schooling in Norway were expanded, and in 1969 it became compulsory for Norwegian schoolchildren to attend school for at least nine years.<sup>54</sup> This was also a result of political agreement across different parties, and the idea of schooling as a symbol of social integration was an important goal as school became an arena in life where children often would meet other children from different economical backgrounds.<sup>55</sup> With the expansion of mandatory schooling, children all over the country were given the right to be provided with the same number of years in school, which was celebrated as something contributing to balance out social differences in society. While children from better-off families most likely had more possibilities in school before, the improvement in mandatory schooling sought to provide children from all parts of society with the same opportunities.

The most important aspect with this development, is the fact that as children spent increasingly more time at school, which made them consequently spent more time away from home and family. It became the job of the child to stay in school, and hopefully do good as well. Furthermore, the school wound up taking more and more responsibility for the general

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<sup>53</sup> Seip, *Veiene til velferdsstaten*.

<sup>54</sup> Thune, "norsk utdanningshistorie."

<sup>55</sup> Sejersted, "Norge i etterkrigstiden."

upbringing of children than before, such as making sure that the students were able to read and write, teaching them simple cooking skills, mathematics, and the importance of religion. The school became an arena for the socialization of children in a much greater sense than before, due to children increasing the time they spent at school.

One can argue that some of the tasks of parents were gradually taken over by the school and therefore contributed to the changing relationship between parents and children, as parents slowly were relieved of some central parts of raising children due to the school taking control of these tasks. This does not mean that the school completely took control of the upbringing and education of children, but that the expansion of mandatory schooling created a new expectation of children to stay in school for longer than previously, which also resulted in the reduction of their chores at home. On top of that, the growing importance of the school as an institutional space in the lives of children contributed to heightening the expectations adults already had to the state and its role in the upbringing.

### **Increasing Numbers of Women Choosing Higher Education and a Place at Work**

At this time in history, society also experienced a quickly rising number of students attending universities, which also resulted in a bigger focus on expanding the university sector in order to be able to offer people what they wanted, as well as what the society needed. While new universities were founded in bigger cities, such as Bergen and Trondheim, smaller colleges in the districts were also founded so that there would exist possibilities to take higher education for those living in the districts as well.<sup>56</sup> The number of women choosing to attend higher education increased dramatically from the 1970s, contributing to the need for revision of the traditional views on the relationship between men and women.<sup>57</sup>

The period from 1945 to 1970 have been named the housewife era of Norwegian society, where the majority of female adults were housewives. During these decades, more than half of Norwegian women stayed at home after marrying and starting a family, and it was usually considered a good thing if the man was able to keep the wife at home. It was also a political

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<sup>56</sup> Sejersted, "Norge i etterkrigstiden".

<sup>57</sup> Norgeshistorie and Institutt for arkeologi, "Kvinnerevolusjon i utdanning og arbeid - Norgeshistorie."

goal from the Labor Party that every household should be able to live on only one income.<sup>58</sup> The housewife era was not something restricted to the Norwegian society, as it was a Western phenomenon. What characterized some of the Western countries in their approach to housewives, was their active political goal to uphold the number of housewives.<sup>59</sup>

The work of a housewife usually consisted of keeping house and raising the children, and at this time the work of a housewife was much more complicated compared to what it would be in the 21st century. Household appliances that we today consider permanent fixtures, such as the refrigerator, became more common in the average household from the 1950s and 1960s, and they contributed to making the job as a housewife a bit easier, though a modern kitchen and various household machines also raised the expectation of the husband, while at the same time suggesting that housework almost happened automatically, as the new devices were often branded as a kind of genie at the service of women who now led a leisurely life.

The housewife of the decades following the second world war was alone with housework in bigger part than in previous generations, as the practice of maids and unmarried family members helping at home was being phased out.<sup>60</sup> Many housewives appreciated not having paid work to concern themselves with, on top of the many heavy chores that their job as housewives already included. On the other hand, there were also women who found this practice restrictive. However, the housewife era would soon end, and from the end of the 1960s, we can observe an increase in the number of women who chose to continue working for pay after giving birth to their first child.<sup>61</sup>

This new trend was generally considered a passing phenomenon by the state, as married women were not considered legitimate labor, but labor that dissolved into thin air as soon as they got married. It was not expected that women would go back to work after giving birth to their first child, and especially not after their second and third children. However, the housewife ideology had started to change gradually during the 1960s, and the debate now generally spoke about how women should be able to choose between paid labor and staying at home, which also made

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<sup>58</sup> Norgeshistorie and Institutt for arkeologi, "«Husmorparadiset» - Norgeshistorie."

<sup>59</sup> Norgeshistorie and Institutt for arkeologi.

<sup>60</sup> Norgeshistorie and Institutt for arkeologi.

<sup>61</sup> Lønnå, "Kvinneres rettigheter i Norge fra 1945 til 1990-årene."

it easier for women to make that choice for themselves<sup>62</sup>. This change not only created a heightened need for kindergartens and daytime care activities for the children, but it also resulted in a family with two parents abruptly having much wider economic space than previously, with two parents being wage earners.

Married women of all ages who sought to have paid work doubled in 1960 compared to only ten years earlier.<sup>63</sup> However, it was not until the end of the 1960s that state organs started to show interest for this new situation. Men were still considered the natural worker of the household, and the fact that an increasing number of married women wanted to participate outside of the household surprised the authorities. Factors such as the growing educational competence among women and change in family structures can be used to explain this trend.<sup>64</sup> Another argument that was used, is the changing fertility rates in Norwegian society that affected the number of children born within one family. This will be discussed further later in this chapter.

### **Creating the Need for More Kindergartens**

With more women choosing to go back to paid work after giving birth, and the percentage of women doing so going from 5 percent in 1950 to 20 percent in 1970, as well as more women choosing to take higher education, there was now an obvious need for more kindergartens. In 1970, Norway was far behind both Denmark and Sweden in the building of new kindergartens, with only 12 000 spots available for children with both parents working, compared to their 100 000 spots each.<sup>65</sup> This was one of the main things that the feminist wave of the 1970s fought for, arguing that it was difficult for women with children to work if they did not have a space in kindergarten for their children. Many solved this issue by hiring nannies or having family members taking care of the children while being at work, but the expectations towards the state and their involvement in this project was big.

Until the 1970s, most of the kindergartens in Norway were privately owned, where the majority of these was owned by the organization *Hjemmenes Vel*, the oldest European organization for

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<sup>62</sup> Skrede and Ternes, *Den Norske kvinnerevolusjonen*.

<sup>63</sup> Skrede and Ternes, 15.

<sup>64</sup> Skrede and Ternes, *Den Norske kvinnerevolusjonen*.

<sup>65</sup> Lønnå, "Kvinneres rettigheter i Norge fra 1945 til 1990-årene."

housemothers that was active between 1898 and the end of the 1970s.<sup>66</sup> The first law concerning kindergartens were passed in 1975 and held each individual county responsible for creating a plan for the building of new kindergartens so that families would have the possibility to send their children to a safe environment while being at work.<sup>67</sup> Kindergartens were expected to create an environment where the children could thrive and feel well, and it was expected that they would be able to play and have fun under the watchful eye of staff with pedagogical competence.<sup>68</sup>

The fact that the state was held responsible for the creation of enough kindergartens is another example of a development where the expectations towards the state were heightened compared to previously. With the building of the welfare state, it was now considered natural that the state and the counties should be responsible for providing families with the possibility of sending their children to kindergarten. This development would also affect the relationship between parents and children, especially combined with the expansion of mandatory schooling. Parents, especially mothers, and children now spent much less time together than previously, and the state gradually took responsibility for providing care that had previously been the responsibility of the family. With this development on top of the expansion of the obligatory years of schooling, the state had gradually become a part of the upbringing of children in a much wider sense than ever before.

### **The Changing Birth Rates**

Around the same time as married women went from staying at home after the birth of their first child, to going back to work after this, and on top of that the increasing number of women in higher education, the fertility rates also started to drop. Following the second world war, there was a baby boom in the 1960s, and in 1968 there were born 2,75 children by each woman.<sup>69</sup> However, the birth rates now turned drastically, and it could be observed a dramatic fall in the number of children born by each woman who had children. Eleven years later, in 1979, there were only born 1,75 children by each woman who had children, which reduces the number of children in an average nuclear family consisting of two parents and children from 3 to 2

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<sup>66</sup> Garvik, "Hjemmenes Vel."

<sup>67</sup> Korsvold, "barnehageloven."

<sup>68</sup> Korsvold.

<sup>69</sup> See Appendix 1.

children. In the period between 1968 and 2000, the years with the lowest birth rates was 1983 and 1984, with 1,66 children born by each woman who had children.<sup>70</sup>

It is difficult to know the exact factors that contributed to the changing numbers in birth rates, but amongst researchers there is generally an agreement that factors such as women choosing to go back to work after giving birth, as well as improved birth control methods, can be used to explain this drop in birth rates.<sup>71</sup> The change in fertility rates have traditionally been explained as a result of both economic and social changes within society, as well as cultural factors. It sounds logical that many women felt it would be difficult to have many children, and at the same time being in a part-time or full-time position at their place of work. Even though the majority of women decided to go back to work after having children from the 1970s and onwards, the majority of them were still responsible for most of the housework and caring for the children of the family, which naturally made it difficult to have too many children to care for.

When it comes to contraceptive use, the history of contraceptives took a great turn mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the introduction of the contraceptive pill. Early contraceptive advice urged the woman to hold her breath during intercourse and sneeze or blow her nose immediately after ejaculation. Amulets and magical spells, as well as different substances such as fabrics, fruits, or sponges moistened with brandy were used to prevent pregnancies. The condom, which has become one of the most used contraceptive methods in the modern age, was invented in the 1500s but it took centuries before the technology was close to the same as it is today.<sup>72</sup>

In other words, before the contraceptive methods that were eventually developed halfway through the twentieth century, the methods being used were unsure and often resulted in unwanted pregnancies, and because of this, there were also a number of women trying to induce a miscarriage who ended up seriously wounded or dead in the process. Therefore, there was most likely also a higher number of wanted pregnancies than what we see after the introduction of proper medical contraceptives such as the pill, which became a part of the Norwegian market in 1967.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> See Appendix 1.

<sup>71</sup> "Familie og jobb i ulike kvinnegenerasjoner."

<sup>72</sup> Drucker, *Contraception*.

<sup>73</sup> Norgeshistorie and Institutt for arkeologi, "Prevensjonsrevolusjonen - Norgeshistorie."

However, it did not mean that contraceptive use was automatically accepted in society. In 1948, more than 400 000 people signed a campaign called “The public letter against contraception” when Norwegian authorities decided to hand out free condoms to soldiers in Germany.<sup>74</sup> Contraceptives were also regarded by some, such as religious groups, as a threat to the traditional family, and there were many people who voiced their concern about the repercussions of people being able to have sex without any big consequences. (??)

In Norway, abortion was introduced as a legal option for unwanted pregnancies in 1964. This made it possible for pregnant women to apply for abortion, but this option was strictly reserved to those whose application was approved. In 1978, abortion for all women was legalized and it became much more accessible for women with unwanted pregnancies to terminate their pregnancies in a safe environment. Levine and White write that “However one regards this shift, it represents a fundamental change not only in the means by which children are raised but also in the reasons for which they are brought into the world and the goals which they pursue during their lives”.<sup>75</sup> Making sure that children were brought into the world on the right grounds, that they were wanted and, in the most part, planned, is considered one of the most fundamental arguments for making abortions available for all women, regardless of their marital status. In this respect, the accessibility of abortions should be considered an important mark in the rights of both women and children, where it provides unborn children with a bigger guarantee of growing up in a safe environment.

These two factors, medical contraception, and abortion have been extremely important in the paradigm shift that we can observe within the relationship between parents and children. For the first time in history, there existed an opportunity for women and their partners to choose for themselves if they wanted to have children or not, and they were in greater part able to control the exact number of children they wanted than before, both before and after a child was conceived. It also resulted in more women having children at a time in their lives that fit their living and family situation. This can be used to, at least partially, explain the declining birth rates that happened from the 1970s because the family had much more direct control over how many children they saw fit to have. As Levine and White argue, this would also impact how

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<sup>74</sup> «Folkebrevet mot preventivene» (my own translation) Norgeshistorie and Institutt for arkeologi.

<sup>75</sup> Carr, Light, and Woodhead, *Growing Up in a Changing Society*, 5.

children were being raised, with parents having fewer children to keep the focus on and only after making an active choice in bringing them into the world.

This fall in birth rates not only happened at the same time as contraceptives and abortions became more available but also at a time when women went from primarily being housewives to earning an education by getting more educated, taking college degrees, and becoming a part of the national workforce. Contrary to the tendency of the housewife era, where the woman often quit her job in order to become a stay-at-home mom, more and more women now chose to continue to work even after giving birth. This was not unique in Norway and was a part of a Western trend where it was possible to see the consequences that the factors mentioned had on family life and planning. The typical Norwegian family became smaller and had more money to spend due to two incomes instead of only one. Mothers still had the primary responsibility for the children, which often resulted in them working part-time in order to be able to combine paid work and caring for their children.

### **The Emergence of a New Scientism on Childhood**

As mentioned in the introduction, sociologists and historians became fascinated with the concept of childhood during the 1970s, shortly after the publication of Phillipe Ariès' book *Centuries of Childhood* at the beginning of the 1960s.<sup>76</sup> Parallel with the sociological discovery of childhood, it is possible to observe the emergence of new scientism and discourse on children and childhood in great part influenced by these sociological and historical currents. This resulted in an industry of educational books directed toward parents and families, written by self-proclaimed experts on the appropriate ways to raise a child. As we can see, this new scientism was supported by the growing number of literature within the field of childhood studies and the growing number of experts claiming to know what the best was for children. The trend of self-proclaimed experts on childhood who also published books to validate their arguments had already existed for some decades, but what changed now was that their ideas became more supported by research done within different academic fields, providing their arguments with significantly more legitimacy.

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<sup>76</sup> Ariès and Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*.



Addressing insecurities, real or perceived, of concerned mothers and fathers, an emerging group of experts on the art of child-rearing published books explaining to parents how to best raise their children so that they would be as prepared for life as possible, inspired by the growing awareness of children in academic fields such as sociology, psychology, and medicine. With an increasing number of academic publications on the act of child-rearing, authors of popular child-rearing manuals created a bridge between the often-difficult language of academic papers and a mass readership by publishing books written in a more easily accessible language. One must not underestimate the importance of making theoretical knowledge accessible for the typical reader. The emergence of the new scientism on childhood should be considered positive in this respect.

Many of these experts had a background in such fields, with experience as psychologists, teachers, doctors or sociologists. They often used already established theories to explain their reasoning, mixed with some of their personal experience achieved through work, their personal lives as a parent themselves, or a combination of both. However, even if several books were published like this, there was not necessarily any guarantee that some of the people who wrote them were in a position to claim themselves as experts in this sense. Beatrice Whiting, an American anthropologist who specialized in the comparative study of child development, noted that

The young American turns to specialists for advice – Dr. Spock and other pediatricians, psychologists, and the authors of magazine articles. From the myriad of suggestions she chooses those which seem most plausible and carries out that part of the advice which seems compatible with her personality and the idiosyncratic circumstances of her life.<sup>77</sup>

It is important to note that much of the advice on child-rearing presented in these books and magazines mostly are conveyed as ‘common sense’, as much of this advice is a part of the natural instincts of most parents, as Whiting argues herself. However, it is argued that this literature contributed to a growing anxiety amongst parents, and especially mothers, that it became a perception that they had a lot to learn to be able to take care of their children.<sup>78</sup> These experts combined knowledge from various fields mixed with common sense to explain the

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<sup>77</sup> Whiting, “FOLK WISDOM AND CHILD-REARING,” 26.

<sup>78</sup> Smyth and Craig, “Conforming to Intensive Parenting Ideals.”

perceived needs of children, and with this, sold their theories on the perfect method to vulnerable parents desperate to do things right. On the other hand, it is also worth noting that being able to research child-rearing methods could also be a comfort for many parents, both mothers and fathers, using it the right way.

Providing the many anxious parents with a bouquet of mixed advice with based on different theories and beliefs regarding what should be considered important for young children, these experts would eventually define the expectations of what parenting should be. According to Fass, it is possible to observe a reality where parents and experts gradually created a united front in the pursuit of a new and modern childhood.<sup>79</sup> This newly found childhood that would affect the later generations, slowly became more characterized by going from being something thought of as private matters reserved for the family, to being something that the society at large should be able to and had the right to meddle in. This argument would become more and more valid for Norwegian families as the century progressed, with the growing legitimacy of the welfare state.

A quick search of using the word “oppdragelse” (“child rearing”) in the Norwegian national database over books, shows that search shows that there were only published a handful of books with this keyword each year between 1900 and 1935. Between 1935 and 1944, however, a total of 725 books fitting this keyword was published, while the number for the period between 1945 and 1949 is 1,669 books. It is important to note that these are only books, and that other publications that dealt with the act of child rearing, such as magazines, are not included in these numbers.

The growing literature on child-rearing methods contributed to the creation of some type of standard of what a normal child should be.<sup>80</sup> This also made it easier for society to define the number of younger individuals who did not fit into this norm and have again contributed to the clearer definitions of troublemakers amongst children and teenagers, as well as an attitude of what measures should be necessary to use in order to deal with children causing trouble.<sup>81</sup> This clearly defined standard of what could be considered normal is by some historians and sociologists considered problematic due to the fact that this standard probably also created

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<sup>79</sup> Fass, *The End of American Childhood*.

<sup>80</sup> Fass, 112.

<sup>81</sup> Fass, 112–14.

even more anxious parents than ever before, because it was now easier for parents to compare their own efforts and its result to others. It also contributed to the already mentioned growing scientification of childhood that became even more clear as the decades would pass, as well as starting a modernization process of the Western childhood. Fass writes that

Many fine studies are available on the history of twentieth-century childrearing advice. These all agree that the 1920s witnessed an earthquake of advice that spoke to and elevated parental anxieties about how best to raise children in newly “modern” and scientific ways.<sup>82</sup>

With the increasing number of experts in the emerging field, such as Dr. Benjamin Spock, Thomas Gordon, and Muriel James, as well as the many publications that came along, the legitimacy of the advice given by these experts became more valid in the eyes of the public, and eventually devalued advice that was passed on the former traditional advice of older generations. This does not mean that the advice provided by grandparents and other older member of the child’s family was not considered any more, but rather that the advice of the experts became more and more valuable in the eyes of the parents. This resulted in new parents not relying on their own parents as much as they used to, which have been tradition for generations previously.

There exist many explanations for the emergence of a new scientification of childhood at the time in history that it did. As both Fass, as well as Thuen and Sommerschild mention, there have not only been extreme improvements within the fields of medicine and technology, but we have also seen an improvement of the general standard of living in Western societies during the twentieth century.<sup>83</sup> It is argued that this would not have happened at this time in history, had it not been for the improved economic standard that emerged throughout the century. As fewer and fewer families lived in poverty, they would also have the money to invest in what they now considered to be their children’s well-being.

It might be difficult for people of twenty-first century contemporary society to understand that something that in the twenty first century is considered as ‘basic’ as keeping a child alive was much more difficult before than what it is thought of today. As the century progressed and

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<sup>82</sup> Fass, 101.

<sup>83</sup> Fass, 100.

medical and technological advances were introduced in the sphere of births and act of raising children, the rate of children surviving gradually became much higher, which made room for parents to find other worries about their newborns. American historian on the history of childhood, Paula S. Fass, writes that

Today's parenting manuals often advice parents in matters related to a child's emotional and cognitive well-being and, most recently, about successful schooling. But the origin of this advice literature lay not in aspirations for psychological adjustment or cognitive enrichment but in a much simpler goal – keeping the child alive.<sup>84</sup>

As soon as the medical techniques were improved and the number of children surviving birth and the first few years of life started to rise, it only became natural for the books on child-rearing to take on a whole new agenda, as the goal of preventing unnecessary infant deaths was achieved. Based on the new concerns expressed by new parents, the literatures on child-rearing now took on a new direction, dealing with more detailed concerns such as the children's psychological and cognitive needs. This is a classic example of the challenge of one problem disappearing while another problem appears. Norwegian psychologists and writers, Harald Thuen and Hilchen Sommerschild writes that

Through all ages, parents have had wishes and goals for their own children. The first wish is for their children to have a good health. Four to five generations ago, the infant mortality rates were high, and parents' concerns for their children to fall sick or maybe even die, prevented them from being concerned for anything else (...) During our own century, other wishes for children have had the ability to present themselves. An education and a life filled with leisure activities are examples of such wishes.<sup>85</sup>

As mentioned in the quote above, times have changed in what focus child-rearing literatures have had throughout the century. The literature published towards the middle of the century often focused on the important task of making sure that the child stayed alive, because of the

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<sup>84</sup> Fass, 91.

<sup>85</sup> «Til alle tider har foreldre hatt ønsker og mål for barna sine. Det første ønsket er at barna skal være friske og ha god helse. For tre-fire generasjoner siden var ennå barnedødeligheten høy, og foreldrenes angst for at barna skulle bli syke og kanskje bukke under, skygget ofte over alt annet (...) I løpet av vårt eget århundre har andre ønsker på barnas vegne kommet til. Utdanning og et aktivt fritidsliv er eksempler på slike ønsker i dag» (my own translation) Thuen, Sommerschild, and Foreldreveiledning (program), *Foreldre - til barns beste*, 8.

high mortality rates amongst newborn children at that time.<sup>86 87</sup> This problematic statistic made it difficult for parents to focus on much more than making sure that the child would survive. Therefore, this is the reason why most of the literature on child-rearing had survival as the primary focus and did not argue for a more child centered upbringing in the degree literature published towards the close of the twentieth century did.

Parents, and especially mothers, saw themselves confronted with an abundance of well-intentioned advice as the century progressed. Women's magazines profited from the fact that women/mothers usually felt a huge amount of responsibility towards their children and their well-being and development. The different magazines were packed full of well-meant advice on how to best take care of their children, and as medical techniques became better and more children survived the critical first years of life, parents were able to concern themselves with other aspects of the child-rearing process. In a society where most child-rearing practices had existed for many years, it became confusing for new parents to navigate in the world of magazines, books, and self-proclaimed experts within this particular field. As we may see later in this thesis, this development arguably also affected the idealization of raising children and created an idea that there exists a correct way to raise one's children.

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<sup>86</sup> Fass, *The End of American Childhood*.

<sup>87</sup> See Appendix 2 & 3.

## **Chapter Two: From a Focus on “Parental Authority” to “Parental Responsibility”: The Political and Legal Recognition of Children**

This chapter seeks to illustrate how the new sociology of childhood, combined with the emergence of the Norwegian welfare state, have contributed to the political recognition of children that became more clarified throughout the Norwegian culture of the 1970s and 1980s. These decades have made their mark on family politics and the way children are recognized as human beings in their own right, and not as mere small adults in Norwegian contemporary society. As noted, the change happened because of the gradual awareness and scientification of childhood mentioned in the previous chapter, that was slowly making its mark on how adults thought about children and their needs. The fact that researchers and politicians both globally and within the state of Norway started to become seriously affected by the new discourse on children and consequently started to change the way in which parental responsibility was defined legally, also affected the expectations of the role of parents and how they were to act and behave towards their children.

Firstly, the chapter gives a brief introduction on the legal and political position of the child before the 1970s, in order to identify the important changes that happened regarding the political and legal recognition of the child towards the close of the century. This introduction sheds light on the importance of the changing cultural processes in which laws and political decisions are created.

Accordingly, the 1970s and 1980s became turning points regarding the legal and cultural position and recognition of the child. Even though this thesis has a geographical focus on the case of Norway, it is still important to understand the global phenomenon of the growing awareness of children, as various organizations, political groups, and individuals fought for the improved legal position of children, both nationally and internationally.<sup>88</sup> This chapter gives a brief view on how international organizations such as the United Nations have affected the legal position of the child internationally, but also how these currents have affected the debates in Norway. It follows the early formulations of international children’s declarations, culminating in the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989.

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<sup>88</sup> Fass, “A Historical Context for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.”

Nationally, the Government sought to investigate the legal position of the child and how to create a new children's law that would in greater part reflect the thoughts of contemporary society in a matter that the old children's laws from 1956 did no more. The first step in this process, was the creation of an advisory group consisting of independent academics, representatives from the population, and people from the Department of Justice. The following report they provided, have been foundational for the final result of the new law that came into force in 1981. As the chapter shows, the most defining change in the new law of 1981, was the shift in focus from the term "parental authority" to "parental responsibility" in the discourse on children's rights and needs in society.

Norway has for many decades been considered a forefront for the rights of children, in much part due to different happenings during the 1970s and 1980s. It had been a well-functioning welfare state for many years, and it has been considered logical for many that Norway should be a good place for children to grow up. However, this does not mean that Norwegian society without discussion has defined the terms and conditions of childhood without debate and disagreement. One of the most important debates concerning children and their right for protection in Norwegian society during the decades in question, was the debate concerning the implementation of a spokesperson for children, called a *barneombud*. This idea had existed for some time, when the debate concerning this position started again during the 1970s. This chapter also deals with this process, from the idea of a *barneombud* presented in the report from 1977 until the realization and the political debates throughout this process. This debate was tense in the political landscape, and the biggest parties in Government were opposed to each other throughout.

### **Cultural and Legal Attitudes Concerning Children and their Rights Before the 1970s**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, adults became increasingly aware of the perceived need for improving the conditions of children in many aspects of society. However, this did not mean that rules and regulations concerning children and parents did not already exist, although many of the laws at that time were outdated. Laws regarding children have existed in Norwegian society for several centuries and have been subject to changes and renewal many times, in order to adapt to contemporary thoughts and beliefs concerning the best way to treat children. In other words, the old laws that are considered outdated today did, as with most other

laws, in great part reflect the culture in which they were born, and it gives us an idea of how children were considered in the eye of the law in the past.

King Christian Vs law of 1687, often just referred to as NL, stated parental custody as much more comprehensive and absolute than what later children's laws would do. It stated the parental authority as something total and that children revolting against this authority should be punished hard for stepping out of line. This was considered natural, as punishment at this time was a common part of child-rearing. NL 6-5-2 states that

If someone curse their parents, or in any way act unbearable in a matter that affect their honor, should lose their inheritance, be punished, and work at Bremmerholm, if it is a boy, or in the case of girls, the spinning house, for life.<sup>89</sup>

Not surprisingly, this reflects the idea of the period in which this law was written, that children were subjects of the parental authority of their parents, not able to express their own needs and emotions in a negative manner without feeling the reactions on the body, according to the law. Respect for the parental authority was key in the upbringing and it was considered natural to punish children for standing up to their parents, due to the belief that adults would always know what was best for themselves, their family, and their children. There was a general consent amongst adults that children were not able to make decisions for themselves. Nonetheless, they were still expected to contribute to the family by doing chores and other work in a time period in which children had a much larger role in the productivity of the family. This was considered an important part of the upbringing of obedient and well-mannered children, and the voices of adults protesting the way children were treated were few, if any.

However, when describing these viewpoints, it is important to remember that not everything was awful in the relationship between parents and children. Most parents and children still loved each other like any other parent and child at the end of the 1900s or beginning of 2000s, but the power between them were skewedly distributed compared to what it would be four centuries later. The laws regulating the relationship between parents and children mainly

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<sup>89</sup> «Bander nogen sine forældre, eller dennem ubluelig tiltaler eller paataler paa Ære og Lempe, miste Arv, og straffis med Jærn og Arbejd paa Bremmerholm, om det er Mands-person eller i Spindehuset, om det er Quind-folk, deris Livs Tid» (my own translation) "Kong Christian Den Femtis Norske Lov - Lovdata."



focused on the punishment an adult or a court could give a child in different situations rather than what rights a child had when facing a world created by and for adults.

This belief in parental authority as something where the parents were in ‘control’ of the child, and these laws regulating this said parental authority, would still be relevant at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>90</sup> On the other hand, the twentieth century would become a century where big changes in the thoughts surrounding the means and boundaries of parental authority were emerging. There are many factors that contributed to the gradual attitudinal change that is observable during this century, such as the development of the welfare state previously discussed, and the improved interest in doing research on the nature of children. One debate that sparked heated discussions amongst the adult population in Norway and contributed to the gradual changes in the attitude towards what should be considered best for children, was the debate concerning the corporal punishment of children during the 1890s.

This debate did not specifically or directly change the fundamental opinions concerning the scope of parental authority, but it represents a shift in the way adults thought about punishment of children who had done something wrong. The most important thing that came out of this debate, was the defined need to specify the fact that parents and other adults in a child’s life should only give a punishment that fit the crime committed and be careful so that the child in question would not sustain lasting injuries. It was considered important to underline the fact that punishment was not to be used with the only intent of punishment, but as a learning experience in cases where children had done something wrong, and the parent believed that physical punishment were the only right solution. It was also widely agreed on that one of the most important aspects of physical punishment was to explain to the child the reason why they were being punished, so that they would remember, understand, and learn from it.<sup>91</sup> Another aspect of this debate was the discussion revolving the school’s position when it came to punishment. While the school and its teachers had the right to give corporal punishment to children who misbehaved, many parents now argued that teachers should not be able to interfere in such a way, as they had been able to before.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Arnholm: *Privatrett IV* (1969), s. 8, gjengitt i NOU 1977: 35, kapittel V, punkt 6.2.

<sup>91</sup> Skundberg and Thuen, “”I kjærlighedens tjeneste”.”

<sup>92</sup> Skundberg and Thuen.

Even though the discourse on the act of punishment evidently changed its course in the 1890s, the right of a parent to punish their child for behaving badly was still considered a natural and even healthy part of child-rearing. The act of child-rearing was considered a private matter amongst most people and imagining people outside the family involving themselves in such private matters were for many unheard of. The thought of having a state that intervened itself in how people raised and cared for their children were for most people at this time something that did not sound possible, except for in cases of extreme poverty or neglect.

Nonetheless, this debate demonstrates that changes were slowly happening with the attitude towards children and how they should be raised. It contributed to a more general understanding of and restrictions surrounding physical punishment of children and what consequences could occur if one did not treat children in what was to become the ‘proper’ way. The debate concerning physical punishment of children therefore symbolize the beginning of a bigger cultural change regarding the rights of children, that we can see the consequences of during the twentieth century. Until the 1880s, Norwegian law did little to regulate corporal punishment as a means for providing an upbringing for children, but with the debate there were introduced restrictions both at school and at home.<sup>93</sup> In 1936, a general ban of corporal punishment in Norwegian schools was introduced, as a result of debates provoked by several parents. This was one of several changes that contributed to the restriction of physical punishment done by teachers in school.

Already at the beginning of the 1900s, there existed people in government fighting to introduce laws concerning the rights of children and mothers. Two of the most prominent figures here were Johan Castberg and his sister-in-law, Katti Anker Møller. Castberg’s political views were characterized by the belief of the state as the protector of vulnerable groups in society, and therefore he thought it natural that it should take care of mothers and children in much wider terms than previously. His mission to improve these conditions was mainly restricted to mothers and children in poverty, and especially mothers with children born outside of marriage as those children at that time lacked the same rights as children born by married couples.

The children’s law that are discussed more throughout in this chapter are in great deal built on some of the laws that Johan Castberg pushed through in 1915, meant to improve the living

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<sup>93</sup> Skundberg and Thuen.

conditions of children born outside of marriage and their mothers. Castberg was hopeful that this would improve the lives of many children, especially those in bigger cities.<sup>94</sup> However, there were aspects of these children's laws that would be criticized only a few decades later, such as the fact that children born inside and outside of marriage were separated by law and therefore considered different.

### **International Debates Concerning Children's Rights**

As the focus on learning more about children and their needs heightened throughout the twentieth century, there was also a change in what was to be considered important for children's rights and development. Parallel to this, the century was characterized as a turbulent time in modern history, with wars, economic crises, and social change, to name a few. Especially the two world wars and their aftermaths made people and countries realize that there was a long way to go in order to better protect innocent children against the bestiality of humanity.<sup>95</sup> This awareness would result in the creation of several international treaties that will be discussed later in this chapter, such as the Declaration on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The twentieth century is also a time characterized by the creation of a number of national and international organizations fighting for the rights of disempowered groups of people in society, as well as states forming different inter-state organizations working to both improve their cooperation but also improving living conditions all over the globe. One of the most important organizations when it comes to the development of children's rights internationally, was the United Nations (UN), formed after the Second World War. In 1946, the UN created the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, also known as UNICEF. Their goal has been to help children whose lives are at risk, no matter what role their country played in the Second World War.<sup>96</sup> It symbolizes a belief that every child should have the right to be protected and have the space needed to reach their full potential in life, no matter which country they live in and what political infrastructure their country has.

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<sup>94</sup> Lønnå, "Castbergske barnelover."

<sup>95</sup> Fass, "A Historical Context for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child."

<sup>96</sup> "UNICEF History."

There are several explanations on why the need to provide children with a set of rights occurred in the middle of the twentieth century. Fass writes that “the desire to articulate the rights and needs of children in universal terms has accompanied the growing importance of international organizations and universal charters throughout the twentieth century”.<sup>97</sup> Parallel to this, adults were still affected by the horrors of the Second World War in the way they thought and acted, and their goals of improvement in society. This evidently resulted in a heightened awareness of the vulnerability of certain groups, such as children. The United Nations were responsible for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, which have been celebrated as one of the most important documents on the rights of people in history. However, this declaration does not mention children and is primarily concerned about adult human rights. This is something that the UN was criticized for several times. It was not before 1959 that the UN drafted and adopted the Declarations of the Rights of the Child, claiming that every child has the right to a ‘happy childhood’. According to Fass, this declaration “expressed a much more restricted conception of rights” than the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which would be adopted in 1989.<sup>98</sup>

The fact that children were being left out of official declarations of rights shows the position children had in society at that time. Being voiceless compared to adults, they were easy to forget or overlook. Even though there existed organizations working towards the specific rights of children’s rights, such as the UNs own Children’s Emergency Fund, it was obvious that children were in need of better rights and protection. One thing was to make efforts to protect children, but it seems that this did automatically make people believe that children were in need of official laws to protect them in the same way as parents did. Nonetheless, children had previously been protected by targeted laws concerning things such as factory work, as a means of limiting the amount of time factory owners were allowed to keep their young workers at work. Still, the fact that the Human Rights Declaration did not in any way mention children and were exclusively focused on the rights of adults shows that there was room for improvement.

Fass argues that one of the reasons behind this, was the fact that throughout most of the twentieth century, it was the right to be protected and cared for that defined the ideals that

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<sup>97</sup> Fass, “A Historical Context for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child,” 17.

<sup>98</sup> Fass, 18.

international organizations adopted. In this picture, democratic ideals and beliefs were not necessarily considered important in order to create good conditions for children and their development. It was not yet considered important to give children a safe space for voicing their needs and beliefs in order for them to have a good life. The voices of children were for the most part ignored, both their opinions in society and their personal lives. The thought of a child speaking up against his or her parents were for many people unheard of at that time, and in cases where children voiced their opinions they were usually shut down. As we will see later in this chapter, this would eventually change.

There are several explanations for the sudden wish for defining the rights of children, where the one already mentioned is the horrors of the twentieth century. On top of this, it is argued that the increasing interest from the 1920s and onward, amongst mothers for raising children who were well-balanced and well-adjusted would also contribute to the focus on the creation of later conventions and laws regarding children and their rights. Fass writes that

In the United States, proper child-rearing became a passion by the 1920s, as middle-class mothers turned to advice from new specialists who were informed by Freudian or Watsonian behaviorist theories. *Parents Magazine* was established and grew by leaps and bounds.<sup>99</sup>

She continues by writing that “Less physically hazardous, more protected and well nurtured, childhood now became a period in which mothers and nations believed that they could turn out happy and productive young citizens”.<sup>100</sup> It was no longer enough to just give children the basic protection they needed and access what we today consider basic necessities such as health care and to schooling, there was now a belief in the collective responsibility to ensure a good life for all children. As opposed to previously, this attitude did not only exist as a combined effort within nations, but people saw the need to define the rights of children internationally.

These factors must be seen as some of the major contributing forces for the growing recognition of children that started during the twentieth century. This century is quite special in the field of childhood studies, where most of the development in this field happened in only a few decades. Psychology and eugenics are fields that are closely connected to childhood studies, where

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<sup>99</sup> Fass, 21.

<sup>100</sup> Fass, 21.

psychology contributed with a growing understanding of the minds of children as well as new ideas regarding their needs and the proper means of child-rearing. Even though eugenics is usually associated with racial hygiene, it also influenced the way society thought about the importance of providing children a good upbringing in order to prepare them to become a part of the national workforce.<sup>101</sup> It was with influence from this movement that schools in many Western countries gradually started to gain more and more influence in children's lives and became a natural place for observing children collectively.

In 1979, as a means of celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the Declaration on the Rights of the Child, the year was dedicated to all children, as the Year of the Child. It was supposed to symbolize that the voices of children were important for the democratization process of every country dedicated to improving the situation of fragile groups. However, some people such as Jupp have argued that the Year of the Child was no immediate success. On one hand, he claims that the Year of the Child was a short-term success in creating a framework for advocacy, but questions if children were better off in 1989 than in 1979.<sup>102</sup> He also argues that even though the growing literature on children is obvious, the public rhetoric describing children as the 'future of mankind' and 'our most precious investment' and policy still indicated the interest in children as subordinated to the political and economic interests of adults.<sup>103</sup>

### **Voicing the Need for a New Children's Act in Norway**

Inspired by the current international discourse that we have discussed, parts of the Norwegian society eventually expressed the wish and need of a new children's law that in greater part would reflect the cultural changes that had happened since the last children's law was adopted in 1956. Politically, the first requests to revise the current children's laws from 1956 appeared around mid-1970s. In 1956, the six Castbergske children's law had been revised and resulted in different laws separating children born inside and outside of marriage. While many argued for a revision of these laws, with the wish to combine them into one law, there were still many

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<sup>101</sup> Thuen, *Om Barnet. Oppdragelse, Opplæring Og Omsorg Gjennom Historien.*, 132–34.

<sup>102</sup> Jupp, "The International Year of the Child," 31.

<sup>103</sup> Jupp, 42.

representatives in the Government arguing that there should still exist legal differences between these two groups of children.<sup>104</sup>

The mission to improve the legal condition of Norwegian children began when the female organization of Norway's biggest political party, the Labor Party found inspiration from Swedish Red Cross and their office for "the ombud for children", asking if Norway should have an office with the task of protecting children's rights by hopefully strengthening their position both at home and in society.<sup>105</sup> Inspired by this, it was decided in 1975 that the Norwegian Government should create an advisory group with two different tasks: 1) to revise the current children's laws and propose an idea on how a new children's law should look like based on the cultural environment of the 1970s, focusing on self-expression and self-determination, and 2) they were asked to investigate the idea of creating an ombud specifically for the protection of children, and how this position could function in society.<sup>106</sup>

The idea of an "ombud" was not a foreign idea, as the Scandinavian countries have been familiar with this concept for centuries. An "ombud" can be described as a set of Norwegian official institutions with the task of promoting the extra consideration and interests in society. This institution should always be independent from the rest of state management.<sup>107</sup> In Norway today, groups of people such as the elderly and consumers have their own "ombud" that often speak on behalf of the group they are ombud for, so the position was not something entirely new when people began to consider it for children.

The initial idea of an ombud to speak on behalf of children was first proposed by law professor Anders Bratholm in his book *Umyndige personer* in 1969. Here, Bratholm argued that children were a big yet weak group of citizens in society, lacking things adults have often taken for granted, such as different organizations and interest groups dedicated to protecting the rights of workers, and so on.<sup>108</sup> He therefore concluded with and argued that children were a group in definite need of a person or an agency to protect them and help them fight their battles. During the debates in the 1970s, there were questions regarding the responsibilities of such a

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<sup>104</sup> Prop. 25 LS (1956), 2–3.

<sup>105</sup> «Barnets Obudsmann» (my own translation) Flekkøy and Fretheim, *Det er så urettferdig, altså!*, 13.

<sup>106</sup> NOU (1977: 35) Lov om barn og foreldre.

<sup>107</sup> Tjernshaugen, "ombud."

<sup>108</sup> Bratholm, *Umyndige personer*.

position; if it should focus on specific cases such as conflict resolution between parents and children, or if the position should function as a political and bureaucratic voice regarding the conditions of children. The group behind the report ended up concluding with the latter, stating that it would become too complicated if the first alternative had been chosen.

As mentioned previously in this chapter, Norwegian law concerning children and their parents had been dealt with in two different laws; one law dedicated to children born within marriage and another law dedicated to children born outside of marriage. At the time when these laws from 1956 were under discussion during the process of creating them, it was argued that the difference between these groups of children were so big that it would be necessary to separate them. Already in 1956, there were a big group of people arguing for one law only, and this group succeeded in their wish when the new law would be drafted by the advisory group. Norwegian society and norms regarding cohabitation between the sexes had changed drastically in only a few years, and cohabitation despite of marriage was now very common amongst Norwegian couples.

It was also believed that the practice of differentiating between children born within and outside of marriage was unfortunate for the many children affected by these laws, and in the debates regarding the drafting of a new law, or laws, the importance of not discriminating between these groups was emphasized. This is seen in the negotiations from the debate in Storting:

The reason behind the wish to combine the two children's laws into one law is first and foremost to avoid treating children differently based on whether they were born within marriage or not. Today, this discrimination lies partly in the fact that the laws are different for each group of children (...) partly in the fact that the laws are different in many respects.<sup>109</sup>

However, even if there existed a group of people in society and within politics that stated the definite need for a revision of the existing laws, there were still many people who spoke out against the need of an advisory group and a new process of revising these laws.<sup>110</sup> These people

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<sup>109</sup>«Bakgrunnen for ønsket om å sammenarbeide barnelovene til én lov er først og fremst å unngå forskjellsbehandling mellom barn født i og utenfor ekteskap. Forskjellsbehandlingen ligger i dag dels i at reglene finnes i én lov for hver gruppe barn (...) Dels består forskjellsbehandling i at innholdet av reglene i de to lovene er forskjellige på mange punkter» (my own translation) "Stortingsforhandlinger (Ib. Utg.). 1979/80 Vol. 124 Nr. 4C "

<sup>110</sup> "Stortingsforhandlinger (Ib. Utg.). 1979/80 Vol. 124 Nr. 4b - Nasjonalbiblioteket."



were especially skeptical to the second task of the advisory group, stating that the group should investigate the idea of creating an Ombud with the specific job of acting as a spokesperson on behalf of children as a vulnerable group in society. The people arguing against the implementation of this position believed that Norway already had the means needed to protect children with the different state departments that already existed. The people positive to such a position believed that the state departments that already existed and had some say in matters regarding children had too many other things to consider and that the matters of children's welfare would always be ignored in the end.

The Norwegian debate regarding a new children's law shows how little important many people thought it was to define the need of children's protection. The whole process from the debate in the Government to the finished report from the advisory group in 1977, people argued loudly about the need of an ombud, and the priority the group was given illustrate this. The drafting of a proposal for a new children's law was not prioritized in the responsible department. Instead of drafting a proposal for a new law, the department shifted their focus to other matters they deemed more important for their attention. This resulted with a decision that two law students, Helge Olav Bugge and Wilhelm Matheson, interns of Professor Anders Bratholm, should stay in charge of the draft and preparations for the proposal.<sup>111</sup> Bratholm himself believed that this must have been the first time in Norwegian history of law that two students were given such a big project.

### **The Report of 1977 and the Shift from a Focus on “Parental Authority” to “Parental Responsibility”**

The advisory group given the task of propose a new children's law and investigate the possibility of creating an official position as ombud on behalf of children, also called barneombud, presented their report in 1977. They had spent two years on this and voiced the need to give children more individuality and greater choice in their lives. This view reflects the general contemporary thought from this time in history, where the focus on a person's individuality was becoming more and more important. As will be discussed further in the next chapter, the Western world saw a tendency of the heightened focus on creating or finding the individual, in most aspects of everyday life. This also affected some of the parental values of

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<sup>111</sup> Flekkøy and Fretheim, *Det er så urettferdig, altså!*, 10.

the 1970s, where parents no longer focused as much on creating obedient children, but rather preferred to guide their children into becoming themselves.<sup>112</sup>

They also admitted that the relationship between parents and children in a historical perspective had been characterized by an unfair amount of power for the parents and too little co-determination for the child, even though the parental authority at that point also was restricted to other laws such as the duty for children to attend school and the expectation that children should be able to have their opinion heard in matters that affected them. The advisory group wrote that

In principle, children have the same rights as adults according to criminal law, chapter 21 (crimes against personal liberty, such as the illegal deprivation of liberty) and chapter 22 (violations of the body). However, it happens utmost rarely that parents are prosecuted for these violations against their children, often because the crime is not reported – because it is the people closest to the child, and therefore the ones with the responsibility to report anything, who do the violation.<sup>113</sup>

This imbalance in the power relation between parents and children is perceived as something problematic due to the fact that children were in a position where they could experience being treated badly by their parents in a manner that went against the law and still not receive the necessary help due to their lack of comprehensive rights. This is used to illustrate the need of a new set of laws with a mission to protect children even more in their upbringing than previous laws did. Thuen states that

The law was supposed to renew and widen the independence of the child. It broke with the old ideas of the child as the ‘property’ of his or her parents. The child as a legal subject was strengthening, not only in light of an extra protection, but also by promoting the child as an independent individual.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Gullestad, “From Obedience to Negotiation.”

<sup>113</sup> «Barn nyter i prinsippet samme vern som voksne etter straffelovens kapittel 21 (forbrytelser mot den personlige frihet, bl.a. ulovlig frihetsberøvelse) og kapittel 22 (legemskrenkelser). Men det er sjeldent det blir reist sak mot foreldre etter disse bestemmelsene, bl.a. fordi forholdet ikke blir anmeldt – det er jo nettopp de som er nærmest til å foreta anmeldelse, som har forgått seg» (my own translation) NOU (1977: 35) Lov om barn og foreldre, 45.

<sup>114</sup> «loven skulle fornye og utvide barnets selvstendighet. Den brøt definitivt med de gamle ideene om barnet som foreldrenes ‘eiendom’. Barnet som juridisk subjekt skulle styrkes, ikke bare i form av et ytterligere vern, men også ved fremme av barnet som et selvstendig handlende individ» (my own translation) Thuen, *Om Barnet. Oppdragelse, Opplæring Og Omsorg Gjennom Historien.*, 228.

This report is defining in the new paradigm of childhood in Norway. It symbolizes a clear break from the previous focus on obedience in child-rearing and strict parental authority over children. The report and the researchers behind it are clearly affected by international currents within the field of childhood studies that was discussed in the previous chapter. They wished for a children's law that in greater part neutralized the relationship between children and their parents, with a bigger opportunity for children to develop their own individualities. Still, there were of course clear thoughts concerning the limitations of the greater independence and determination that the group sought. The role of the parents was still to be considered important in a child's life, as a person responsible for guiding children in their upbringing.

One of the most important and interesting things from the report is the shift in focus on terms. The group behind the report makes a big point in shifting from a focus on "parental authority" to "parental responsibility" in Norwegian legal discourse. They believed that from their point in history, there was an important cultural turn in the way adults thought about their relationship with and responsibilities towards children.<sup>115</sup> With the change of terms from "parental authority" to "parental responsibility" there was a conscious and thoroughly contemplated decision to shift the focus from parents' rights regarding their children, to the duties they have towards their children. It is not accidental that this has been given so much attention in the report because as mentioned earlier, the group behind the report was in much part affected by the ongoing international debate about children's rights. In a process of democratization of child-rearing, this was only to be seen as a natural, but still revolutionary, step.

With a children's law formulated in the way suggested in this report, children would be able to gain much greater legal security than before. Instead of children standing in the shadow of adults, the opinion now was that adults were legally responsible for making sure that children would be able to thrive and develop as individuals in their upbringing. As mentioned previously, there was also a focus on the fact that the child should gradually gain more co-determination as they grow older. The older the child becomes, the more the law believes the parents should take his or her opinion into consideration in matters directly relevant for the child. This reflects the idea that the role of parenthood is to guide children into becoming adults. The report states that

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<sup>115</sup> NOU (1977: 35) Lov om barn og foreldre, 46.

In the opinion of this advisory group, the most important aspect of the parental responsibility is making the child aware that they can get advice and understanding from its parents. However, this demands that the parents take their time to listen to the child rather than telling him or her what to do without discussion, and unfortunately this side of the parental responsibility is often forgotten.<sup>116</sup>

They express a wish that this will also become a part of child-rearing that parents' focus more on, especially as the child reaches school age. The perceived importance of negotiation is clear with this. From a culture of obedience in the upbringing of children, the report presented by the advisory group did in great part provide the Norwegian society with arguments for a new children's law that would mirror the opinions of the general public much more than the two children's laws from 1956. The advisory group underlined the importance of not only supporting children in their journey to find themselves, but also the importance of negotiation and self-determination. These two concepts were gradually becoming fundamental in the parenting values conveyed in child-rearing manuals from the same time period, as will be discussed further in chapter three.

### **Norway as the Leading Example: Creating a Spokesperson for Children**

Another important suggestion that was presented with the report in 1977, that has already been discussed briefly in this chapter, was the suggestion of creating a new and independent position within the Norwegian state with the specific task of promoting children's welfare. In their assessment of this proposal, the group writes that

Administratively, the responsibility for the fate of children is divided into different state organs. For most of these state organs, the responsibility for the well-being of children is one of many important considerations – to avoid children being killed in traffic is only one of the many considerations that the traffic authorities have, and to create recreational spaces for children is only one of many considerations in the planning of new buildings and public areas, and so on. Often, other interests are far stronger than the needs of children.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> «etter utvalgets mening er det en viktig side ved foreldreansvaret at barnet føler det kan få råd og forståelse fra dem. Dette krever imidlertid at de tar seg tid til å lytte til barnet istedenfor å fortelle det uten diskusjon hva det skal gjøre, og dessverre blir nok denne siden av foreldreansvaret ofte ikke ivaretatt godt nok» (my own translation) NOU (1977: 35) Lov om barn og foreldre, 47.

<sup>117</sup> «I forvaltningen er ansvaret for barns skjebne spredt på forskjellige organer. For de fleste av disse organene er hensynet til barna bare ett av flere hensyn – å hindre at barnet blir drept i trafikken er bare ett av de mål

As mentioned previously, the debate concerning creating a position as barneombud was split into two sides: the people who were positive to this due to their belief that children needed much better legal protection, and the people who believed a barneombud to be unnecessary because they were convinced that the different state agencies already in existence were able to protect the needs of children. The advisory group behind the report place their recommendation within the wishes of the first group, with the belief that children would have a hard time being prioritized if they did not have someone to work specifically with their needs.

They argued the importance of the creation of a position as barneombud, so that children would have someone who would help them fight their battles and support them as a fragile group. The wish to implement an ombud clearly represented the society's, and the state's responsibility towards children and their need of a safe environment to thrive in. The report stated that

The proposal is new and will make it clear that the public authorities in general have a responsibility for the conditions surrounding the upbringing of children (...) It will have meaning for the planning and design of all sides of the public politic, for their concrete decisions, for the interpretation of laws and the execution of the free discretion of the administration. In this, there is no expectation that the interests of the child should be prioritized above anything else, or that all types of measures necessarily fit the interests of the child. However, the proposal underlines the importance of being aware of what consequences a measure can have for a child – directly or indirectly.<sup>118</sup>

Still, the idea created debate. After the report was published, the Department of the Consumer and Administration received 73 different statements as feedback to the report itself, where 52 of these concerned the specific suggestion of implementing a barneombud.<sup>119</sup> The feedback was mixed, even though most people agreed to the importance of protecting children. However,

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trafikkmyndighetene har, å skape gode utfoldelsesmuligheter for barn er bare ett av flere hensyn for de som treffer beslutninger om arealdisponering og boligbygging, osv. Ofte er andre interesser langt sterkere enn barnas» (my own translation) NOU (1977: 35) Lov om barn og foreldre, 99.

<sup>118</sup> «bestemmelsen er ny, og gjør det klart at offentlige myndigheter generelt har et ansvar for barns oppvekstvilkår (...) Den får betydning for planlegging og utformingen av alle sider av den offentlige politikk, for deres konkrete tiltak, for tolkningen av rettsregler og for utøvelse av forvaltningens frie skjønn. I dette ligger ikke at barns interesser alltid skal ha forrang, eller at alle slags tiltak nødvendigvis berører barns interesser. Men bestemmelsen gjør det nødvendig å ha et blikk for hvilke konsekvenser et tiltak – direkte eller indirekte – kan tenkes å få for et barn» (my own translation) NOU (1977: 35) Lov om barn og foreldre, 143.

<sup>119</sup> Flekkøy and Fretheim, *Det er så urettferdig, altså!*, 11–15.

there were still disagreements on the best way possible to protect their rights, and many still believed that there was a need of examining the different possibilities further before making any decisions. Even though the group behind the report recommended creating a Barneombud, it continued to be a big debate politically and the opposition in Storting, the right wing of Norwegian politics, made it one of their main causes to fight against the proposal, and promised that the position would be repealed when they gained majority again. The proposal of creating a position and an office for the world's first Barneombud gained enough votes, even though Storting was split in the middle, and in the end the proposal was voted through with a margin of only five.<sup>120</sup>

In her book, *Det er så urettferdig, altså! Da barna fikk sitt eget ombud* ("It's so Unfair! When Children got their own Ombud"), Norway's first barneombud, Målfrid Grude Flekkøy, reflects on the political process of creating the position she was the first person to have. She claims that the political beliefs regarding children and childhood were much different when she retired in her role after eight years than when she first began. She writes that "there still exist some people who doubt the need for a barneombud. But the number of people with this doubt are only a few now",<sup>121</sup> indicating that her eight years in office hopefully had helped the opposition realize the importance of the work Flekkøy and her office did. But with the political storm between the parties for and against her position, Flekkøy did not dare to think of how long she would have the position as Barneombud, mostly since she was given the job during the elections, where the Right wing won.<sup>122</sup>

Since Norway was the first country to create an office dedicated to the protection of children according to the mandate given to the barneombud, Flekkøy did not have any earlier experiences to lean on in her process of creating the office. This is something she mostly regarded as an advantage, and from the start she made it clear that the goal was to create something that would reach the children themselves. One of the first things they did was announcing that children were welcome to contact them if they ever had problems and opened a phone line to process the inquiries.<sup>123</sup> The biggest problem the office had during the first

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<sup>120</sup> Flekkøy and Fretheim, 11–15.

<sup>121</sup> «Det finnes ennå noen som tviler på om det er bruk for et barneombud. Men disse tvilerne er blitt få» (my own translation) Flekkøy and Fretheim, 12.

<sup>122</sup> Flekkøy and Fretheim, 17.

<sup>123</sup> Flekkøy and Fretheim, 18.

period Flekkøy was Barneombud was the lack of money, since the office was underfinanced. This compromised their wish to make the office widely known amongst children.

The Norwegian idea of creating an office solely dedicated to protecting the rights of children gained international attention, and within a few months both Iceland and Sweden followed. Other countries such as New Zealand, Costa Rica, Germany, Austria, and England also found inspiration from the Norwegian model, not necessarily following it to the letter but using it as an example in the preparation of a position that would fit their own system.<sup>124</sup> After eight years in office as barneombud, Flekkøy passed the job on to her successor Trond Viggo Torgersen. However, her work on children was not yet over, and Flekkøy moved on to continue her pioneering work to support the work on improving the international rights of children, participating in a number of national and international organizations targeted towards advancing the conditions of children.<sup>125</sup> Flekkøy have with this become one of the most important individuals who have worked for the rights of children, not only in Norwegian contemporary society but internationally as well. With this, her legacy lives on far beyond national borders.

### **The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**

Internationally, one of the most historically important documents stating the rights of children was still to be finished at the time Flekkøy moved into her office as the first barneombud in Norwegian and international history. Some of the developments regarding international efforts towards improving the conditions of children have been discussed previously in this chapter, focusing on the progress from the First World War to the beginning of the 1980s. As mentioned briefly, what characterize the laws and conventions from before the 1980s is the fact that they mainly focused on children's rights to protection and care, and not their psychological needs in the same ways as their physical needs. What makes the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 different than previous conventions, is the fact that it in greater part focus on the child itself and its vulnerability in a world dominated by adults, and what nation states can do to become better at listening to the voices of children.

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<sup>124</sup> Torgersen, Gaarder, and Norge: Barneombudet, *Stafettpinnen*, 15–16.

<sup>125</sup> Borgen, "Målfrid Grude Flekkøy."

Even though the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child from 1959 existed, the expressed need for a more thorough declaration on the rights of children were eventually heard and resulted in the new Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. While the Convention on the Rights of the Child symbolized the belief that children should be entitled to protection against harm and access to basic needs such as schooling and health care, the Convention on the Rights of the Child symbolize a new belief in children's needs, focusing on aspects such as their rights to self-determination and expression.<sup>126</sup> It therefore follows the social and scientific thoughts believing that one should stop thinking of children as young adults and the property of their parents, but rather as autonomous human beings with their own need to express themselves. As Fass writes

The growing recognition by the 1980s that even in acting on their behalf, children could remain the voiceless objects of exploitation and potentially misused may help us to understand why and how the UN commission that began in earnest to revise the initial statement on children's rights provided the more bones.<sup>127</sup>

The work of creating a new Convention defining the rights of children began in 1979, with the year of the Child. Here, Poland suggested that the United Nations should draft something new that would include a better understanding of children's rights and put countries responsible for upholding them. Cohen explains that at the beginning of the drafting of the convention, many of the Western countries were uninterested, due to the belief that it was a 'Eastern Block project' focusing only on economic, social and cultural rights. As soon as it became clear that the convention would be more than that and include civil and political rights as well, they became more open to the idea of drafting a new declaration for the protection of children.<sup>128</sup>

On November 20<sup>th</sup>, 1989, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The convention consists of a great number of articles, dealing with different important matters such as the importance of avoiding discrimination, the importance of respecting the duties of parents and extended family in their guidance of the child, and the importance of special protection provided to children who for different reasons are permanently deprived of their family. One of the most prominent and recognized people who worked to

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<sup>126</sup> Kosher, Ben-Arieh, and Hendelsman, "The History of Children's Rights," 22.

<sup>127</sup> Fass, "A Historical Context for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child," 21.

<sup>128</sup> Cohen, "UNITED NATIONS," 1449.



improve the legal status of children, Cynthia Price Cohen, wrote in the introductory note of the Convention that

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is a unique human rights treaty in that it protects not only the child's civil and political rights but that it also extends protection to the child's economic, social and cultural rights and humanitarian rights.<sup>129</sup>

The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child acknowledged the limitations that affected earlier charters and statements on behalf of children – the limitations of dependency.<sup>130</sup> It was admitted that by not letting children get access to any platform where they could be able to express their needs, they would also never be heard in the way that adults now wanted them to be heard. Being in a position where you had to rely on your parents or other adults made children more vulnerable than what was wanted for them, and therefore it was considered important to shift the focus from the protection of children to making it possible for them to express their own needs to parents, teachers, politicians, lawmakers, and other adults crossing their paths throughout childhood.

Article 3 of the convention states that “In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interest of the child shall be a primary consideration.<sup>131</sup> The idea of the ‘best interest of the child’ has since the adoption of the convention been a fundamental consideration for countries that signed the document, in the way both states and organization talk about children and their needs. A group of advisors from a Norwegian report published in 2020, writes that

The expression “all actions that affect children” signifies that the principle has a wide meaning. It includes decisions, actual actions and different efforts and processes that directly or indirectly affect children. The UN children's committee underline that “the child's best” is a flexible expression that has to be considered from case to case. It can also change over time.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Cohen, 1448.

<sup>130</sup> Fass, “A Historical Context for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child,” 26.

<sup>131</sup> Cohen, “UNITED NATIONS.”

<sup>132</sup> «Uttrykket ‘alle handlinger som berører barn’ antyder at prinsippet har vid rekkevidde. Det omfatter beslutninger, faktiske handlinger og ulike tiltak og prosesser som direkte eller indirekte berører barn. FNs barnekomité legger til grunn at ‘barnets beste’ er et fleksibelt begrep som må vurderes fra sak til sak. Det vil også kunne forandre seg over tid» (my own translation) “NOU (2020: 14) Ny barnelov - til barnets beste, 62.”

While article 3 underlines the importance of taking children's needs into account in every decision made by the states, article 12 focus on the child's right to be heard in matters concerning them

State parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child (...) For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.<sup>133</sup>

It was revolutionary for all member states of the UN to adopt this convention in the time they did, and the convention itself was quite revolutionary seen in a historical perspective. This was the first paper that committed the member states that had ratified it to report back to the UN in their mission to improve the lives and rights of children in the different countries. The member states are to report back to the UN regarding their situation concerning children's rights, showing their compliance to the convention.<sup>134</sup>

While Norway passed its new children's law in 1981 and many of meanings behind the articles of the Children's Convention were already included in this, the convention still functions as an important symbol of the international cooperation that the UN and its member states believed to be important in order to improve the conditions of children globally. Norway signed the document January 26<sup>th</sup>, 1990, and the convention became a ratified part of Norwegian law in January 1991.

With this, it becomes clear that the discourse on children and their needs improved considerably throughout the twentieth century, driven by several factors such as advancement in psychology, the eugenics movement, and the aftermath of the two world wars. Even though the Convention was adopted without too much debate amongst the member countries of the UN surrounding the final draft, there were contentions regarding the need to define own rights for children. Some people were convinced that having human rights were enough to protect children, while

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<sup>133</sup> "Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)"

<sup>134</sup> Cohen, "UNITED NATIONS," 1452.

the growing majority argued that the existing Human Rights Declaration from 1948 would not be enough to give children the rights they needed and should be able to expect.

## **Chapter Three: Identifying Changes in Parental Values and the Emergence of Intensive Parenting**

As the previous two chapters have shown us, there were several fundamental changes in how adults perceive children and their needs throughout the twentieth century, especially towards the close of it. With the structural changes happening within society, as noted in the first chapter, and the judicial and political changes pointed out in the second chapter, one might ask how these changes have affected the ideas surrounding children and how parents and other adults have changed the way they treat the youngest members of society. From a time when children were supposed to “be seen but not heard”, and practice the virtues of self-control, the discourse on children and childrearing towards the close of the century was changed in many ways.

When thinking back to the decades after the 1950s, most of the adult population asked at the end of the 1990s would probably say that times have changed in the relationship between children and adults and that children of their contemporary society had become much more thought of in society than during their childhood. Older generations complain about childhood and upbringing becoming too scientific and driven by rules that did not previously exist. Even though there were certain aspects of the first part of the twentieth century that affected the condition of children, such as the world wars and their aftermaths, there are actual grounds to believe that their claim of changing childhoods has some truth to it.

Using what has already been discussed in the previous chapters, this chapter seeks to understand the gradual shift in the relationship between parents and children towards the end of the twentieth century. It aims to explain how the emergence of a comprehensive welfare state, changing family structures due to declining birth rates, more women going back to work, as well as the improved political and judicial position of the child have contributed to the enhanced awareness of children and their needs and how this again have resulted in a new paradigm of childrearing in the Western world. While parents some decades previously had been focused on parental authority and obedience of their children, we can observe that at the close of the century an overwhelming number of parents valued more democratic tendencies in their parenting, such as the values of co-determination and negotiation.

This chapter also deals with the growing globalization of the consumer market from the 1980s and how this affected what Norwegian parents read and heard about child-rearing methods. With the boost in globalization towards the end of the century, I believe that much of the culture regarding intensive parenting was imported from outside the country, especially from popular American childrearing books translated into Norwegian. As with most goods and services, advertisements also took on and used the new expectations of parenting to engage their target group and sell as much as possible. The phenomenon concerning childhood and parenthood has become more focused on by the media and advertisers than before, as well as professionals and politicians, and have resulted in a situation where the consumer society contributes to upholding the unobtainable image of being the perfect parent, and the pursuit of providing one's child with the perfect childhood.

This chapter seeks to understand how the aspects brought up in the previous chapters are connected to this new parenting trend. How is the decreasing number of children per family and the improved rights of children related to the growing tendency of intensive parenting, and as a continuation of this concept, concerted cultivation? The chapter argues that fewer children to care for and improved awareness of children's needs and rights have been some of the factors that have resulted in a new parenting paradigm described by many words, such as 'helicopter parenting,' 'anxious parenting,' 'curling parenting' – and 'intensive parenting.'

This chapter not only deals with the emergence of what Sharon Hays calls intensive parenting but also how consumer culture deals with this paradigm and reinforces the current paradigm. As most media scientists would expect, the mass media have embraced the new parenting paradigm. My argument here is that we can observe that the media have exploited this paradigm to sell magazines and books, but also advertisements targeted toward parents becoming anxious about their parenting skills. This has resulted in a new era where much of the discourse on children focuses on the parents themselves and how their actions can affect their children. The act of bringing up children is not as straightforward as it seems in earlier times and has become a lifestyle for many.

As a continuation of the concept of intensive parenting, Anette Lareau argues for the emergence of what she calls 'concerted cultivation'. According to Lareau, this concept represents the

growing interest in the cultural and emotional dimensions of family life and parenting.<sup>135</sup> <sup>136</sup> She argues that concerted cultivation is highly influenced by the class in which the family is a part of, claiming while that middle-class family shows a tendency for concerted cultivation, while working-class and poor families are more likely to allow ‘accomplishment of natural growth’. The argument I present in this chapter is that concerted cultivation emerged as a continuation of intensive parenting partly because of the highly material society of the late twentieth century.

### **From the Wish for an Obedient Child to the Focus on Negotiation**

American professor of sociology and research analyst Duane Alwin has been recognized for his research on the change in parental values in the United States throughout the twentieth century. He observed a change in these values between 1924 and 1978, where there was a gradual shift from the wish for obedience in children to the encouragement of greater individual independence and responsibility.<sup>137</sup> Alwin argues that the results of the survey used in his research show the changing patterns of family relationships and parents’ conceptions of desirable traits in their children in modern society.<sup>138</sup> He presents three possible explanations for this shift: 1) the many essential changes like the family that has happened over these decades, such as the already mentioned changes where women in more significant part chose to go back to work after giving birth, and the falling birth rates, 2) the changing features of “technology and social organization,” with the society becoming more complex as a part of modernization, where this consequently results in the demand for educational certification among professional occupations, and 3) changing characteristics of subgroups within society, suggesting that some social trends may in part happen due to disproportionate change among subgroups, such as religious groups in society.<sup>139</sup>

Norwegian researcher on childhood Marianne Gullestad argues that there are intriguing parallels between some of the existing theories on management and work-life and the change

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<sup>135</sup> Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods*.

<sup>136</sup> Irwin and Elley, “Concerted Cultivation?,” 480.

<sup>137</sup> Duane F. Alwin, “From Obedience to Autonomy,” 42.

<sup>138</sup> Duane F. Alwin, 45.

<sup>139</sup> Duane F. Alwin, 46–48.

of emphasis on obedience to being oneself in the upbringing of Norwegian children.<sup>140</sup> By reading a rich number of journals written by Norwegian people raised throughout the twentieth century, Gullestad observed a break between the parental values of the 1950s and the 1980s while reading the stories of Kari and Cecilia. Their stories were briefly presented in the introduction of this thesis. There is especially one passage from a journal written by Kari, who, between 1988 and 1989, reflects on both her childhood in the 1930s and her own daughter's upbringing in the 19650s:

But she could also be very obstinate, and I, being the one who noticed, took her to task, because it could be an inheritance from my father and very negative. Today I think I was wrong. She should have been more herself. I continued to make her obedient, the way I was raised myself. This is the way it is, but today one knows better. Nevertheless, I think that she got a good upbringing, with lots of love and tenderness.<sup>141</sup>

Here, Kari describes a clear break in parental values that happened in the few years between the upbringing of her daughter and at the time she wrote the journal. Where she had focused on obedience in the upbringing of her daughter, she admits that the knowledge she has about children and parental values at the time of writing the journal tells her that such a significant focus on creating an obedient child was wrong considering the 'new' knowledge on children and the 'right' parental values of the 1980s. Gullestad argues that there is a continuity between her childhood and her daughter's childhood. Still, a break happened after this, affected by new ideologies of parenting that are perceived as better than previous ideologies.<sup>142</sup>

Further, it is argued that this new ideology, or ideal, concerning parenting opposes the terms 'obedience' and 'being oneself.' Where being obedient used to be considered positive, and being obstinate or oneself something negative, this has been turned on its head in this new parenting ideal. Being obstinate is regarded as being inflexible or non-social. Even though being obstinate and being oneself seem to be two terms much alike, being obstinate was perceived as unfavorable in the 1950s, and being oneself was considered positive in the 1980s.

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<sup>140</sup> Gullestad, "From Obedience to Negotiation," 25.

<sup>141</sup> Gullestad, 30.

<sup>142</sup> Gullestad, 30.

Comparing the childhoods of Kari, who grew up in the 1930s, and Cecilia, who grew up in the 1970s, Gullestad argues that what they decide to talk about themselves in their respective journals is influenced by their different concerns at the time of writing the journals. While Kari makes it clear that her childhood was something entirely different than the contemporary childhood and strived to defend the beliefs of previous generations of young mothers, Cecilia is at a place in life where she is in the process of ‘creating herself’ as an individual.<sup>143</sup> In Cecilia’s case, the connection between finding oneself and independence is relatively straightforward, with independence being essential to finding herself.<sup>144</sup> The process of creating an identity had now become a process of *finding oneself instead of becoming oneself*. Cecilia’s case is, therefore, an excellent example of the heightened focus of individualism of the 1980s, which will be further discussed later in this chapter.

Cecilia’s story also shows how the changes that occurred within the Norwegian welfare state affected the childhoods of people born after the state gradually took on more responsibility for the upbringing of children, as her childhood was much more characterized by the presence of state institutions such as school and kindergarten than the childhood of Kari, characterized by her close relationship to her family.

On how these changes in the preferred parental values have affected the relationship between parents and children, Gullestad writes

While the notion of ‘obedience’ focuses on continuity and the open and legitimate transmission of values from parents to children, the notion of ‘being oneself’ emphasizes separateness and discontinuity. This means, in other words, that there are changes not only in the values transmitted, but also in the ways of transmitting them.<sup>145</sup>

She continues by arguing for an upbringing of children where parents do not force specific ideas and values onto their children but rather guide them to make their own choices through negotiations, although within certain limits. At the same time, it is argued that changes in family life are related to the modern welfare state, where children of the 1970s and 1980s and onwards were in much greater sense participants of different institutional settings – such as

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<sup>143</sup> Gullestad, 33.

<sup>144</sup> Gullestad, 33.

<sup>145</sup> Gullestad, 36–37.



kindergarten, organized leisure activities, and an educational system more thorough than previously – that was not a part of the upbringing of older generations. Even though the family should still be considered necessary in the childhood of those growing up in this period, children now had a much more comprehensive network and responsibilities in the institutional landscapes of the state than generations before.<sup>146</sup>

With a parenting culture that stress the importance of parenting values such as negotiation and supporting a child in their mission to ‘find themselves’ rather than obedience, the landscape of childhood in the 1980s looked much different from the one Kari describes in both her own and her daughter’s childhoods. This is one of the characteristics of the emerging new paradigm of childhood, as the opinions and wishes of the child weighted far more at this point than in earlier decades. These changes are in part because of the modernized welfare state with its extensive institutions that made it possible for children to both be formed by their family and the institutions they are members of, such as kindergarten, school, and after-school leisure activities. With this new paradigm of childhood, we will observe in this chapter a tendency of parents to over-invest time, money, and energy into the upbringing of their children, with the wish for them to find themselves and their place in society. Not only that but they wish for their children to succeed in all aspects of their lives.

### **The Concepts of Intensive Parenting and Concerted Cultivation**

In 1996, Sharon Hays coined the term ‘intensive mothering’ in her book, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*. Here, she claims that with time during the twentieth century, there has been a contradiction in a society where women have become victims of the expectations of being both a part of the work-life and a mother. It seems that it is no longer enough for women to be a mother and an employee, but at the same time, they must create the best possible environment for their vulnerable children to thrive in. Hays argues that the life of work and parenting and being responsible for the family’s children are not naturally compatible and that women, or mothers, are stuck in this contradiction. She also notes that even though the act of child-rearing has historically been underprioritized, towards the close of the century, there was an overwhelmingly amount of focus on how families, and especially mothers, deal

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<sup>146</sup> Gullestad, 36.

with being a family relying on two incomes and on top of that being responsible for raising children.<sup>147</sup>

For Hays, it was only natural to focus on the mother in this context, as women used to have a much more significant part in the upbringing of their children than men. She believed that women experienced the contradictions at a much higher level than their partners, as society traditionally has expected much more from women than men when it comes to taking care of children. According to Hays, this must be considered problematic, as it puts enormous amounts of pressure on women who decide to work at the same time as raising their children, and the society contributes to the creation of an unrealistic idea of what should be considered the right way of parenting.<sup>148</sup> Over time during the second part of the twentieth century, there has been a cultural change when it comes to child-rearing, where mothers are expected to both be able to work and devote much more of their time to their children. However, I believe that it is still important to remember the fathers who have also been affected by the paradigm of intensive parenting, feeling the pressure of societal expectations on their own shoulders as well.

At the same time, intensive parenting is described as “child centered, expert guided, emotionally absorbing, labor intensive and financially expensive” method of child-rearing, where the child or children in question receive much more attention than what has been considered ‘normal’ previously.<sup>149</sup> Intensive parenting requires parents to spend much more time, energy, and money on being the best possible parent than what has historically been considered necessary, in order to raise children in a manner that hopefully provides them with the right skills to become the best versions of themselves. This is a highly deterministic belief, where small and sometimes irrelevant actions of parents are considered to be defining for the child and their future behaviors.

As will be discussed later in this chapter, the solution society provides for children reaching their full potential, is characterized by being developed by experts and a professionalization of the act of child-rearing within different fields connected to childhood development, such as psychologists, pediatricians, and pedagogics. Even though experts on child-rearing have existed for centuries and cannot be considered a new phenomenon in the history of child-

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<sup>147</sup> Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, 2–6.

<sup>148</sup> Hays, 2–6.

<sup>149</sup> Hays, 8.

rearing, the argument here is that the advice provided by experts towards the end of the twentieth century is much different from advice provided by experts only a few decades earlier.<sup>150</sup> It becomes clear that the parent has become the target of the massive amount of advice in a distinctive way.<sup>151</sup>

The paradigm of intensive parenting contributes to the increased expectations that meet parents, where they are believed to have a parenting style where the child's needs are in the center and guided by the right advice. Hays writes that

The model of intensive mothering tells us that children are innocent and priceless, that their rearing should be carried out primarily by individual mothers and that it should be centered on children's needs, with methods that are informed by experts, labor-intensive, and costly.<sup>152</sup>

Hays's presentation of the culture surrounding intensive parenting mainly focuses on the models of parenting that have been developed in the West, represented by the white middle-class notions of appropriate childrearing. This is because the white middle class has been the dominant and most visible group throughout the last centuries. She also argues that this results in people not fitting into the middle-class feeling that their parenting will not hold up compared to the expectations of other classes of society.<sup>153</sup>

In the paradigm of intensive parenting, children are conceptualized as vulnerable beings lacking agency, and therefore in need of the protection and care of their parents. They need constant attention and are rarely perceived as capable of fully taking care of themselves. This fits with the perception described in the previous chapter, of children being a vulnerable group in a world created for adults and therefore also a group in need of better protection by law. They are perceived as in need of the help of experts to thrive best in their environment, and it is often deemed necessary to provide children with extensive care to make sure they are all right. Hays writes that "the ideas are certainly not followed in practice by every mother, but

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<sup>150</sup> Lee et al., *Lee, E. Bristow, J. Faircloth, C. and Macvarish, J. 2014 Parenting Culture Studies Basingstoke and New York*, 51.

<sup>151</sup> Lee et al., 51.

<sup>152</sup> Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, 21.

<sup>153</sup> Hays, 21.

they are, implicitly or explicitly, understood as the *proper* approach to the raising of a child by the majority of mothers.”<sup>154</sup>

Even though the practices of intensive parenting are not followed by every parent, the argument here is that it is so established in the society that parents who do not follow this parenting style feel it on their bodies that they are not doing parenting in the ‘right’ way that the society has established. This again contributes to growing anxiety where some parents who do not necessarily follow the ‘rules’ of the new paradigm become unsure of their own parenting skills, which again makes some parents more exposed to the solutions that experts and professionals on children sell to insecure parents. The paradigm of intensive parenting contributes to an unrealistic belief of what is necessary to raise a child, and this perception is further heightened by the discourse on parenting that is held through different media.

When discussing the paradigm of intensive parenting, it is important to ask how this paradigm had the possibility to establish itself. The growing scientification of childhood previously discussed has played an important role in the emergence of the new paradigm, as the impression of the child and its childhood as something important for the later development of the child has provided new anxiety concerning their conditions. This scientification contributes to child-rearing not looking as straightforward as it used to be, and further complicated the role of the parents, who now had to be much more aware of the feelings and perspectives of their child. Furthermore, it has sparked, along with the improved legal status of the child, a professionalization of child-rearing, where experts on childhood matters have gained more ground in the discourse on children’s needs. The value of the traditional advice of grandparents and other adult members of the family is not as significant anymore, as parents prefer to rather listen to advice based on scientific research. Parenting advice provided by the older generations is in the perspective of intensive parenting no longer considered as valuable as it used to be, and is often outdated by the current generation of parents of younger children.

There are many problematic aspects of intensive parenting that we must be aware of and address; it is financially expensive, and parents from low income-families report that they often feel that they do not have the economic stability that is considered necessary to create a good childhood for their young ones. One of the most challenging parts of the economic aspect is

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<sup>154</sup> Hays, 9.

the belief amongst many parents that children should be provided with one or more after-school activities so that they are able to let their creative, academic, or athletic sides blossom and thrive. This is one of the reasons intensive parenting is mainly considered a phenomenon linked to the middle and higher classes of society, as it excludes low-income families who cannot provide their children with such activities due to the costs. It is also time-consuming, and many parents report that they do not feel they have the time to focus on their children and work simultaneously. One of the contradictions of intensive parenting that Hays deals with is the fact that parents of this paradigm are expected to spend much more time with their children than previous generations, even though women at the same time are expected to work at the same time as raising children.

These aspects of intensive parenting are some of the reasons why it is argued that this paradigm conveys a picture of the perfect parents that does not correlate with the reality of many. These expectations are believed to be obtained from different parts of society, but the role of the media is significant in creating the picture of perfect parenting. Not only is there a vast amount of literature written by the many different experts on child-rearing, both in books and as articles in magazines and academic journals, but the marketing of certain products contributes to the continuation of this culture, such as toys, clothes, and different ‘necessary’ baby products. It seems that marketers have realized that parents anxious due to the expectations of society are a group that is vulnerable to the marketing of goods and services targeted towards both themselves and their children.

With the growing focus on the consumption of goods and services, and the desperate need of parents to provide their children with the right equipment in order to reach their full potential and find themselves, I argue that Anette Lareau’s concept of concerted cultivation, presented in *Unequal Childhoods*, is a continuation of Hays’ term intensive parenting.<sup>155</sup> As both concepts deal with the growing and eventually unobtainable expectations that society has created to the abilities of parents and their use of resources in their child-rearing methods, Lareau goes a step further than Hays in the focus on the role of the consumer society.

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<sup>155</sup> Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods*.

## Parents (Mothers) and Children as Consumers

As with most other Western countries, Norway experienced a growing economy after the Second World War, and the housewife era saw the introduction of many household appliances that are now taken for granted in the everyday lives of most Norwegians, such as the refrigerator and the washing machine, to name just a few. To claim that consumer society and the globalization of markets towards the close of the century was something entirely new would be wrong, as both these concepts have existed for centuries. But massive and essential changes were happening within the late-twentieth-century consumer culture.<sup>156</sup> These changes were partly due to the technological advances that contributed to a world that was slowly becoming more globalized than ever before.<sup>157</sup>

New technologies such as television and the early stages of the Internet made the distance between countries and cultures easier to cross. Some theorists have argued that this process has contributed to a world that looks much the same in some way by becoming more westernized and standardized.<sup>158</sup> Children in countries all over the world consume many of the same TV programs and toys and use the same slang and phrases, making childhoods across the globe more uniform. With the growing wealth in society, families now had the economy to invest in different consumer goods, such as television and other media. It is also possible to observe a growing consumption of goods such as clothing, music, toys, cosmetics, and more. Consequently, the production and sale of consumer goods increased, and with the more globalized economy, many of the goods sold and purchased in Norway were imported from other markets such as the United States, England, and other European and non-European countries.<sup>159</sup>

At the same time as we can observe the rise of intensive parenting alongside a growing awareness of children's position in society and their needs, we can also follow a culture of growing awareness of parents and children as consumers in a world characterized by a rise of globalization and a consumer culture that was becoming more advanced than before. Where children had previously been almost invisible in different media theories, the debates

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<sup>156</sup> Lee, *Consumer Culture Reborn*.

<sup>157</sup> Cross and Smits, "Japan, the U.S. and the Globalization of Children's Consumer Culture."

<sup>158</sup> Fosshagen, "globalisering."

<sup>159</sup> Cross and Smits, "Japan, the U.S. and the Globalization of Children's Consumer Culture," 873–75.

concerning the role of media in children's lives started to occur, as well as the focus on children as active participants in consumer society.<sup>160 161</sup>

With the social construction of childhood as it was towards the end of the twentieth century, with children being pictured as inherently good and innocent and in need of protection, the media was portrayed as something that would corrupt this innocence.<sup>162</sup> It was generally agreed that parents should have the responsibility of making sure that their children were protected against the negative forces and sides of marketing and consumer culture, but children were still affected by the growing consumption of goods in society.

The study of the cultural process of consumption is a field that only gained legitimacy towards the end of the twentieth century, where it before was highly fragmented and considered niche to other fields. While consumption for some reasons previously has been considered either good or bad, this thesis follows the tradition of consumption theory argued for by cultural studies, anthropological research, and sociology. This perspective argues that consumption is an active, creative, and authentic practice, and has been argued for from the 1970s and after. This perspective shifts the emphasis from the production of desire by producers and advertisers to consumers themselves. The history of consumption also provides knowledge on the growth of Western individualism, which will be discussed later in this chapter.<sup>163</sup> The reason for this is the fact that this perspective shifted the emphasis from the production of desire by producers and advertisers to consumers themselves. Trentmann writes that

For the historical study of consumption, the cultural turn involved a dramatic shift in perspective and substance. The focus turned from the producer and retailer to the end-user, and, with it, from the point of purchase to what people did with things once they had them. The anthropological interest in symbolic meaning and ritual practices also swept aside an older, hierarchical order of consumption, so central to social investigations and welfare policies, which contrasted 'basic needs' with higher, more experimental wants and desires.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Cook, "Consumer Culture, Children's."

<sup>161</sup> Martens, Southerton, and Scott, "Bringing Children (and Parents) into the Sociology of Consumption."

<sup>162</sup> Langer, "Commodified Enchantment."

<sup>163</sup> McCracken, "The History of Consumption," 145.

<sup>164</sup> Trentmann, *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption*, 12.

Not only were children almost entirely forgotten in the field of consumer theory, but women were not entirely recognized as consumers until the second part of the twentieth century. One of the primary reasons for this, is the fact that the majority of women until the 1970s and 1980s were stay-at-home mothers and wives and did therefore not have their own income. As more and more women started to go back to work after having children, they would become more recognized as consumers amongst theorists on consumerism. The reality is that women and children are important members of the culture of consumerism, and especially towards the close of the twentieth century.

Research on the consumption of children began to grow at a fast rate during the 1990s, when several historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and researchers of other relevant fields started to focus on the role of children in commercial life.<sup>165</sup> Langer writes that “Children provided a particularly profitable ‘frontier’ for market expansion, both as ‘sites of consumption’ and as independent consumers. The two are inextricably connected in that spending on and for children is either done or funded by parents.”<sup>166</sup> The realization double role of the child in consumer culture as both something to spend money on and an individual with the ability to spend money itself, would prove to be a profitable focus for advertisers. This can be explained due to the need of the parents to clothe, feed and entertain their children, while the child at the same time was an autonomous individual with its own wants and desires for various consumer goods.

Even though the marketing of goods and services towards the child itself is not a new phenomenon, it is argued that this activity now occurs on a scale that has never existed previously, because of media and sites of consumption that did not exist before.<sup>167</sup> The increased affordability of goods and services for an average household towards the end of the twentieth century has contributed to the heightened focus on children in the everyday lives of people in society. While consumer culture is something that has existed for a long time and is therefore not something that can be considered unique to the 1980s, this decade saw a dramatic change in the way people consume goods and services. Lee observes that “it appears to me that the influence of the commodity and its power to touch so many discrete areas of our social life

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<sup>165</sup> Cook, “Consumer Culture, Children’s,” 220.

<sup>166</sup> Langer, “Commodified Enchantment,” 69.

<sup>167</sup> Buckingham, “SELLING CHILDHOOD?,” 15.



had, by the mid-1980s, reached a hitherto unparalleled intensity”.<sup>168</sup> According to Lee, the difference between the consumer culture of previous periods of history and the 1980s, is the impression that the culture of the 1980s reached far beyond anything that consumer culture had ever been able to reach previously.

### **Consuming Literature Written by the Experts**

With the growing professionalization of childhood, the amount of literature on child-rearing written by ‘experts’ in the field has skyrocketed. Books on parenting styles and methods were not an entirely new phenomenon, as there exist books on childrearing from earlier eras, and especially from the 1800s, but there has developed a new industry targeted especially towards parents. As Christina Hardyment notes

A vast industry of childcare advice has arisen. Bookshop shelves groan under the weight of warring theories about the best way to bring up a baby, guides for fathers, grandmothers and even aunts ...

Information overload is turning parenthood into a nightmare of anxiety and stress.<sup>169</sup>

As mentioned in the first chapter, we can observe a growing number of publications on child-rearing targeted towards parents as early as the 1940s. However, there was a steady increase in the number of books published on children and parenting after this, and during the 1990s, the number of books on this matter passed 12 500 publications, according to the Norwegian National online database on books. This shows that there were many parents willing to read publications on child-rearing in order to learn more about how they could best bring up their children, as it is only natural to believe that the enormous number of publications on parenting meant that there existed an audience willing to buy the books published.

The themes of the literature on child-rearing from the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s are primarily focused on how parents can communicate with their children and make sure that they have what they need to grow up happily. The themes of these books follow the change of parenting values already mentioned, where parents of the 1970s and 1980s wish to create a childhood for

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<sup>168</sup> Lee, *Consumer Culture Reborn*, 11.

<sup>169</sup> Hardyment, *Dream Babies*, 283.

their children that is characterized as one based on negotiations and helping the child find themselves, rather than on obedience and creating the child in the eyes of the parents.

One of the most famous books on children and child-rearing published on the important task of child-rearing was Dr. Benjamin Spock's 1946 publication *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*, which was translated into several languages, went through seven editions, and sold more than fifty million copies. The book was translated into Norwegian with the title *Barnet: sunn fornuft i barnestell og oppdragelse* and was one of the most influential books on child-rearing practices targeted towards parents for decades.<sup>170</sup> Most of the book deals with some of the most basic practices in raising children, such as giving advice on nutrition, physical growth, sickness, and more. However, the book also sought to make it clear to insecure parents that they should trust their instincts and included some advice on the psychological development of children.<sup>171</sup>

On the influence of Spock's books on child-rearing, Paula Fass writes that "no single childrearing authority ever completely defined the horizons of childcare, although Benjamin Spock probably came closest. And while children raised under his aegis were unlikely to remember the experience, their mothers did", and continues by arguing that part of Spock's appeal was that his advice was so simple and lowkey.<sup>172</sup> With his background as a pediatrician with training in child psychiatry, Spock's advice on child-rearing were read eagerly by many mothers all over the world. Even though there existed other experts on child-rearing who had their work published, Spock is by far the one who is most remembered for the influence his books had on mothers.

Fass argues that even though there existed several other books on child-rearing, Spock's *Book on Baby and Child Care* distinguished itself from other manuals at the time, with the focus on the psychological development of the child. Even though the part on psychological development is brief compared to the size of the book, it is argued that it was relatively new to include this part in a child-rearing manual, as other manuals at that time mostly focused on the practical aspects of being a parent.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Fass, *The End of American Childhood*, 183.

<sup>171</sup> Spock, *Barnet*.

<sup>172</sup> Fass, *The End of American Childhood*, 184.

<sup>173</sup> Spock, *Barnet*. Preface in the Norwegian edition.

As the decades progressed, it became more and more natural to include the psychological aspects of childhood in the literature on parenting. Examples of other publications of child-rearing manuals that in greater part focused on the psychological needs of the child are Dr. Ross Campbell's *How to Really Love Your Teenager* and Muriel James' *Transactional Analysis for Moms and Dads. What do you do with them now that you've got them?*<sup>174 175</sup> Both these books were translated into Norwegian, and consequently reached a Norwegian audience with their heightened focus on the communication between parents and children, and the psychological aspects of parental responsibility.

In 1970, the book *Parent Effectiveness Training* by Thomas Gordon was published in the United States, and seven years later it was published in Norway, with a much different title; *Skal vi snakke om det? Om å lytte aktivt, snakke ærlig, løse konflikter – og få kontakt*, which can be translated back to English with the title “Should we talk about it? On listening actively, speak the truth, solve conflicts – and get in touch”. The reason why the Norwegian translation got such a different title compared to the original publication, was based on feedback concerned that the original title could create negative reactions amongst people.<sup>176</sup> The reason for this feedback is not mentioned, but it is possible that the reactions were in part due to the perceived harshness of the term *effectiveness training*. However, this book went even longer to focus on the psychological aspects of child-rearing, with emphasis on learning parents to be tolerable in their communication with children.

Gordon believes that parents should be presented with what he calls “Parents Effectiveness Training” (P.E.T), a program he developed during the 1960s as a course on parenthood for insecure and untrained parents. With this, Gordon presents a belief that parents are in need of help from experts in order to be able to develop the skills necessary to create a thriving environment for their children. P.E.T came to be a training program for parents that turned out to be widely popular almost immediately after Gordon taught his first class in 1962. Since then, the program has become a worldwide phenomenon and is typically considered to be the first proper parenting course in Western contemporary history.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Campbell, *Er du fortsatt glad i meg?*

<sup>175</sup> James, *Hva kan vi gjøre for ungene våre?*

<sup>176</sup> Gordon, *Skal vi snakke om det?*

<sup>177</sup> “2022 - Celebrating 60 Years of the Gordon Model! - Gordon Training International.”

## **The Rise of Cathedrals of Consumption**

With the social construction of childhood as it was towards the end of the twentieth century, the media was portrayed as something that would corrupt this innocence. Children were pictured as inherently good beings in need of the protection of adults, and there was a growing belief that the uncontrollable nature of medias such as the television and what they were able to communicate through various shows and advertisements would be negative for children.<sup>178</sup> During the first era of the television, parents were not able to control what was shown on screen, and it was a general acceptance in society that parents should have the responsibility of making sure that their children were protected against the negative forces and sides of marketing and consumer culture. However, children were still affected by the growing consumption of goods in society through mediazation.

For a long time, children were forgotten in the field of media and consumer research.<sup>179</sup> Serious research on the consumption by children only began to grow at a fast rate during the 1990s, when a number of historians, sociologists, anthropologists and researchers of other relevant fields started to focus on the role of children in commercial life.<sup>180</sup> Even though the marketing of goods and services towards the child itself is not a new phenomenon, it is argued that this activity from the middle of the twentieth century happened on a scale that have never existed previously, through medias that did not exist before.<sup>181</sup> Therefore, many adults were concerned about how children could be affected by the forces of the capitalist market that acted through medias and following this there were growing focus on children in theoretical fields.

As mentioned, great technological advances were happening within Western societies, with the introduction of the TV included, but also the introduction of the Internet into society, connecting the many corners of the world in a way that had never been possible before. The second half of the twentieth century also saw a growing consumption amongst highly industrialized societies, such as Norway.<sup>182</sup> This was both a growth in consumer goods for the public in general, but also a growth in the types of consumer goods offered to children. On the development of the toy industry, most historians claim that this industry experienced an

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<sup>178</sup> Buckingham, "SELLING CHILDHOOD?," 15–16.

<sup>179</sup> Cook, "Consumer Culture, Children's."

<sup>180</sup> Cook, 220.

<sup>181</sup> Buckingham, "SELLING CHILDHOOD?," 15.

<sup>182</sup> Langer, "Commodified Enchantment," 69–70.

enormous growth from the 1950s and onwards, mostly due to how the production companies started to advertise their products through medias such as television. Another important factor was the change in a tradition of passing down toys from one child to another, or even one generation to another, to the concept Langer terms ‘commoditoys’. These commoditoys are

characterized by their capacity to stimulate rather than satisfy longing, their short but intense ‘shelf life’ as objects of desire, and their promotion through television cartoons and films which double as ‘children’s entertainment’.<sup>183</sup>

The possibilities that the television offered, made it sure that children’s toys became something that children became even more aware of, as televisions and magazines provided companies with endless possibilities of advertisement.

As with most other Western countries, Norway experienced a growing economy after the second world war, and the housewife era saw the introduction of many household appliances that are now taken for granted in the everyday lives of most Norwegians, such as the fridge. To claim that consumer society and the globalization of markets towards the close of the century was something entirely new would be wrong, as both these concepts have existed for centuries. But it is clear that huge and important changes were happening within the consumer culture in the late twentieth century, and these changes were partly due to the technological advances that contributed to a world that was slowly becoming more globalized than ever before.

The increased affordability of goods and services for an average household towards the end of the century, in part due to the heightened tendency of two-income households as discussed in the first chapter, have contributed to the heightened focus on children in the everyday lives of people in society. While consumer culture is something that has existed for a long time and is therefore not something that can be considered unique to the 1980s, this decade saw a dramatic change in the way people consume goods and services. Lee argues that “it appears to me that the influence of the commodity and its power to touch so many discrete areas of our social life had, by the mid-1980s, reached a hitherto unparalleled intensity.”<sup>184</sup> He argues that in the centre of social, economic, technological and even international changes of the 1980s, was

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<sup>183</sup> Langer, 70.

<sup>184</sup> Lee, *Consumer Culture Reborn*, 11.

consumerism. Lee is with this one of many theorists within the field of consumption that believes in its enormous influence in every sphere of both public and private matters.

George Ritzer argues that the reason in the enormous growth in consumption during the second part of the twentieth century, is that the means of consumption have been revolutionized. By this, Ritzer argues that technological advancements creating new ways in which goods are consumed have contributed to an enormous change in consumption patterns. The consumption of goods has been revolutionized in a way that have created a new *need* for consumer goods, as well as provided new means for consumption that have never existed in such a scale previously.<sup>185</sup>

Ritzer argues for the emergence of what he calls ‘cathedrals of consumption’ during the twentieth century. These cathedrals are described as the meeting point between the consumer and the products ready to be consumed. Typical examples of cathedrals of consumption are shopping malls, department stores, and theme parks especially targeted towards children and their families.<sup>186</sup> Disney world is used as one of the primary examples here, as a space where both parents and children as consumers are met with “advanced technology for consumption rather than production, the commercialization of ‘fun’, and the offer of a safety valve where people can expend their energies without threatening society.”<sup>187</sup>

While the extreme commercialization of almost every aspect of life is generally associated with modern American culture, there are no doubts that the cathedrals of consumption have affected Norwegian society and consumption just as much. One example of the commercialization of family life and activities in Norway is the gradual expansion of the famous Norwegian zoo situated in Kristiansand that first opened its doors in 1966. While the park originally only offered a meeting with animals, the park saw thorough commercialization of its areas from the beginning of the 1990s. Wishing to reach more families and accumulate a steady flow of visitors, the park expanded to spaces based on famous stories from Norwegian children’s literature, such as the recreation of a village in a book written by well-known Norwegian writer Torbjørn Egner, filled up with the characters from his story about three robbers. Later, the zoo would also have evening shows targeted especially toward children’s families and expanded to

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<sup>185</sup> Ritzer, *Enchanting a Disenchanted World*, 2.

<sup>186</sup> Ritzer, 2–3.

<sup>187</sup> Ritzer, 3.

become a family park. However, the park and other theme parks have been criticized for being overly expensive and exclusive to low-income families. This is a good example of one cathedral of consumption in Norwegian contemporary culture and is also a witness to the growing awareness of families as consumers of goods and services.

Further, Ritzer argues that in order for this ‘hyper-consumption’ of various things, where consumer goods have to be sold and consumed at a fast pace, the process of consumption has to be rationalized. The process of rationalization consists of the efforts to “enchant disenchanted worlds of consumption; to make nothing seem like something.”<sup>188</sup> Ritzer follows the argument that in a world where things such as religion and a sense of community is falling, many people seem to look for meaning in material goods. It is a part of the social-psychological processes of humans to try to find meaning in things that are originally lacking meaning.<sup>189</sup> With this, it is logical to think that the process of rationalization and the enchantment of disenchanted things have reached the world of parents and children as well, as most families of the late twentieth century were drawn into the world of consumption through various medias.

this thesis follows the tradition of consumption theory argued for by cultural studies, anthropological research, and sociology. This perspective argues that consumption is an active, creative, and authentic practice, and has been argued for from the 1970s and after. This perspective shifts the emphasis from the production of desire by producers and advertisers to consumers themselves. The history of consumption also provide knowledge on the growth of Western individualism, that will be discussed later in this chapter.<sup>190</sup> The reason for this, is the fact that this perspective shifted the emphasis from the production of desire by producers and advertisers to consumers themselves. Trentmann writes that

For the historical study of consumption, the cultural turn involved a dramatic shift in perspective and substance. The focus turned from the producer and retailer to the end-user, and, with it, from the point of purchase to what people did with things once they had them. The anthropological interest in symbolic meaning and ritual practices also swept aside an older, hierarchical order of consumption, so

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<sup>188</sup> Ritzer, Stepnisky, and Lemich, “The ‘Magical’ World of Consumption,” 121.

<sup>189</sup> Ritzer, Stepnisky, and Lemich, 122.

<sup>190</sup> McCracken, “The History of Consumption,” 145.

central to social investigations and welfare policies, which contrasted ‘basic needs’ with higher, more experimental wants and desires.<sup>191</sup>

At the same time as we can observe the rise of intensive parenting and concerted cultivation alongside a growing awareness of children’s position in society and their needs, we can also observe a culture of growing awareness of parents and children as consumers in a world characterized by a rise of globalization and a consumer culture that was becoming more advanced than before. Where children had previously been almost invisible in different media theories, the debates concerning the role of medias in children’s lives started to occur, as well as the focus on children as active participants in consumer society.

### **The Downsides of Childhood Reconstructed as Something to be Consumed**

In the book *Sold Separately: Parents and Children in Consumer Culture*, Ellen Seiter writes in the introductory chapter that

The research for this book began during my first pregnancy, when I found, pushed through my mail slot every day, free magazines filled with cheerful advice and tempting offers for products that promised to cure illness, to provide good nutrition, to banish children’s tears, and to turn my soon-to-be-born child into a person as clever as could be.<sup>192</sup>

Seiter writes that as she became pregnant with her first child, she became fully aware of how intense the market for children’s products was, and on top of that, the market targeted specifically towards parents. It was not before she was about to have her own child that she started to listen attentively to advertisements on the radio or television and give her full attention to whatever message was conveyed through different advertisements for all types of products such as diapers, shampoos, foods and even cars.<sup>193</sup> As a media expert herself, she is intrigued by the way the media portrays the act of parenting as something giving emotional fulfillment, with advertisements promising feelings such as joy, intimacy, and gratitude. However, the act of mothering, portrayed as the most fulfilling experience in the world, is

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<sup>191</sup> Trentmann, *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption*, 12.

<sup>192</sup> Seiter, *Sold Separately*, 1.

<sup>193</sup> Seiter, 1.



according to the advertisements only perceived as possible as long as you have the right equipment.<sup>194</sup>

One can argue that the concepts of intensive parenting and concerted cultivation, and the massive consumer culture that emerged during the 1980s are correlated to each other, where the consumer culture that existed towards the end of the twentieth century magnified the intensive parenting culture. With the consumer culture of the 1980s being as enormous as it was, marketers saw the opportunity to use this anxiety in order to sell goods and services, as Seiter observes in her book. The world saw immense growth in the global market, with mass consumption of all types of goods, such as clothes, literature and magazines, toys, beauty products, and much more. This is considered a natural consequence of the globalization of markets that happened at this time in history, where goods from one part of the world suddenly became much more available on the other end of the globe.

As discussed previously in this chapter, the phenomenons of intensive parenting and concerted cultivation and all their consequences contribute to the act of child-rearing having become something much more time-demanding, emotionally draining, and economically straining than what it has usually been viewed as in earlier times of history. It puts a lot of pressure on parents wishing to live up to the ideals of parenting as perceived through intensive parenting, consequently resulting in a group of parents developing anxieties in their wish to ‘do parenting right’. The consumer culture of the late twentieth century further heighten the belief that in order to do parenting right, not only is providing the child with emotional care and protection important, but also the purchasing of the right type of consumer products often specifically targeted towards parents and children.

This growing commercialization of childhood that happened towards the close of the century is problematic for several reasons. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the phenomenon contributes to putting a price on the child-rearing practices that have emerged as the dominating ideal in Western contemporary society, resulting in parents from low-income families feeling that they cannot afford giving their children the upbringing they deserve.<sup>195</sup> By doing this, the parenting ideals of intensive parenting and concerted cultivation are restricted to only include

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<sup>194</sup> Seiter, 1–2.

<sup>195</sup> Romagnoli and Wall, “I Know I’m a Good Mom.”

the middle and upper classes of society. Seiter further observed the downside of the childhood now characterized by a growing number of consumer goods when she volunteered in a therapeutic nursery for working-class children from homes where social workers had classified the children as at risk for abuse or neglect:

I repeatedly observed ways that toys and media experiences did indeed help children to talk and to learn basic concepts and divert them from aggressive behavior. But I also recognized, as did the teachers there, what a tremendous struggle it is for working-class parents to translate the child-centered pedagogy's emphasis on expression, freedom of movement, and exploration into the more confined, crowded spaces and circumstances – and the limited budgets – of working-class family life.

When good parenting is defined as the provision of an appropriate environment for child development, class oppression expresses itself in children's everyday lives through deprivation, through the absence of material goods.<sup>196</sup>

Seiter is not the only person who have expressed her reaction to the changing expectations on consumption in the act of child-rearing, and concerns regarding children from low-income families. In a 1991 article in the *New York Times*, Stephanie Strom wrote an article on how the culture of consumption have changed the way parents buy things for their children:

Clear a shelf in the bathroom – Junior now has his own shampoo, after-bath splash and mouthwash (...) Now competing for shelf space are a slew of new products from neon-colored toothbrushes to oat flour talc and to bubble bath in a Miss Piggy bottle.<sup>197</sup>

The argument here is that big companies have exploited the growing awareness of children and the parents' wishes for children to have what they need in order to reach their full potential. While whole families used to share shampoos only a few decades earlier, it was now natural for parents to supply their children with their very own shampoos, preferably one with a picture of their favorite cartoon character. Strom is fascinated by how big production companies with the help of advertisement through children's television have contributed to the creation of a new type of consumer that had previously been forgotten by industries: the child. Most importantly, it seems that parents are the main mediators between children and their

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<sup>196</sup> Seiter, *Sold Separately*, 2–3.

<sup>197</sup> Strom, "Creating the Well-Groomed Child."

consumption and are often as invested in the market targeted towards children as the children themselves. Langer writes that

What was new, however, was the accelerating speed of the fashion cycles to which children's play was bound, the pervasiveness of the product universe into which children were drawn, and the magnitude of the corporate assault through which 'childhood' was reconstructed as something to be consumed.<sup>198</sup>

Not only does this extreme focus on the fast consumption of goods exclude low-income families from participating in the new paradigm on childhood, the consumption of goods and services is also considered an important aspect of the individualization process of the child. This process is a part of the growing importance of self-realization rather than obedience in both the literature concerning child-rearing and the child-rearing ideal towards the end of the century, and on top of that also an important part of the consumer culture that emerged at the end of the twentieth century. The process of a society going from collectivity to a greater focus on the individuals is by many researchers considered an important characteristic of modern society.<sup>199</sup>

Norwegian author, Kari Blom, writes that "The act of child-rearing is characterized by the interaction between the educators of the child, the child itself, and the values and material structures of society."<sup>200</sup> It is clear that the modernization process of a heightened focus on individuality have affected the ideals of child-rearing as well, which is something we can also observe in the growing focus on children in advertisements and the expansion of the industries targeted especially towards children. With a wider range of options for children of both clothes, toys, and leisure activities, it is argued that it has become easier for children to develop their own individuality than before. In a society with a wider range of professions and educational opportunities than before, it also becomes important for both the child and the parents investing time and money in their education, for the child to 'find themselves' and choose the right path early on.

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<sup>198</sup> Langer, "Commodified Enchantment," 69.

<sup>199</sup> Beck, *Individualization*.

<sup>200</sup> «Oppdragelse skjer alltid i et samspill mellom barnets oppdragere, barnet selv og samfunnets verdier og materielle strukturer» (my own translation) Blom, *Norsk barndom gjennom 150 år*, 93.

## Conclusion

One of the goals I set for this thesis was to identify the changes in parental values that occurred both in Norway and internationally from the 1970s onwards, resulting in a new child-rearing paradigm towards the close of the century that in much greater part than before valued negotiation, the guidance of children, and their process of becoming oneself. This was in stark contrast to earlier parental values, where children were considered the property of their parents, subject to a wish for children to be ‘seen but not heard.’

The mission to find out what changes in Norwegian society have contributed to the alteration of contemporary parental values, took me on a journey that started with the emergence of the Norwegian welfare state after the Second World War. As the first chapter illustrates, the creation of the welfare state, along with changing values and norms in society contributed to a shift in the relationship between parents and children. As it became more normalized for women to attend higher education and for mothers to go back to paid wage labor after having children, so did the responsibility the welfare state took in the lives of children.

Responding to the changing currents in society, the Norwegian welfare state contributed by starting the process of building more kindergartens all over the country from the middle of the 1970s, as well as expanding the number of years with mandatory schooling for all school children. With a growing number of mothers choosing to combine family life and paid wage labor, the average child began spending an increasing amount of time in kindergarten and at school. We can also observe that the school gradually took on more responsibilities of teaching children things they often would learn at home, such as basic cooking skills. With this, the responsibility of the upbringing of children did not belong to the family alone.

At the same time, we can observe the growing awareness of children in the political and legal discourses of Western societies, the state of Norway included. Also, this development was affected in part because of the Second World War, forcing adults to realize the fragile legal position of the child, in lack of the same democratic rights as adults. While the Human Rights Declaration was introduced in 1948, politicians and lawmakers saw the need to articulate the rights of the child in its own document. After a long process involving several papers, the

Convention on the Rights of the Child was finally introduced as an official UN document in 1989.

Parallel to this, the need to clearly define and articulate the child's right to protection in Norway resulted in a new children's law of 1981 that in greater part demanded responsibility from the parents and the family of the child. While previous Norwegian children's laws talked about 'parental rights,' the new children's law expected more from parents. The new law distanced itself from the old thoughts of children as the property of the parents, by replacing the term 'parental right' with 'parental responsibility.' This underlined the importance of guidance rather than creating an obedient child.

As we see through the stories told by Kari and Cecilia, the parental values of Norwegian society gradually changed during the second part of the twentieth century, continually adapting to the culture in which they existed. From Kari's wish for an obedient daughter in the 1950s to the childhood of Cecilia there were major changes in parental values. Cecilia did not have an upbringing affected by a parental wish for obedience, but rather the experience of her parents doing their best by guiding her in important matters. In Cecilia's case, her childhood was characterized by the need of *finding oneself*.

As the thesis shows, the notion of *finding oneself* is closely associated with the concept of individualization, and the parental values that formed Cecilia's childhood were greatly affected by this notion. This brings me to my second goal of this thesis, namely identifying the emergence of consumer culture of the late twentieth century that contributed to the emergence of the concepts of intensive parenting and concerted cultivation.

The concept of intensive parenting is recognized by a child-centered parenting ideal in which the parent is aware of the perceived importance of advancing the individuality of the child. In a consumer culture where buying goods is essential to the individualization process, the influence of the commodity and its ability to touch almost all areas of our social lives has an unparalleled intensity. This further heightened the belief that in order to do parenting right, not only is providing the child with emotional care and protection important, but also purchasing the right type of products of utmost importance.

When Kari recollected the way she brought up her daughter, she expresses regret in her parenting values claiming that the values of the time in which she wrote her journal are more correct. This illustrates how parental values are shaped by contemporary culture and always adapting. It is not unthinkable that somebody thirty years from now will look back at how we raise our children today and view it with the same regret that Kari did at the close of the 1980s.

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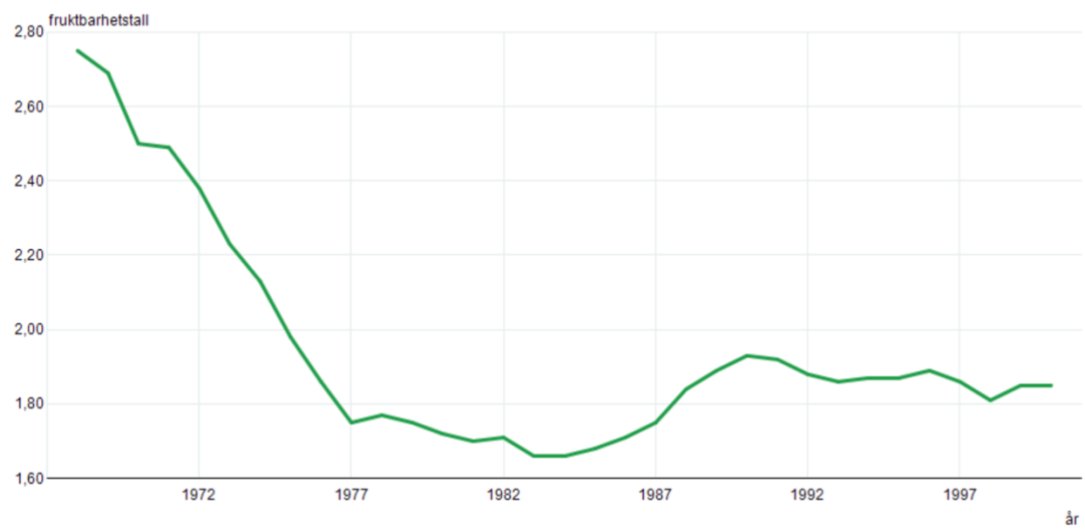
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“UNICEF History.” Accessed May 10, 2022. <https://www.unicef.org/history>.

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## Appendix 1

04232: Samlet fruktbarhetstall, kvinner, etter år. Samlet fruktbarhetstall, kvinner.



Kilde: Statistisk sentralbyrå

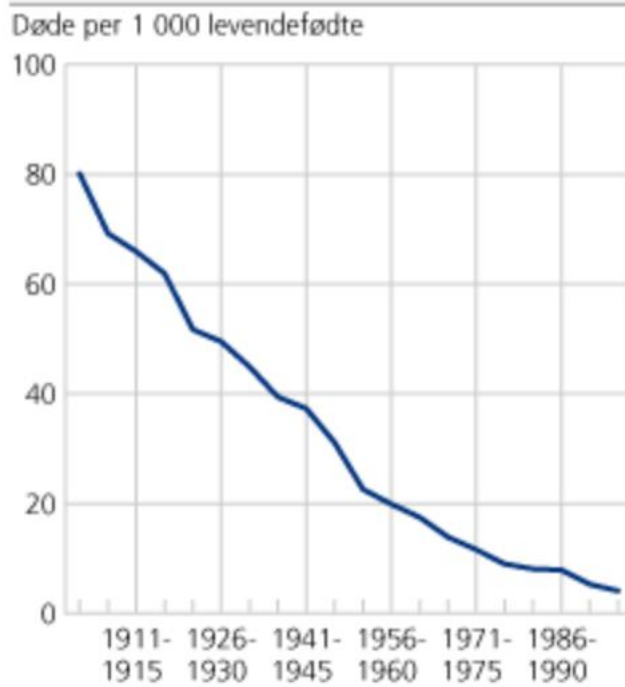
## Appendix 2



*Spedbarnsdødeligheten i Norge 1967-2016. Hentet fra norgeshelsa.no 22.5.2018.*

### Appendix 3

**Figur 1. Spedbarnsdødelighet i Norge.  
Per 1 000 levendefødte. 1900-2000**



Kilde: Befolkningsstatistikk og Dødsårsaksregisteret.



