

Mastergradsavhandling

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Children of the Clock

Experiences of Time and Childhood in Norway and the United States



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PREFACE

There is no lack of irony in the fact that this thesis, which concerns itself in large part with the concept of time, has taken more time to complete than I care to admit. This has been a personal frustration, but it has also meant that I have been able to draw on the experiences of some very eventful years. With the end of this process now in sight, it is in its place to thank all those who have displayed extreme patience and provided encouragement throughout.

To my advisor, Ellen Schrupf, thank you for feedback as immediate and perceptive as my drafts were belated and fumbling. Your expertise and guidance is greatly appreciated.

To those who allowed me to catch a glimpse of their lives, through interview or observation, I am ever grateful for the contribution you made to this project. Parents, children and teachers alike opened their doors and let me catch a glimpse of their day to day experiences, and that is a privilege I hold in the highest regard.

To good friends, family, neighbors, fellow students and colleagues, your support and encouragement has both motivated and inspired.

A special thanks to my lovely niece, Ine Berge Lund, for her insightful artwork.

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Thanks to Albert, for reminding me that I am not the center of the universe, thesis or no thesis.

Finally, a huge thank you to my eternal sparring partner, Øyvind, for holding down the fort and keeping me (relatively) sane.

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Magical Water Creature A: The people have so many kinds of time.

Magical Water Creature B: Many kinds?

Magical Water Creatures A & C: Many kinds of time. All kinds of time.

Magical Water Creature A: The people have little time, all the time and no time.

Magical Water Creature B: The people have old time, new time and dead time.

Magical Water Creature C: And still they have time left over.

Magical Water Creature B: Left over? What do they do with that?

Magical Water Creature A: Often they just throw it away.

Choir: The people chop time up in pieces.

Pieces.

Why do they do that?

Can't time be left in peace?

Can't time be left in peace?

In peace.

In peace.¹

¹ From "Veslefrikkspelet," based on a Norwegian folk tale collected by Asbjørnsen and Moe, text by Stanley Jacobsen. My translation.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Choice of Topic

At the age of 23, I stepped off a plane at Gardermoen Airport in Oslo and into a different time. I don't mean another era, as in a nostalgic transplantation to a previous decade, but rather that the experience of time itself was different. The physical clocks were the same, ticking away unrelentingly, measuring the same seconds and minutes, yet the world around me was somehow slower.

I'm not sure that this realization struck me precisely at the moment I stepped off the plane from Minneapolis, but I know it didn't take long before I realized that my sense of time would need to be adjusted if I ever expected to survive in Norway. On Sundays, when none of the stores were open, I would find myself pacing the house, irritated that nothing seemed to be happening. I became outraged at the lackadaisical attitude Norwegian officials and bureaucrats seemed to have in processing applications and other documents. I lamented at how things seemed to take so much longer and how no one appeared to be worried about making them happen. Clearly, I was missing something.

After about 6 months, my sense of time had more or less been adjusted. I found myself enjoying "lazy" Sundays, walking in the woods or reading a book. I began to pity my American friends who rushed harried from one obligation to the next. I would get exhausted simply from listening to my retired father's weekly schedule. Somehow, waiting indefinitely for a response from government or municipal agencies no longer seemed as agonizing. My sense of time was becoming more "Norwegian" and there was no turning back.

My first year as a teacher in Norway, however, gave me a sneaking suspicion that my experiences were not necessarily representative of all facets of Norwegian life. I saw parents' worn-out expressions as they delivered one child to a flute lesson before scrambling to get the next child to soccer practice. I heard the desperate voices of third graders who were balancing band rehearsals, violin practice, horseback riding, dance lessons and church choir obligations. I even witnessed a 6-year-old, one who had not yet begun to attend school, pleading for her mother to understand how exhausted she was due to her busy schedule.

These kinds of experiences and types of behavior were not new to me. I recognized my own parents' faces in the faces of my students' parents. I saw my own childhood schedule in my students' schedules. My childhood, however, was spent in the United States, a country arguably characterized by its emphasis on efficiency and the moral imperative of "keeping busy." Was Norway, a country which in some respects appears to emphasize a different set of cultural values, starting to resemble the "American model"? It was this basis in my own experiences of time, as well as the close contact with children and parents I experienced as a teacher in both Norway and the United States, that led to a choice of the general topic of time and childhood.

1.2 Background: Time and Childhood

It is noteworthy that the rhetoric around these two ideas, time and childhood, is filled with negatively charged connotations, both in Norway and the United States. In Norway, this is conveyed through expressions such as "tidsklemma" (the "time bind" or "time crunch"), which place emphasis on an experience of the diminishing availability of time, as well as a sense that time is "filling up." As Norwegian social anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen describes it, contemporary society is "closing up the spaces," risking the possibility that "life becomes a hysterical series of over-populated moments, without any 'before' and 'after,' without any 'here' or 'there'."²

In the United States, this "hysterical" or "accelerated" pace has been documented over many decades. Hugh Cunningham, for example, cites J.B. Priestly's description from the 1930's: "[American children] seemed to be living at too fast a pace; they were not solid enough; they appeared to be over-excited...All of them were more adult in their tastes and style of life."³ The emphasis in Priestly's description, as well as in the rhetoric popularly used in the United States today, is placed on the institution of childhood, using terms like "the over-scheduled child" and "hyper-parenting." These terms refer to the idea of an all-encompassing involvement of parents in a child's life, manifesting itself in a significant investment of time

² Hylland Eriksen 2007. Pg. 13. My translation.

³ Cunningham 2005. Pg. 189-190.

and money in structured activities,⁴ something which diminishes children's ability to decide over their own time.

While the varying emphases in the Norwegian and American cultures is certainly of interest and will be explored in greater depth later in this paper, there are a number of similarities which can be identified in these expressions. It is clear in the American expressions, but also to a certain degree implicit in the Norwegian term, that the 'problem' itself has the highest impact for parents and children. In addition, both cultures seem to view time, or the lack thereof, as the determining factor.

In their introduction to their book "The Over-Scheduled Child: Avoiding the Hyper-Parenting Trap" (2000), Alvin Rosenfeld and Nicole Wise provide a number of reasons as to why hyper-parenting needs to be recognized and why this phenomenon should ultimately be eradicated. They claim that "starting to apply the brakes to our insanely fast-moving lives" will "improve the quality of daily life for our families" as well as "improve the odds for happiness in the future." In addition, by following their advice, they claim that "our kids may get back their childhood, a gift most of them would be extremely grateful for."⁵ Clearly, the authors have identified a societal "problem," one which they also claim to have a solution for.

Although the intention of my thesis is not, as Rosenfeld and Wise attempt here, to find a more or less moral solution to a societal problem, it remains of interest in this context to examine the various cultural constructions of what is considered problematic within different societies and the proposed solutions to these problems. As I interpret it, this quote provides a look into two different, yet related areas: the problems associated with time and the problems associated with childhood.

1.2.1 Problems of Time

Rosenfeld and Wise describe parents' lives as "insanely fast-moving." This fits in with the idea that most areas of modern/post-modern life are in a state of acceleration. Things are

⁴ See, for example, Rosenfeld and Wise 2000 for a more in-depth description of these terms. Annette Lareau also uses the term "concerted cultivation" to refer to a similar concept (see Lareau 2003).

⁵ Rosenfeld and Wise 2000, pg. xxxii.

moving faster and faster, our time is “filling up.” There is also an increased focus on taking back control of one’s own time. This implies that many individuals do not feel like they are in control of time.

Norwegian researcher Brita Bungum calls for an increased focus on children’s perspectives in this area, since much of the debate about the changing experiences of time have focused on adults.⁶ One aim of this thesis, then, is to explore these ideas of acceleration, time-deficit and lack of autonomy in deciding over one’s own time in Norway and the United States and their relation to the experience of daily life for children and parents.

In order to gain insight into these phenomena, it is necessary to delve into the more all-encompassing, often taken-for-granted concept of time. This paper examines more closely the concepts of time which have been prevalent in the Norwegian and American societies, for example ideas about age, the use of clocks, the necessity of schedules and so forth. This particular inquiry focuses on these ideas as they relate to childhood, but requires contextualization in historical experiences. It is therefore also relevant to look into the various ways in which time can be understood and the historical evolution of time within Western societies.

1.2.2 Problems of Childhood

The second “problem” presented in “The Over-Scheduled Child” is the problem caused by the “loss” of childhood. Rosenfeld and Wise claim that by eliminating, or at least recognizing, hyper-parenting, children may “get back their childhood.” This expresses a presupposition that there exists a shared concept of what “childhood” is, and indeed of what it should be. In addition, the authors maintain that this childhood is a “gift” for which most children would be “extremely grateful” to receive. This statement goes even further towards problematizing the “loss” of childhood. It makes childhood something positive, something desirable that children are being denied. To some degree it also implies that children themselves are aware that they are missing out on this experience and are dissatisfied.

⁶ Bungum 2008. Pg. 6.

My response to this is to ask a number of questions. For example: Is there indeed a shared concept of what childhood is and what it should be? If so, is this a universal understanding or does it vary from culture to culture? What differences exist between the ideal of childhood and the experience of childhood in these cultures? These are obviously very large questions, much too large to be covered adequately within the confines of a master's thesis. My goal, therefore, is to provide a very general description of the "ideal" of childhood in Norway and the United States and to provide a more detailed analysis of the relationship between time and childhood.

1.3 Disposition

In synthesizing the two subjects described above, time and childhood, I have chosen to move away from describing these areas as "problematic" in my thesis question and have therefore phrased the question which guides my research as follows:

How is the institution of childhood in Norway and the United States affected and governed by (dominant) constructions of time?

In order to limit the amount of research required to approach an answer to this question, I have set some boundaries regarding the scope of this project. While a broader historical and cultural contextualization is necessary as a background, the primary focus of this thesis is to examine contemporary childhood in Norway and the United States.

1.4 A Few Assumptions - Constructivism, Causality and Comparison

As it was important to evaluate the assumptions and implications of Rosenfeld and Wise's statements, it is equally important that I evaluate the assumptions that my own thesis is based upon, as well as the implications those assumptions have for the research and analysis that follows. The question I have posed above divulges a good deal about the nature of the project to be undertaken. Certain perspectives lie inherent in the question itself. One of the fundamental perspectives is that this project is concerned with the social construction of meaning. It views both time and childhood not as scientific facts, but as ideas constructed by societies and possessing fluidity of meaning. One of the goals of this project is to try to describe the meanings injected into these concepts.

Another inherent perspective in this line of questioning is a certain causal relationship between time and childhood. As it is put in the question's text, time is seen to have an effect on childhood, not vice versa. This springs out of my own hypothesis that while both childhood and time have socially constructed meanings, childhood is the concept out of the two which has previously been presented more consciously as a constructed term rather than a scientific "truth." Time, on the other hand, is most often thought of as a universal entity, independent of and existent prior to human beings. In fact, time can be viewed as standardized, quantifiable and objective or as internal, qualitative and subjective.⁷ The objective understanding seems to be increasingly taken for granted and is arguably the discourse members of a society are less conscious of from a constructivist position. This, in my hypothesis, leads to time assuming a more privileged status, with the power to influence other, more explicit constructions in an unconscious way.

The final perspective which should be mentioned at this point in regards to my thesis question's text and implications relates to an argument by Norbert Elias that sociological studies of time lose their meaning if not approached with a comparative, long-term perspective.⁸ I would argue that this perspective is applicable to the study of childhood as well. While my thesis centers around discovering contemporary relationships between time and childhood in Norway and the United States, it is indeed concerned with cultural values often not made explicit to the members of those societies. In an attempt to make such values and preconceptions more explicit it can be useful to compare a society to alternative societies with potentially divergent values and preconceptions. Therefore, this thesis is of a comparative nature, exploring both different contemporary cultures and historical constructions of cultural values with respect to time and childhood.

1.5 Postmodern Childhood Studies and Cultural Studies

In integrating the ideas of time and childhood, it is in fact the institution of childhood which receives most of my attention as a researcher. Time is, of course, of great interest to this

⁷ Gillis 1999.

⁸ Elias 1992. Pg. 4

project, but only insofar as it can lead in the direction of a greater understanding of the experience and perception of childhood. Therefore this study can be appropriately categorized not only as a “cultural study,” but also as a “childhood study.”

Gaile Cannella has presented a potential model for a so-called “postmodern childhood studies,”⁹ one which I find to be both applicable to my own research, as well as a suitable platform for studying childhood from within a Cultural Studies perspective. Some of the aspects of this proposed platform include an emphasis on the contextualization/construction of societal beliefs, interdisciplinary inquiry, analysis of material conditions, the institutionalization of dominant beliefs, the examination of public policy and an exploration of modernist beliefs.¹⁰ Many of these ideas will be returned to and elaborated upon in Chapter 3.

Due to the relatively recent emergence of a form of Childhood Studies which challenges dominant biological/psychological models while simultaneously utilizing, building upon and growing out of the Cultural Studies tradition, there has been relatively little research done from this particular perspective. My ambition is that this thesis can contribute to a growing body of research which reevaluates both the institution of childhood and the multitude of culturally constructed ideas of what it means to be a child.

1.6 Organization of Thesis

The remainder of this paper is organized into four sections. Chapter 2 is a discussion of methodological approaches and considerations. Chapter 3 presents the theoretical background used in this project, including historical perspectives on the concepts of time and childhood. Chapter 4, “Building and Hopping Fences: The Parameters of Childhood,” discusses the criteria used, by children and others, in building and maintaining childhood identities. The final chapter, “Having, Spending, Using, Controlling: Experiences of Time in Childhood (and Beyond),” covers the time experiences as described by participants, including aspects such as

⁹ Cannella and Kincheloe 2002.

¹⁰ Ibid. Pg. 8-11.

autonomy over time, the “time crunch,” free time, school/work, and organized activities. This chapter also includes a summary of main points, as well as concluding remarks.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES AND CONSIDERATIONS

The intention of this chapter is to provide a thorough description of and justification for the methodological approaches used during the completion of this thesis. An articulation of these approaches serves a number of purposes. It allows other researchers to more adequately interpret, analyze and expand upon the work presented and it affords the researcher the opportunity to remain grounded and realistic in the analysis and application of her conclusions. This chapter is an attempt to make the research process as transparent as possible.

2.1 Approaches: The Case for Qualitative

In determining which methodological approaches are best suited for a particular endeavor, an appropriate place to begin is with the question itself. This thesis seeks to discover and describe cultural perceptions relative to time and childhood. The primary motive in this case was to *understand* a phenomenon in more depth, rather than *explain* a causal relationship, a key component suggesting a qualitative approach.¹¹ Another consideration was the assumption that the concept of time, the concept of childhood, and, not least, the cultural interaction of these two concepts are complex, nuanced spheres with numerous variables. This particular focus would then strengthen the argument for a qualitative approach, one of the chief advantages to such an approach being its potential to explore the subjective experiences of individuals in greater depth.¹² The primary methods used in this study were semi-structured interviews and semi-participatory observation. The responses and impressions generated from these methods were then analyzed within the context of the respective societies in a comparative perspective.

¹¹Holme and Solvang 1993. Pg. 84.

¹²Ibid, pg. 77. My translation.

2.1.1. A Comparative Perspective

The decision to use a comparative perspective presented itself almost immediately following the conception of this project. This was due in no small part my own background as an expatriate, a symptom of which is the constant comparison of cultural experiences and traditions from two countries.

An examination of two cultures in contrast to one another can bring to light aspects of both cultures which may otherwise seem mundane or remain “taken for granted.” Comparative studies provide a unique platform from which to examine underlying cultural aspects and assumptions. As Charles Ragin purports, comparative social science “has a long tradition of qualitative work that is stronger and richer than its quantitative counterpart. Not only is this traditions qualitative, but it also tends to be case-oriented (as opposed to variable-oriented) and historical (as opposed to abstractly causal).”¹³ While there are certainly disadvantages of every method to match their advantages, the expository nature of comparative approaches provided a basis for this research.

While cultural studies is a cross-disciplinary area of study which takes into consideration methods and theories from various fields, such as the social sciences, it is important to articulate that the ambitions in this thesis are not purely sociological nor anthropological. The intention is rather to provide a cultural analysis of the concepts of time and childhood. Sociological and anthropological approaches and perspectives can aide in the pursuit of a cultural analysis, but they are used primarily as tools in order to gain insight into the experiences of individuals. These experiences are then combined with information from secondary sources in order to provide a larger cultural context from which to analyze the situation. In this case, a comparative perspective, that is to say participants from two different countries, two different languages, two different schools and two different cultures, has brought a number of important variables to the surface. This can facilitate a more thorough and explicit analysis.

For the purposes of this thesis, it is important to note that comparison is used primarily as a perspective, rather than as a method. The goal in this case is not to compare in order to

¹³Ragin 1987. Pg. viii.

explain a phenomenon, but to *understand* the meaning a phenomenon has in a particular culture. Just as white sheet of paper can seem brighter when compared to a yellow sheet, the meaning a phenomenon has within a culture can become more evident when compared with expressions from another culture.

2.1.2 Selection of Interview Participants

In an ideal situation, with unlimited time and resources, a qualitative researcher would be able to interview a virtually limitless number of respondents. This would allow for the researcher to explore a larger number of variables in greater depth. In this case, however, time and resource constraints mandated a limited number of interview participants. Eight children aged 10-11 years and their mothers¹⁴ were chosen to participate in interviews, four from a moderately sized city in eastern Norway and four from a comparable community in the mid-western United States. The size of this group is not large, and the number of participants from each category is therefore limited. This also has an impact on the ability to generalize based on the findings of this thesis. However, the experiences of these few can provide a basis for further discussion and analysis based on additional sources and context.

As far as the age of the children interviewed is concerned, it was important that the participants were old enough to reflect and resonate about their own experiences, both past, present and future. The limitation in age range also provides a limitation in the general application of the findings, something which much be seen in relationship to the scope of the project. Challenges associated with these limitations are discussed further in the Chapter 5.

The communities in which my research took place were chosen based on certain similarities. For example, both cities had a metropolitan population of between 50.000 – 100.000 inhabitants and were considered cities in growth. Both cities were also regional seats of government and housed several regional facilities such as hospitals, theaters and institutions of higher education. These areas were chosen both because of their geographic accessibility as well as their relatively large population, an aspect which was prioritized in hopes of

¹⁴No conscious effort was made to control the gender of the parents interviewed. The fact that all eight parents were female certainly has implications for the outcome of this research, something which is discussed further in Chapter 5.

maintaining participants' anonymity.

The first interviews were completed with the Norwegian children. Contact was made via e-mail with the principal of a school in the area I wished to conduct my interviews. This particular school was also prioritized because its history of collaboration with the local university, a factor which I hoped would make gaining access an easier task. In addition, the students at the school would be used to having individuals from the university present during the school day, something which could potentially diminish research effects. The principal at the Norwegian school, hereafter referred to as Solbakken Elementary, put me in touch with the vice principal, who in turn put in me contact with a 5th grade teacher. In order to expedite the process, it was the classroom teacher who chose which students were to be interviewed, based upon his evaluation of which students' parents would be the easiest to involve and which students would be most comfortable around a new individual. This, of course, colored the selection of respondents. Despite the effects this may have had on the selection, I believe receiving assistance from the classroom teacher in choosing respondents ensured that the amount of information collected in a limited amount of time was maximized.

In the United States, contact was taken via e-mail with a principal at a school in an area similar to the Norwegian city where interviews had been conducted. Communication proved to be somewhat more complicated, but I was eventually put in touch with an individual serving as the head of research and development in the school district. I was then informed that I would have to submit a project proposal which would need to be approved by a committee in order to proceed. Due to constraints limiting the amount of time I was able to conduct research in the United States, I made a decision to contact individuals outside of the school environment.

A contact in the area who was informed about the project provided me with the name of a parent with a 5th grade son who was willing to participate. After meeting with her and her son and explaining a bit about the project, they both agreed to be interviewed. In addition, a list of friends/acquaintances with 5th grade children was provided. Using this "snowball effect," I was able to contact and interview three additional child/parent pairs. Three of the four children interviewed attended the same school and all the children lived in the same area of the city.

The methods of selection in each country may certainly have had an impact on who was interviewed and therefore on the comparability. No attempt was made to determine particular characteristics about interview participants, with the notable exception of the age of the students. The selection of participants would undoubtedly been different had children been chosen completely at random or if characteristics such as gender, income level of parents, or ethnicity had been controlled for. The intention with these interviews, however, was never to be able to generalize for a large population, but rather to gain a deeper understanding of a few individuals in order to identify some of the factors which form their experiences. With this as a goal, I believe the methods of selection described above do not present any appreciable difficulties as a basis for comparison in this study.

2.1.3 Execution of Interviews

Certain aspects of the interview process were virtually identical for each interview. All of the interview participants were provided with written information about the project, including details about how the data collected would be treated, as well as contact information in the event participants had questions after the interview process was completed. Also included was a consent form to be signed by both parent and child, acknowledging that each had read the provided information and agreed to participate based upon their understanding of that information.

My first contact with the Norwegian children was as an observer. I observed portions of three school days at Solbakken Elementary. During two of the observation days, I conducted interviews with the students, both a group interview and individual interviews. The interviews were held in available classroom space, away from the other students, and lasted between 15-30 minutes. During this time, students were excused from other class activities. All interviews were recorded using a digital recorder.

The Norwegian children were generally forthcoming and seemed to be comfortable in the interview situation. The students had been briefed about the project by their classroom teacher prior to my arrival, something which seemed to have incited a certain degree of excitement around the interviews. The first interview was a group interview. In this setting, several of the students exhibited tendencies to respond with more or less off-topic comments and erratic behavior, most likely in an attempt to show off for their classmates, while other children hardly spoke a word. The one-on-one interviews seemed to be a much more relaxed forum for

all of the children: those who had earlier been a bit erratic provided clearer, more easily understandable responses and those who had been withdrawn in the group interview had the chance to offer their opinions without being ridiculed or teased.

The Norwegian parents were contacted by telephone in the weeks following the interviews at Solbakken Elementary. Most of the parents had spoken with their children about their experiences at school and were more or less informed about the interview topics prior to being telephoned. An interview date and time was arranged, with most of the interviews being held at the home of the individual being interviewed. One interview was held at a café. As I had not controlled for gender in the adult participants, but rather focused on scheduling interviews with the parents who had written their names on the forms returned by students, all of the adult participants were female. Most of the Norwegian mothers seemed a bit skeptical at first, although all of them were very friendly and interested in the project. The interview guide began with fairly neutral questions about the number of children in the household and their ages, the mother's occupation, the daily routines in the household and so on. These questions invited participants to share information about themselves in a non-threatening manner and many of the mothers warmed up considerably after the first few questions. It seemed that the mothers appreciated that someone was taking an interest in their day-to-day activities. All the mothers appeared to give a good deal of thought to their answers and often displayed an interest in my thoughts and opinions on the topics discussed in the interviews. I would try not to give any of my opinions during the actual interview, but after the interview was concluded and the audio recorder was turned off, I would often engage in informal conversations with the participants about various topics covered during the interview. I do not think this impacted the information collected during the interviews and it probably served to make the interview participants more comfortable after the interview situation was concluded.

In the United States, contact with children was made through their parents, rather than through the school environment. A parent would be contacted by telephone and a brief explanation of the project and the interview process would be provided. A date and time would then be arranged for both the child and parent to be interviewed. Again, after not selecting parents based on gender but on those individuals who responded relatively quickly to contact made about the project, it was only possible to schedule interviews with mothers. The consequences the participant group has for this thesis are discussed further in Chapter 5.

Usually the interviews took place at the family's home, although one interview was at the mother's place of employment. The main difference in the execution of the interviews in the United States, as compared to those in Norway, was that both mothers and children were interviewed in the same session, at the same location. During three of the children's interviews, the mothers were in the same room and actually made comments during the child's interview. During the fourth interview, the mother was present in the house, while the interview occurred outdoors. This certainly may have affected the manner in which the children responded. For example, some children may have been more reluctant to provide particular pieces of information that they did not want their mothers to hear. On the other hand, some children may have provided more information than they otherwise might have due to the prompting of a mother. However, since I had not had any contact with the American children prior to the interview situation, as I had done via my observation days at Solbakken Elementary, I believe that the mothers' presence during the interviews generally served to both make the children more comfortable and to encourage them to take the interview process more seriously.

2.1.4 Observation

The main intention of observation for this project was to provide supplementary information about the context in which the child interview participants live and experience the world, in this case the school day. This observation component of this project was extremely limited and does not attempt to provide any fundamental description of the students' experiences, rather it serves as a tool to orient the analysis of interview material and to provide a context for that material.

Observation at Solbakken Elementary was, as described earlier, conducted over a three-day period. These were partial days, implying that I was not present for the entire school day. Interviews were also conducted in between observation periods. All the Norwegian children interviewed attended the class observed.

In the United States, a one-day observation was conducted at Robbinsdale Elementary. One of the American children who participated in an interview attended this school, the other three were students at a different school. I was present for the entire school day, following a class of 5th grade students.

At both schools the observation focused on the way in which students' time was structured; verbal (and other) communication to students, particularly related to time; and to students' reactions and behaviors. The focus was on the class and school environment as a whole, not only on those children who were interviewed. Field notes were taken during each observation session. The type of observation performed here is referred to by the author as “semi-participant observation.” This implies that I was present in the classroom and the students were certainly aware of my presence, but I was obviously not a 10-year-old elementary school student and therefore not a full and equal participant in classroom activities.

2.2 Consideration and Preconceptions: The Researcher as Subject

2.2.1 The Situated Researcher

In any type of research, scientific, social or otherwise, the researcher is an individual, situated contextually in a specific time and place. All the choices one makes as a researcher, whether applied to theory used, methods performed or analysis made, are influenced by that researcher's own history of experience. As Holme and Solvang explain:

Generally speaking one makes a decision, one takes a certain starting point for their scientific work. These choices, and the starting point one has, have their basis in one's own values and norms, as well as those of the environment one is working in. They are not, first and foremost, expressions for having grasped the full truth, but rather that one approaches reality from a specific point of view.¹⁵

Both the topic for this thesis and the methods described in this chapter have their origins in the author's own background and experiences, conscious and unconscious. This is what Øyvind Baune calls a “horizon of understanding.”¹⁶ By examining one's own horizon as closely as possible, one's assumptions and prejudices, a researcher can attempt to increase the validity and credibility of one's work.¹⁷

One of the most important components of my own “horizon of understanding,” particularly as

¹⁵Holme and Solvang 1993. Pg. 32. My translation.

¹⁶Baune 1991. Pg. 99. My translation.

¹⁷Gjervik 2008. Pg. 31.

it applies to this project, is a concept of what childhood is. Having been educated to be a classroom music teacher, much of my previous experience studying childhood had been focused on behavioral techniques and psychological theories of development. Graue and Walsh contend, however, that those who study children and childhood carry with them a researcher perspective which is “even more personal than theoretical frameworks or disciplinary traditions – it includes personal experience, memory, identity, and our tacit hopes for children and their place in society.”¹⁸ This “research baggage” makes the study of childhood a much more complicated minefield than one might have previously thought. In working within a comparative framework, I attempted to alienate myself from my own preconceptions as a researcher in order to generate information regarding the structural form of childhood, especially as it relates to the social construction of time. Simultaneously, I worked out from an awareness that my background, analysis and conclusions also contribute to the ongoing construction of meaning.

2.2.2 Ethical Considerations

During my research, I was in close contact with both adults and children. While the techniques for studying children do not differ from the methods used to study adults,¹⁹ there are certain ethical considerations which one must take into consideration when working with children. As with any interview or observation participant, the tenants of voluntary participation, informed consent and confidentiality should be observed. In addition to this, there is an asymmetrical power relationship which characterizes the interactions between adult researchers and children as interview participants.²⁰ There is a good chance that this power relationship affects the responses of the children interviewed and indeed affect whether or not a child participates in the interview situation at all. In this respect, all of the children interviewed for this project seemed to be excited and willing to participate in the interviews, although I am certain that they experienced some expectations from parents and teachers regarding their participation. These are expectations which I could not control for as a researcher. To compensate for this, my goal was to make the interview situation as pleasant and non-threatening as possible and to attempt to develop a trust relationship with the children

¹⁸Graue and Walsh 1998. Pg. 74.

¹⁹Ibid, pg. 45.

²⁰Gjervik 2008. Pg. 38.

I interviewed. I trusted that the children would share with me to the best of their abilities, and they (hopefully) trusted that I would treat them and their responses with respect. I believe that this relationship was established with each of the children interviewed, despite the brief nature of the interview situation.

Another ethical consideration when engaging in qualitative research is the effect the interaction with the researcher has on participants even after the interview or observation is concluded. Holme and Solvang explains:

No matter how anonymous the data is made, no matter if one maintains strict confidentiality, no matter if the respondents are not made a means to achieving a researcher's ends, one can be sure that one always does something with the respondents through the research process. One can create expectations for the respondents which one has not planned to do anything about. One can set in motion processes in the respondents which one does not have the opportunity to follow up. One can have gotten the respondents to share something of themselves which they hadn't planned to share. One always does something with the respondent. Therefore, the fundamental question one always must ask oneself is if one has the right to intervene in people's lives in this way.²¹

This is a very difficult question for any researcher: what right do I have to intervene in other people's lives? The researcher may not even be aware of the effects they have on those who participate in research projects, something which makes such intrusion seem even more dramatic. If a researcher is to be able to act at all, since most research depends, to a greater or lesser degree, on the participation of other human beings, it seems they need to make a "risk analysis" for participants. This analysis can never be exhaustive, of course, but it can at least make the researcher aware of what they are asking of participants. In this case, I felt that the risk to participants was fairly low. The topics covered in during the interviews were not of an incriminating nature and no identifying information was provided to anyone other than the researcher herself. I am positive, however, that several of the respondents were made to think about situations in their lives in a different way as a result of particular questions. This had the potential to set in motion processes which I am not able to follow up. I think the most dramatic consequence of this is the parents and children involved in the interviews may begin to discuss some of the topics covered in the interviews with one another. While this was not an ambition of the project, I do not see a overwhelmingly negative impact of children and parents discussing some of their preconceptions and new perceptions with one another.

²¹Holme and Solvang 1993. Pg. 34. My translation.

2.2.3 A Frog In The Pocket: Research Effect(s)

“The researcher is not a fly on the wall or a frog in the pocket. The researcher is there. She cannot be otherwise. She is in the mix.”²² No matter how hard a researcher tries to minimize her influence on a research participant, no matter how much she wishes she could just be invisible and observe others completely unnoticed, oftentimes the only ethical way to generate new information is for the researcher to be present. There is no way to ignore the effect that the researcher has on the research, there is also no way to determine exactly what that effect is. Nina Gjervik proposes that “research effects are a relevant challenge both during participant observation and in interview situations. This results in that participants behave differently than they otherwise would have done, because they know that they are being researched.”²³ Participants behave differently, but we don't know how they would have behaved had the research not been taking place. The only remedy for a researcher in this case is to try to identify the factors which may affect the behavior of research participants and try to compensate for those factors as best one can.

In my research there were several factors which may have impacted the behavior of participants or the type of information they provided. The physical space in which the interviews were conducted varied a great deal. Most of the parents were interviewed in their homes, while one was interviewed at a coffee shop and one was interviewed at work. It's hard to say if the differences in location led to differences in the individual's behavior or the answer that they gave, but it is worth noting that the location of the interview could have had an effect. The time of day at which interviews were conducted can also play a part. All of the Norwegian children were interviewed during the school day, while the American children were interviewed anytime from directly after school to evening to Saturday morning. This could obviously have influenced how tired the participants were, and how focused or concentrated they felt. Presence of parents during the interview of the students is an additional factor which almost certainly led to a certain type of behavior and response which may not have been the case if the students had been interviewed without a parent present.

²²Graue and Walsh 1998. Pg. 91.

²³Gjervik 2008. Pg. 40. My translation.

It is also worth taking into consideration when in the course of the week and the year observation took place. At Solbakken Elementary, observation was completed during the weeks before and after a major holiday and towards the end of the school year. At Robbinsdale Elementary, observation occurred the day after a festival weekend and towards the beginning of the school year. These considerations would affect how teacher's choose to interact with the students, the behavior of the students themselves and the routines and schedules in the classroom.

One also must be aware of the impact of the researcher herself. Age, gender and identity of the researcher are factors which influence the types of behavior and responses provided by the participants. The mothers interviewed probably responded differently to a 26-year-old female interviewing them about their family's daily life than they would have had I been a 64-year-old male. This is also probably true of the students interviewed. The identity of a student also may have influenced responses and behavior in a different direction than if I had been identified as a teacher or sociologist.

My personal identity, having grown up in the United States and having lived in Norway for several years, to some extent made me an outsider in both situations. Some might contend that this would be a drawback, since I may not “observe and recognize more of the frame of reference the respondents experience reality from,”²⁴ the unspoken aspects of culture. This may be accurate to some degree, but I actually experienced my background and identity to be advantageous when initiating conversations with participants during the interview situation. Many of the children and parents were curious about how I came to live where I did or where I had lived before. I also think that my background, as well as the project's focus on two different cultures, perhaps incited some of the participants to verbally articulate certain underlying cultural assumptions which may have otherwise remained tacit.

²⁴Kjendalen 2009. Pg. 29. My translation.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

3.1 Children and Time in Cultural Studies

Cultural studies has, since its inception, been a field of inquiry which focuses on the experiences of certain groups within a society. These have traditionally been groups whose experiences have not been represented in any great depth in other fields. Often these are groups that highlight areas of society where differences of power occur, such as race, gender and class, as well as colonized groups.²⁵ Interestingly absent from this list is the category of age. Relatively little attention has been paid to the issue of age in cultural studies, resulting in correspondingly few studies focusing on questions of the experiences of children and the concept of childhood. However, a growing body of work in related fields, perhaps most notably sociology, has encouraged an increased focus on issues of childhood in recent years. In addition, the emerging field of childhood studies, fronted by authors such as Jenks, Prout, James, Cannella, Viruru, and Kincheloe, has in turn utilized many of the theories and perspectives used in cultural studies in its analysis of contemporary childhood. They take into consideration many of the same factors (gender, race, class, colonialism) as cultural studies in looking at questions of power, as well as exploring childhood as a “power-oriented narrative.”²⁶

As Cannella and Viruru describe, the experience of childhood can, in many ways, resemble the experience of a colonized people. Citing the importance of time in the colonization of native populations by Western colonizers, they point out that the obsession with time (for example, eating and working at “proper” times) “resembles our insistence on getting children (especially younger children) scheduled and into predictable routines.”²⁷ This scheduling or “dominant constructions of how to best use one's time” is, according to Cannella and Viruru, “imposed onto the bodies of those who are younger.”²⁸ This is then seen as a type of control over the younger individuals' concept of time and space, which in turn allows them to be

²⁵Barker 2008. Pg. 6.

²⁶Cannella and Kincheloe 2002.

²⁷Ibid, Pg. 208.

²⁸Ibid.

“distanced from their physical environments and communities.”²⁹

This connection between childhood and colonization can be helpful in exploring the concept of childhood, particularly as it relates to the subject of time and questions of power. It is important to examine the ways in which power differentials are played out between adults and children. At the same time, one must be careful not to portray children merely as objects, as passive subordinates who are dominated by the opinions and ideologies of adults. They are not simply “adults in the making,” treading water until they are ready to join the colonizing forces, but rather active agents who participate in constructing their own social world.³⁰ This understanding has been paramount in this thesis, especially when presenting/interpreting ideas from the children interviewed, as well as those from their mothers.

3.1.1 Deconstructing and de-mythologizing time and childhood

The dichotomy “adult-child” is a perfect example of a set of hierarchical binaries. Within cultural studies, such binaries are seen as serving “to 'guarantee' truth through excluding and devaluing the 'inferior' part of the binary.”³¹ There are many theories and historical perspectives on childhood which would seem to confirm the existence of a hierarchical division between adult and child. Childhood has, for example, been described as “merely a journey on the way to adulthood”³² and children have been portrayed as everything from “parents' servants”³³ to innocents needing protection from “the corruption of adult culture.”³⁴ Economists have discussed the “value” of children as economic assets to families³⁵ and psychologists use children’s abilities to grasp certain concepts, or lack thereof, as a basis for placing them in various developmental phases. Children are often portrayed as unfinished projects, as “human becomings” rather than “human beings.”

Jacques Derrida contested the binaries of western philosophy, but was himself condemned to

²⁹Cannella and Kincheloe 2002.Pg. 209.

³⁰Corsaro 2005. Pg. 7.

³¹Barker 2008. Pg. 87.

³²Rosenfeld and Wise 2000. Pg. 139.

³³Ibid, Pg. 220.

³⁴Cannella and Kincheloe 2002. Pg. 110.

³⁵Cunningham 2005. Pg. 82, 84.

use the very same language in order to express his ideas. His solution was to place certain terms “under erasure,” crossing them out in order to simultaneously communicate their inaccuracy and their necessity.³⁶ Cannella takes another approach, substituting words like “younger human beings” for the word “children.”³⁷ I, however, am less interested in finding alternative constructions for the concepts of children and childhood and more interested in investigating the meanings and connotations associated with those concepts in various contexts. This brings my focus from deconstruction, the first step in what West calls “the new cultural politics of difference,” to de-mythologization.³⁸

De-mythologization can be described as the process of “highlighting the social construction of metaphors that regulate descriptions of the world and their possible consequences for classifying the social.”³⁹ Ellingsæter explains that:

Metaphors are anchored in our thinking, and are thereby an important and inevitable part of our conventional way of conceptualizing the world; our everyday behavior reflects our metaphorical understanding of experience. Exploring these metaphors, what they are and the cultures within which they are constructed, is an important step in understanding our own behavior.⁴⁰

Such metaphors, in this case, can include phrases such as act your age, time flies when you’re having fun, to act childish or to have a childlike innocence, childhood passes so quickly, the good old days and so on. This exploration of metaphors includes examining particular constructions and connecting them with societal aspects such as “politics, values, purposes, interests and prejudices.”⁴¹ It is at this level I attempt to make connections between the concepts of time and childhood, as well as the connections these concepts have to the above-mentioned societal aspects.⁴² It has been important for me, therefore, to not only examine the comments from the participants interviewed for this thesis, but also to set their comments into a cultural framework.

³⁶Barker, Chris 2008. Pg. 88.

³⁷Cannella and Kincheloe 2002.

³⁸Barker 2008. Pg. 451.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ellingsæter 2009. Pg. 53-54. My translation.

⁴¹Barker 2008. Pg. 451.

⁴² See in particular sections 5.1 and 5.6.6.

3.1.2 Social/cultural constructivism

In contextualizing concepts of time and childhood, I have examined various ideas and perspectives on what these concepts mean. Many studies of children and childhood focus on various psychological stages which characterize how far individuals have progressed on the “journey to adulthood.” In relationship to the concept of time, Piaget focuses on children's ability to “grasp the idea of duration.” He describes the failure of children to grasp the concept as a source of frustration for teachers and educational psychologists.⁴³ In such a study, one takes for granted that a child's capabilities, opinions and experiences can be objectively observed and a child's performance on various tasks thereby gives the researcher a basis for classifying the individual within a psychological phase or category. Such psychological views of development have focused on a linear view in which “it is assumed that the child must pass through a preparatory period in childhood before he or she can develop into a socially competent adult.”⁴⁴ This type of approach has been criticized for its focus on individual development and an emphasis on the “endpoint of development.”⁴⁵ This tradition of viewing children as “human becomings” rather than legitimate “human beings” is a crucial distinction between previous research on children and childhood and more contemporary research stemming from a movement known as “new childhood studies.” This thesis attempts to correlate itself with the latter, focusing on children’s experiences as legitimate and authentic, independent of “becoming” anything else.

The concept of time has also been a concept subject to many scientific explanations. Even within the field of cultural studies, time has been reduced to a marginal reference to Einstein's theory of relativity in some textbooks.⁴⁶ As Norbert Elias explains, “The high social significance of the physical sciences in our age has contributed to a situation in which time is regarded somewhat self-evidently as a datum belonging to the great complex of non-human natural events and so as an object of scientific investigation within the framework of physics.”⁴⁷ This idea of time as a natural phenomenon independent of human influence or

⁴³Piaget 1969. Pg. x.

⁴⁴Corsaro 2005. Pg. 23.

⁴⁵Ibid, Pg. 15-16.

⁴⁶Barker 2008. Pg. 376.

⁴⁷Elias 1992. Pg. 3.

control is an important factor to be considered in the examination of the interaction between time and childhood, not least due to the fact that it represents an area where positivist perspectives remain prevalent.

While it is important to acknowledge the existence of such scientific perspectives in looking at questions of time and childhood, particularly in attempting to understand the theoretical underpinnings prevalent in the culture being studied, it is not these perspectives which provide a theoretical basis for this thesis. These types of perspectives have influenced and continue to influence the study of childhood and time as well as the meanings these concepts have. Therefore, such understandings should not be completely disregarded. However, in keeping with the traditions of cultural studies, I prefer to base my inquiry on a constructivist model.

3.2 Socially Constructed Childhood

There are many approaches to understanding the concept of childhood. Several alternative models are presented in Allison and Adrian James' book *Constructing Childhood* (2004).⁴⁸ Four models are presented graphically as positions on a matrix with variables such as particularism and universalism, agency and structure, continuity and change. These variables provide an excellent platform from which to examine various views of childhood and childhood studies.

3.2.1 Particularism and universalism

It is difficult for any researcher writing about childhood to ignore the legacy of Philippe Ariès. Ariès' groundbreaking and controversial work *Centuries of Childhood* (1962) has created a bedrock for childhood historians, as well as for sociologists and anthropologists. One major point of contention with Ariès' book was his claim that childhood did not exist in the Middle Ages. In order to understand this statement, one must clarify what is meant by the term "childhood." I would agree with those who argue that Ariès' statement serves to express differentiation of meaning as experienced in various cultures as a particular time. I interpret

⁴⁸James and James 2004. Pg. 58-60.

Ariès not as negating that children were in fact children during the Middle Ages, but rather as maintaining that childhood as understood in the modern, Western world, did not exist. Hugh Cunningham writes the following about children of the Middle Ages: “This did not mean that a child of, say, ten had the same status and role as an adult of thirty, but that there was no boundary fence separating off the world of adults from that of children. Children found their place within this world, but, as Ariès indicated, it was a special place, dependent on their age...”⁴⁹

These boundaries are important in uncovering what certain cultures understand and experience as childhood. How is childhood defined and framed? Is there even a conscious understanding of childhood in many cultures? As several historians and scholars of childhood would remind us, childhood as “a totally separate kind of existence”⁵⁰ is largely a creation of the past century or two. Previous cultures have not necessarily had a need to set aside childhood as a “protected space” in the same way in which Western cultures do today.

James and James describe Ariès' legacy as follows: “What Ariès offered, above all, was a taste of cultural relativity across time. This alerted researchers to the diverse, rather than universal, nature of conceptions of childhood.”⁵¹ Such an understanding gives weight to a definition of childhood which focuses on the culturally constructed, particular nature of childhood, while not neglecting certain biological realities. James and James recount two main propositions stemming from Ariès' work: “First, that ‘childhood’ cannot be regarded as an unproblematic description of a natural biological phase. Rather the idea of childhood must be seen as a particular cultural phrasing of the early part of the life course, historically and politically contingent and subject to change.”⁵²

One of the arguments against such a particularist view is that cultural relativism leaves no room for moral judgment. For example, such “social ills” as child labor, human rights violations and slavery, perhaps even genocide, can all be more or less justified under cultural

⁴⁹Cunningham 2005. Pg. 27.

⁵⁰Rosenfeld and Wise 2000. Pg. 220.

⁵¹James and James 2004. Pg. 13.

⁵²Ibid.

relativism. Everything is relative and no judgments should be made about the merits of different cultures, since all cultures are ultimately equally good, the argument can be made. While these arguments can provide a moral dilemma for certain social players such as politicians and activists, I believe the role of the researcher in a cultural relativist perspective is to attempt to describe and understand a cultural phenomenon based on that culture's own frame of understanding. The role of the researcher is to try to *understand* a culture and the reasons or motivations for acting, thinking or behaving in a particular way within that culture, rather than judge, condemn or praise a certain practice or way of thinking.

There is also a distinction to be made between the study of historical societies versus contemporary culture. As Ludmilla Jordanova points out: “Classes, groups, and individuals are constantly negotiating and renegotiating in many different contexts what children are, using perpetual social and conceptual policing which is hard to reconstruct historically.”⁵³ A dialogue cannot be initiated with past civilizations, and this increases the importance of trying to understand these societies based on their own pretenses. Modern societies, on the other hand, are constantly changing and emerging, something which, especially during this globalized point in history, lends itself to an exchange of ideas and perspectives that is not possible with historical cultures.

3.2.2 Structure and Agency

A discussion of cultural relativism also relates to the issue of structure and agency. In a structurally constituted perspective, individuals have very little control, but are instead controlled by societies' structures. If this is the case, it would be very difficult for a society to change or adapt without the structural components of that society being changed. In an agency-driven society, each individual is a part of creating and reproducing their own experiences and cultural norms. Few scholars would claim that society is either one or the other, purely structural or purely a matter of individual agency, but rather that a combination of both shapes our daily lives. To this end, I would claim that childhood is a societal structure which shapes the lives of those who experience it, whilst children are active societal agents who in turn have the capability to evaluate, reevaluate, construct, create, and reproduce their

⁵³Jordanova 1989. Pg. 11.

own reality. William Corsaro provides a description of childhood as a societal structure:

...childhood – that socially constructed period in which children live their lives – is a structural form. When we refer to childhood as a structural form, we mean it as a category or a part of society, like social class and age groups. In this sense children are members or incumbents of their childhoods. For the children themselves, childhood is a temporary period. For society, on the other hand, childhood is a permanent structural form or category that never disappears even though its members change continuously and its nature and conception vary historically.⁵⁴

This structural form, childhood, is the object which childhood studies attempts to say something about. There are some aspects of this structural form which are easy to describe in a concrete manner. This could be, for example, laws, rules and other external boundaries which create a space in which childhood is experienced. At the same time as these external factors press in on and influence children and their childhoods, children themselves are agents capable of pushing out and reshaping such external factors. As James and James summarize: “Put simply, in our view ‘childhood’ is the *structural* site that is occupied by ‘children,’ as a *collectivity*. And it is within this collective and institutional space of ‘childhood,’ as a member of the category ‘children,’ that any *individual* ‘child’ comes to exercise his or her unique agency.”⁵⁵

Children have not always been viewed as social agents. In many fields, children are still seen as simply products formed by their surroundings, “socialized” to think, act or behave in certain ways.⁵⁶ They have been portrayed as objects under the direction of various institutions, such as school and the family. In this view, children are considered to be just reacting to stimuli from these institutions, as objects rather than subjects. In new childhood studies, this perspective has been amended and children are seen as subjects possessing agency in their own right. William Corsaro has examined this view in his work, observing that children creatively and cooperatively develop their own cultural practices which cannot simply be dismissed as mimicking or miming adults. He emphasizes the shift over the past decades from research *on* children to research *with* or *for* children.⁵⁷ In this view “...instead of studying adults as representatives of children (for example, relying on parents', teachers' or

⁵⁴Corsaro 2005. Pg. 3.

⁵⁵James and James 2004. Pg. 14.

⁵⁶James and Prout 1997.

⁵⁷Corsaro 2005. Pg. 45.

clinicians' perceptions and reports about children), children are viewed as social actors in their own right, and methods are adapted and refined to better fit their lives.”⁵⁸ Corsaro also mentions the concept of “interpretive reproduction” which he describes as “the idea that children actively contribute to societal preservation (or reproduction) as well as societal change.”⁵⁹ Some of these potential contributions are discussed further in Chapter 5, section 5.6.

While the view that children are legitimate social agents has gained a certain degree of popularity in recent years, it is not an unproblematic perspective. There is still a dominant belief that adults must act in the best interest of the child, insinuating that children are not aware of, nor capable of acting in, their own best interests. This particular tension is a very interesting one to examine when investigating the opinions of both children and adults. In my own research, this tension is particularly apparent in relationship to how children use their time. The idea of children being “over-scheduled” depicts children as passive, not as active social agents. There is also a clear focus in the media on the hundreds and thousands of ways parents can either help their children to be successful, well-adjusted members of societies, or prevent them from reaching their full potential. By emphasizing the statements from children themselves, this study attempts to acknowledge children as social agents and present their experiences as legitimate and meaningful. More discussion about the narrative of acting in the best interest of the child can be found in Chapter 5, section 5.6.4.

3.2.3 Continuity and Change

The idea that parents act in the best interest of their children according to their own knowledge, beliefs and cultural limitations is one of many ideas used to support arguments of continuity in the history of childhood. Those who wish to present a model of continuity search for evidence to support the view that for all the cultural differences in both time and space, some aspects of childhood are the same throughout. For example, that parents have always loved their children and have always acted in their best interests based on their own

⁵⁸Corsaro 2005. Pg. 45.

⁵⁹Ibid, Pg. 4.

capabilities.⁶⁰ This narrative ties in with a universal perspective, that is to say that some aspects of childhood are universal and never change. Other researchers have focused on the history of childhood as a story of development, either as a tale of optimism and improvement or one of decline and degeneration. It is important to be aware of these three types of narratives when analyzing various source material and constructions of childhood, since they may act as veils for attitudes and ideas that are taken for granted. A narrative presenting childhood as ever-improving will undoubtedly emphasize the positive sides of contemporary childhood, but this does not mean that negative aspects do not exist, they are just more difficult to see. These narratives can also provide a great deal of information about the society that perpetuates them. An awareness of such narratives gives the researcher increased opportunity to unveil attitudes and experiences that reproduce common narratives as well as those that may not fit with the dominant narratives within the culture. Such an awareness can also help in understanding how particular experiences and understandings are constructed within a culture. In this study, there is a particular focus on the narrative of acting in the best interest of the child, as well as a narrative of nostalgia (everything was better before). These are explored in Chapter 5, section 5.6.

3.2.4 Local and Global

It can generally be agreed upon that no two childhoods are the same. No child has exactly the same experiences, and even if they had, those experiences would be interpreted and internalized in different ways. We can therefore say that childhood, in many respects, is local, indeed it is personal and individual. At the same time, when one speaks of “children” as a group, it is inferred that this is a collective group of individuals that spans the globe, across cultures and continents. Within the cultural studies tradition, emphasis tends to be placed on the local and the particular, although it is important to see the local from within a global context. In my study, the comments from individuals are explored in a national and international context. It is clear that each child has their own experiences and understandings, but at the same time there are similarities that indicate some common elements in the institution of childhood, at least in Norway and the United States.

⁶⁰Pollock 1983.

3.3 Socially Constructed Time

In the context of this thesis, childhood is viewed as a function of various narratives, shaped by social interactions. Time as a concept can also be viewed in this way, though it is perhaps easier with time than with childhood to maintain that there is an objective truth that exists independently of human interaction and interference. Time has, for many in Western societies, been relegated to the world of physical science and not to the world of human social interaction. This is a view I would like to establish distance from.

The concept of time itself is in essence born out of precisely a need to coordinate human social interaction. In its earliest stages, the need for coordination was tied more directly to activities essential to physical survival, such as planting or harvesting crops. The methods of determining the appropriate time to engage in such activities were connected to events in the natural world. This could be, for example, events in the skies such as sunrises/sunsets, stars and the waxing/waning of the moon, as well as events on Earth such as the changing of the seasons.⁶¹ Such necessary events often included social rituals or other interaction that in many cases became equally important for the society. As societies grew more complex, the need for coordination of activities increased, as did the complexity of the system of coordination.⁶²

The objective of this paper is not to provide a complete historical progression of understandings of time, but a historical perspective is helpful in reinforcing that time is a social construction, created by humans in order to ensure the coordination of social events. The needs of different societies and cultures have led to various understandings and concepts of time. In order to create an awareness of the prevalent conceptions in our own societies, it is useful to examine alternative understandings. The following sections take a closer look at some of the most important components of understandings of time as it relates to this project.

⁶¹ Whitrow, G.J. 1988. Pg. 16.

⁶² Elias 1992.

3.3.1 Straight ahead, round and round or a collection of moments: directionality, chronology and compression

The idea of childhood being portrayed as narratives of change, either as optimistic stories of development or as cautionary tales of decline, presupposes a linear conception of time, which constantly moves from the past to the present and on to the future. This conception, for all intents and purposes taken as a given in modern Western societies, can be seen in contrast to cyclical understandings of time, which were prevalent in many historical societies and are still present in some contemporary aboriginal communities. G.J. Whitrow points out the linguistic aspects of this differentiation, maintaining that, “Indeed, it is only in Indo-European languages that distinctions between past, present and future have been fully developed.”⁶³

This can be compared to, for example, the Hopi who have no verb tenses, the Azande of Southern Sudan where the present and future overlap or the ancient Egyptians who began the numbering of years anew with the beginning of a succeeding pharaoh’s reign.⁶⁴

Cyclical aspects of time do exist in our modern world, for example the changing of the seasons, the start and end of the school year, weeks, months, or even clocks (particularly analogue clocks that physically reinforce the cyclical image). Some also view the aging process as cyclical (the life cycle), as in the Bible’s enduring image of “from dust you were formed, to dust you shall return.” However, these concepts exist in many ways as a kind of anomaly within societies dominated by linear-time and do not enjoy the same privileged position as a progressive understanding of time. Such societies often attach qualifiers onto cyclical events (*last* fall, *next* Wednesday, summer 2013, the 1992/93 school year), which serve to orientate seemingly repeated events onto a linear timeline.

Another defining aspect of a linear understanding of time is its focus on chronology. Events take place in a particular order and are not to be repeated. This is evident in the numbering of years, whether it be on a calendar or in relationship to the calculation of age. The maintenance of numerical age is an essential feature of modern life in Western societies and an important identifier. Elias points out that “in the more developed societies it seems almost self-evident,

⁶³ Whitrow 1988. Pg. 13.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, Pg. 8-9, 25.

for example, that a person knows how old he is.”⁶⁵

In my own experience teaching teenage refugees in Norway, I have indeed felt the self-evidence of chronological classifications such as age. The culturally determined understanding of age became glaringly obvious to me when a student informed me, using his very few words of Norwegian, that it was his birthday. I congratulated him and asked what I thought, in my cultural naivety, to be a straightforward question: “How old are you?”. The student became quiet and went back to his desk. I thought perhaps he was not aware of what the numbers were called in Norwegian, so we went through a few: “Sixteen? Seventeen? Eighteen?” Each number was met with a blank stare. At last he came up to the front of the room holding his cell phone and thrust it into my hands “Happy birthday from Telenor” it read.⁶⁶ “I got it yesterday,” the student explained, “so yesterday was my birthday.” The student had no concept of his own age, and his birthday was a date arbitrarily chosen upon his arrival in the country. A date which only the Norwegian authorities and the mobile phone company were aware of, but which held no significance for this individual prior to receiving the text message.

If it is true what Thomas Hylland Eriksen writes that “it is as if we, at birth, sign a contract where we promise to be faithful to clock and calendar time for our whole life,”⁶⁷ then my student had missed out on signing any such contract before arriving in Norway. His identity was not intrinsically connected to a number representing his trips around the sun, 13 or 20 had very little to say one way or the other. It can seem, however, that numerical, chronological age is only strengthening its grip on Western societies as many defining life events (confirmation, education, marriage, parenthood, retirement) no longer occur in the same sequence as they did a few generations ago. This is described by, amongst others, John R. Gillis who writes that “changes in the length of life, career patterns, and familial relations are causing women as well as men to reach for symbols that would give meaning to the flux of middle age. Most adults would no doubt like to forget their annual birthdays, but they find themselves fixated on years like forty, fifty, or sixty fashioning these into collective observances of ever greater

⁶⁵ Elias 1992. Pg. 6 (One can question Elias’s use of “developed” here.)

⁶⁶ Telenor is a provider of mobile phone services.

⁶⁷ Hylland Eriksen 2007. Pg. 59. (My translation.)

significance.”⁶⁸

A final consideration in the discussion of the directionality of time is that it is perhaps not a circle nor a straight line which best represent the experience of time in a modern/post-modern world, but rather a smattering of moments, similar to a cluster of stars. These moments may be chaotic or more orderly, but they are characterized by an increased acceleration, a compression of time and experiences. This type of visualization may be closer to Hylland Eriksen’s depiction of the post-modern experience of time. In his words, “And still, many of us have a sneaking feeling that something is about to go wrong. This cannot be blamed on the linear understanding of time, rather on the contrary that the understanding of time is no longer linear enough.”⁶⁹ Time, in Hylland Eriksen’s opinion, is becoming fragmented and disjointed.

One goal in analyzing my interview material was to look for common or noteworthy characteristics in the participants’ descriptions of time. I was interested in whether any of these experiences of time (for example cyclical, linear or fragmented) dominate, or if several exist simultaneously. In addition, I was interested in which ways these socially constructed conceptions of time interact with and affect the experience of childhood.

3.3.2 The ticking clock: abstract time

The image of a clock is one that has been paramount throughout this project. A ticking clock provides the ultimate representation of the relentless, unyielding march of time, a concretization of time that is independent of human interaction or influence. While calendars can, to a greater degree, be connected to organically reoccurring phenomena in the natural world (for example the phases of the moon or the solar equinox), modern clocks provide a seemingly arbitrary time-scale. Time, as determined by the numbers on a clock, becomes a highly abstract concept, separated from natural human rhythms such as hunger, drowsiness or the need to relieve oneself. Sleepy teenagers are dragged out of bed to be at school by 8:30 a.m., elementary school children cross their legs and wait for the next allotted bathroom break and adults eat during their lunch break, regardless of whether they feel hungry or not. G.J.

⁶⁸ Gillis 1999. Pg. 118.

⁶⁹ Hylland Eriksen 2007. Pg. 69. (My translation.)

Whitrow concludes that, “Consequently, although there are differences between the objective order of physical time and the individual time of our personal experience, we are compelled more and more to relate our personal ‘now’ to the time-scale determined by the clock and the calendar.”⁷⁰ In not only do the clock and calendar affect the way in which we experience time in our daily lives, they also serve in industrial societies to tie together time and money,⁷¹ thus bringing forth the concept of “time efficiency.”⁷² This, in turn, leads to a moral categorization of individuals as efficient or inefficient based on their relationship to time.

Paradoxically, despite the establishment of an “objective” method of measuring time, recent years have yielded an increased focus on the concept of *fast* and *slow* time. These terms have undoubtedly surfaced in part as a reaction to the deficit between what Whitrow refers to as “the individual time of our personal experience” and the objectively and arbitrarily determined time-scale of the clock. Clock-time, in and of itself, cannot proceed at an accelerated or decelerated tempo, but our personal experience of time can be faster or slower.

Jean Piaget performed numerous experiments with children in the attempts to understand their conception of time. He concluded that a child’s sense of time (in this case an internalization of the abstract time-scale represented by the clock) is not fully developed until around age 7 or 8. Before this age there is “failure to grasp the idea of duration.”⁷³ In one experiment, children were asked to time various events using an hourglass. When asked to perform tasks or measure the duration of events happening at a faster speed, the children reported that the grains of sand in the hourglass also fell faster.⁷⁴ This is a clear example of the disharmony between the personal experience of time and objective time.

Although Piaget reports that a sense of time is generally developed before the age of 10,⁷⁵ this disharmony seems to persist even into adult life. Common phrases such as “time flies when you’re having fun” and “time is dragging on,” support the idea that personal experience of

⁷⁰ Whitrow 1988. Pg. 18.

⁷¹ Ellingsæter 2009. Pg. 58.

⁷² Hylland Eriksen 2007.

⁷³ Piaget 1969. Pg. 36.

⁷⁴ Ibid, Pg. 177.

⁷⁵ Whitrow (1988) mentions that “it has been found that at the age of 10 only one child in four regards time as an abstract concept independent of actual clocks.”

time is, to a very high degree, determined not by clocks nor internalized concepts of duration, but rather by the emotional and cognitive state of the individual. Hylland Eriksen relates the tale of one German 9-year-old who is frustrated over how slowly his teachers talk and who wants to go home to his video games which tell him things faster. This is contrasted with the story of a 5-year-old interviewed about instruction for small children who reported that he never got to play because he was always being urged to hurry up.⁷⁶ Here are two seemingly contradictory ideas: that teachers (or adults) are too slow and, at the same time, are not giving children enough time. The conclusion is that the difference in the experience of time can be related to the level of autonomy the individual feels in a given situation. Whether fast or slow, we want to be in control of our own time, something which can present a conflict with the relentless ticking of the clock.

3.3.3 Work and free: time and autonomy

A central differentiation in an industrial/post-industrial society more or less governed by the clock and its objective time-scale is that of work vs. free time. The idea of working in order to be free was present already with Aristotle,⁷⁷ but it is with the onset of the Industrial Revolution that the idea of work as an activity subject to the time-scale of the clock was thoroughly established. The main difference between work and free-time seems to be that work is seen as an “unfree” activity with a low level of autonomy, while free-time is viewed as being time where the individual has a higher level of autonomy. This definition is certainly contestable, but provides a starting point in order to examine what individuals experience within the open categories of work and free-time. These two categories (modified to *school* and *free-time* for children) provide the basis for the analysis of children’s and parents’ use and experience of time. It is here that an expressed conflict takes shape (the time crunch or *tidsklemme*) and therefore it is a point of departure from which to explore the different meanings present in concepts of time and childhood.

Anne Lise Ellingsæter writes: “Clock and calendar time exist with a multitude of

⁷⁶ Hylland Eriksen 2007. Pg. 203

⁷⁷ Ellingsæter 2009. Pg. 26.

understandings of time, with rich combinations of varying conceptions of time.”⁷⁸ This is true both of understandings of time and childhood. There exist many, oftentimes contradictory, understandings of both of these concepts and this variation, as well as occasional convergence, is what is of particular interest in this thesis.

⁷⁸ Ellingsæter 2009. Pg. 65.

CHAPTER 4: BUILDING AND HOPPING FENCES – THE PARAMETERS OF CHILDHOOD

After establishing a view of time and childhood as socially constructed concepts, it is high time to explore what it is that constitutes these concepts. What is it that American and Norwegian societies use to define childhood, and what do children themselves say?

The image of a fence lends itself to examining the parameters of a particular identity. In this case the identity is that of “child,” children being those experiencing childhood. Such an “identity fence” can be built around a particular group, either to contain the group or to keep out members of other groups. The beams of the fence can be seen as characteristics by which group members are defined, either by themselves or others. The height of the fence, the presence of a gate or a missing beam can be used to represent the ease or difficulty with which individuals can move from one particular identity or group to another. In the course of my interviews, children provided three main groups of criteria which can be considered the beams of the identity fence for childhood:

1. Age criteria
2. Biological criteria
3. Behavioral criteria

In this section, I will discuss in more detail these three types of criteria and what they can say about the understanding of childhood.

4.1 Self-Identification

All of the children interviewed for this project identified themselves as children on the basis of their own criteria, be it age, biological or behavioral.⁷⁹ This self-identification is notable

⁷⁹ It could be of interest in a later study to examine where the boundaries of self-identification go, as far as identifying oneself as a child.

since it indicates that the participants felt that they were making statements about a group to which they themselves belonged. The parents of these children were also interviewed and, where appropriate, their responses will be included as representation of external classification of members of an identity group.

Interestingly, and perhaps unexpectedly, while there was a moderate degree of variation in individual responses, the majority of the criteria regarding the parameters of childhood were equally represented in both the American and Norwegian responses. That is to say that the Norwegian and American children, as a group, expressed a number of similar ideas about where the boundaries of childhood exist. The mothers also expressed similar ideas, although those ideas differed in certain ways from those of their children. Due to the unexpected level of similarity in responses, the majority of analysis in both this chapter and the following does not treat the Norwegian and American children as separate groups in every instance, but does address differences when they occur. In order to make the nationality of the participants more explicit, the names of Norwegian participants are followed by an (N) and American participants with an (A).

While not much separated the Norwegian and American responses, more differentiation is made between children and parents (in this case, mothers). One of the areas in which the responses varied the most between these two groups, children and mothers, was in regards to chronological age.

4.2 Age

Using a linear, chronological concept of time, as discussed in section 3.3.1, numerical age would seem to provide a logical, definitive boundary for an understanding of childhood. At a particular age, one is a child and thereby has (or deserves?) a childhood. After a certain age is passed, the individual is no longer a child and childhood becomes a thing of the past. Indeed, this is what the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in essence accomplishes by

establishing 18 years as an official “end of childhood.”⁸⁰ This 18 year limit is also used as the age of majority in Norway and the United States,⁸¹ further formalizing chronological age as the determining factor for particular legal treatment and protection for the group classified as children.

The children interviewed for this study did mention age in their responses, but only one of the eight children named 18 as an age with any particular significance in relationship to childhood or entering into adulthood. The children were, however, acutely aware of their own ages (including one Norwegian boy who emphasized that he was not only ten, but ten and *a half*), and they connected age to the progression into a period of youth proceeding childhood. Age was, in fact, the only aspect that all of the children mentioned as a defining characteristic of childhood during their interviews.

In using age as a parameter for socially constructed childhood, it is noteworthy that there does not seem to be a correlation between the legal boundary and the experiences of individuals. There is clarity in the legal and UN-determined boundary of 18 years, but this age seems not to hold meaning for the participants of this project, as far as providing an authentic experiential boundary. The children I interviewed were unanimously clear in their perception of a period of life between childhood and adulthood, a period where the boundaries on either side remain relatively muddy. The most common answers when asked about where the limits of childhood might be were around 13-14 years old. One American participant explained that his “range” was between 11 and 15. Due to the similarity in answers, one could maintain that these ages were most likely not chosen at random, but were probably influenced by the focus on “teenagers” as a distinct identity group. “Teenager” was a common answer when the children were asked what a person was when they were no longer a child, in addition to “youth” and “young adult.” The word “teen” itself (or the Norwegian equivalent “tenåring”) seemed to represent a type of boundary between identifying as a child or as belonging to another identity group (a teenager or youth).

⁸⁰ UN General Assembly. Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 1. 1989. United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1577.

⁸¹ With the exception of the states of Alabama, Nebraska and Mississippi, which have even higher ages of majority.

This type of focus on chronological age was not present in the responses from the children's parents, where very few of the participants made reference to age. The participants who did mention age, did so in regards to increased responsibility, which in this case falls more under behavioral criteria. This variation in responses points to a difference in children's own criteria and adult's criteria for inclusion in this identity group.

4.3 Rituals of Transition

One point on which both the parents' and children's responses converged was on the topic of transitional events. The participants seemed to be in agreement that there was no particular event or ceremony (for example confirmation, graduation, marriage) which marked the end of childhood or a transition to another phase of life. This is consistent with Gillis's analysis⁸² in which he claims that chronological age has become more consequential than such transitional rituals since these events often do not occur in as fixed a sequence as they have done previously.

Confirmation has been the ceremony that has traditionally played a defining roll in the transition from child to adult in many Western cultures. This ritual, however, may have lost its significance with the emergence of a longer period of "youth" prior reaching adulthood, as well as with the establishment of a legal age of majority which comes later than the age of confirmation. The participants I interviewed did not describe a direct transition from childhood to adulthood, but rather a gradual development through a period of youth/teenage years. While the age of confirmation varies from country to country and from faith to faith, many are confirmed at a time when they no longer feel they are children, but neither are they considered adults by their own judgment or that of the society they live in. A ritual of transition from childhood to a diffuse identity as a youth or young adult leaves the participant without a clear sense of meaning and reduces the event's significance as a defining characteristic in forming the parameters of childhood.

Since many children or youth in Norway and the United States choose not to be confirmed for

⁸² Gillis 1999. Pg. 118.

various reasons, there are perhaps other institutions or rites of passage that carry more meaning in contemporary society and that hold a societal role similar to that previously held by confirmation. Compulsory elementary education is another stipulation in the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child⁸³ and the school system is an obvious choice in looking for events bearing cultural meaning which affect the majority of children in a particular society. School was, in fact, an area of transition cited by some of the students and parents interviewed. Those who mentioned school as part of the transition from childhood cited the beginning of middle school (or *ungdomsskole* in Norwegian) as a meaningful event.

It can be worthwhile in this context to mention some of the differences that exist between the Norwegian and American school systems. There are regional variations in the structure of education both in Norway and the United States, but the following comments are based on the school districts I was able to observe, as well as other general experiences with the public school systems in each country.

In the United States, compulsory education lasts for 12 years and these years are generally divided up into elementary school, middle school/junior high and high school. The elementary schools in the district I conducted my research in consisted of grades 1-5, plus kindergarten (students ages were from 5-11 years). The middle schools housed grades 6-8 (from 11-14 years). In the Norwegian system, 10 years of education are compulsory, but the vast majority of students choose to continue on to an additional three years at high school (*videregående skole*). Elementary education (*barneskole*) consists of grades 1-7 (ages 6-13 years), divided into the lower grades (1-4) and the intermediate grades (5-7). After completing elementary school, students transfer to middle school/junior high (*ungdomsskole*) for grades 8-10 (ages 13-16). (See figures 4.3a and 4.3b) An interesting sidenote is that the Norwegian word for elementary school, *barneskole*, can be literally translated as "child school." Likewise, the word for middle school/junior high, *ungdomsskole*, can be translated as "youth school." My interviews did not provide any basis for a conclusion regarding the possible importance or inferred meaning of the more overt use of the words *child* and *youth* in the Norwegian school

⁸³ UN General Assembly. Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 28. 1989. United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1577.

structure, but it is feasible that these words inspire a certain consciousness about the identity of the individuals attending schools labeled with these terms.

Figure 4.3a School Structure in the United States (Elementary and Secondary)

Name of school	Grade levels	Age of students (in years)	Compulsory by law
Elementary	1-5 (plus kindergarten and pre-k at some locations)	5-11	Yes
Middle school	6-8	11-14	Yes
High school	9-12	14-18	Yes

Figure 4.3b School Structure in Norway (Elementary and Secondary)

Name of school	Grade levels	Age of students (in years)	Compulsory by law
Barneskole	1-7 (divided into “småtrinn” and “mellomtrinn”)	6-13	Yes
Ungdomsskole	8-10	13-16	Yes
Videregående skole	1-3 (or 11-13 if compared to the American system)	16-19	No

The difference in age when transferring to the next level of education could have implications for when individual children experience a transition from childhood to a period of youth. It is worth noting that this transition was more imminent for the American children than for their Norwegian peers. All the students interviewed were in 5th grade at the time they were interviewed, which meant that the American students would begin in middle school the following year, whereas the Norwegian students would have to wait two years before starting at a new school.

One of the American children I spoke with mentioned the transition to middle school multiple times during his interview. Michael, age 10, described the entrance into middle school as an approximate end to childhood. He also brought up the transition to middle school as an important event when asked what he would be doing the following year: “Next year. Hm.

Well, I know next year I definitely won't be telling my brother 'yeah, big me.' I'll just be going, 'I'm in middle school, you treat me like a little kid. I'm not in elementary school anymore.'" The transition to middle school clearly holds meaning for Michael, both in the way he regards himself, but also in the way he relates to his brother (who was 13 at the time of the interview). He did not view those attending middle school as "little kids." but his statement also shows a reluctance to define himself as "big" unduly. Annette Lareau also reports a similar "trepidation and excitement" connected to middle school in her work with 5th grade students in the United States.⁸⁴ Perhaps these types of responses can be seen as reflections of the indeterminate nature of the early teen years, a period of youth which seems to exist in a grey area between childhood and adult life.

This lack of clarity around the ever-expanding period of youth which follows (or perhaps even overlaps) childhood can, in part, be characterized by the waning importance of transitional rituals. In addition, although most of the children interviewed provided the age of 13-14 years as the point at which one stopped being a child, coincidentally an age which does not correlate with the legal definition, age was not a key component in the majority of responses to the question "How do you know whether or not someone is a child?". This leads to the conclusion that there exist alternative criteria by which children determine which side of the identity fence someone is on.

4.4 Biological criteria

In societies dominated by scientific explanations, it is not surprising that physical development and biology were present in several of the responses regarding the transition from childhood. Puberty and its many effects were not lost on the 10- and 11-year-olds interviewed. This was, for some, an important factor in defining one's own identity and those of the people around them.

Puberty, defined as "the stage when a person's sexual organs are developing and he or she

⁸⁴ Lareau 2003. Pg. 233.

becomes capable of having children,”⁸⁵ seems in many ways to be a logical place to draw a line between childhood and adulthood. It is, after all, consequential that the process of puberty enables individuals to have children of their own, which would lead to the logical assumption that those capable of producing children are no longer children themselves.

Aspects of this phenomenon of physical change were present in a few, but certainly not all, of the responses from children. One participant in particular, 10 ½-year-old Sebastian (N),⁸⁶ cited exclusively physical and biological changes as the defining criteria regarding childhood. When asked how he knew whether or not someone was a child, Sebastian replied: “If someone is a child, then their voice hasn’t changed.” Another defining aspect was the growth of hair in “other places.” Sebastian’s responses were notable in that he was the only one of the children who did not outline a longer period of transition from childhood to adult life. There was no mention of “teenager” or “young adult” in his responses. In Sebastian’s own words: “You’re an adult when you’re an adult and a child when you’re a child.” For him, there was a clear biological line between childhood and adulthood which included a change in physical characteristics. Once a voice had changed or hair appeared, that line had been crossed, the fence had been jumped.

Sebastian’s classmate, Fredrik (N), also mentioned some physical criteria. He mentioned that those that had transitioned from childhood were often larger than those who had not. This characterization would fit in well with Piaget’s findings that young children often correlated age with height.⁸⁷ Fredrik’s responses, however, were generally more focused on other criteria than the biological in determining the boundaries of childhood.

While biological characteristics factored heavily in some descriptions of childhood, both Norwegian and American, and can provide a much more cut-and-dry definition than some other types of criteria, it was not these characteristics which dominated the descriptions of the majority of children and parents I spoke with. The criteria which participants seemed to put most emphasis on were much more diffuse in nature, typified by a focus on the behavior of individuals.

⁸⁵ Oxford: Advanced Learner’s Dictionary. 1995. Pg. 936.

⁸⁶ Interview participants are indicated as either Norwegian (N) or American (A).

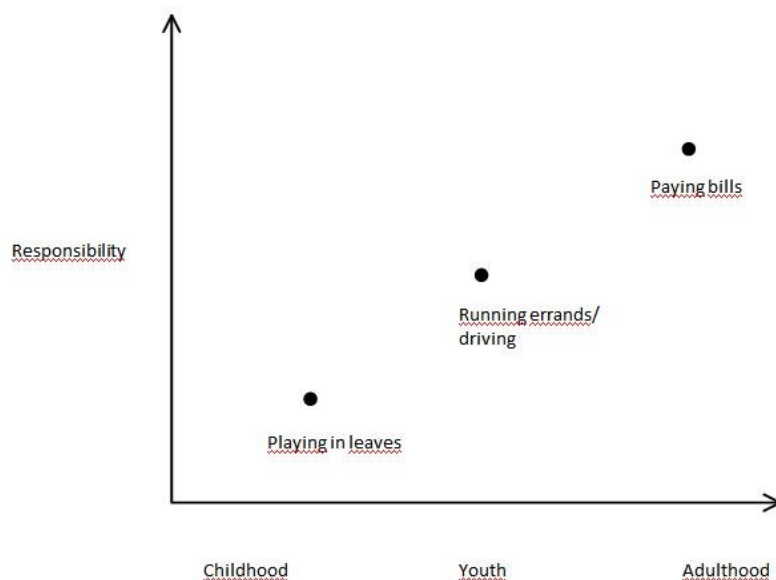
⁸⁷ Piaget 1969. Pg. 201.

4.5 Behavioral criteria: responsibility and maturity

The word “child” can be used to describe behavior in both positive and negative ways. Someone can possess a *childlike innocence* or act in a *childish* fashion. The children I interviewed identified several behavioral characteristics that could indicate whether or not someone was a child. These characteristics had less to do with what someone was or what they had, but rather the kind of things they did. For example, Randi (N) reported that you knew you were an adult when you paid your own electric bill. Michael (A) pointed out that children would play in the leaves, ride their bikes or play a game of tag, whereas older teenagers or adults would be driving and going on errands. Descriptions like Randi’s (N) and Michael’s (A) place emphasis on the performative nature of identity, a central feature of the cultural studies tradition.⁸⁸

One way to visualize the performativity of an identity such as adult, youth or child is to place each of the categories along one axis, with responsibility and maturity serving as the second axis. Various events can then be placed at appropriate positions between the axes and an individual’s position can be plotted out.

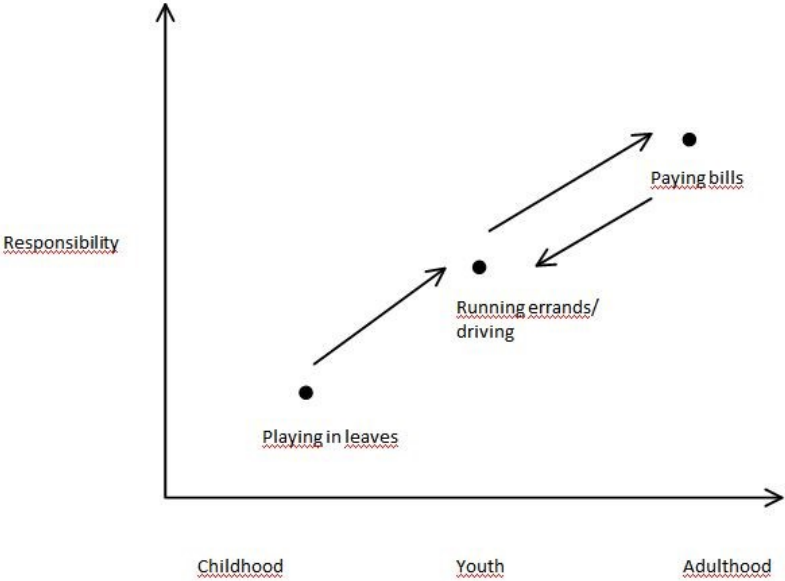
Figure 4.5a



⁸⁸ Sørensen et al 2008. Pg. 140.

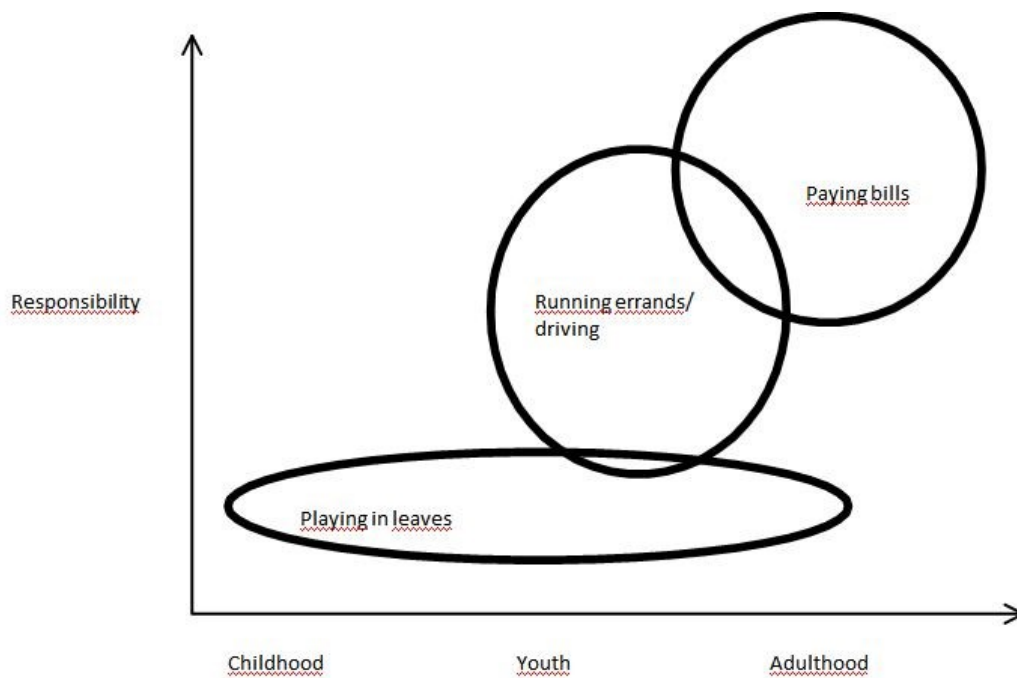
This path, however, may not necessarily be in a straight line, depending on the behavior of the individual. For example, several of the parents interviewed responded that they did not consider their children to be out of childhood before they moved away from the family home. Using this criteria, an individual could move out of the parents' home, begin paying their own bills, then at a later point return to living with the parents for a period of time, thus returning to a more youthful identity.

Figure 4.5b



A further adjustment can be made to accommodate for the fact that many behaviors persist over a longer period of time and do not exist at merely one point.

Figure 4.5c



These visual representations are not meant to provide a concrete method of pinning down exactly where childhood ends and another period of life begins, but are rather meant to serve as an indication of the fluid nature of identity, where an individual may move between different identities at different times.

The responses from children and parents also indicate that the types of behavior that constitute being a child, a youth or an adult are not set in stone and can vary based on the culture, the family or over time. These boundaries are constantly being negotiated and renegotiated. What was generally agreed upon amongst the participants I interviewed, both in Norway and the United States, was that childhood was a period with less responsibility and that responsibility increased gradually as the individual moves towards adult life.

4.6 Responsibility – Who does what?

The concept of responsibility is integral in describing the differences in experience between children, youth and adults. The children I interviewed indicated that they had responsibilities, but that those responsibilities were not the same as those of their parents. Mothers also described the responsibilities of children and parents as varying. One mother, Ellinor (N), concluded about her daughter: “It’s clear that she also has responsibility. A kind of subordinate responsibility.” This idea that children have “less” responsibility, or a different

kind of responsibility, was echoed in all of the interviews. None of the participants from either country responded that parents and children had the same responsibilities. This could have implications related to the idea of children being “unfinished” (see section 3.1.2) or of childhood being a protected space.

A common thread that emerged, independent of age or nationality, was the emphasis on children having a primary responsibility for themselves, whether that meant their own belongings, their own actions and behavior or for communicating their needs to adults.

4.6.1 “Don’t break things”: Responsibility for physical possessions

Several of the children interviewed expressed a sense of responsibility for taking care of their own physical possessions. Randi (N) reported that it was a child’s responsibility “not to break things,” further explaining that she had broken her father’s CD and he “got completely mad.” Julianna (N), also responded that children should be careful with their things. Interestingly, neither Randi’s nor Julianna’s mother mentioned care for personal possessions as a particular area of responsibility for their children, whereas some of the other mothers brought up this aspect while their children did not.

For Charlie (A) and his mother Barbara (A), however, there was clear agreement on this point. Upon being asked the same question as all the other participants (What are children responsible for?), both immediately answered “glasses.” This was apparently due to the fact that the family was now on their third pair of eyeglasses for Charlie that year, after the first set had disappeared into thin air and the second set had been lost and presumably destroyed at football practice. Charlie, and several of the other children, expressed the experience of caring for physical personal belongings as an important responsibility they held, and not something that another person could control. These experiences also show that the children feel some responsibility towards their parents or family, in addition to a responsibility towards themselves.

4.6.2 “Responsible for having fun” – Responsibility for personal feelings and actions

Another area in which the children seemed to experience that they had responsibility was their own feelings and actions. Several of the interviews provided similar responses in this area:

Question: What are children responsible for?
Lydia (A): What they do and their actions.
Fredrik (N): They are responsible for having fun, for being nice, for behaving.
Michael (A): Well, they should be responsible for about how they act...and what they will do. A child should say no to whatever somebody says to do that is wrong.

The children appear to have an understanding of what constitutes “good” or “bad” behavior and these responses indicate that these understandings are internal and are not controlled by other individuals, adult or otherwise. Michael (A) elaborated: “It’s like, a child should say ‘no’ to like, ‘light the dumpster on fire’ or something like that. Something like that would not be smart at all.”

Lydia (A), Fredrik (N) and Michael’s (A) responses give the impression that children know and understand, for the most part, the difference between right and wrong and are responsible for acting accordingly. The responses from mothers generally indicated that they also trusted their children to make good choices. In addition, they expected their children to communicate with them about difficult situations of which the parents could not have knowledge. Sebastian (N) expressed a similar responsibility, but perhaps not in the same way the parents were imagining:

Question: What are children responsible for?

Sebastian: Mm, to tell about different things. If someone is hungry, for example.

Although not necessarily the type of moral dilemma a parent hopes their children feel comfortable talking to them about, Sebastian’s (N) comment does depict an attitude of acceptance that parents cannot know every thought or need a child has, and that some responsibility lies with the child to communicate or seek advice from others. This concept of communication is related to an important area of responsibility as described in particular by the American mothers: responsibility as a member of a household.

4.6.3 “You have responsibilities to take part in this family” – Chores

Up to this point, most of the Norwegian and American responses have been similar in great enough measure that no attempt has been made to establish independent “Norwegian” or “American” understandings of childhood. As far as the children themselves are concerned, the responses do not provide any basis for establishing two distinct concepts of what it means to be a child. In attempting to create a space in which to explore children’s experiences through their own words, it is these descriptions I wish to give most weight (see section 3.2.2).

However, the responses of parents can also give insight into alternative societal attitudes or boundaries placed on childhood. In a way of speaking, parents and other adults can add boards to the children’s identity fence from the outside, which those on the inside may react to in various ways. Therefore, it can be useful to examine differences in the way adults describe childhood along cultural lines.

One notable difference in the descriptions of the Norwegian and American mothers was the latter’s emphasis on the concept of the family unit and the child’s responsibility to that unit. American Genevieve was the mother who most clearly expressed this type of responsibility:

Well, I always tell my children, you’re part of a family, and that means that you have responsibilities to take part in this family. This family needs everybody to work together to work. And that means that you have a responsibility to keep your room clean. I’m not going to tell you that you need to get your clothes into the laundry basket, cause when I do laundry, if the clothes aren’t in the basket, they don’t get washed... I think that they should be responsible to help with clearing supper dishes and, you know, preparing meals if they’re home. They can help prepare a meal. Picking up their toys, whatever they get out. You know, Sam will pick up his newspapers at the end of the day. But I just think in order for a family to work, everybody needs to take part to make it work. Just one person can’t do it all.

In Genevieve’s (A) description, the responsibility, as it relates to the family, revolves in large part around chores done in the home, such as keeping the house tidy and helping with meal preparation. There are concrete tasks which must be completed for a family to “work.” There is also a focus on the child’s role in relationship to the parent, that not all the work should fall to one person. This idea is echoed in Roxanne’s (A) response: “They [children] should be responsible for making sure that the household continues to run smoothly enough that, their parents, the burden isn’t totally on the parents... Their responsibility is to be part of the family and make sure that the household stays, you know, running.” There is a clear understanding, according to these mothers, that all members of a family or household, adults and children alike, have a responsibility to perform certain tasks out of a sense of duty to the collective unit.

In the responses from children, it is clear that some feel such a type of responsibility. However, the responses do not differ between countries. Charlie (A), age 10, describes a potential responsibility for a child: “Yeah, if you have a pet, you should start like, feeding it every day, and like caring for it, so your parents don’t have to.” Charlie seems to accept that the parents probably would feed the pet, rather than watch it starve, but out of a sense of responsibility to the parents (and presumably also to the animal in question), a child should assume that duty his- or herself.

Despite the lack of explicit references to housework, chores or obligation to the family unit in the responses from the Norwegian mothers, Norwegian children did articulate that there are particular expectations for children in the home. Julianna (N) explained that children should be responsible for certain tasks around the house and that they “maybe watch siblings if they have them, younger siblings.” Fredrik (N) reported that children should “clean their rooms and have some jobs at home and that sort of thing.” These responses can indicate that the Norwegian children themselves experience an obligation to a family unit, which perhaps is not an expectation their parents have, or it could be one so engrained that the parents did not articulate it during the interview. It is difficult to draw a conclusion here, but one possible influencing factor could be a difference in what the society and the parents themselves view as the parent’s responsibility in relationship to the child.

4.6.4 The role of the parent: Safety, comfort and success

If you ask a child, the role of a parent does not seem that difficult to comprehend. When I asked 10-year-old Lydia (A) what parents are responsible for, she simply replied “their child.” Several of the Norwegian children expanded on this, explaining that parents had a responsibility to make sure their child is doing alright, that the child is happy and content. This could include spending time with their children or listening more to their children. Other responses, and perhaps those which would raise a few chuckles from the parents themselves, provided very concrete tasks for which parents were responsible:

Question: What should parents be responsible for?
Randi (N): Drive children back and forth to school, even if they are at the neighbor's.
Fredrik (N): Wash clothes and do almost all the house stuff at home.
Charlie (A): Cooking, cause I really don't know how. I mean, I can make the Easy Mac ⁸⁹ in the microwave, but other than that all I know how to make is Rice Krispies.
Michael (A): Parents should be responsible for...making dinner, helping out with dinner and stuff.

Michael (A) also mentioned that his mother, Roxanne (A), was responsible for the decorations around the home, a further indication of the delegation of duties to particular members in a household. For the children, the role of the parent was to take care of the child, there and then, in very specific terms or in a more general sense.

From the mothers' perspective, taking care of the here and now was important (providing care and support for their child, as well as the day-to-day concerns of keeping children fed, clothed and safe), but equally important was the idea that they were preparing their children to be happy and successful adults. All the responses from the mothers I interviewed included descriptions of a feeling of responsibility for their children's future lives as adults, but there was a slight difference in the articulation of what was most important in that future life. For the Norwegian mothers, the emphasis seemed to be on safety, decency and independence. All of these aspects were present in the American mothers' responses, but there was an additional facet which had to do with opportunities and education.

This contrast can be seen in comparing the responses from the Norwegian and American mothers. Norwegian Agnes responds that the role or responsibility of the parent is: "care and making sure that they [children] have it as good as possible...That they develop themselves in relation to the abilities they themselves have, without putting one's own dreams and expectations in each child, I think. And that they behave properly and with...manners." In Agnes's response there is a focus on well-behaved children who are allowed to develop

⁸⁹ Microwavable pasta.

without too much pressure from adults or parents.

American Barbara also expresses the importance of behavior, but there are certain additional expectations:

I think they [parents] need to be responsible for the basic needs of their kid. You know, shelter, clothing, you know, make sure they get educated... They need to be responsible for raising a child that's a good kid, you know. That's the big thing, being a good kid and being good to other... I think it's responsible for, important for kids to have a college education. So to me, that's a big thing that I think parents need to help their kids get a college education.

Barbara's (A) response, like that of Agnes (N), puts most emphasis on raising well-behaved children, a child that's a "good kid," but in addition there is a focus on higher education.

There were aspects of this pressure to ensure that a child got an education and was successful in all of the responses from American parents.

American mother Roxanne articulated a similar point in a slightly different way: "Well, they're [parents are] responsible for making sure their children grow up to be functional, healthy members of society, that aren't mooches off the society." It is perhaps here that the key to the variation in expectations from the American and Norwegian parents can be found: an underlying difference in the way in which one views the relationship between the individual, the family and the larger society. While the public sector in Norway has spent years building up a system of public "safety nets" from which the vast majority of the population have benefited (for example: higher education that is essentially free of tuition charges, universal health care, paid maternity leave), welfare systems in the States are aimed towards those "falling through the cracks." While Norway is beginning to see more negativity connected to being on welfare, with a new verb "å nave" (loosely translated: to welfare) being coined in recent years, this connection between welfare and "mooching" is well-established in the United States. The American parents I interviewed all seemed to share a view that it was the family's and in particular the parents' responsibility to provide the child with all the opportunities they would need to not only survive, but succeed as an adult. Perhaps this responsibility was not felt as heavily by the Norwegian parents who knew that their children would more than likely have access to government funded education and health care once they left the family home.

All of these expectations, however, seem to transpire outside of the realm of childhood, since

none of the children's responses revealed any description or expectation of preparation for future life either from themselves or their parents. In the mothers' descriptions, several aspects of the discourse around children as "human becomings" appeared, that children were on their way to being something else (a "successful adult"). In contrast, the children's descriptions depicted two separate worlds, childhood and adulthood (or in this case, parenthood), each inhabited by human beings who were complete at the stage they were in, not defined by a process of becoming anything else.

4.7 Time and Responsibility– Creating the Boundaries of Childhood

It may seem as though this discussion of responsibility has very little to do with the main focus of this thesis, which is to examine how ideas about *time* affect and influence the concept of childhood. To this, my response would be twofold:

1. A conclusion that certain areas or ideas about childhood are *not* influenced by time is as valid and valuable a conclusion as that all or some areas *are* influenced by ideas about time.
2. Responsibility does, in fact, have an integral relationship to time, particularly in conjunction with the idea of autonomy and control over one's own time. This relationship will be further explored in the next section, with a basis in the differences in the experiences and expectations of responsibility expressed in the interview material.

In summary, the identity fence surrounding childhood is built up of several determining factors, including chronological age, biological components and behavioral characteristics. For most of those "inside the fence," the children themselves, biological components were least meaningful in construction their identity. Chronological age had meaning for many of the children, but this meaning was not shared by their parents and the boundary was far from absolute with *responsibility* emerging as a key concept. While children's responsibility was most focused on themselves, occasionally extending to the family, adults and parents had responsibilities which were much more outwardly focused. This indicates that chronological time is not the singularly defining characteristic of childhood, but that a much more complex understanding of time, related to and tied up in the concepts of responsibility and autonomy,

influences the concept and experience of childhood.

CHAPTER 5: HAVING, SPENDING, USING, CONTROLLING: EXPERIENCES OF TIME IN CHILDHOOD (AND BEYOND)

With some understanding of how children identify themselves and how others in Norwegian and American society draw lines around childhood, the next step is to explore what ideas about and concepts of time exist within childhood. How do children experience time and are these experiences in any way different than those of adults? What does this convey about childhood in general? The following sections attempt to describe some of the ways in which children experience time, in comparison to the experiences of their parents.

5.1 Responsibility and Autonomy

The ideas of responsibility and autonomy are central to the experience of time in this context, but they can have opposing connotations. Responsibility carries with it a connection to expectations, and expectations often come from external sources. This can lead to a view of responsibility as something imposed or enforced from the outside, from society, as opposed to “autonomy” which bears connotations of freedom from societal conventions, the ability to choose and decide independently.

These two ideas, however, can actually be much more closely related. While some definitions of responsibility refer to “accountability,” a concept which would reinforce the idea of external expectations, others emphasize that responsibility entails being able to do or accomplish something independently, without supervision. This emphasis is much closer to the connotations associated with autonomy, such as independence, self-sufficiency and freedom.

My interviews included a good deal of information about what children (and parents, in particular mothers) spend their time doing and how in control they feel they are of their own time. In this sense of the word, to be *in control* of how one *spends time* has less to do with the idea of a clock and more to do with the experiences of responsibility and autonomy. It is having the ability (or lack thereof) to prioritize, organize and execute particular activities according to one’s own wishes. A crucial difference in the responses from the mothers and the

children was the way in which they described their relationship to time. This difference was particularly evident in regards to whether or not they had enough time to do the things they wanted to do.

The children were asked to describe their favorite things to do. Answers included a wide variety of activities. Some could be organized activities (football, soccer, softball, playing saxophone, horseback riding), others were not (sleeping in, playing with friends, model railroading). All the children responded that they felt they had enough time to do those activities. Michael (A) summed it up quite clearly: “Oh yeah. I’ve got plenty of time.”

When Michael’s mother, Roxanne (A), was asked a similar question (whether she had time to do the things she wanted to do), her response was: “Absolutely not. Are you crazy?” This indicates a vastly different experience of time between mother and son. All of the responses from the American mothers echoed Roxanne’s, as did Norwegian Rebekka’s. These mothers often responded incredulously, almost seeming to take the question as a joke (“Are you crazy?”) and several referenced the idea that not having time to prioritize oneself was the natural state of all mothers. Barbara (A) said that she did not have time to do the things she wanted to do, adding “that’s probably pretty typical.” Genevieve (A) responded, “What mother has the time to do what they want to do?”

There were mothers who responded that they had time to do what they wanted to do, including Genevieve (A) herself when she elaborated that what she really wanted to do now was to spend time with her children, realizing that it is a short period of life she has to do that. Anette (N) replied in a similar way, saying that she probably would have time to do the things she wanted to if she prioritized a little better. In a discussion about the idea of a “time crunch,” Anette describes her attitude towards the prioritizing of time: “You would maybe feel a time crunch because you have so many of your own things you would really like to do. But I think there’s a period, there’s a period where I have my focus on young children, and now on slightly older children, then I will get my time again later, and I can do my things, I think.” For Anette, external things (society or other people) can affect the activities she participates in, how she “spends” her time, but it is her attitude towards those obligations and her own expectations for her time use that determine whether or not she experiences a feeling of not having enough time. Anette appears to be squarely in the middle of the structure/agency dichotomy. (See section 3.2.2.)

This feeling of being able to adjust one's expectations and prioritize time-use based on the phase of life one is in was one idea presented in the mothers' responses, another being that mothers clearly did not have enough time. In my initial inquiry, however, I was interested in the phenomenon of over-scheduled *children*, not over-scheduled *mothers*. The descriptions painted by children were much different than I had been expecting.

5.2 Children's Arenas – School and Free Time

In order to investigate this idea of the over-scheduled child, I needed to hear what it was that children were actually doing. What type of activities were they participating in and who decided that they would participate in them? Children's lives, at least from the time they begin at school, and most probably already from the time they begin in daycare or kindergarten, mirror the lives of adults in that their existence is divided into two distinct arenas. There is "school" (or "work" for adults) and the time not spent at school, commonly referred to as "free-time." School, for children, much like work for adults, lends itself easily as an "arena" for socially created meaning. It is many ways a closed space, both in relationship to time and space, as well as in regards to the power structures which influence it.

5.3 Children at school

Conducting my interviews during the school year meant that school was a defining activity for all of the children, but it was also the activity I heard fewest details about. The way in which the children described school was not uniform, but several of the responses converged along similar lines. One of the similarities (with two notable exceptions⁹⁰) was the lack of detail involved around school as an activity.

5.3.1 Just another day at work

When asked to describe a typical day, most of the children provided much more detail about what they did before and after school than what they did during their time at school. Sam (A)

⁹⁰ Michael and Charlie, two of the American children interviewed, provided quite a bit of detail about what they did at school when asked to describe a typical day. This is discussed further in section 5.3.2.

described his day in the following way: “Get up, get ready for school, go to school, ride the bus home from school. Then, either swim, play with my Legos, play with my pandas or play with my friends, or play on my Wii.⁹¹ And then, eat supper, and then, watch TV, and then go to bed.” Although the time spent at school is probably just as long as, if not longer than, the time he has after school, Sam sums up the activities of all of those hours in three words. This was something that was repeated in many of the interviews and was similar to the way in which the parents mentioned work. This can support Qvortrup’s argument that school functions for children in a way similar to that of work for adults, that school is the work that children contribute to society.⁹²

Despite generally giving few details about the school day as such, for many of the children school seemed to provide a sense of predictability and routine to their lives. When asked what they would be doing the next day, nearly all the children were unsure of the exact plans, but school was a definite. School also defined the passing of years for many. When asked what she would be doing next year, Julianna (N) responded: “I’ll go to 6th grade. And then...and then I’m not quite sure what I’ll do...” Amidst the general uncertainty around activities for the coming year, school was an activity that the children knew would be there. In this way, school was an arena where children described both a cyclical experience of time (school would be there again tomorrow, gone during the summer, but back in the fall) as well as a linear experience (next year would be a new grade level). Being a cyclical event, school is a constant in an otherwise diffuse and indeterminate future.

The lack of choice in attending school may be one reason that the majority of the children did not describe their school days in any great detail. When asked to tell someone about ourselves, the tendency may be to include those aspects that we feel characterize and define us as *individuals*. It stands to reason that activities we choose ourselves would then appear to be more defining than activities that *all* other people our age must participate in. There may also be an assumption that “everybody knows what school is” and therefore it isn’t necessary to elaborate points with which everyone is familiar with by virtue of the fact that they have

⁹¹ Wii is a video game system.

⁹² Qvortrup 2001 provides further basis for comparing children’s activities at school and adult’s work.

attended school themselves.

5.3.2 The importance of keeping busy: Michael and Charlie at school

While several of the children's responses provided very little specific information about what went on during the school day, two of the American participants described their activities both in and out of school with a much higher level of detail. Charlie (A) gave the following description of his school day:

So when I get to school we do breakfast in the classroom. And, I'm not really used the schedule yet, but like, so sometimes we have P.E. and music and, like 12:30 when we come in from recess, we usually have like art or LMC or something. And after that we usually do math. And then we do, we have these journals, and we lie there on what we did at school today. And so then school's over and I usually walk home or go to the Boys and Girls club.

Michael's (A) description was even more explicit. The first part of his day was described in this way:

And I will, just wait 10 minutes for my bus. Take the bus to school. Get off and go put all my things in my locker, get everything I need for school. And I'll go back to my classroom, if I am having breakfast, rarely I'll have breakfast at school, but sometimes I will. I'll do that, or I'll talk with a friend. Then we would have our first math class in the morning. And then, we just have something to drink, just kind of silent reading and stuff. Then that's when we would have, that's when we would go to a different class, switch classrooms. Today, like I had P.E. So, when we came back, we would go into reading. Read our book until 11:25, write down note about the book. Then we would go to lunch and recess at 11:25.

These responses, markedly different from the responses of the other children interviewed, represent an experience of the importance of a schedule and the importance of keeping busy, of being able to account for one's time. Charlie (A) mentions that one of the tasks he is expected to complete at school is a journal entry where he "lies" about what he has done at school during the day. This illustrates the way in which children from a relatively early age are expected to be able to account for what they have done during the day, account for the way in which they spend their time. It is also interesting to note that the mothers of these two boys were particularly concerned with their sons' future prospects related to education and, in Michael's case, self-sufficiency later in life. These types of descriptions may be linked to a moral connection to time, which is further explored in section 5.6.6. The fact that only American children responded in this way could be an indication that the moral connection to time, expressed through accountability and efficiency, may play a larger role in the United States than in Norway.

5.3.3 Experiencing time at school

Although most of the children's interviews provided relatively few details about the school day itself, there were indications that the children experienced time differently at school as opposed to at home or in their free-time. When asked if she checked the time often, Lydia (A) replied "At school I do, but not at home." Fredrik (N) had a similar response about how often he checked the time: "Yeah, a lot at school and a little bit at home." I also noticed a focus on clock time in the schools I observed. This was evidenced both in the form of physical clocks in highly visible positions in each room in the schools, as well as in the way teachers spoke to students ("Okay, you have 5 minutes left, in 2 minutes you should start packing up your things."). A school is an arena with many activities occurring simultaneously, something which requires a high degree of coordination. Clock time appears to be an efficient way in which to coordinate these activities, a concept which Lydia (A) and Fredrik (N) had begun to internalize.

Other students interviewed seemed to have a more ambiguous relationship to the clock at school. Although he could relate in extreme detail exactly when each activity at school started and ended, when Michael (A) was asked how he knew it was time to start a new activity, he explained: "Our teacher will just usually say 'alright, now it's time for' whatever, recess, now it's time for lunch, now it's time for whatever." Clock time was a concept that Michael understood, and it could be that he was well aware of the time during the school day, but he did not deem it his responsibility to decide when it was time to begin a new activity. That responsibility lie with the teacher.

It seems that, at school, time was experienced as something others controlled, but that the children were often very aware of. Perhaps this acute awareness is partially due to a particular feeling of not being in control, as if watching the minutes on a clock gives the children some kind of control in a situation where they otherwise do not have the ability to exert much power.

5.4 Free Time

Children's experiences of time when talking about their free time were, in many ways, quite different from those described in relationship to school. Their descriptions of activities during non-school hours were generally much more detailed, describing both routine and variation. It

is perhaps important to clarify at this point that “free time” in this context is used to mean any time which is not spent at school during a regular school day. In this way, the differentiation is between activities determined by law (compulsory attendance at school) and those determined by alternative instances, whether that be parents, children or other individuals.

5.4.1 Routines and schedules

Fredrik (N) was an example of a fairly routine free time schedule. When asked to describe a typical day, Fredrik’s response was as follows: “School, then home, then eat, then do homework, then training/practice, then home and then drink a smoothie, and then go to bed.” This fixed routine fit well with Fredrik’s mother, Anette’s, ideas about the importance of schedules for children (or at least for Fredrik):

I think they [schedules] are very important. I think it’s important to have security, that things are predictable. For some it is more important than others. I have, as I said, two boys who are very different. And Fredrik, he needs, needs system and order...Fredrik, he’s so, he’s, there it’s full speed and mess and it goes fast and forgets things and, so he needs for someone, that he has some fixed points.

It seemed, from Fredrik’s (N) own description, that he had several of these fixed points, everything from when he did homework and went to soccer practice to when he had a smoothie. Fredrik’s free time was predictable and structured.

Michael (A) also had a schedule that had several fixed points, but his after-school schedule was more open to impulsivity. His description of a typical day was very extensive, but some of the aspects he mentioned are as follows:

Then [after getting home from school] I will ride my bike, or, I have a power scooter... And then we would, I would take my scooter around, find whoever’s outside. And if I don’t find anybody outside, that’s when I come to the computer or my camera. So I’d just go around, looking for stuff to take pictures of. And, after that I would come home. By that time it would be about 5:00. Maybe have supper, watch TV. And after that, I would do all my homework. Like today, for me I did my homework a little bit after 3:00 cause I needed to go to my friend’s swimming, for a swimming day and help him out with a few things for Boy Scouts and stuff.

Michael has a long list of potential activities to fill his afternoons and evenings, but his description is characterized by flexibility and spontaneity. If no one is outside, he will find a different activity to occupy his time. This is reinforced by Micheal’s mother, Roxanne’s, reflections about schedules: “They’re [schedules are] good, they’re good for adults too. Just because then they know what’s going on. I like to, sometimes...shake up their world a little bit. I spring in some surprises and things like that...so they’ll wonder ‘what’s she up to now?’” She emphasized that schedules, especially for sleeping, were particularly important during the school year, while in the summer she tried to make things as spontaneous as

possible.

It may be significant that Michael's free time schedule contained, in fact, very few *scheduled* activities. That is, activities such as organized sports or clubs which meet at particular times. This was actually fairly typical in the children's responses. With a few exceptions,⁹³ none of the children expanded much upon their participation in organized free time activities, even though the vast majority of the children interviewed did participate in such activities.

5.4.2 Organized free time activities

It is somewhat unclear why more mention of organized activities was not made in the children's descriptions of a typical day, particularly with all of the media focus on over-scheduled children. There could be a kind of parallel between organized activities and school, at least in a deference of responsibility for keeping track of or managing time. Just as it was teachers who seemed to have the responsibility for keeping track of time and monitoring activities at school, the children seemed to defer to parents in keeping track of the time in regards to organized free time activities.

Sebastian (N) who had band practice, soccer and saxophone lessons in the course of the week, was clear about the fact that it was his mother who told him when it was time to start a new activity. Fredrik (N) also asked his father about when it was time to go to soccer practice or matches. Charlie (A) was a little more aware of the time himself in regards to his football practices, noting that "Well, football's at, I know it's always at 5:00" and adding, "And she [mother] just gets me to the games."

These responses indicate that the major responsibility in regards to organized free time activities lies with the parents. It is parents' responsibility to make sure that children get to their activities at the appropriate time. It was also noteworthy that, when the children cited a parent as being the one informing the child that it was time to start a new activity, all but one of the children mentioned their mother. The exception was Fredrik, whose father was the

⁹³ Fredrik (N) and Charlie (A) each mentioned spending a good deal of time playing organized ball sports and Lydia (A) mentioned being active in karate.

coach for his soccer team and would therefore be attending the same practice or match. This predisposition to ask mothers in matter of time or scheduling is consistent with a view of women as “keepers of the family clock,” a concept which it is worthwhile to explore in greater depth.

5.4.3 Time as a feminine domain

One weakness in my interview material is the lack of any adult male voices.⁹⁴ This was by no means intentional, quite to the contrary, but gaining access to fathers proved to be very difficult within the timeframe I had in which to carry out my interviews. In Norway, I was in contact with a father on and off for over a month, during which time all the mothers participating in the project had both scheduled and completed their interviews. Still not able to find a time that fit into the father’s schedule, I decided to continue without the material from this father and his daughter.

In the United States, the initial contact was not with students, but with parents. I spoke to both mothers and fathers on the phone, and all of them seemed to find the premise of the project interesting. When I spoke to mothers, it was usually possible to schedule an interview right away. When I spoke to fathers, there was a greater uncertainty about when might be a good time, and I was either asked to call back or I was referred to their wives. As one father explained, “You should talk to my wife about that, she handles all that stuff.” Once again, the process of gaining access to interview participants yielded an all-female parent group. It seemed that the fathers, to a large degree, were either not interested in being interviewed, or did not have enough insight into the family schedule to be able to commit to an interview time without consulting their wives.

Of course, there can be many reasons that it was more difficult to gain access to fathers as interview participants. In popular media, the time crunch seems to be represented as more of a “problem” affecting women, and the home (childcare) is still primarily considered a feminine task in many ways. In contacting participants, I did explain some aspects of my project, including the overarching themes of time and childhood. It could stand to reason that these

⁹⁴ See section 2.1.3.

topics were more immediately interesting to women and held less interest for men. My own gender could also have played a role, with men finding it perhaps more uncomfortable to invite a young woman into their homes to ask them about their lives and their children. A third factor could be that some women have more flexible work schedules in that they work part-time, making it easier to schedule an interview.

While any of these factors, and in fact probably a combination of them, would make gaining access to fathers more difficult, I would argue that a main reason, perhaps *the* main reason that men were more reluctant to be interviewed is that they feel they have less insight into or control over the family schedule and activities than their wives. It did seem clear that the mothers believed that they had more of an idea of what was going on in the family (timewise at least) than their partners. For example, one of the questions participants were asked is how they keep track of what is going on in the family, as far as activities and events. Some families did use a family calendar, although mostly for “out of the ordinary” events (birthday parties, end-of-school-year events, etc.). Most of the mothers I talked to, however, responded that they either had the family schedule in their head, on their personal cell-phone or that they were the “go-to” person when someone wanted to know what was going on in the family. As one participant, Angela (A), described: “Yep, I’m kind of the one who knows what’s going on. My husband will call me at work and say ‘Well, what’ve we got going on today?’ And I’ll be like ‘well, you have to get him. I’ll get her there,’ and you know, it’ll be kind of like that.”

This seems to describe the situation for many of the families I interviewed: that the mothers were effectively “managers” of the family schedule and the family calendar, while the fathers often had to consult the mothers in order to coordinate responsibilities. All of the parents I interviewed who lived together with a partner referenced a differentiation of household tasks and cooperation on duties such as picking children up from activities or daycare. When asked how she keeps track of everything that happens in the family, Rebekka (N) responded:

Yeah. I write in everything that happens on the calendar on my cell phone. So last year, when it broke, then we had a big problem. Everything from doctor’s appointments to if there are extra band rehearsals is in there. Yeah, everything extra. Right now, for example, it’s totally full of end of the school year events. So I write everything in there. So every evening, I have to go in and click on the calendar and then we check what the next day is like. We also do that on Sunday evening, to see how the whole week is, thinking about working overtime and when pappa can pick up from the day-care and when I can and...yeah, so we, we two adults have a coordination on Sunday evenings before the week starts, and then we take each evening...to see what’s happening tomorrow.

While Rebekka's (N) husband clearly shares in the household responsibilities, she was still the one with the "answer key" as far as what events were taking place and when. This was a general trend throughout the interviews, that the mothers tended to describe themselves as primarily responsible for making sure the cooperative family effort was organized and that each parent knew where to be and when.

While the small number of mothers interviewed for this project hardly provides a basis for any widespread conclusions or generalizations, I would argue that the similarities of the responses given by each of the mothers, the comments received from fathers and the difficulty I experienced in gaining access to fathers as interview participants, point in the direction of mothers having a certain amount of power or control over the family's time and schedule. It would be interesting to follow up this perceived trend in a more comprehensive study of the differentiation of power and responsibility within the family. As far as this project is concerned, however, it can be safely claimed that the women interviewed, both in the United States and Norway, had some common experiences and perceptions related to scheduling of the family time, that they were keepers of the family clock.

5.4.4 Unstructured activities: children's self-regulation

Although women seem to be the keepers of the family clock, there were areas where children reported that they regulated their own use of time. This was most evident in responses that had to do with unstructured activities, that is to say activities not governed by specific time schedules, such as organized sports or clubs. In this case, children often indicated that it was their own mood that determined at what point they switched to a new activity.

Lydia (A) cited boredom as a deciding factor when asked about how she knew when it was time to start a new activity. Randi (N) mentioned that she started a new activity when she was in a good mood. Sam (A) had a generally difficult time understanding what was meant with many of the interview questions, but he concluded: "I don't know. Just like when I feel like going swimming, I ask my mom if I can go swimming and I go swimming." These types of responses demonstrate a feeling of self-regulation. The children do things when they feel like

doing things, when motivated by boredom or other impulses. This could seem to represent a feeling of time more closely related to a “functional” understanding, akin to eating when hungry and sleeping when tired.⁹⁵ In this experience, it is not the clock that determines when an activity should begin or end, but rather a feeling, mood or inspiration. It is also in this experience of time that children seem to express most responsibility for their own regulation of time use.

One could conclude on this basis that children experience most autonomy during free play. There has certainly been a good deal of focus, in the media and studies on children’s lives and culture, on the diminishing amount of time children have for free play in increasingly structured societies. I would argue, however, that children experience a higher level of autonomy than one might expect. It is my impression that this is the case during most of their free time, even during activities in which the children delegate the responsibility of watching time to others.

5.5 Children’s navigation through time: determination and delegation

Although it may seem that children write-off responsibility for organized free time activities, leaving their parents to ensure that they get to the right place at the right time, my interviews indicate that the children themselves are the ones choosing these activities. With the powerful rhetoric about the over-scheduling of children and the “time crunch,” I was surprised to hear that every single one of the children interviewed considered the choice of free time activities to be their own. Indeed, parents were generally not viewed by their children as pressuring them to participate in activities, but rather as a limiting element. Charlie (A) explained that he decided which activities he wanted to participate in, but that he would also have to ask his mother for permission. “And if it’s okay with her,” he reported, “then, yeah, I guess I’m doing that.”

The mothers, for their part, also responded that it was their children who decided which

⁹⁵ See section 3.3.

organized free time activities they participated in. Several of the mothers expressed that they had introduced particular activities to their children, but that it was ultimately up to the child whether or not they wanted to participate. As Roxanne (A) explained: “We encourage them, you know, ask them if they want to do guitar lessons and sometimes it’s yeah, and it’s kind of like nah, you know. So I just kind of like leave it up to them.” This “yeah/nah” attitude towards organized activities was evidenced by the fact that Roxanne’s son, Michael (A), was the only one of the children who did not participate in any kind of organized free time activities at the time he was interviewed.

Charlie (A) represented the opposite side of the spectrum. He was the most “involved” of the children interviewed in that he had the most organized free time activities. This was, according to both him and his mother, Charlie’s own decision. As Barbara (A), Charlie’s mother, described:

He really loves his sports and we don’t encourage too much, or discourage, mainly because he’s pretty already into it. So he wants to do pretty much every sport there is, you know... So yeah, he pretty much gets information either through the Boys Club⁹⁶ or through things that they send home from school about activities, you know, are available. And he’ll usually just say “Mom, did you see that, did you see that sign up sheet? Can I do it?”

Barbara saw these activities as important for Charlie, particularly since he didn’t have any siblings. His “buddies” were almost like family in her view. This view was shared by 10-year-old Lydia (A), who reported that she and her mom decided which activities she would participate in, but that at some level it was also dependent on some of her friends’ moms: “cause their daughter’s in that activity.” Lydia’s description indicates a concept of organized free time activities as an area of socialization, an arena where she could be together with friends. These responses emphasized an attitude towards organized activities not as a preparation for success later in life, but as a social outlet, providing the possibility to be part of a community.

Several of the mothers interviewed, although in agreement that their children decided which activities they wished to participate in, described a type of parental “enforcement” in relation

⁹⁶ The Boys and Girls Club is a private community organization providing sports programs and other after school activities for children and youth.

to organized activities. In some cases, and notably only amongst Norwegian parents, this had to do with limiting the number of activities a child could participate in. Sebastian's mother, Rebekka (N), had a limit of two organized activities per child. Julianna's mother, Ellinor (N), had a similar restriction, describing that "she [Julianna] decides what she would like to do and comes with requests, but I am the one who sets the limit for how many things she can do per week." None of the American parents reported a similar need to limit activities, which could be related to the feeling many of the American mothers reported of being responsible for giving their children as many opportunities as possible.

In addition to limiting the number of organized activities children participate, some mothers also expressed that they thought it was important that their children made a commitment to the activities they chose to participate in. Both Genevieve (A) and Ellinor (N) indicated that once their child had chosen an organized activity, he or she was expected to continue the activity for the duration of the school year or the season. In these ways, either by limitation of participation or enforced commitment, parents have influence over the child's organized free time activities.

Despite various motivations for participating in (or not participating in) organized free time activities, both the mothers and children I spoke with described the decision as primarily as the child's. This indicates an attitude towards these activities as a semi-autonomous area, where children have most of the responsibility for participation, but where parents can exert some influence. As mentioned earlier, many of the children reported a reliance on their parents to get them to these activities or to tell them when it is time for a particular organized activity. This could be viewed as an indication that the children were not that engaged in the activity and that it was in some way imposed on them by the parents. I would rather argue that the children trust their parents to be the clock-watchers so that they don't have to be. The children have chosen to participate in these activities and, therefore, have made mostly autonomous choices in how they will spend their time, even in regards to organized activities. However, as with unstructured activities, this does not mean that the children necessarily relate these activities to clock time. The children seem to delegate the responsibility of clock-watching to their parents, perhaps in order to be able to focus on other tasks. Because of this, some responsibility, and with it some autonomy, is removed from the child. At the same time, the larger source of autonomy, choosing the activities in which to participate in, remains with the child. In this way, children have an ability to determine how much responsibility and

autonomy they have in regards to their own free time. How much they themselves are aware of this negotiation is difficult to say, but I would maintain that it is a sort of “semi-conscious” navigation through areas of responsibility.

These areas of responsibility can also exist at school. In this case, children cannot generally negotiate whether or not they will go to school, but recess or free choice time is an area in which children can exert some control as far as their own activities are concerned. Children’s agency in this area and areas of free time will be discussed further in the next section.

5.6 Who Controls Time?

With a view of children as over-scheduled, agency is taken away from the child. Children become objects of the external demands of society, whether that be parents, teacher or law-makers.⁹⁷ To be “scheduled” implies that something is happening *to* the individual, and that the individual themselves experiences very little autonomy in determining his or her own schedule. So to what degree are children being scheduled, and to what degree are they participatory in scheduling themselves? Who is controlling children’s time, if it can be controlled at all?

5.6.1 Control at school

In regards to school, it could seem like children are primarily scheduled, since the legal constraints of compulsory elementary education dictate in no uncertain terms that children shall attend school. However, even in this area there are signs that children can influence the structuring of their time. As one example, Norwegian school children and their parents have recently brought the topic of meal breaks into the public limelight. Some students complained of not having enough time to eat or to wash their hands before meals. This caught the attention of the Norwegian ministers of public health and education⁹⁸ and made the issue one parent groups and schools around the country were invited to evaluate and take a position on. In this way, children are able to bring issues they are concerned with all the way to the top of

⁹⁷ See section 3.2.2.

⁹⁸ Dommerud, Tine and Helene Skjeggstad. ”Foreldre og lærere må engasjere seg!” Aftenposten. February 14, 2013. Pg. 7.

Norwegian politics, to the attention of those who have the power to change and enforce rules and regulations. Similarly, student council groups in both the United States and Norway provide students the opportunity to express their ideas and to participate democratically in shaping their own school environment and experiences.

5.6.2 Control of free time

As far as free time is concerned, there was a clear perception amongst the mothers I interviewed, that many children did not have very much freedom of choice. Agnes (N) said that she thought children had had the opportunity to organize their own free time taken away from them. According to her, certain developments or changes in society had led to the current situation, in part because parents were home less and children no longer had the same arenas in which to play due to an increased focus on safety and supervision. This echoes Annette Lareau's conclusion:

The point is that areas of family life are growing more systematic, predictable and regulated than they have been in the recent past. Forces that have converged to bring about this change include increasing concerns about the safety of children who play unsupervised on local streets, rises in employment (resulting in adults being at home less), and a decline in the availability of neighborhood playmates due to a dropping birth rate and the effects of suburbanization...⁹⁹

It is interesting that Lareau's point, based on her work in the United States, and the response of Norwegian Agnes were so strikingly similar. This, again, gives the indication that Norwegian and American culture share very many commonalities.

The other mothers I interviewed were all in agreement that children needed so-called "downtime." As one of the mothers, Ellinor (N), explained, they needed time to "relax, use one's head and find out what you want to do with the time you have." Roxanne (A) referred to children's need to play, but also to their need to "just kind of veg out"¹⁰⁰, "recooperate." Anette (N) expressed it as needing time "to do nothing."

For these mothers, there was an imminent danger that children's lives were becoming too controlled by adults. Children were not being given the chance to decide over their free time

⁹⁹ Lareau 2003. Pg. 247.

¹⁰⁰ Relax

themselves. This did not correlate with the responses from the children, who described in detail which activities they most enjoyed, many of which were not “adult driven,” and who all responded that they had enough time to do those things. How, then, can we understand these two contradictory experiences? The following are my attempts to understand why children and mothers have different understandings about how much autonomy children experience in their free time.

1. Children experience more autonomy in organized (adult driven) activities than parents are aware of.

As discussed earlier in this thesis, the children interviewed expressed that they viewed themselves as the ones choosing the activities they participated in, and that they had enough time to do the things they wanted to do. It could very well be the case that many children do not experience “adult driven” activities to be as adult driven as the adults themselves might expect.

2. Parents’ focus on providing “down time” has led to children not experiencing a lack of autonomy in their free time.

It is also entirely possible that the parents’ attitudes toward “over-filling” their children’s free time and their attempts to limit such a development have been contributing factors in the children themselves feeling that they have enough time to do the things they want to do. If this is the case, it is not necessarily true that a condition of over-scheduling did not exist within the societies in question, but that the parents’ attention on this area has eradicated any potential effects before their children experienced them.

3. Parents may be projecting their own feelings and experiences regarding time onto their children.

While the children I spoke with all reported an experience of having enough time to do the things they would like to, this was not the case with the mothers. Perhaps mothers themselves are wishing they had time “to do nothing,” but they find it easier to advocate for their children to have this perceived luxury. This connects to the idea that childhood is a protected space, in “a realm where the major responsibility of adults involves shielding the innocent child from

the corruptions of adult culture.”¹⁰¹ Adults cannot expect to have much free time, but children should be entitled to it.

There is also a paradox here: Mothers are worried about children not having enough freedom in determining their own time. Simultaneously, they view themselves as having the power and responsibility to protect children’s time. There seems to be an assumption that children have the agency to make their own decisions regarding their own time, but only as long as parents, teachers and other adults grant them this agency. This point touches upon a couple of powerful discourses about childhood that were widely represented in my interview material. The first is a paradigm of nostalgia, the other a discourse about acting “in the child’s best interest.”¹⁰² These discourses are worth exploring, especially in relation to their connections to ways in which time interacts with childhood.

5.6.3 Nostalgia

In my interviews with mothers, participants were asked to compare childhood today with their own childhood. All of the mothers cited differences in the way childhood is experienced today versus their own childhood. Some of the mothers emphasized that, although they saw differences, they didn’t want to assign value judgments. Roxanne (A) explained: “Childhood is different today than before. It’s not worse, it’s not better. I think it’s just different, you know. And that’s just the way life is. Life’s...the only constant is change, so it’s a good thing.”

Change was indeed something all the mothers could agree upon, but it was not as easy for some to refrain from making value judgments about these changes. As discussed in section 3.2.3, there is a tendency to characterize childhood as either a narrative of improvement or decline. In the latter, an idea of childhood as getting worse and worse, a sense of nostalgia is often present, a yearning to return to happier, more carefree days.

In figure 5.6.3, some of the various responses about the ways in which childhood has changed have been listed. It is hard to say whether all the mothers would agree with the assignment of

¹⁰¹ Cannella and Kincheloe 2002. Pg. 110.

¹⁰² See section 3.2.3.

a positive or negative values to these changes, but it did seem as though the vast majority of mothers were nostalgic for the days of unstructured free time. This being said, almost all of the mothers mentioned that parents today spend more time and are more involved with their children, something which they implied was positive and something that many had missed in their own childhoods.

Figure 5.6.3 Comparative characteristics of childhood as reported by mothers

Mother’s Childhood	Contemporary Childhood
More unstructured free time	More engaged parents
Less pressure to be perfect	More time together with parents
More time without adults	More opportunities (girls can participate in sports)
More freedom	More mobility
Fewer fears (for example predators)	
Greater tolerance for differences (not everyone need a label, for example ADHD)	

The overall sense of nostalgia expressed by the mothers seemed to be mostly connected to the concept of freedom. In their own childhoods, they experienced more freedom, more unstructured time and less pressure to achieve. Children today may have more opportunities and more parental involvement, but at what cost? Are these opportunities worth it if the children have less freedom to decide what to do with their own time?

Despite some resistance to qualify some childhoods as better and some as worse, parents do make choices that affect their children and they do so with a background of experiences from their own childhood, both positive and negative. These experiences, compounded with the reigning discourses in their particular society, provide the platform from which parents act. In this case, a nostalgic wish to return to days with fewer obligations and more unstructured time may influence the way parents view their own children’s experiences.

5.6.4 In the best interest of the child

In their wishes to ensure that children are not over-scheduled, parents are also participating in a discourse concerning acting in the best interest of the child. Returning once again to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 3 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 interests of the child shall be a primary concern.”¹⁰³ Although not specifically mentioning parents, there is no reason to believe that parents would not be held to the same standards. The mothers I spoke with expressed wishes for their children to be healthy, happy, successful, well-adjusted, kind and caring human beings. Surely this must be the goal for any parent, and acting in the child’s best interest would appear to be a logical means to that end.

Unfortunately, there does not exist an objective set of rules for what a child’s best interest is. It also seems that ideas about what best behoves a child is in constant change, both over time, between different cultures and even within one particular society. While some say that children crave structure, others claim that they need freedom. On one hand, children should develop naturally and without interference, on the other, children can “fall behind” without the right opportunities. As a parent, teacher or policymaker, acting in the child’s best interest can seem to be an impossibly daunting task.

5.6.5 Can we control the clock?

The final question both the children and mothers were asked in each interview was: Do you control time or does time control you? There were many similarities in all of the responses, but there were some minor divergences. One group of responses maintained unequivocally that time was in control. Lydia (A) explained that time controlled her “because, if it’s like 5:15, then I have to go to karate, and I have to. And because you have to go to bed at a certain time and it kind of makes you go to bed.” Julianna (N) described that time even controlled activities she had planned herself: “If there is something I am going to do and I have an appointment, and some others have said that they will meet up for it, then of course it is time that determines that I will go there.” This was a common feature in responses from all of the participants: although individuals had some say in activities, it was an external, independent “time” that ultimately controlled when particular activities occurred.

¹⁰³ UN General Assembly. Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 3. 1989. United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1577.

Despite the overwhelming control time had over their daily lives, some participants did express that there were certain period in which they controlled time. In the children's responses, the descriptions of this phenomenon were rather diffuse. Charlie (A) mentioned: "Time pretty much controls me, because you have to be on time for everything. Like football, basketball, baseball, all those sports and everything. And like, you have to be on time for CCD¹⁰⁴ and church and, so it pretty much controls me. Sometimes I control it, but that's not very often that I do." Other responses from the children were just as vague, as represented by Sam's (A) "half and half" and Fredrik's (N) "it's in between." In spite of the lack of detail, these responses indicate that there are certain points at which these children experience a sense of control over time. This idea was elaborated on in some of the mothers' responses. Angela (A), Lydia's mother, agreed that in general it was time that was in control, but with an exception: "It's a constant hustle and bustle here and there, so definitely time controls us. Unless I'm on vacation." Angela (A) admitted that even on vacation it was difficult to avoid schedules, but continued: "For the most part we try to maybe not look at a clock or watch too much, and not really care." Ellinor (N) also described a difference between work days and free days as far as breaking away from the control of time.

These responses indicate that mothers and children on both side of the Atlantic experience time as something external and uncontrollable for long periods of their lives. In spite of this, it is possible to find pockets of time where the clock does not reign supreme, where it is possible to "not really care." This could be, for example, a day off of school/work or a longer vacation.

5.6.6 The moral hands of the clock

Angela's (A) use of the phrase *to not care* is interesting, because it implicates a moral aspect of clock time, as if not knowing the time is in some way indicative of a weak character. This connection is evident in some of the metaphors used about time (for example "wasting time" in English or "å sløse med tiden" in Norwegian),¹⁰⁵ but also in the way those who come late or do not pay attention to the time are viewed. Individuals who do not live "by the clock" risk

¹⁰⁴Religious education for Catholic children who do not attend Catholic schools.

¹⁰⁵ See Ellingsæter, section 3.1.1.

being seen as lazy, arguably a cardinal sin in a country like the United States where efficiency and work ethic are paramount and parents express fears about their children becoming “mooches” of society. It seems that in order to become decent adults who do not present a burden on society, it is essential that children learn to use a clock and to accept that it is the clock that, to a large degree, controls one’s life. The exception is the allowance of a few guilty, “time free” days once in a blue moon when the cell phone can be turned off and the watch can be left in the dresser drawer. Too many of these days, however, can be dangerous. Like too many chocolates can lead to obesity, too much irreverence towards the clock can lead to laziness.

Both Norwegian and American cultures have strong roots in the protestant tradition, with its focus on work ethic and the prevailing idea that “idle hands are the devil’s tools.” There are, however, differences in the ways Norwegians and Americans structure their time and the threshold at which one is considered to be “idle.” For example, a full-time job in Norway averages 37.5 hours per week, as compared to the 40 hour per week standard in the United States. This trend appears to apply to children’s work (school) as well. While the schools I have visited, attended and/or worked at in the United States have had an average of 6-8 hours of scheduled activity per day, the Norwegian schools I have experienced have had school days ranging from 4-6 hours. Norway also has national labor laws mandating a certain amount of paid vacation for all employees,¹⁰⁶ regardless of whether the employee is in the public or private sector. No such laws exist at the national level in the United States. Employers are rather entrusted to establish their own vacation policies.

Maternity and paternity leave is also quite different between the two countries. While the United States has no federally mandated paid parental leave, Norway has of the most comprehensive policies in the world in this area, with up to about a year of paid parental leave.¹⁰⁷ In addition, universal health care alleviates the necessity for Norwegian workers to be employed in full-time position in order to receive health care benefits. This makes working part-time a more realistic choice for some Norwegian workers than it would have been in the

¹⁰⁶ At the time of submission, the number of federally mandated vacation days is 25. Ferieloven, Article 5.

¹⁰⁷ Folketrygdloven, Article 14-9.

United States, although there is still a controversy surrounding the relatively large (and disproportionately female) percentage of the labor force involuntarily working part-time.

These policies, both those with more or less involvement from the state, affect not only the amount of time adults are left to dispose themselves outside of work obligations, but also the amount of time parents are allowed (and expected) to spend with their children. Such policies also indicate the value placed within a society on the “invisible” work going on inside the home, such as housework and childcare. However, these policies seem to have little to say in regards to the experience of a “time crunch” or lack of control over one’s own time.¹⁰⁸ This was an indication in the responses from the mothers I interviewed, since all of the mothers expressed a feeling of not having enough time to do everything they would have liked to. The Norwegian mothers, however, especially those working part-time, seemed to hold a belief that they could have more control and more time for themselves if they prioritized in a certain way. This was not a feeling the American mothers seemed to share.

5.7 Conclusions: Time controlling childhood or childhood controlling time?

Despite differences in adult society, the children I interviewed, between the ages of 10 and 11, did not seem to describe any major differences in their experience or definition of childhood. If there is an apex at which the experiences of Norwegian and American children diverge more significantly, the scope of my research was not large enough to uncover such a point. The children I spoke with, however, had many similar experiences and understandings of both time and a sense of autonomy in organizing their own activities. The children’s experiences of time were complex, encompassing ideas about cyclical and linear time, routines and schedules, autonomy and lack of autonomy, as well as an experience of being controlled by time.

5.7.1 Children of the clock: clock-time and children’s agency

Within the narratives described in my material, one of the dominant conceptions of time was

¹⁰⁸ Ellingsæter 2009. Pg. 171.

that of an objective clock time, independent of human interaction. It was this understanding of time that was important for children to internalize in order to function within societies so intensely dependent on the coordinating function of clocks and calendars. The continuing narrative being told to and reproduced by Norwegian and American children is that they (and their parents) are controlled by time. As long as this is the dominant narrative within the culture, it will remain a resonating experience for children and adults alike.

The children I interviewed in both the United States and Norway did exert agency over how much they wished to be defined by the clock, for example in choosing which parts of their days they self-regulated and which parts they delegated the responsibility for clock-watching to parents or teachers. Although aware of chronological time as an important characteristic in the definition of childhood, children themselves seemed to reject age as an absolute boundary. In addition, children gave clear signals to their parents about which activities they wanted to participate in. Some enjoyed being in many “adult driven” organized activities, others did not desire to participate in any. Based on their experiences, children will continue to affect the way in which they relate to time now and as they leave a period of childhood.

5.7.2 Cultural differences and similarities

One intention I had at the beginning of this project was to explore the experience of time in two cultures and to examine what is that may have led to my own experience of two very different time cultures. The comparison of Norwegian and American cultures based on interview material has given some indication of select differences in experience. For example, the American mothers seemed to be more concerned with providing as many opportunities as possible for their children, while the Norwegian mothers described a role in which they limited the number of organized activities their children participated in. There was also a greater emphasis on efficiency, productivity and self-sufficiency amongst the American mothers, which may be traced to larger socio-political factors.

While these characteristics of the mothers’ responses are notable, the overwhelming (and potentially surprising) agreement in responses from children in both the United States in Norway indicated that there are very few sweeping differences in the experiences of the 10- and 11-year-old children interviewed. Their ideas about and experiences of time and childhood reveal individual differences, but also many similarities despite 3000 miles of physical separation. Both the American and Norwegian children interviewed had similar ideas

about where to draw the boundaries of childhood and similar experiences of time, autonomy and agency. They also indicated unanimously that a “time crunch” was not a relevant in their experience and they did not describe themselves as over-scheduled.

These results only provide information about a select number of children between the ages of 10 and 11. It is entirely possible that this is an age where children experience a particularly high level of autonomy as compared to other age groups. It is also possible that this particular age group experiences a greater degree of similarity across cultural lines, at least between the United States and Norway. Without a more extensive study, these conclusions cannot be drawn. However, for the group of children who were interviewed, their descriptions indicate a high level of experienced autonomy in relationship to time and a high degree of similarity of experience between Norwegian and American childhoods.

5.7.3 Living where one is: meeting and defying expectations

The question can then be asked: if the experiences described by these children appear to be so similar, why did I react so strongly to the transition from the United States to Norway? It is here that one begins to “live where one is.” As a child, or even as an adult without children in the United States, I doubt I would have complained of being “over-scheduled” or having a lack of time. The schedule I had and the activities I participated in were “normal” for the society I was living in. My experiences and expectations were filtered through that cultural lens. By traveling to another country, I was able to experience not only the norms of the country I traveled to, but also to evaluate and examine what I had taken as given from my own country. I would argue that this is also the case for the children interviewed. They also live the culture that they are in, generally accepting certain premises as givens until an experience that requires them to reevaluate these assumptions. Had the children from the United States and Norway switched places for 6 months, their responses might have been drastically different.

It is important to note that the children interviewed indicated such a similarity of experience, especially since this was not necessarily the case with their parents. At some points, Norwegian and American society do diverge, for example in regards to norms about the number of hours one should work in a week, when children should begin life away from their parents, as well as how much responsibility lies with the state and how much with the

individual/family. The fact that the children's responses do not reveal anything about these differences does not mean that they do not exist or that they should not be discussed and debated, but it does mean that children lead their own lives independent of adults, with their own culture and their own individual, yet sometimes strikingly similar, experiences. The fact that the children I interviewed do not consider themselves to be over-scheduled is meaningful and should be taken seriously. However, in a society where one is constantly striving to "act in the best interest of the child," it is unlikely that children's descriptions and opinions in and of themselves will be the sole deciding factor in questions of policy, pedagogy and family dynamics. One goal of this thesis is to present those few voices that I was privileged enough to hear. After having heard those voices, it can safely be reaffirmed that children's realities are not always the same as those adults expect them to be.

5.7.4 Time and childhood: Who is really in control?

Although my original intention was to understand more about how *time* exerted its influence on *childhood*, it seems that the children I had contact with navigated through time relatively unaffected by the "heavy burden" many of their mothers felt. The "time crunch," affecting primarily women with families, was not an issue for these children, nor did they consider themselves over-scheduled. Rather, the idea that children should be protected from such phenomena came up again and again among parents. Time affects childhood insofar as it shapes the ways in which a society structures its institutions and the ways in which individuals define and identify themselves. Our understandings of time affect the words and phrases we use to describe our experiences. Time is a powerful cultural construction, one which is often taken as a physical inevitability. At the same time, ideals of childhood hold a particularly privileged position in both Norwegian and American culture which can give pause to reevaluate even such a powerful construction as time.

We are, then, not slaves to time, but slaves to our own powerful construction of an external, objective clock time as the glue in social organization and interaction. In wanting to shield children from just this type of experience of time, the protected space of childhood reminds us that it is possible to think about time in different ways. It is not only our ideas about time that affect the ways in which we view childhood, but indeed our ideas about childhood that can open our eyes to alternative ways to organize, experience and think about time.

5.7.5 Coming full circle

And so I am back where I started: Gardermoen airport. Seven years have passed and now the time at Gardermoen is “my” time. Now it is the time in the United States that seems foreign, seven hours behind and always racing, like it’s trying to catch up. I can now glance at my 2-year-old son, who is a physical reminder of the fact that none of us can really control time, but we can live *in* it rather than *by* it and we can describe its passing. My son, who was not even born when work on this thesis began, is already now able to shape his world, to develop his own experiences of time and to actively create his own childhood. Like the mothers I interviewed, I want what I consider to be the best for my son. I want him to be happy, healthy, well-adjusted and to experience success in the areas of his life that he deems meaningful. I, too, experience childhood as a protected space, where I would like to shield my son from the aspects of society that I consider negative. Some of these seemingly negative aspects could be a particular relationship to time or an experienced loss of childhood. This process of writing this thesis has perhaps not changed my underlying ideas about how I hope my son’s childhood will be, but it has allowed me to explore the experiences of several mothers and children in more depth, which has in turn made it even more clear how strongly my own ideas about how childhood should be are influenced by the culture I grew up in and the culture I now live in. It is in this process, attempting to see the particular in the universal, the agent within the structures, the local within the global and the continuity within change, that the struggle to act in the best interest of my own child becomes even more apparent.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide (Children)

Time/time use/opinions about time

1. What grade are you in?
2. How old are you?
3. When was your last birthday?
4. What do you do when you're not at school?
5. Describe a typical day for you.
6. How much time do you spend on homework?
7. When do you do your homework?
8. How do you know when to start a new activity?

Experienced autonomy

9. Who decides which activity/activities you will participate in?
10. What are your favorite things to do?
Do you get time to do those things? Why or why not?

Opinions about childhood

11. How does someone know if they are a child or not?
12. When does someone stop being a child?
13. What happens when someone is not a child anymore?
14. Are you a child?

Closing

15. What are you going to do tomorrow? Next week? Next year?
16. Do you control time or does time control you?

Appendix B: Interview Guide (Parents)

General/background

1. How many children do you have?
2. How old is your child/are your children?
3. Are you a single parent?
4. Do you work outside the home? If so, what do you do?

Time/time use/ideas about time

5. Describe a typical day for you and your family.
6. Describe a typical week for you and your family.
7. How do you and your family keep track of what happens from day to day? (For example, do you use a calendar? Computer? iPod, palm pilot, blackberry, etc.?)
8. How does your child/do you children spend their time at home?

Autonomy

9. Who decides which activities your child/ren participate in?
10. Do you feel you have enough time to do the things you want to do?

Ideas about childhood/parental roles

11. How would you compare your childhood to childhood today?
12. Where would you say the line goes between childhood and, for example, adult life? When do children stop being children?
13. How concerned are you about protecting your child?
14. How much would you say the media influences childhood today?
15. How important do you think schedules and routines are for children?
16. What do you think about the idea that children should have a lot to do, that they should “fill” their free time?
17. What should children be responsible for?
18. What should parents be responsible for?
19. What thoughts do you have about the role of parents?
20. Do you control time or does time control you?