

Abstract

Title: The Pre-school Child's Relation to its Family: Changed Conditions and Conceptions 1950-1990

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This thesis discusses changes in the pre-school child's relation to its family during the post-war period. It is divided into two main parts.

Part I discusses changed conditions for the relation between parents and pre-school children.

The long-term historical change of the family-kinship system in western societies is discussed first. The post-war development of the Swedish family is analysed in this historical context. Specifically, some theorists have seen extensive changes of the family, especially since the 1960s. Included in this process are changes in parental roles, and in the family's socialisation of the child.

Three basic changes in the post-war family in Sweden are examined and described by means of official statistics and other statistical sources, namely: (a) the development of wage-earning among mothers of pre-school children, (b) the development of the public child care, and (c) the pre-school child's increased connection with different groups and institutions outside the family, e.g. organised leisure time activities.

Part II focuses on changed conceptions and ideals regarding the pre-school child.

This part comprises, first, a recapitulation and discussion of the development of different ideas about the family and the child in Sweden since the 1930s, which is followed by an analysis of the conceptions and ideals that appear in Swedish government official reports (Statens offentliga utredningar, SOU) from the 1970s and early 1980s, which deals with the pre-school child, the family, the employment of mothers of pre-school children and the public child-care.

Then follows the main study of the thesis, which is an examination of a selection of advisory literature for parents of small children during the two periods: the 1950s and the late 1980s/early 1990s. This study analyses conceptions and ideals about the pre-school child's nature, its social and emotional development as well as an outlook on parental authority.

The conceptions and ideals brought forward in the analysed texts express an increasing tendency towards looking upon the pre-school child as a separated individual. The contrast between the writers of advisory literature during the two different periods was in this respect considerable. In SOUs from the 1970s, the pre-school child's individualisation is focused, and the analysed advisory literature from late 1980/early 1990 brings this tendency even further.

The analysis of the advisory literature is then connected with various empirical studies regarding parents' views on children and their development. This discussion is focused on whether it is possible to discern similarities between the advisory literature of the 1980s/early 1990s and the parent's points of view during this period. It is tentatively concluded that, at least in certain respects, similarities can be found between parents' views and conceptions and ideals in the advisory literature, although the parents do not go as far as the advisory literature. As a consequence, the socialisation of children may have changed significantly in Sweden during the post-war period.

Keywords: Social change, family, socialisation, individualisation, day-care, public childcare, childrearing patterns, ideas, values.