Fathers and parental support in everyday family life
On informal support in Sweden beyond the auspices of the welfare state
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Introduction
Sweden has long been characterised by the implementation of an active family policy with strong links to policies intended to promote gender equality. As early as the 1960s, the goal of efforts to bring about gender equality, which were to permeate all social policy work, was stated to be that of so-called “double emancipation”, whereby both women and men would be given the right to paid work, economic independence and equality in relation to family life, implying more modern parenting ideals (Klinth, 2002). An extensive, well paid and gender neutral parental insurance, in combination with high quality state-subsidised public childcare, has improved the ability of mothers and fathers to combine work and parenting (Klinth & Johansson, 2010; Plantin, 2001; Plantin, 2007). Thus the welfare state has been an important guarantor of everyday care provision for children, and private or market-based actors have not been assigned any major role in this area in Sweden.

Despite the reformist zeal of Swedish society, the move towards gender equality in care provision has been relatively slow. Fathers still utilise significantly less paternity leave than mothers, and the same pattern is found with regard to taking leave to look after children who are ill. Swedish fatherhood research has often directed its focus at the unique welfare-state support provided to parents, which we in this article refer to as parents’ formal social capital (Edwards & Gillies, 2005; Pichler & Wallace, 2007, Dürrschmift et al. 2010). This situation is not unique to Sweden. There are similar models in other Nordic countries, although family policies and the welfare-state support provided to parents may vary between them (see Westerling in this issue). During the first decade of the new millennium, there also emerged an intense research interest in the labour market and in the labour-market conditions that govern fathers’ opportunities to combine work and family life. Here too, however, the research has been permeated by a powerful focus on formal forms of support and on how legislation and policies are operationalized in practice. Commonly, researchers have examined how family-friendly various employment organisations are, and their formal structures for providing support to working parents (Haas, Hwang & Russell, 2000; Haas & Hwang, 2007; Plantin et al., 2012). This means that there is in principle no research that has examined other forms of support utilised by Swedish fathers, outside of the formal support structures, i.e. in the form of informal social capital (Widmer, 2007; Reynolds, 2008; Holland, 2008; Rossi, Bonini & Mazzucchelli, 2010). What support, for example, do parents receive from the older generation, i.e. their children’s grandparents? How often do they turn to friends or neighbours for help with the children, babysitting or child-minding, advice, the school run etc? What opportunities for support are there for the parents of today’s small children beyond the auspices of the welfare state? The objective of this article is thus to discuss these questions, with a special focus on Swedish fathers with small children and their everyday access not only to practical help, but also to emotional support.

The design and implementation of the study
This paper is based on a larger qualitative study of the everyday lives of parents with small children. The empirical
material in the study comprises interviews with a total of 30 mothers and fathers of young children. This article directs its focus at the fathers, however, in order to develop an understanding of how fathers with small children may obtain support in their parenting, and there is no intention to make any broader comparisons with the mothers who have been interviewed. A total of nine fathers with children aged one to three have been interviewed. The fathers were recruited from three strategically selected districts of Gothenburg but they were relatively homogenous in terms of relationship status, age, and geographical location. They were cohabiting heterosexual men in their thirties who categorised themselves as middle class. They were diverse in terms of occupation and educational levels, but several of them have completed a programme of higher academic education. At the time of the interviews, only one of the fathers was out of work. Almost all of the interviewed fathers had experience of sharing parental leave with their partners. At the time of the interview, two of the fathers were on parental leave and the remainder were working full or part time. Statistics show that fathers accounted for 24.8 percent of the total number of paid parental leave days in Sweden in 2013 (Försäkringskassan, 2013). Parents with a high level of education tend to share their parental leave more equally than parents with a lower level of education (SOU, 2014). Here we can note a difference between Swedish and French fathers, since the article by Milner and Gregory in this issue shows that paternity leave in France has become the norm for lower-paid employees, but is less widely used by higher grade employees. The fathers included in our study are thus part of a very interesting group of parents, both nationally and internationally, since they share parental leave with their partners in line with the social policy ambitions of double emancipation. Our analysis focuses on the actors who provide fathers with informal support, and on how the interviewed fathers describe their access to support and the relationships in which this support is obtained. Thus the results and analysis presented in this article regarding access to support among fathers of small children cannot be used to make generalisations about e.g. which factors determine levels of access to support among fathers of young children in Sweden.

The empirical material and analysis presented in this paper draw on a qualitative data collection utilising individual interviews and a focus group interview conducted with fathers. In this way we have been able to draw on both the individual and collective experiences of fathers. In the case of the individual interviews, a semi-structured interview guide was employed which contained a number of themes and associated sub-questions. The respondents were asked to answer questions concerning work, social networks, parental leave and experiences of the societal support system. Just what it is that functions as a resource for fathers may vary on the basis of individual and contextual factors. The interview guide therefore allowed for a broad understanding of resources. In the case of the focus group, different kinds of written material were used in order to stimulate the participants to engage in discussions about the everyday lives of families with small children and about support in fatherhood. The material from the individual interviews is rich in descriptions of personal experiences and in thoughts on everyday fathering practices. The focus group transcripts complement these individual stories by illuminating how fathering is formed in interaction and collectively.

All of the interviews were recorded and then transcribed. Our interpretation of the interview data followed the standard procedures of qualitative analysis. This means that we first and foremost searched for patterns and thematic features in the interviewees’ experiences and feelings regarding fatherhood and support in everyday life. In our treatment of the interviewees’ subjective accounts, the analysis focused on drawing out and organising information about meaningful relationships and characteristics. This selection process followed an inductive analytical model, which stresses a continuous interplay between the developing theoretical perspective and the grouping and categorising of the data.
Theoretical points of departure – social capital, habitus and fathering practices

Our analysis of modern fatherhood proceeds on the basis of the concepts of fathering practices, habitus and social capital. With the concept of habitus, Bourdieu emphasises that individuals’ thoughts and actions are of a social and collective nature. By spending time and participating in social environments, people acquire different forms of habitus, i.e. ways of acting and relating naturally to one or more social environments (Bourdieu, 1977; 1990). When individuals come into contact with patterns of action and attitudes formed by individuals with whom they have not come into contact in the context of their own social origins, these are woven together to form part of a new habitus. Habitus is something that occurs beyond conscious thought and intentional action, and it is perceived by the subject as self-evident and natural. David Morgan (2011) has elaborated on the links between the taken-for-granted character of habitus and the wider concept of family practices. Family practices are “practices carried out with reference to other family members”, which implies that family practices are carried out in diverse situations and not only in the home or in face-to-face interactions between family members. Thus we view fathering practices as including not only the actual practices of doing parenthood, but also discursive elements in which fathering is shaped in interaction with other actors.

The social capital concept can be traced to the theoretical work of Pierre Bourdieu (1986), James Coleman (1988) and Robert Putnam (1993). Our theoretical understanding lies relatively close to that found in Bourdieu’s writings on social capital, and we use the concept both to describe actual resources in the form of formal and informal social relationships, and also expectations and perceptions relating to the significance of these relationships. According to Bourdieu (1986), it is not until others acknowledge resources that they receive a value, which implies that there is a clear connection between social capital and symbolic capital.

As a theoretical concept, social capital has been used, amongst other things, for analysing access to formal and informal relations in a welfare context (Scheepers et al., 2002; Pichler & Wallace, 2007), and relations within the family and other social networks (Widmer, 2007; Reynolds, 2008; Holland, 2008; Dürrschmift et al., 2010; Rossi, Bonini & Mazzucchelli, 2010). In an earlier study of parents’ access to formal and informal support, Edwards and Gillies (2005) identify three factors that contribute to social capital in relation to parenting: information, emotional support and practical help. According to Edwards and Gillies (2005), social capital comprises “the values that people hold and the resources that they can access, which both result in and are the result of collectively and socially negotiated ties and relationships” (Edward & Gillies, 2005 p. 2). In this respect, there is a clear link to the work of Bourdieu and his view of social capital as something that is contextual and changeable, and that includes both physical resources and values and norms.

In the following, we will examine how the interviewed fathers’ social capital and habitus are formed and manifested. We begin by looking more closely at the practical support that the men have access to in relation to their everyday parenting.

Practical help in everyday family life

The fathers in our study may in several respects be regarded as modern fathers of small children. All of them expressed a desire to be present and caring fathers, and stated that they attempted to share paid work and the work of caring for the family equitably with their partners. This is very much in line with the findings of previous fatherhood research, which has shown that modern fatherhood is strongly linked to being present and participating in the lives of one’s children, first and foremost through taking parental leave (Klinth & Johansson, 2010; Plantin, 2001). The fathers also often stated that people should take advantage of the opportunity for parental leave, since spending time with the child during its
early years is something both valuable and more or less essential in order to establish a good and close relationship with the child. Eight of the nine fathers interviewed had also taken parental leave for at least six months, and several of them had experience of working part time.

The fathers included in the study described themselves as being present and active with their children, but stated at the same time that their lifestyle nonetheless required some form of assistance in the work of caring for the children in order to be able to combine the children’s care needs with their own employment. When social capital is discussed in family research, one recurrent issue is that of opportunities for obtaining help with everyday routines, not least various solutions for ensuring that the children are looked after. In this respect, Pichler and Wallace (2007) differentiate between formal and informal social capital. Formal capital takes the form of resources provided by the state in the form of public sector transfers and services, and relations with professional actors. Informal capital is comprised of the resources that are found among family and friends. On the basis of this categorisation, Sweden is characterised by a high level of formal social capital, where the protection afforded by the welfare state means that the state is regarded as the principal support provider. This picture is given nuance, however, by studies which show that a substantial level of inter-generational transfers nonetheless take place in Sweden, in the form of both economic support and the provision of practical help (Björnberg & Latta, 2007; Halleröd, 2008). Kohli (1999) argues that informal assistance should also be regarded as a result of the way the welfare state is constructed, amongst other things because it means that the economic and social situation of today’s older generation is better than that of its predecessors, which provides them with better opportunities to help their children in adulthood.

**Supportive grandparents**

When the fathers in our study spoke of practical everyday assistance, it was first and foremost the informal actors that they referred to. Many of them spoke of receiving relatively extensive practical everyday help, primarily from their own parents, who collected their children from, or dropped them off at day-care, babysat on evenings and at weekends and in certain cases also looked after children who were ill when the parents were working. Krister is one of the participants in our study. Both he and his partner were trying to combine demanding jobs with irregular hours with caring for their two children. In the context of this logistic balancing act, Krister’s mother played an important role in the everyday life of the family, looking after the children a couple of days each week, sometimes also in the evenings and overnight.

-We have my mother, of course, who is on a timetable here, so to speak (laughs). No, but seriously, she is, it wouldn’t be possible otherwise. Both that we’ve arranged in advance when she will pick them up and so on, but we also give her a call if a situation arises where we need help a bit more urgently (Krister, employed chef, cohabiting with two children).

Intergenerational transmissions, also discussed in this issue by Baker and Bosoni, need to be contextualized in relation to different national approaches to childcare as a private, family or public concern. In Sweden, there is an extensive system of subsidized childcare and in 2011, 83 percent of all children aged between one and five were registered at nurseries (Skolverket, 2012). Thus, the state does not view grandparents as a natural child-minding resource. The interviewed parents in our study also described preschool day-care as having a given role in their everyday lives, which was linked both to their being able to work and also to the children spending time in a social and educational environment.
Our empirical material focuses on practical transmissions, and the interviewed fathers pictured their own parents and parents-in-law as being “grandchild-centred”. Krister’s mother’s help in looking after the children was in part necessary because the family still lacked public sector day-care provision for the youngest child. The family had chosen to decline the first place offered to them by the municipality because they wanted to have both children at the same nursery, to make dropping them off and collecting them easier. When a grandmother is able to serve as a buffer between the family’s care needs and public sector supply, the family can stay in the queue for a day-care place until they are given a place that makes their everyday routine a bit easier. Informal resources, and informal social capital, thus affect the autonomy of the individual in relation to formal actors such as central and local government. Even in a welfare regime where parents are expected to be independent of informal solutions for care provision (Lewis, 1997; O'Connor, Shola Orloff & Shaver, 1999), informal assistance may be an important factor in relation to opportunities to combine work and children. The quote from Krister shows how formal support in Sweden in the form of day-care provision sometimes does not completely correspond to the needs and requests made by parents, and thus has to be supplemented by means of informal support as a way of facilitating everyday life. Family-based care solutions may however be regarded as being more complex and unstable than public sector childcare, as has been noted by Lewis, Brannen & Nilsen (2009). In this regard, there were also substantial differences between the fathers interviewed in our study. Roger, another of the fathers, lacked both parents and parents-in-law, nor did he have any siblings who could help to look after the children. Roger and his wife therefore chose to accept the nursery place offered by the municipality, despite the fact that the nursery was located a relatively long way from the family home, which meant that dropping off and collecting the children was a time consuming activity.

- We have to take the bus, and then we have to walk a few kilometres up the road. The youngest girl is in the pram now, of course, and that’s lucky, because otherwise it would have taken a very long time. But the children are set on being able to start at the nursery that’s right next door here /…/We should have been given a place in August, but now it seems like we can get a place for the summer. And of course that was the best response we could have got; yes, it has gone okay during the past six months too, but if I’m going to change job, it wouldn’t have been tenable. (Individual interview with Roger, unemployed trucker, married with two children.)

When the interviewed fathers spoke about receiving help from their own parents, a picture emerged of the grandparents wanting to look after their grandchildren. Other individuals regarded as close family members, such as siblings, were also expected to provide willing and unconditional help. The possibility of receiving such everyday help is in part affected by geographical proximity, but even when the fathers’ parents and siblings live at a considerable distance, they sometimes nonetheless turn to them rather than to friends. The interviews shed no light on the fact that many of today’s grandparents may have several roles to play, with obligations in relation to the workplace, for example, or that they might be more interested in their own fulfilment, and therefore not available for babysitting. The unconditional help that the family is expected to provide is regarded as natural. This is different in some ways to ideas of reciprocity, which emphasise a mutual exchange of services. Reciprocity is often regarded as a basis for social capital and as the motivating force for informal help provision, while also including an element of rationality, since it will eventually be of benefit to oneself (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2001). These aspects were toned down, however, when the interviewed fathers described the help they received from the family. We regard this form of help as an expression of what Portes (1998) has labelled bounded solidarity, i.e. a view that help within the family is something to be expected. Even if the family and its structure is in a state of flux, and it is not self-evident who belongs to the family at different points in time, our results indicate that the parents themselves feel that “the family” should be willing to help whenever needed.
Emotional support in fatherhood

Given that the fatherhood discourse has increasingly come to emphasise relational and emotional aspects of fatherhood, it is interesting to focus on how the interviewed fathers often emphasised the importance of having access to emotional support in their parenting role and of having someone to talk to about questions relating to their children and their parenting. Edward and Gillies (2005) regard emotional support as being part of parents’ social capital. The Swedish parental support discourse places a major emphasis on emotional support, amongst other things in the form of the provision of professional advice at special child welfare centres and parental education to all parents. Governmental inquiries relating to parental support emphasise the importance of parents having someone to talk to about their parenting, and of being able to obtain advice and support in relation to the parenting role (SOU 1997; SOU 2008). In this respect, the fathers interviewed in the current study did not place any major emphasis on supportive measures from professional actors, but instead referred first and foremost to informal contacts and social networks.

-You do need to talk to other people. It can be fun to tell someone about something that the children have said or done, but there are also many situations where you feel you did something wrong /.../if you’ve been inattentive or grabbed hold of the child, and you have conflicts with the child. You can feel remorse sometimes and a bit frustrated sometimes. Then we usually talk to our friends, because they’ve been in similar situations of course. And it’s probably a good thing that we meet similar people who dare to say that they also have conflicts.

(Individual interview with Olof, employed electrician, cohabiting with two children.)

In our study, many of the fathers turned in the first instance to their partners, their siblings or to friends when they needed support and guidance in their parenting. These fathers have access to informal social capital; ties and relationships with people that provide support in fatherhood.

Colleagues and support at the workplace

All but one of the interviewed fathers were employed, even though some of them were on parental leave at the time of the interview. Analysing the material, it emerged clearly that work colleagues constituted an important source of emotional support for the fathers. It is with work colleagues that many everyday routines are discussed, and these individuals come to provide easily accessible mental relief, since they provide daily opportunities to talk about both the joys and concerns of parenthood.

- We probably talk a lot about it ourselves, me and my wife. Otherwise it’s probably most often the case that I talk to colleagues. Several of them have children, a few have children who are a bit older and who know like how it can be./.../I could probably talk to any of the people at work, you know, around the coffee table. /…/It gives you a bit of perspective. It’s probably not so much advice, but rather, no, just kind of discussing something.

(Individual interview with Fredrik, employed physiotherapist, married with two children.)

Roger, who is unemployed, talked a lot about how much he missed the workplace and what he called “the fellowship” there. He described lacking people to talk to about parenting and childrearing. He had access to some informal capital;
he spoke to his wife and to some of their friends, but his everyday routines with the children were lonely, and he had sought out other social arenas, such as a community center for children and their parents. Nonetheless, he said that it was difficult to compare these relations to the ones he had with colleagues.

- You go to the center maybe once or twice a week, and even if some parents are regular visitors, you meet different people, and you don’t get to know them. You can talk about the children, watch them play; you drink your coffee sitting next to other parents, but you don’t laugh and talk about ordinary stuff or about, well just anything. (Individual interview with Roger, unemployed trucker, married with two children.)

Roger’s story provides support for the idea that the workplace is an important arena for emotional support. His view is that regularity and fellowship are central at the workplace, factors that can form a basis for support in fatherhood. Our analysis of the empirical material suggests that the role played by the workplace involved more than simply colleagues providing support, and that the workplace can also function as an arena where norms on good parenting are negotiated and where different habituses are formed.

- Actually we have one guy at work who has not taken any parental leave, and his son is like two years old now. And sometimes the rest of us are like, “Hey, what’s wrong with you”. I guess a lot of us, me included, think he’s kind of old fashioned. Why bother to have children if you don’t want to be with them?/…/Otherwise, all the fathers at my workplace have been on parental leave. I think you’re considered to be a bit strange if you chose not to take advantage of that possibility. (Lars, focus group participant. Employed system analyst, married with two children).

Even though there is a dearth of comparative studies in this field, it is possible that Swedish fathers, in general, experience stronger informal support in their work-life than other fathers. Sweden has, as was mentioned in the introduction, a long history of discussing and implementing an extensive range of policies to provide support for fathers and this might provide them with a higher level of “discursive resources” (Hobson & Morgan, 2002) for discussing and reflecting upon their everyday lives as fathers (see Dermott & Miller in this issue). The interviewed fathers who described receiving positive support in their parenting from colleagues stated that their workplaces had a view of fathers as natural carers. It had been completely natural for them to take parental leave, and their colleagues, both male and female, expected men to utilise the opportunity to take such leave. The fathers often spoke about striving to limit the amount of time their children spent at nursery or in after-school care, and stated that collecting one’s children from nursery early in the afternoon meant being viewed as a good parent. A number of the fathers have also chosen to work part time in order to be with their children more often. Several of them also referred to what Himmelweit (2002) has labelled the parents’ moral responsibility; they were acting on the basis of a moral habitus in which this type of behaviour was not questioned.

- Now we’ve had children and we have to take care of them mostly. (Roger, unemployed trucker, married with two children.)

The fathers’ experiences of the value of talking to colleagues about child-related matters distinguishes the current study from Edward and Gillies’ (2005) study of British parents, in which it was primarily mothers who described receiving this form of support. This difference between British and Swedish parents may be interpreted as a result of how the different logics of welfare regimes are reflected at the micro level, and of how fatherhood in Sweden is more associated with looking after the children than it is in the UK (Plantin, Månsson & Kearney, 2003). Discursive resources relating to involved and emotional fatherhood are available to Swedish men, since the modern fatherhood discourse has a broad...
base in Swedish society, which makes it possible for men to integrate a modern vision of fatherhood. As was found in an interview study of Icelandic men who had taken paternity leave (Gislason, 2007), our material provides no indication that taking parental leave might be regarded as being “unmanly”. Nor did the men in our study regard themselves as norm-breakers. Instead they rather saw themselves as norm-followers, and they described others both in their circle of acquaintances and at work who acted in the same way.

Having said this, previous studies have shown that some workplaces are still characterised by norms which primarily regard fathers as providers, and not as carers, which may reduce the opportunities for obtaining support in the fatherhood role (Allard, Haas & Hwang, 2011). In Sweden, service companies are found to be significantly more father friendly and more likely to have formal father-friendly policies (Haas & Hwang, 2007). Research also shows that there may be a class dimension to the availability of such informal support at the workplace. Haas and Hwang’s (2009) survey study of 244 large businesses in Sweden showed, for example, that white-collar fathers receive more informal support from co-workers and managers than blue-collar fathers. Our material does not allow us to point to differences among blue-collar fathers and co-workers. However, many of the interviewed fathers problematized the support available from the workplace, and expressed skepticism about their employers’ positive formal views on involved fathers.

- At my workplace we have many dads on parental leave right now, because they hired lots of guys my age a couple of years ago, and we’ve all become fathers now. And I don’t think that they (the employers) think it is such a good idea. And then all the days we spend at home with our sick children. No, it’s not good for the job. (Anders, focus group participant, employed computer engineer, married with one child.)

The fathers who participated in the focus group came from different workplaces, but shared the view that in spite of formal support structures at the workplace, there might be informal or unspoken views about fathers’ involvement in the daily care of the children.

**Concluding discussion**

Unlike much of the previous Swedish research on fatherhood, which has had a strong focus on fathers’ formal social capital, this article has instead directed its focus at the informal social capital associated with parenting, i.e. that which lies beyond the auspices of the welfare state. The issues examined have focused on the access that fathers of small children have to help in the context of their everyday parenting and the habitus that determines who the fathers turn to and the extent to which they utilise this support.

On the basis of our material we have argued that the formal social capital provided via the welfare state is not sufficient to give parents the ability to combine work and family life. Even though the interviewed fathers are aware that they have the right to work part time and to stay home with sick children, and although they have access to subsidized childcare, they nonetheless often turn to family members for practical help in collecting children from day-care or caring for sick children. Several fathers received relatively extensive practical help with their children from their own parents, and this was regarded as something natural in the context of their everyday lives, a form of bounded solidarity within the family (Portes, 1998). It was not as natural to ask friends or workmates for practical help however.

As regards seeking other forms of support in relation to parenting, such as advice or emotional support, friends play an important role. It can be seen that informal social capital plays a central role for parents’ access to advice and support. It
was not primarily various forms of professional support measures that the fathers in our study thought were important, such as antenatal clinics or child welfare centres. Instead the fathers first and foremost turned to their partners, their siblings or to friends when they felt the need for support and guidance in relation to parenting. It is however important to acknowledge that these fathers have access to informal social capital; social networks and relations that are acknowledged as resources, and their family constellations do not challenge the conventional family model. Our material does not allow for an analysis of more fragile fatherhood (Dermott, 2008), e.g. among non-resident fathers, gay fathers or poor fathers. On theoretical grounds, we can argue that access to social capital is linked to other forms of capital, and the significance of class cannot be overlooked, since research has shown that informal support is distributed unequally (Björnberg & Latta, 2007; Halleröd, 2008). In our analysis, employment has been portrayed as being important for having access to informal social capital in the form of emotional support for fathers with small children. The workplace is also viewed as an arena where fathering practices are formed. It was with work colleagues that many everyday routines were discussed, and with whom both the joys and concerns of parenthood were shared. This reflects a family-practices-approach as discussed by Morgan (2011), with overlaps between work and family life and how family- and fathering practices are enacted away from the home. Discursive resources, as discussed by Hobson and Morgan (2002) appear to provide the interviewed fathers with the opportunity to discuss and reflect upon their everyday life as fathers at the workplace. We thus emphasize the workplace as an important arena in which norms relating to good parenting are negotiated and paternal habitus is formed, not least regarding the ideal of fathers being present and participating in everyday family life.

Our analysis raises new questions however. Are there differences between workplaces in this respect? Do class and ethnicity affect whether fatherhood and family life are discussed at the workplace? And does a feeling of fellowship at the workplace imply that emotional support is being developed in relation to parenthood, or are there other loyalties at stake? As has been discussed above, we have identified structures at workplaces that produce contradictory expectations in relation to fathering practices. On the one hand, fathers are supposed to be involved and caring fathers, but on the other, they are supposed to be hard-working employees. At the beginning of this article we argued that Swedish research, and political ambitions to enhance parents’ opportunities to combine work and family life, have both concentrated on formal structures such as legislation and labour market policies. Our results, however, point to the necessity of studying inter-relational processes at workplaces in order to understand how supportive relationships may be developed and whether employers can be proactive in these matters. We would also argue that the workplace is an important arena for studying family- and fathering practices, since habitus is formed in interaction with others. When the interviewed fathers described relationships at the workplace, they used the word *fellowship*; a fellowship that serves as a basis for social capital in parenting. However, this fellowship also implies loyalties towards colleagues. Swedish official statistics show that the fathers of young children comprise the group that spends the most time at work (Statistics Sweden, 2012; SCB, 2012). The mothers of young children comprise the group that spends the most time at work. The mothers of young children comprise the group that spends the most time at work.
this respect our findings support the idea of role expansion, that having access to multiple arenas, including in this case the workplace, can serve as a positive resource for working parents (Barnett 2008). Grönlund and Öun (2010) go so far as to claim that this relationship is stronger in countries with extensive dual-earner policies.

However, close relationships at the workplace may contribute to parents not utilising the existing formal support systems to the extent that they need to. A study by Bäck-Wiklund and Plantin (2007; 2009) showed, for example, that employers’ reluctance to employ relief staff/substitutes to cover for short-term absences among parents resulted in many parents returning to work more quickly out of loyalty towards the colleagues who otherwise had to shoulder the extra work burden. This was also discussed in the focus group with fathers in our study. The same mechanism that produces bounded solidarity within the family, i.e. a strong sense of identification with a group that makes you voluntarily join in various activities (Portes, 1998), can also be found at the workplace. However, the interviewed fathers made clear distinctions between family and friends/work colleagues, with family members being viewed as a natural resource for practical help in family life, whereas friends and workmates were preferred in relation to the provision of information and emotional support.

The interviewed fathers in our study described work colleagues as a resource and as providing emotional support in fatherhood. However, as has been discussed above, we have also identified various structures at the workplaces that produce contradictory expectations in relation to fathering practices and habitus. On the one hand fathers are supposed to be involved and caring fathers, but on the other, they are supposed to be hard-working employees. These are conflicting loyalties that many fathers experience in relation to work and family life (Mellström, 2006; Plantin, 2012). Even though the fathers gain from having discursive recourses in relation to equal and involved fatherhood, they are still torn between other values and habituses.

Although it can be seen that an increasing number of women are working full time and, in the same ways as fathers, are torn between parallel ideals of parenthood, Swedish official statistics show that the fathers of young children comprise the group that spends the most time at work (Statistics Sweden, 2012; SCB, 2012). In this respect there is a clear difference between mothers and fathers.

References


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