

## Chapter 1.1.

# NEW CONCEPTS IN FAMILY RESEARCH AND THEIR APPLICATION TO FAMILIES AND MIGRATION

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## **Introduction**

This initial chapter will provide one of the conceptual frameworks in which the empirical study of families and migration in Lithuania (and beyond) can be understood. By introducing a focus on the involvement of, and impact on the family to migration research, rather than just studying the migrating individual or taking an economic perspective, this allows the use of theories and concepts from family and childhood studies. Such concepts – doing and displaying family, the sociology of personal life and issues of relationships and intergenerational interactions – are evident throughout a number of the empirical papers which make up this book. The aim of this chapter is to explain these concepts further and show how they have been applied in studies of migration as groundwork for the later Lithuanian specific chapters.

The background for the development of the concepts I will be drawing on is a change in the way that families are viewed. No longer simply a category consisting of people who are linked by marriage and kinship or living in one household, they are now seen in a more processual way – as a site where family-like practices are carried out and values are shared. Hence the word family changes from a noun to a verb as argued initially and most strongly by Morgan (1996; 2011a). As such, researchers no longer look at ‘The Family’ but how groups of people who identify as family-like go about ‘doing family’. This more active view of the activities that people engage in as part of their family life can also be seen in the labelling of the more specific practices that people carry out as part of family life: hence parenting (Klett-Davies, 2010; Dermott and Pomati, 2016), fathering (Aitken, 2016; Kilkey, Plomien and Perrons, 2013) and mothering (Vincent, 2010). These grammatical changes reflect, as use of language always does, this conceptual turn – toward the idea of family life as a collection of practices rather than a set of positional labels.

## Family practices

In family research Morgan has spearheaded the practice approach with his work on family practices although he acknowledges the influence of Bourdieu and the latter's emphasis on the importance of everyday social interaction in the formation and continuation of social relationships (Morgan, 2011a; 2011b). Within families or other intimate relationships, these practices both allow the everyday activities of family life to be carried out but serve, at the same time, to identify and reinforce the intimate nature of the relationships between those involved. Expressed in Morgan's (1996: 190) terms, these are 'little fragments of daily life which are part of the normal taken-for-granted existence of practitioners. Their significance derives from their location in wider systems of meaning'. This quotation shows the two distinct but mutually re-inforcing elements of family practices; those of activities and discourses. Activities are required to produce and reproduce families and intimate relationships but draw on, reinforce (and sometimes transgress, see Seymour, 2015) the familial discourse which contextualizes such activities in specific socio/ economic/ legal circumstances. It is this reference to discourse as a constituent part of family practices which responds to some critiques of it as overly agentic (James and Curtis, 2010) and which allows the consideration of structural constraints on family life (Smart and Neale, 1999). Within this book, Part Two focuses particularly on the details and impact of discourses of the family and the migrating family within Lithuania from a range of sources both legal and official. The research also starts to show how the lived experiences and, in some cases, resistances of migrating families can serve to amend the discourse to acknowledge the diversity of family life in a globalized world. In Part Three, the focus is more on the activities of family life as carried out in caring, celebrating and memory-making in transnational Lithuanian families.

Importantly, a practices approach allows for the spatiality of family life to be shown to extend beyond the home. It problematizes the assumption that family practices, particularly those of parenting, require family members to be co-located (Dobler, 2019) and the innovative and energetic ways in which migrant parents carry out these activities transnationally are clearly outlined within Part Three of this volume as well as by other authors (Baldassar and Merla, 2014; Walsh, 2015).

Family practices require a focus on the relational. Even if an activity is carried out by an individual on their own, e.g. earning an income, the purpose is a contribution to the 'doing' of family and therefore has relational repercussions. A practice approach to family life crucially allows

the explicit contribution of children to the construction and reproduction family life to be made transparent and this could be a fruitful further area of migration research. Further research which highlights children's active role in contributing (or indeed being prevented from contributing) to family practices would prevent the children of migrants being viewed only as 'victims' or 'orphaned' while continuing to acknowledge the extent of their agency.

### **Family displays**

A further development of the family practices approach came from Finch in 2007 who considered that there were specific times when family practices needed to be made much more explicit – either to family members or other audiences. This she named family display: that is 'the process by which individuals, and groups of individuals, convey to each other and to relevant audiences that certain of their actions do constitute 'doing family things' and thereby confirm that these relationships are 'family relationships'. By doing so, family members show 'this is my family and it works' (Finch, 2007: 67). Although Heaphy (2011) has criticized the phrase *family display* as heteronormative, as a concept it can also be applied to 'Families of Choice' such as groups of friends who carry out family-like activities.

Family display may not always involve face-to-face interactions – it can be carried out by displaying photos, wearing artefacts meaningful to the family (Walsh 2015) and increasingly through social media. The development and use of internet technology and particularly social media has proved of vital importance to the doing of transnational families allowing often daily interaction as shown by Česnuitytė in this volume.

Finch (2007) considers displays are required specifically at times of intensity, such as times of change in the family composition or celebratory events. This would seem to be particularly pertinent to the issue then of migration. Crucial to the idea of family display is the idea of an audience or indeed multiple audiences such the family, the State or transnational communities – all of whom may have different criteria by which a family display is judged as successful. Hence Walsh (2018) shows how children in families which have migrated to the UK are aware of responding to both local residents and family members when displaying family in public and may change the language they use in response to these different audiences. As a concept then, displaying family usefully illustrates the significant awareness children, and indeed all family members have of audiences, both

internal and external to the family, for the interactions and relationships enacted around their family, domestic space and in public arenas.

In a more recent development of the concept of family display, Morgan (2011a) calls for researchers to consider if and how family displays are used to convey a specific 'type' of family. Here they are not just displaying family but displaying Family with an emphasis on the core values of the group; Morgan (2011a) gives as an example, The Christian Family.

Walsh, McNamee and Seymour (2019) have shown how in the UK displaying Family Type by migrant families can take a number of forms including displaying the Assimilated Family or displaying a family of a particular country of origin, for example The Polish Family.

In the first case, that of The Assimilated Family the audience is perceived to be the local people of the country of destination and signs that the family have different origins are hidden. Hence Matus, a Slovakian child only spoke Slovakian 'in the house, on holiday [in Slovakia] when my family's here'. Going further, his mother confirmed that he had asked her not to speak Slovakian in public. In contrast, families who are aware that an important audience of their family display are other migrants from their country of origin may display a family type which strengthens this affiliation. So in the UK, families who were displaying The Polish Family celebrated traditional festivals, attended Polish Church and made sure they interacted with their wider family (Walsh et al., 2019). Further studies of this nature could develop the work on displaying family 'types' such as the Lithuanian family abroad but also consider if this is something which is carried out by returning migrants. Do they consider the need to display themselves as the Lithuanian family on their return (given the discourses in some early official documents) or is there, more recently, any merit in displaying themselves as a 'Family with migrant experience'?

### **Personal Life**

An alternative approach which includes family life and the home but also aims to extend beyond it is that of Personal Life (Smart, 2007) or more recently the Sociology of Personal Life (May and Nordqvist, 2019). Developed by Carol Smart, this 'new direction in sociological thinking' involved a focus on the personal but aimed to develop it beyond the previously accepted sphere of the private. It incorporates research on intimate relationships, kinship, childhood and family studies but intended to widen the scope of Personal Life to include same-sex relationships, friendships, pets and other areas in which people were connected. As with family practices, it acknowledged

the increasing fluidity of relationships in form, time and space and aimed to consider the ways in which these were made manifest in everyday life throughout the life course. In order to develop this conceptual shift, Smart proposed a focus on core features of all Personal Lives, these being: memory, imaginary, biography, relationality and embeddedness (Smart, 2007: 37). By looking at these aspects, individuals' experiences of family life could be examined from a wider perspective. For example, the impact on the child of changing relationships between other family members caused by migration could be understood by the child's embeddedness in a family network. The focus of Personal Life is still on relationality but it goes beyond simply family relationships to comprehensively 'cover a number of types of relationship to people, things and places, and to include different settings in which personal life takes place' (May and Nordqvist, 2019: 2). This is significant to migration research as it again problematizes the static location of some constructions of intimate relationships and goes beyond a consideration of the home environment as the only site of Personal Life. Research drawing on the Personal Life approach recognizes the embedded and connected positions (or occasionally the non-embedded and non-connected positions) of family members. Empirical studies on caring and partnering show that such relationality does not require co-location to be enacted (Kilkley and Merla, 2014; Brahic, 2015). Indeed Döbler (2019) questions whether the simple proximity of family members is sufficient to count as presence when it is something that has to be actively 'done' and discusses how co-presence can be performed at a distance, echoing Walsh's (2015) transnational displays by families separated by migration.

### **Family Configurations and Introducing Generagency**

A final significant development on researching the family has been put forward by Widmer and Jallinoja (2008) with their concept of 'Family Configurations'. As with Personal Life, this approach aims to go beyond the nuclear family or single households while stressing that people remain interdependent and configured in networks and relational structures. It does not have the reach ascribed to recent expositions of Personal Life (which can be used to look at politics or consumerism) and can be criticized for overly focusing on heteronormative family forms. The value of this approach, given the focus in migration research of generational relations (especially Part 3 of this volume), is its focus on multiple generations of families. Widmer and Jallinoja (2008) point out the significant presence of what they call the 'beanpole configurations' in which children live; that is families

with three or more generations. They consider what this means in terms of vertical caring responsibilities covering child care, elder care, migration and kin support including finance. There is also a focus on horizontal responsibilities and support through a consideration of siblings, friends and acquaintances. The Family Configurations approach aims to emphasize the structured and committed nature of many people's family relationships and acts as a rebuttal (as does Personal Life and Family Practices) to the much criticized (Jamieson 1999, Smart 2007) Individualization thesis which viewed relationships as simply a matter of individual choice and part of an self-constructed identity project (Giddens 1992; Beck and Beck Gernsheim, 1995). Widmer and Jallinoja consider family relationships to be more influenced by social structures and less fluid and agentic than they appear in a Family Practices approach, However, the emphasis is still on relationality which allows the importance of social interactions and the consequences of these, including the indirect consequences on children of the interactions between other family members, to be recognized.

The importance of beanpole configurations, that is three generations or more carrying out family practices, has emphasized a need for researchers to consider the importance of family members beyond the simple nuclear family of parents and children. It has also reasserted the agency of all family members, grandparents, siblings and children rather than over-focusing on parents. This recognition of the role of generations in families has been taken up by other researchers who stress this approach focuses not only on age but acknowledges the intersectionality of the concept with class, gender and ethnicity (Spyrou et al., 2018) and, as such, would appear to mesh into a Family Configuration approach. Yet here, Widmer and Jallinoja's (2008) focus on structure may be too confining for some researchers; it may be that the new concept of generagency coined by Leonard (2019) would be usefully transferred into family research. This concept 'brings together the mutually reinforcing, interdependent but continually dynamic relationships between agency and generation' (Leonard 2019: 9). Moving from a dualistic construction of adults and children, it recognizes generational power structures but shows how agency can be realized and enacted, by both children and adults, in their everyday lives. Mirroring Widmer and Jallinoja's 'beanpole configurations' and horizontal networks but incorporating greater agency, Leonard has proposed two components to the concept: intergeneragency and intrageneragency (Leonard, 2019: 9). The former considers power and agency in child-adult relationships, the latter in peer groups both child-child and adult-adult. It can be seen how generagency could be adopted by family and personal life researchers

to consider studies of multiple generations but also those on siblings, friendships and peer groups. As such, it could be particularly interesting as a new lens through which to view migrant families focusing on those who leave and those who remain in the country of origin. In addition, family practice researchers who are interested in the way that discourses around the family change through the everyday activities of family members (see Part Two, this volume) can utilize generativity to understand children – and adults – as agents of change (Leonard, 2019: 9). As such, we may see more joint and intergenerational interviews in family research as methodology reflects changing substantive agendas and the impact of migration and return on children is further researched.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a history and an introduction to a number of the conceptual frameworks incorporated into the later chapters of this book. By drawing on developing thinking in family, personal life and more recently childhood research, the fluid, dynamic but still connected ways in which family life is currently conducted can be interrogated. While not limited to migration research, such concepts seem particularly suited to such inquiries since they require a focus on the family that moves beyond the household and indeed the nation. As such the research which unfolds in the subsequent chapters of this book show the multiple, inventive and engaged ways in which people conduct their family life and their continuing commitment to it despite often being separated by long distances. These studies then show how the actions of such family members serve to develop and enhance our recognition of the diverse ways in which families are done in the twenty-first century.

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