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Parenting and social solidarity in cross-cultural perspective

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Abstract:
Many scholars, particularly in Anglophone countries, have observed that mothers and fathers are now expected to do much more explicit 'parenting' than in the past. This paper draws on the case studies of Norway and the UK as examples of welfare states with different historical orientations to social coherence, equality and diversity as a means of examining the spread (or otherwise) of these ideologies. In particular, it considers theoretical concerns of risk, responsibility and trust, especially as they relate to our ideas of childhood and adulthood. In short, the paper suggests that an intensification of parenting has the potential to have a corrosive effect on notions of social solidarity, and makes the case instead for a societal conception of raising children.

Key words:
Parenting, Childhood, Social Solidarity, Trust, UK, Norway.

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Introduction

What is the relationship between the way we raise the next generation and wider social relations? This paper uses classical social theory to ‘think through’ the subjects of parenting and social solidarity, with the aid of a comparative perspective.

Many scholars, particularly in Anglophone countries, have observed that mothers and fathers are now expected to do much more explicit ‘parenting’ than in the past. For the purposes of an investigation into the reception, or otherwise, of this more ‘intensive’ parenting culture, typical in (neo)liberal welfare states, Norway has been selected as a ‘social democratic’ state with an alternative historical orientation to questions of social coherence and equality.

Drawing on classical sociological themes, the paper investigates how the ‘intensification’ of parenting relates to notions social solidarity or ‘gemeinschaft’ relations. It considers the effect of a more individualistic narrative around parenting (arguably, part of a move towards ‘gesellschaft’ society) on notions of trust and social cohesion in the two settings. This provides a means of thinking through broader theoretical concerns around risk, responsibility and trust, especially as they relate to our ideas of childhood and adulthood. In short, the paper suggests that an intensification of parenting has the potential to have a corrosive effect on notions of social solidarity. Whilst this has been tempered by Norwegian social democracy, this is changing with the global spread of neoliberal ideologies.

In policy, practice, and academic scholarship the intensification of parenting has been examined through the lens of neoliberalism and in relation to individual family problems. Whilst these are important, they are insufficient, and can fall into the trap of taking neoliberalism on its own terms of competition and familisation. By drawing on Tonnies’ concepts of ‘gemeinschaft’ and ‘gesellschaft’ (1887) to analyze the rise and impact of intensive parenting, the paper argues for a societal conception of parenting where the ways that we – including children and adults (parents and non-parents) – care for each other is central to the potentials and challenges of building social trust. To make this argument, the paper uses four ‘theoretical examples’ of social relations where antagonism might be expected to be particularly pronounced, such as between the sexes, between parents and non-parents, between fertile and infertile couples, and between the generations. Drawing on work in childhood studies it asks throughout how children themselves might be active in shaping ideas about good parenting and social solidarity, both within and beyond family units.

‘Intensive’ parenting

Parenting has long been considered of great importance when it comes to the transmission of social norms and values, the continuation of kinship, family and household, and for reproducing local and national communities (Barlow and Chapin, 2010). Recent sociological work, however, has situated ‘parenting’ as critical for understanding contemporary changes in modern society – particularly in the US and the UK but also further afield (Author 2013). Drawing
attention to broader socio-cultural processes that have cast modern child rearing as a highly important yet problematic sphere of social life, this work starts from the premise that raising children has become a more complex task, culturally, than it used to be in the past. Far from simply ensuring the transition to adulthood, today's parents are expected to do much more to protect and optimise the development of their children (Lee et al., 2014). There are continuities with the past here, in that parenting has always been subject to moralizing and 'guidance', but the magnitude of the increase in expectations around raising children, particularly since the mid-1970s, (the fact that we even use the term ‘parenting’ as a verb at all) is striking: parenting classes, parenting manuals, parenting experts, and parenting ‘interventions’ are now so commonplace as to be unremarkable (Lee et al., 2014).

Chiming with work done by modernization theorists (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1999a) the assumption is that children are particularly vulnerable to risk in the early years, such that a developmental ‘blueprint’ can be set during this period (see also Macvarish 2016). In a neoliberal era, with its emphasis on self-management, ‘good’ parents are reflexive, informed consumers, able to account for their parenting strategies (Murphy, 2003, Author 2013). Recognizing the gendered dimension to these changes, much work in the US and the UK has drawn on the concept of ‘intensive mothering’ (Hays, 1996) in understanding the experiences of contemporary women, who are increasingly torn between the spheres of work and home (Hays, 1996; Lee et al., 2014). Fathers have not been immune from this trend but it remains mothers to whom these cultural messages are largely targeted, and around women’s reproductive choices that the fiercest debates reign (Douglas and Michels 2004, Author, 2013).

Of course, the perception of what is a ‘good parent’ is largely culturally, historically and ideologically rooted, and thus in continuous change. So an ‘neoliberal’ cultural script does not affect all parents in the same way – class, ethnicity and gender all affect its internalization, and there may be a curious combination of adoption, resistance or adaptation within and between specific times and places. Certainly, the traction of this more individualised and competitive approach to parenting is intimately linked to wider cultural norms as well as state infrastructures, which differ dramatically in terms of welfare and resources for education and care (e.g. lack of school places, which puts extra pressure on parents to ‘go the extra mile’ (Nelson 2013)). At the same time, in a globalized world, there are commonalities and shared experiences as these discourses circulate through both formal and informal channels.

In our introduction to this special issue, the editors elaborate on the passivity of children in the model of ‘parenting’ whereby ‘the child’ becomes merely an ‘outcome’ of parental input, and a trope rather than an active contributor to the parent-child relationship. Alanen and Mayall’s (2005) suggestion that ‘childing’ be the logical partner to ‘parenting’ is a welcome intervention here, and whilst this paper does focus on the parental experience of the relationship, this is not to endorse the idea that socialization is a unilateral process. Instead, it asks how we might use concepts like ‘gemeinschaft’ to re-think popular, policy and academic understandings of ‘parenting’ as a more social endeavor, that necessarily involves children (as conduits, mediators and agents) in building and breaking
solidarities, as much as being cared for and socializing others, whether other children or other adults.

Theoretical context: Social solidarity and ‘gesellschaft’

Theoretically this paper investigates the relationship between the contemporary construction of the ‘task’ of raising children (‘parenting culture’), the state infrastructure which supports it or not, and perceptions of community solidarity, both in the UK and in Norway. Combining classical theoretical concerns around the effects of modernity on social cohesion (such as from Marx, Durkheim, Weber and Tonnies) with work on changing parenting culture, which draws on notions of individualisation and risk consciousness (from those like Giddens, Beck and Bauman), is part of an attempt to re-invigorate debates about the relationship between ‘gemeinschaft’ and ‘gesellschaft’, particularly in increasingly diverse societies (Tonnies 1887, Bendixsen and Danielsen 2018). As used by Weber, these are ideal types referring to social relationships based on informal, personal and ‘community’ ties in the former, and indirect, formal or ‘society’ ties in the latter.\(^1\)

The Norwegian anthropologist Eriksen has argued that the recent turn towards ‘intensive’ or ‘paranoid’ parenting (Furedi 2008) represents a shift in our very notions of personhood, responsibility and trust (2015). He suggests that there has been a corresponding loss in community or ‘gemeinschaft’ trust, as part of the turn towards ‘reflexive modernisation’ or ‘gesellschaft’ society that Giddens et al. describe (Tonnies 1887, Giddens 1999). He gives the example that in the past, mothers in the UK would leave prams outside the shop whilst they carried out errands, or informally arrange for friends to do the school run; today, this would be unthinkable (and probably a prosecutable offence).

In line with work on risk consciousness, whether this is an actual or an imagined loss of social cohesion the effects are the same: People do not leave their children outside shops because they perceive solidarity, or ‘trust’ to have eroded (see also Bristow 2014, discussed further below). A focus on these conceptions therefore has important implications for both theory and policy. Arguably, the notion that the adult generation has a responsibility for nurturing the next generation was historically something that was taken for granted (Furedi 2008). Even if as an adult one was childless, for example, this did not mean that one was indifferent to the next generation (see Rosen and Suissa, this issue).

Today (in the US and the UK) Furedi argues that something has changed, in part as a result of contemporary political shifts towards neoliberalism. Now that parenting has become more individualized, he argues that there has been an estrangement from responsibility. The presumption of generational responsibility that has historically underpinned child-rearing has become

\(^{1}\) This is not to argue for a return to a romanticised forms of ‘gemeinschaft’ society (where forms of stratification and exclusion were arguably more pronounced) but rather to see how these heuristic concepts might help us think through shifting conceptions of trust and its implications for social reproduction.
disorganized, with parents positioned as both the omnipotent protectors yet ultimate cause of children's problems, and therefore in need of expert help. This means, he argues, that there has been a breakdown in the very notion of adult (and indeed childhood) identity. Adults are no longer confident in their ability to act as authority figures per se to the next generation. And, as noted, whilst 'good parenting' in this model is ostensibly child-centred, it is arguably one where children qua children are eclipsed as participants in 'building tomorrow' and understood merely as outcome of parenting skills (again, this chimes with Rosen and Suissa's argument, this issue).

Furedi diagnoses this as a crisis of adulthood, where being a 'grown up' is no longer valued (or socially signified) in the same way as the past; again, in line with the shift towards 'liquid' modernity that Bauman describes (2005). Because of this confusion, relationships between adults and children are ever more subject to juridification – that is, to rules about both formal and informal contact. This is historically and culturally specific: in Japan, for example, small children – aged only 2 or 3 – routinely take the subway alone, without parental supervision (Dixon 2015). Dixon notes that one reason for the unusual degree of independence of Japanese children is not (only) self-sufficiency, but rather, 'group reliance'. He observes that children learn early that 'any member of society can be called on to help or serve others' and that a 'sense of trust and co-operation occurs, often unspoken or unsolicited' (Dixon 2015).

By contrast, where children might once have relied on adults to help them when they encountered day-to-day adversity, today, in the UK, many adults would be wary about getting involved with a child they were not related to, and children are taught from an early age about 'stranger danger' and to be suspicious of unknown adults. As Bristow argues, recognition that some adults may harm children has become transposed, in the form of society-wide regulatory projects regulating inter-generational contact, into the sensibility that all adults should be vetted in case they might pose a danger to children (2014). To give a more extreme example, in New York, a woman who let her 9-year old ride the subway was labelled 'the world's worst mom' (Washington Post 2008). For Furedi, a substantive element of interpersonal relationship (between adults and children, adults and adults and children and children) gets lost in this transformation of personhood in the new parenting culture (see also Ramaekers and Suissa on this instrumental, de-personalized turn in the approach to 'managing' the parent-child relationship, 2011).

As is examined below, this has had a knock-on effect on social solidarity more broadly – to the extent that active resentment between adults (whether parents or not) about their caring rights and responsibilities are becoming increasingly commonplace. In parallel children themselves have become de-responsibilised, leading some to argue that we are 'breeding a nation of wimps' and need to return to a more 'free-range' approach to parenting (Skenazy cited in the Washington Post 2015) recognizing children as willing and able to take responsibility for themselves from a much earlier age.

State infrastructure and social reproduction: A comparative perspective
Norway has deliberately been selected as a comparative case study for the purposes of this paper. Like the Japanese example, traditionally, Norwegian society has been understood as one where neoliberal individualization, and the effects thereof, would be less far-reaching, given a different historical, political and cultural orientation towards social justice, family life and community cohesion. Eriksen, for example, suggests that the loss of ‘gemeinschaft’ trust he describes in the US and the UK has not been experienced in Norway to such an extent – parents will still leave their prams outside shops, and arguably the effects of this individualization of the responsibility for child care are less extreme (2014).

Esping-Andersen’s seminal (if controversial) *Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* categorises Norway as one of the ‘social democratic’ welfare states. He says of these states: ‘The ideal is not to maximise dependence on the family, but capacities for individual independence (2006: 169) The state opts to ‘take direct responsibility of caring for children, the aged and the helpless.’ It is committed to ‘allow women to choose work rather than the household’, providing substantial state-provided child-care from an early age. Taxes are typically high, but in general this is understood by citizens to be in their best interests as a society more broadly, giving the state a high degree of legitimacy (Eriksen 2014). It is also crucial, argues Eriksen, to building a sense of community coherence and safety: in place of the need for competitive or intensive parenting, parents in Norway know that they can rely on the state to provide for their children, and competition for nurseries, schools and universities (for example) is less intense.

In opposition to this ‘social-democratic’ model, the British system has been classified as a (neo) ‘liberal welfare state’ (Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser, 2011). Here, Esping-Andersen notes that the main features are ‘means-tested assistance, modest universal transfers or modest social-insurance plans’; ‘Benefits cater mainly to a clientele of low-income, usually working class, state dependants.’ (2006: 167). Taxes tend to be lower than in social democratic states and a narrative of the ‘(un)deserving poor’ dominates discussions of public finances (Guardian 2012). Not surprisingly (like the US, which might be said to be an even more extreme example) this infrastructure has been linked to the pervasive appeal or spread of intensive parenting, where individual parents must work hard to ‘cultivate’ their children in a concerted way, to ensure their success in life (Lareau 2003).

The commitment to foster the capacity for individual independence seen in many Nordic states does not sit easily with the more ‘intensive’ model of parenting, described above, which stresses the importance of individual, family-based, and embodied care for children, rather than allowing for a more community based or shared model of child care. Indeed, it sits much more easily in the liberal welfare states like the UK, with its implicit support for the traditional model of the family and a stay-at-home, usually female, carer.

Recently, however, to counter ‘gender inequality’ in parenting in the UK – and its knock-on effect on men and women’s working lives – there have been efforts to get fathers more ‘involved’ in parenting. Fatherhood has become politicized, with many calling for better ‘work-life balance’ policies to alleviate gender inequality
in parenting (such as split parental leave and flexible working policies, Author 2014, Baird and O’Brien 2015, Twamley and Schober 2018). Many of those calling for these changes look to the Scandinavian countries as an example of ‘best practice’ – since many of them have long embodied a commitment to ‘equality’ and fairness at the legislative level.

Norway, for example, operates the ‘use-it-or-lose-it’ system whereby a substantial amount of parental leave is allocated to the partner or father but is lost to the family unit if not taken up (Bradt and Kvande 2009); this leave is paid at or nearly at full salary. Similarly, childcare is almost fully subsidized and represents an average expense of less than 5% in terms of the household outgoings (the OECD average is 12%, Daycare Trust 2014, Statistics Norway 2015). By contrast, the UK technically operates a system of ‘Shared Parental Leave’ whereby a mother can ‘transfer’ leave to her partner, but this is typically unpaid or paid at a very low statutory rate at less than a quarter of the average wage. Furthermore, childcare on average amounts to 30% of the disposable household income in the UK (ibid). The suggestion here is that these state infrastructures represent (and inform) different cultural ideas around family life, reproduction and social solidarity. In turn, these expectations are reflected in other social institutions, such as schools, the media or indeed the expertise culture around family life itself.

There is therefore an interesting process of mirroring going on in each location (of parenting culture and social policy respectively) that makes these two countries ideal case studies for an investigation into the iterative relationship between social norms and state infrastructure.

Changing cultures of parenting: diffusion and cohesion

In Norway, preliminary research indicates that a similar trend in parenting culture has been observed to that in the UK, with scholars noting that it has gradually become more ‘intensive’, albeit not to such a great extent. Frønes (2007) describes contemporary Norway as ‘parent-oriented’, an era when parents invest more time and energy in their children than ever before, and where parenting tasks are becoming more demanding. Like the UK, contemporary parenting has therefore been defined as ‘involved parenting’ – a parenthood that centres on the child and the child’s needs, and where parents bear a fundamental responsibility for the child’s future. Aarseth and Andersen’s (2012) work on middle class parents, as well as Danielsen and Bendixsen’s research on parenting and diversity, also show how family-life has become a project to be managed and worked at (2010, 2018). Indeed, this is particularly the case for the newly ‘elite’ families in Scandinavia reported as grappling, historically for the first time, with wanting their children to be socialized according to social values of ‘sameness’, whilst also making them competitive in the increasingly global capitalist market and therefore invest in them in ways

\[^2\] It is worth noting, however, that recent changes in Norway’s government – with the ascension of a right-wing party – have led to proposals for a reduction in the amount of non-transferable parental leave to 10 weeks, making this an interesting time to explore these issues.
familiar to US and UK parents, often with the aid of nannies or au-pairs (Aarseth 2016).

Aarseth’s work in Norway in particular brings to the fore the question of individualism/collectivism. What scholars of ‘parenting culture’ in neoliberal contexts observe is that the task of raising the next generation has become highly fragmented and detailed, with a keen focus on the everyday practices of daily life (such as practices around eating or sleeping). Rather than ‘socialising’ children into a set of shared social values, a more individualised perspective means that the aim is to raise ‘successful individuals’ who are able to ‘be themselves’, at the same time as fulfil adult ‘lifestyle projects’ (Author 2013). This clearly sits well within an intensive parenting ethos, but less well where there is a focus on communality or ‘being social’ (see also Bach 2016 on the Danish case).

In general, however, whilst there are signs of growing stratification, there are important differences between the UK and Norway, specifically around gender (Gullvåg Holter 2014). Whilst in the UK researchers have explored if and how more intensive forms of fathering is ‘on the rise’ (Shirani et al 2012), Norwegian research indicates that a more active role for fathers and norms promoting a shared parenthood has been developing for some time (Lorenzen 2012, Bjornholt 2014), and point to their shifting role in Norwegian society (Aarseth 2011). In part, this is explained by a policy context which has long championed an ‘equality’ ethos. 3

In thinking anthropologically about the politics of cultural translation (see Author 2013) this paper considers the ways in which messages about ‘good parenting’ are mobilized by various actors, including children – and adopted, resisted or reconfigured in these two cultural settings. In terms of resistance to this model of ‘parenting’, for example, Anving and Elden (talking about middle class families in Sweden, 2016) include accounts from children, who are largely skeptical of the intensive ‘quality time’ approach to childcare, and are instead keen to spend time with their parents, during mundane activities of cooking and bathing, rather than having this ‘dirty work’ outsourced to an au-pair.

Certainly, knowledge concerning the cultural presumptions underlying ways of ‘doing parenthood’ (or ‘doing childhood’) is essential for understanding how trust, belonging and support for central societal values are preserved (and changed) particularly in the context of a culturally plural and increasingly cosmopolitan setting (Bendixsen and Danielsen 2018). How has this more ‘intensive’ model of parenting has diffused differently in Norway and the UK in accordance with different cultural and political histories (that is according to gender, ethnic and class differences)? Is it the case that Norway is following in the footsteps of the UK in terms of the intensification of parenting, or is this too simplistic a way of framing this issue?

Parenting and social antagonism: Four ‘theoretical examples’

3 This commitment to gender equality seems to be shifting in these ‘elite’ families, where may women, unusually for Norway, stop work or move to part-time hours so as to focus on a more intensive form of mothering.
The four theoretical examples which follow focus on areas of potential social antagonism relating to ‘parenting’, as a means of thinking through the potential and challenges of building social trust with a more societal conception of raising children.

**Parents and non-parents**

In the UK, an antagonism between parents and non-parents has become increasingly visible as a form of social categorization – most notably in the workplace, particularly around parents’ entitlement to leave and flexible working. As the press would have it, this has become a battle between the ‘breeders’ and the ‘child-free-by-choicers’, with campaigns for ‘personal leave’ to be available to employees for reasons other than child care (Bristow 2014, see also Rosen and Suissa, this issue 4)

In the UK, childcare is understood as the responsibility of the family unit, with many scholars pointing out that the assumption childcare should rest with the individual parents is not only an expression of a neoliberal, individualistic era (Gillies 2009, Fraser 2013), but also one which exacerbates a segregation between parents and non-parents. This could arguably be framed as part of this general loss in gemeinschaft or community responsibility for raising the next generation. Instead, with a societal conception of raising children, leading to a society-wide organised system of care for children, and corresponding re-organisation of the work-place, the antagonisms between parents and non-parents described might well be lessened, as they would not be pushed back onto individuals and employers (Bristow 2014). This makes this an interesting issue to compare with Norway, then, since there the state demonstrates a financial commitment to children’s care through heavily subsidised childcare and flexible working arrangements for parents – seemingly without courting the antagonism mentioned above. Indeed, preliminary research suggests that this antagonism is not one that is considered culturally salient as a form of social labelling, and certainly not one voiced in the media (Bendixsen and Danielsen 2018).

Theoretically it is interesting to consider whether this represents a different vision of the family life to that in the UK, and how, if at all, an increasing ‘intensification’ of parenting outlined above is likely to alter this. The Nordic states are frequently held up as the ‘gold standard’ of equality legislation, but how that actually works itself out in practice is generally less clear-cut (Simonardottir 2016). Certainly, the role of children themselves as active participants in being or shaping ‘the future’ (Rosen and Suissa, this issue) is reflected in a commitment to children’s rights at the level of policy and practice in the Scandinavian context, but has not been empirically investigated in terms of differing understandings what it means in terms of the responsibilities of adulthood and childhood per se.

**Migration and intergenerational change**

4 This clearly chimes with the availability of contraception, abortion and the new reproductive technologies which have meant having children is ever more a ‘choice’
Taking a historical angle, essential to exploring notions of social solidarity over time, the second example is that of intensive parenting and intergenerational relationships, with special attention to issues of migration, diversity and coherence (a subject of much recent scholarship; e.g. Franceschelli forthcoming).

Scholars working on parenting culture in the UK have observed that one of the negative effects of a more intensive, expert-driven individualistic approach to parenting is the impact on intergenerational transmission. A cultural context that views parents as inadequate in the face of the task of ‘building tomorrow’ means that parents have become seen in need of ever more expert guidance in carrying out this task (Lee et al 2014). Arguably, this contemporary, expert-based parenting culture has not only had an effect on parents’ own subjectivities, but it has magnified a disruption to this cultural transmission and recognition of authority between grandparents, parents and children. Grandparents are routinely presented (in the UK) as not to be trusted as they are ‘out of touch’ or not ‘up to date’ on the most recent parenting methods and advice. Children, by contrast, are often targeted by schemes to ‘educate’ parents about, for example, healthy eating or environmentalism (Furedi 2008). It is crucial then to consider intergenerational shifts in parenting culture, as well as at the effect of the intensification of parenting on those intergenerational relationships themselves.

As UK and Norwegian societies become ever more globalized and ‘multicultural,’ new parenting norms, ideologies and practices are emerging, not least at the instigation of children themselves who often act as interlocutors for their parents – something that is of particular concern for the state and notions of social coherence and nation-building. Gullestad has famously written about the Norwegian model of social equality as one which champions ‘sameness’ rather than ‘difference,’ in contrast to the ‘multi-cultural’ model usually promoted in the UK (2002). Working in contexts of high migration in Norway, with communities who embody this ‘disconnect’ most explicitly, Danielsen and Bendixsen have explored how notions of diversity (and disruption) are expressed by Norwegian parents (2018), through a concern with ‘other peoples’ children’, widening efforts at ‘intensive’ parenting beyond the nuclear family and seeing socialization as a collective endeavor. Thus, as the work of Vergara (this issue) acknowledges, we also need to think about how an intensification of parenting in certain contexts has the potential to create coherence within – as well as between – particular groups, as part of this process of ‘integration’ not least as a product of children’s engagement in these social networks (see also Author, 2013).

**Gender relations and couple relationships**

Another key area of potential conflict in a more ‘intensive’ parenting culture concerns relationships between men and women (or, more strictly, partners raising children together). In tandem with shifting legislation around gender equity in parenting, British culture has witnessed a turn toward a construction of the ‘new father’ (Dermott 2008, Gatrell 2005, Shirani et al 2012). As well as concerns around equality, this is understood as important at the level of the individual child (for optimizing child development), and framed as a wider question of social mobility – as David Cameron put it when he was Prime
Minister, having good male role models in working class families is a way of creating social cohesion, and mending ‘Broken Britain’ (BBC 2012).

Research in the UK has already shown that promotion of this ‘new father’ figure tends to focus on what Dermott calls the middle-class ‘caring about’ activities of childcare – swimming classes, reading groups and so on (Fatherhood Institute 2010, HM Government 2011) – in a bid to extend a model of ‘intensive mothering’ to men. This is, say critics, in place of legislating on issues such as subsidized childcare and paid parental leave, which would provide space for a ‘relational’ fatherhood and a genuine sharing of care (Browne 2013). Indeed, given the lack of material support for this ‘equal parenting’ agenda in the UK, some have argued that policies around ‘involving fathers’ are less about promoting gender equality, and more about a class-based cultural anxiety around the importance of intensive parenting (Author 2014). Gillies, for example, notes that for working class fathers who are ‘at home’ with their children due to unemployment, this is not considered the right kind of involvement by policy-makers, unless those men show intensive commitment to the ‘project’ of raising their children (2009).

There is a danger, then, that in that promoting a particular kind of ‘good fathering’ model to men, without the material support for splitting care, does not actually help with the ‘caring for’ activities (feeding, cleaning and so on) that children require (Dermott 2008, Doucet 2006, Wall and Arnold 2007), but leaves women to bear the brunt of this labour whilst also increasing the cultural pressure on men to do more activities with children. So whilst ‘involving’ fathers in family life would clearly go some way towards easing the responsibility of care many women shoulder, the extension of an ‘intensive’ expertise-based ‘parenting’ to men, particularly without material support to do so, might actually leave them in a similar ‘cultural contradiction’ currently faced by women whereby the realms of work and home-life are in fraught tension (Hays 1996). In a shift towards a more ‘gesellschaft’ society, whereby intimate relations are considered ideal when they are most ‘equitable’ (Giddens 1999), this area of social transformation represents an important field for scholarly investigation.

In Norway, which has a much more established history of gender equality legislation, and state support for parental leave and childcare a different picture emerges (Bjornholt 2014, Gullvåg Holter 2014). Here, partners are actually able to care more equitably, and the responsibility for social reproduction is not left solely on the shoulders of (biological) parents, but stratified across society more widely.5

Whilst in the UK changes to fatherhood have been introduced (purportedly at least) as a means of alleviating gender inequality, in Norway recent changes were discussed under the guise of being about the best interests of the child, and the right of the child to have access to their father (Brandth and Kvande 2009.) In what might be seen as evidence for the spread of a more ‘intensive’ parenting’, which puts more and more focus on the importance parents raising their children (rather than using childcare, say), this example prompts us to ask

5 That said, there still remains a gender imbalance in the uptake of leave, and at the level of CEOs higher up the labour market (Gullestad 1984, 2002).
whether this has affected gender equality in Norway, and how this is experienced in different social classes. Are parents internalising this message about the importance of family-based care? Does having two parents ‘intensively’ engaged in child-rearing present the solution to gender-inequality and create greater cohesion amongst couples (Andersen and Aarseth 2012), or does this in fact risk doubling (rather than halving) the problem? (Author 2015, Baird and O’Brien 2015). Certainly, the evidence is not as straightforward as might be expected, with tensions between partners a hallmark of the transition to parenthood in spite of greater ‘gender equality’ (Simonardottir 2016).

**Fertility and inequality**

The final example looks particularly at how the intensification (and individualization) of parenting has differently affected would-be parents (that is, infertile couples seeking treatment) in the UK and Norway, in the context of different regulatory regimes. In a more individualised, intensive parenting culture, which stresses personal fulfilment through parenthood, becoming a (biological) parent has not only become seemingly more feasible for many couples, but the social role has been inflated in congruence, frequently being framed as a ‘human right’ (Strathern 1993). In line with a focus on antagonisms, then, this example considers how the inflation of the parenting identity has led to feelings of exclusion and segregation at the wider social level, for those who cannot ‘achieve’ it (Author 2017). These issues are particularly timely, given recent debates in each country about how far the state should pay for couples to receive fertility treatment (recent headlines in the UK reveal that in many areas of the country, IVF treatment will be scrapped on the National Health Service due to cost-cutting, Independent 2017).

Recent work on the subject of egg-donation explores these issues around individualisation and social reproduction in a cross-cultural comparative framework (Marre 2017). In the UK, couples are (currently) able to receive treatment with donor eggs on the NHS, where in Norway, this is currently prohibited due to concerns about coercion (although the Biotechnology Council has advised changing this law, Melhuus 2005). Instead, couples seeking treatment through egg donation typically engage in what has been called ‘fertility tourism’ or ‘Cross Border Reproductive Care’ in search of egg-donors, with Spain being one of the most popular destinations (Pennings and Gurtin 2012, Marre 2017). This example therefore prompts us to think about ‘solidarity’ not only in access to reproductive technologies, but also ‘what counts’ in the creation of kinship and national communities, not least as this relates to any children born as a result of that treatment (Cheney 2018).

In thinking about the relationship between the intensification of parenting, reproductive technologies and neoliberalism it is important to think specifically about the nature of ‘individualisation’. As both a product of this element of parenting culture, as well as one of its greatest catalysts, reproductive technologies could be read as the example par excellence of the individualisation of a social problem. What might be seen as a problem with the way society is structured (in terms of, for example fertility decline and the pressure to become established in one’s career), infertility is, instead, tackled in ways that makes
individuals accountable for their reproductive trajectories, emphasizing and
enabling ever further the importance of the biological relation (Inhorn and Van
Balen 2002). Paradoxically, many couples seeking fertility treatment narrate
their inability to have children as a form of social exclusion (from a peer group),
whilst those who are parents also report a sense of segregation from society as a
whole. In both cases, this individualization is antithetical to the case of family life
and social reproduction, which has traditionally been about creating connections
(see Author 2017)

It is interesting to consider how couples (or indeed individuals) grapple with
their own desire to become parents in light of this intensive parenting culture,
and how this is differently narrated by would-be parents in the UK and Norway,
particularly as they relate to parents who have not required technological
intervention. How has the intensification of parenting affected patients’
approach to, and experiences of, these technologies, with what implications for
the imagination of ‘kinship’? These kinds of questions prompt us to think about
the relationship between individualization and community relations as they relate
to the role of the state in subsidising treatment (and by extension, who can
afford to become a parent at all).

In short, we need to think about what the technologisation of reproduction does
for society, in terms of thinking about where children come from, and the
collective responsibility for their care, especially in the context of transnational
donation. This example feeds into debates around the ways in which ‘biological’
parenthood fits into models of intensive parenting (Author 2017). Much recent
research on adoption, for example, shows how narratives of intensive parenting
are used to ‘smooth over’ the lack of biological connection to children in creating
a bond of ‘concerted cultivation’ (De Graeve and Longman 2013). Paradoxically
however, one of the downsides of the availability of these technologies might be
that there has actually been a questioning of biological parenthood: as scholars
working on parenting culture have observed, ‘natural’ pregnancies are becoming
problematised, just as those who do not have ‘training’ for parenting are
considered in need of ‘skilling up’. Certainly, people are making reproductive
decisions in a context of longevity which clearly changes patterns of social
reproduction – and as such, there has been a shift from ‘natural’ generational
reproduction to a more bureaucratised, ‘gesellschaft’ or planned process.

**Discussion: Solidarity, care and the ‘common good’**

Taking a comparative perspective allows us to make a contribution to debates
around variability in welfare policies (Esping-Andersen 2006, Moss 2011). These
coups are particularly timely, both because of the recent changes in
parental leave provisions in both Norway and the UK, and in light of the UK’s
likely exit from the EU, and the implications of this, for example, on employment
conditions and gender equality, including maternity, parental leave and childcare
provision. Similarly, Norway retains close relations with the EU, but has so far
rejected full membership, making it an interesting case-study in the European
context. These enquiries aim to enrich and inform these on-going public
discussions, by bringing an inter-disciplinary perspective to bear on what are all
too often two-dimensional, economic-based discussions (though see Garey 1999,
Miller 2011, Somerville 2000), and asking how far we think cultural change could ever be achieved through legislation (Browne 2013).

It is critical that discussions of reproduction and parenting are part of a conversation around the promotion of social trust but of the ‘common good,’ to use the language of Sandel’s community-oriented virtue theory (see also Rosen and Suissa on Rawls’ theory of intergenerational justice, this issue). Sandel notes that the challenge for policy-makers is to ‘imagine a politics that takes moral... questions seriously, but brings them to bear on broad economic and civic concerns’ (2009: 262). Looking at institutions in the US such as national service and public schooling, for example, he rejects a utilitarian approach to the common good that prioritises the maximisation of welfare, on the grounds that justice should not become a simple ‘matter of calculation’ rather than of principle. He also rejects the choice-oriented (or ‘freedom-based’) approaches of both libertarians and liberal-egalitarians for failing to provide anything other than ‘individual preference’ as the guiding principle on public policy design. Instead, revisiting ideas from Aristotle, he argues for the cultivation of virtue and reasoning on questions of policy in which ‘value’ to the common good becomes paramount.

Contemporary political rhetoric in Europe has been increasingly focused on the individual’s private ‘choices’, meaning that structural challenges to collective duties of care often fall outside the remit of equality and anti-discrimination policies (Browne 2013, Baird and O’Brien 2015). But how free are people – as parents, non-parents or even children – to make these ‘choices’ about their work and home lives? In the context of cuts to public services (in the UK) on the one hand, and the obsession with parenthood on the other, what is society actually doing about being and raising children? In this particular political climate, childcare and reproduction provides an interesting ‘litmus test’ for policy-makers in thinking about a range of other issues relating to the allocation of state resources (for example, the political polarization around the recent refugee crisis). Through a comparative perspective, this paper aims to re-frame the debate around ‘parenting’ and ‘childcare’ as one beyond the individual family, opening up, it is hoped, new avenues in how we could approach the ‘problem’ of raising the next generation as a societal rather than an individual one.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the relationship between ‘parenting culture’ and notions of social solidarity, and the ideas of adulthood and childhood on which it rests. Thinking about parenting as a societal endeavour, whereby all of us – children, parents and non-parents care for each other - challenges the model of the neoliberal ‘parent’ and ‘child’ within the new ‘parenting culture’ and helps us approach the question of building social trust afresh. Drawing on classical sociological theory, the suggestion is that an ‘intensification’ of parenting has a potentially corrosive effect on notions of trust and social cohesion, thinking the implications of this through in four theoretical examples. Whilst a social democratic welfare state infrastructure (as seen in Norway) clearly goes some way to curbing the worst excesses of a more individualised ‘intensive’ parenting culture evident in the UK, it’s clear that the spread of this culture is on the rise,
creating novel tensions and forms of inequality in the Nordic context. To put it another way, how long will Norwegian parents continue to leave their children in prams outside shops?
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Introduction

What is the relationship between the way we raise the next generation and wider social relations? Drawing on theoretical discussions around risk and trust this paper ‘thinks through’ the subjects of parenting and social solidarity, with the aid of a comparative perspective.

Many scholars, particularly in Anglophone countries, have observed that mothers and fathers are now expected to do much more explicit ‘parenting’ than in the past (Hays 1996, Lee et al. 2014). This has led to theorisations of an ‘intensification’ of parenting, linked, in particular, to (neo)liberal welfare states (Lareau 2003, Nelson 2013, see also introduction, this issue). For the purposes of a comparative look into the reception, rejection, transformation and potential effect of these discourses, Norway has been chosen as a ‘social democratic’ state with an alternative historical orientation to the UK on questions of welfare and equality.

In particular, the paper considers the effect of a more individualistic narrative around parenting on notions of solidarity and trust in the two settings. This provides a means of discussing broader theoretical concerns around risk and responsibility, especially as they intersect with our ideas of childhood and adulthood. In short, the paper suggests that an individualised understanding of ‘parenting’ is problematic, as it has potentially corrosive effects on notions of social solidarity – a phenomenon arguably visible in the UK already. Whilst this has been tempered by Norwegian social democracy, this is changing with the global spread of neoliberal ideologies.

By drawing on theories of social trust and the ‘common good’ (Eriksen, 2014; Tonnies, 1887; Sandel 2009) to analyze the rise and impact of intensive parenting, the paper uses insights from both parenting culture and childhood studies to argue for a societal conception of parenting where the ways that we – including children and adults (parents and non-parents) – care for each other is central to the potentials and challenges of building solidarity. To make this argument, the paper considers three examples in social reproduction where tensions might be expected to be particularly pronounced, such as between parents and non-parents, between fertile and infertile citizens, and between the generations, in the context of rising migration. In bringing insights from childhood and parenting culture studies to bear on both academic and policy understandings of parenting, it explores how we – children as well as adults – are active in shaping ideas about good parenting and social solidarity, both within and beyond family units. In short, an individualised perspective on the ‘parenting’ relationship is not only highly reductive, it is also damaging to the project of building tomorrow.

‘Intensive’ parenting

Parenting has long been considered of great importance when it comes to the transmission of social norms and values, the continuation of kinship, family and household, and for reproducing local and national communities (Barlow and Chapin, 2010). It is understood here as an element of ‘social reproduction’, as
used by feminist scholars. As part and parcel of the perpetuation of gender and class relations:

[s]ocial reproduction includes the care and socialization of children and care of the elderly or infirm. Social reproduction includes the organization of sexuality, biological reproduction, and how food, clothing, and shelter are made available. Most social reproduction occurs within the family unit...variations in the distribution of the work of social reproduction are affected by the family, market, community, and state. (Laslett and Brenner, 1989: 381).

Recent sociological work has also situated ‘parenting’ as critical for understanding contemporary changes in society – particularly in the US and the UK but also further afield (Author 2013). Drawing attention to broader socio-cultural processes within those societies that have cast contemporary child rearing as a highly important yet problematic sphere of social life, this work starts from the premise that raising children has become a more complex task, culturally, than it used to be in the past. Furedi, for example says the following:

Child-rearing is not the same as parenting. In most human societies there is no distinct activity that today we associate with the term parenting. In agricultural societies, children are expected to participate in the work and routine of the community and are not regarded as requiring special parenting attention or care ... The belief that children require special care and attention evolved alongside the conviction that what adults did mattered to their development. These sentiments gained strength and began to influence public opinion in the nineteenth century. The work of mothering and fathering was now endowed with profound importance. It became defined as a distinct skill that could assure the development of character traits necessary for a successful life ... Once children are seen as the responsibility of a mother and father rather than of a larger community the modern view of parenting acquires salience. (Furedi, 2002, p. 106)

From this point of view, a trajectory towards placing particular significance on the role and contribution of the parent, using their ‘skills’ to ensure a child’s ‘successful life’, has a long history. However, despite its long history, it is also recognized that ‘parenting’ has acquired specific connotations more recently, certainly within neoliberal Euro-American settings. If one looks closely at the question of raising the next generation it will become clear this is rarely discussed as a communal task or the responsibility of adult society as a whole. Rather, it is discussed as an individualized ‘parenting strategy’ (whether it be around discipline, eating and sleeping patterns or otherwise).

Chiming with work done by modernization theorists (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1999) a key conceptual assumption is that children are particularly vulnerable to risk in the early years, such that a developmental ‘blueprint’ can be set during this period, engendering a highly deterministic, heavily loaded understanding of the parenting relationship (see also Macvarish 2016, Burman 2017, introduction, this issue). In a neoliberal era, with its emphasis on self-management, ‘good’
parents are therefore reflexive, informed consumers, able to account for their ‘parenting strategies’ (Murphy, 2003, Author 2013). Recognizing the gendered dimension to these changes, much work in the US and the UK has drawn on the concept of ‘intensive mothering’ (Hays, 1996) in understanding the experiences of contemporary women to describe a kind of interaction with their children that is ideally ‘child-centred, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor intensive, and financially expensive’ (Hays, 1996: x, see also Lee et al., 2014).

In the introduction to this special issue, the editors elaborate on the inevitable relation between the ‘vulnerable child’ and the ‘risky parent’, noting that in such conceptions ‘the child’ becomes merely an ‘outcome’ of parental input, and a trope rather than an active contributor to the parent-child relationship. Alanen and Mayall’s (2005) suggestion that ‘childing’ be the logical partner to ‘parenting’ is a welcome intervention, and whilst this paper focuses largely on the parental experience of the relationship, this is not to endorse the idea that socialization or ‘parenting’ is a unilateral or ‘downwards’ process. Indeed, much work in childhood studies has highlighted the extent to which children are active in caring relationships across the generations and beyond (e.g. Alanen, 2011, Spyrou, Rosen and Cook 2018). In challenging this academic lacunae, and thinking through children’s roles (as conduits, mediators and agents) in building and breaking solidarities, it is critical that we take into account both their positions of being ‘socialised’ and ‘cared for’ but also their role in caring for and socializing others, whether children or adults.

Of course, the perception of what is a ‘good parent’ (or ‘good child’) is culturally, historically and ideologically rooted, and affects individuals in different ways according to a range of intersectional factors. However, the traction of this more individualised and competitive approach to parenting is intimately linked to wider cultural norms as well as state infrastructures, which differ dramatically in terms of welfare and resources for education and care (e.g. lack of school places, which puts extra pressure on parents to ‘go the extra mile’ (Lareau 2003, Nelson 2010)). Drawing on classical theoretical concerns, this article therefore asks how we might use ideas like ‘trust’ and ‘solidarity’ to challenge popular, policy and indeed academic understandings of ‘parenting’, which tend to conceptualize it as an individualized relationship. Instead, what might be gained in thinking about it as more social endeavor that necessarily involves all adults and children?

**Theoretical context: Parenting, social solidarity and trust**

The Norwegian anthropologist Eriksen has argued that the recent turn towards ‘intensive’ or ‘paranoid’ parenting (Furedi 2008) represents a shift in our very notions of personhood, responsibility and trust (2015). Using insights from classical social theorists, Eriksen evokes debates about the relationship between ‘gemeinschaft’ and ‘gesellschaft’, as used by thinkers such as Tonnies and Weber in particular (Tonnies 1887, Weber 2012). For Weber, these are ideal types referring to social relationships based on informal, personal and ‘community’ ties in the former, and indirect, formal or ‘society’ ties in the latter (2012). The term is used here in this Weberian sense to refer to a sense of social cohesion and commitment to others, which is not only kin-based, but formed from a sense of ‘we-ness’ more broadly (Westerling, 2016). Solidarity of this sort matters in
thinking about the project of ‘building tomorrow’; that is, to discussions and decisions about who counts as a member of the ‘we’ – a highly politicized issue in the context of ethno-nationalism (Rosen and Suissa, this issue), but not one necessarily determined by that, either within or beyond transnational borders. Solidarity, as understood here, is premised in many ways on an idea of trust and shared values, and this paper asks how trust is impacted by the rise of neoliberal, risk-conscious intensive parenthood, considering other means by which we might cultivate a sense of social solidarity.

Certainly, Eriksen suggests that there has been a loss of community or ‘trust’ in recent years, as part of the turn towards the ‘risk society’ that Giddens et al. describe (Giddens 1999). He gives the example that in the past, mothers in the UK would leave prams outside the shop whilst they carried out errands, or informally arrange for friends to do the school run; today, this would be unthinkable (and probably a prosecutable offence). To this extent, the loss of ‘solidarity’ or ‘trust’ might best be read as one consequence of the growing individualization of adult-child relations, itself a product of a more neoliberal turn in the management of personal and family life: one cannot trust others to who do not have as much of a stake in that child’s future (and see Rosen and Suissa, this issue, on how this has become politicized in the UK). Arguably this has even extended to intimate and family relations, such that the mother cannot trust anyone – event her partner or parents – to look after her child in the ‘right’ way (Wolf 2011; discussed further below).

Further, in line with work on risk consciousness, whether this is an actual or an imagined loss of social cohesion the effects are the same: People do not leave their children outside shops because they perceive solidarity, or ‘trust’ to have eroded (see also Bristow 2014). A focus on these conceptions therefore has important implications for both theory and policy. Arguably, the notion that the adult generation has a responsibility for nurturing the next generation was historically something that was taken for granted (Furedi 2008). Even if as an adult one was childless, for example, this did not mean that one was indifferent to the next generation (see Rosen and Suissa, this issue).

Today (in the US and the UK at least) Furedi argues that something has changed, in part as a result of contemporary political shifts. Now that parenting has become more individualized, he argues that there has been an estrangement from responsibility. The presumption of generational responsibility that has historically underpinned child-rearing has become disorganized. This means, he argues, that there has been a breakdown in the very notion of adult (and indeed childhood) identity. Whilst this can of course be welcomed in some sense – breaking down traditional power relations, for example – Furedi identifies this as a historically novel development, such that adults are no longer confident in their ability to act as authority figures per se to the next generation. Instead, parents are positioned, by policy makers at least, as both omnipotent and yet the ultimate cause of their children’s problems, and in need of expert guidance. And whilst ‘good parenting’ in this model is ostensibly child-centred, it is arguably one where children qua children are eclipsed as participants in ‘building tomorrow’ and understood merely as outcome of parenting skills (again, this intersects with Rosen and Suissa’s argument, this issue)
Furedi diagnoses this as a crisis of adulthood, where being a ‘grown up’ is no longer valued (or socially signified) in the same way as the past – in line with the shift towards uncertain, ‘liquid’ or ‘reflexive’ modernity that Bauman describes (2005). Because of this confusion, relationships between adults and children are ever more subject to juridification – that is, to rules about both formal and informal contact (see Bristow 2014 on the increased policing of adult-child relations in the form of CRB checks or similar in the UK, for example). This is historically and culturally specific: in Japan, for example, small children – aged only 2 or 3 – routinely take the subway alone, without parental supervision (Dixon 2015). Dixon notes that one reason for the unusual degree of independence of Japanese children is not (only) self-sufficiency, but rather, ‘group reliance’. He observes that children learn early that ‘any member of society can be called on to help or serve others’ and that a ‘sense of trust and cooperation occurs, often unspoken or unsolicited’ (Dixon 2015, see also Hendry, 1986, on neighbourhood based ‘techniques of training’ for young Japanese children).

By contrast, where children might once have relied on adults to help them when they encountered day-to-day adversity, today, in the UK, many adults would be wary about getting involved with a child they were not related to, and children are taught from an early age about ‘stranger danger’ and to be suspicious of unknown adults. As Bristow argues, recognition that some adults may harm children has become transposed, in the form of society-wide regulatory projects regulating inter-generational contact, into the sensibility that all adults should be vetted in case they might pose a danger to children (2014). To give a more extreme example, in New York, a woman who let her 9-year old ride the subway was labelled ‘the world’s worst mom’ (Washington Post 2015). In short, a substantive element of the interpersonal relationship (between adults and children) gets lost in this transformation of personhood in the new parenting culture (see also Ramaekers and Suissa, 2011).

As is examined below, this has had a knock-on effect on social solidarity or ‘trust’ more broadly – to the extent that active suspicion and resentment between adults (whether parents or not) about their caring rights and responsibilities are becoming increasingly commonplace. In parallel, children themselves have become de-responsibilised, leading some to argue that we need to return to a more ‘free-range’ approach to parenting (Skenazy, in Lee et al 2014.) recognizing children as willing and able to take responsibility for themselves from a much earlier age. At the same time, critics have noted that this continues to rely on a deterministic, individualized model of the parent-child relationship. Instead, these authors advocate that that the ways in which we engage in processes of social reproduction should be understood as precisely that – social (Bristow, 2014, Lee et al 2014.).

In the three examples discussed below, areas of potential social tension are explored in more depth, probing specifically why a more individualized approach to parent-child (or adult-child) relations is problematic. The suggestion is that relations between parents and non-parents (for example) act as a ‘pressure point,’ indicating where a sense of social solidarity is particularly under threat from a more individualized understanding of ‘parenting’. A more
stratified perspective on the question of social reproduction (i.e., with a shared sense of responsibility for raising the next generation) by contrast, opens up new avenues for the re-imagining of social trust.

**State infrastructure and social reproduction: A comparative perspective**

Norway and the UK have deliberately been selected as comparative case studies for the purposes of this paper. Like the Japanese example, traditionally, Norwegian society has been understood as one where neoliberal individualization, and the effects thereof, would be less far-reaching than the UK, given a different historical, political and cultural orientation towards social justice, family life and social cohesion. Eriksen, for example, suggests that the loss of trust he describes in the US and the UK has not been experienced in Norway to such an extent – parents will still leave their prams outside shops, and arguably the effects of this individualization of the responsibility for child care are less extreme (2014).

Esping-Andersen’s seminal (if controversial) *Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* categorises Norway as one of the ‘social democratic’ welfare states. He says of these states: ‘The ideal is not to maximise dependence on the family, but capacities for individual independence (2006: 169). The state opts to ‘take direct responsibility of caring for children, the aged and the helpless.’ It is committed to ‘allow women to choose work rather than the household’, providing substantial state-provided child-care from an early age. Taxes are typically high, but in general this is understood by citizens to be in their best interests as a society more broadly, giving the state a high degree of legitimacy (Eriksen 2014). It is also crucial, argues Eriksen, to building a sense of community coherence and safety: in place of the need for competitive or intensive parenting, parents in Norway know that they can rely on the state to provide for their children, and competition for nurseries, schools and universities (for example) is less intense.

In opposition to this ‘social-democratic’ model, the British system has been classified as a (neo)‘liberal welfare state’ (Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser, 2011). Here, Esping-Andersen notes that the main features are ‘means-tested assistance, modest universal transfers or modest social-insurance plans’; ‘Benefits cater mainly to a clientele of low-income, usually working class, state dependants’ (2006: 167). Taxes tend to be lower than in social democratic states and a narrative of the ‘(un)deserving poor’ dominates discussions of public finances (*Guardian* 2012). Not surprisingly (like the US, which might be said to be an even more extreme example) this infrastructure has been linked to the pervasive appeal or spread of intensive parenting, where individual parents must work hard to ‘cultivate’ their children in a concerted way, to ensure their success in life (Lareau 2003).

The commitment to foster the capacity for individual independence seen in many Nordic states does not sit easily with the more ‘intensive’ model of parenting, described above, which stresses the importance of ‘familisation’ (individual, family-based, and embodied care for children), rather than allowing for a more socially based or shared model. Indeed, it sits much more easily in liberal welfare states like the UK, with their implicit support for the traditional model of the family and a stay-at-home, usually female, carer.
Recently, to counter this ‘gender inequality’ in parenting in the UK – and its knock-on effect on men and women’s working lives – there have been efforts to get fathers more ‘involved’ in parenting. Fatherhood has become politicized, with many calling for better ‘work–life balance’ policies to alleviate gender inequality in parenting (such as split parental leave and flexible working policies, Author 2014, Baird and O’Brien 2015, Twamley and Schober 2019). Many of those calling for these changes look to the Scandinavian countries as an example of ‘best practice’ – since many of them have long embodied a commitment to ‘equality’ and fairness at the legislative level.

Norway, for example, operates the ‘use-it-or-lose-it’ system whereby a substantial amount of parental leave is allocated to the partner or father but is lost to the family unit if not taken up (Bradhath and Kvande 2009); this leave is paid at or nearly at full salary.iii Similarly, childcare is almost fully subsidized and represents an average expense of less than 5% in terms of household outgoings (the OECD average is 12%, Daycare Trust 2014, Statistics Norway 2015). By contrast, the UK technically operates a system of ‘Shared Parental Leave’ whereby a mother can ‘transfer’ leave to her partner, but this is typically unpaid or paid at a very low statutory rate at less than a quarter of the average wage. Furthermore, childcare on average amounts to 30% of disposable household income in the UK (ibid), making decisions around working patterns a particularly fraught one for many parents, again linked to wider intersectional concerns. (These economic constraints do not just affect parents, of course; see Vergara et al, this issue on children’s ‘ethical reflexivity’ around debt management in neoliberal settings as part of caring relationships within families).

The suggestion here is that these state infrastructures represent (and inform) different cultural ideas around family life (for all members), reproduction and social solidarity more widely. In turn, these expectations are reflected in other social institutions, such as schools or indeed the media itself. There is therefore an interesting process of mirroring going on in each location (of parenting culture and social policy respectively) that makes these two countries ideal case studies for an investigation into the iterative relationship between social norms and state infrastructure.

**Changing cultures of parenting: diffusion and cohesion**

In Norway, preliminary research indicates that a similar trend in parenting culture has been observed to that in the UK, with scholars noting that it has gradually become more ‘intensive’ as part of a turn towards a more neoliberal agenda, albeit not to such a great extent. Frønes (2007) describes contemporary Norway as ‘parent-oriented’, noting that parents invest more time and energy in their children than ever before, and where parenting tasks are becoming more demanding. Like the UK, contemporary parenting has therefore been defined as ‘involved parenting’ – a parenthood that centres on the child and the child’s needs, and where parents bear a fundamental responsibility for the child’s future. Aarseth and Andersen’s (2012) work on middle class parents, as well as Bendixsen’s and Danielsen’s research on parenting and diversity, also shows how family-life has become a project to be managed and worked at (2018).
Indeed, this is particularly the case for the newly ‘elite’ families in Scandinavia reported as grappling, historically for the first time, with wanting their children to be socialized according to social values of ‘sameness’, whilst also making them competitive in the increasingly global capitalist market and therefore invest in them in ways familiar to US and UK parents, often with the aid of nannies or au-pairs (Aarseth 2018).

Indeed Aarseth’s work in Norway in particular brings to the fore the question of individualism/collectivism. What scholars of ‘parenting culture’ in neoliberal contexts observe is that the task of raising the next generation has become highly fragmented and detailed, with a keen focus on the everyday practices of daily life (such as practices around eating or sleeping). Rather than ‘socialising’ children into a set of shared social values, a more individualised perspective means that the aim is to raise ‘successful individuals’ who are able to ‘be themselves’ (Author 2013, and clearly this is premised on a highly reductive vision of ‘the child’). This sits well within an intensive parenting ethos, but less well where there is a focus on communality, sameness and ‘being social (see also Bach 2017 on the Danish case).

In thinking anthropologically about the politics of cultural translation (see Author 2013) this paper considers the ways in which messages about ‘good parenting’ are mobilized by various actors, including children – and adopted, resisted or reconfigured in these two cultural settings. In terms of resistance to this model of ‘parenting’, for example, Eldén and Anving (talking about middle class families in Sweden, 2019) include accounts from children, who are largely skeptical of the intensive ‘quality time’ approach to childcare, and are instead keen to spend time with their parents, during mundane activities of cooking and bathing, rather than having this ‘dirty work’ outsourced to an au-pair.

In general, however, whilst there are signs of growing stratification and increasing visibility of neoliberal discourses in Norway, there are important differences between the UK and Norway, specifically around gender (Gullvåg Holter 2014). Whilst in the UK researchers have explored if and how more intensive forms of fathering is ‘on the rise’ (Shirani et al 2012), Norwegian research indicates that a more active role for fathers and norms promoting a shared parenthood has been developing for some time (Lorenzen 2012, Bjornholt 2014), and point to their shifting role in Norwegian society (Aarseth 2011). In part, this is explained by a policy context which has long championed an ‘equality’ ethos. iv

Certainly, knowledge concerning the cultural presumptions underlying ways of ‘doing parenthood’ (or ‘doing childhood’) is essential for understanding how trust, belonging and support for central societal values are preserved (and changed) particularly in the context of a culturally plural and increasingly cosmopolitan setting (Bendixsen and Danielsen 2018). How has this more individualized model of parenting diffused differently in Norway and the UK in accordance with different cultural and political histories (that is, according to gender, ethnic and class differences)? Is it the case that Norway is following in the footsteps of the UK in terms of the intensification of parenting, or is this too simplistic a way of framing this issue?
Parenting, childhood and social antagonism: Three examples

The suggestion here is that an individualised approach to parenting, so common in policy, which stresses the importance of the parent-child relationship to ultimate outcomes not only eclipses other social relations key to the parenting relationship, but also has the potential to erode notions of social trust or solidarity. Thus the three examples which follow focus on areas of hypothetical tension relating to ‘parenting’ and social reproduction, as a means of thinking through the potentials and challenges of building social trust in using a more societal conception of raising children. To do this, this section draws on work in childhood studies to articulate the ways in which children are engaged in building and breaking solidarities, caring and being cared for being socialized and socializing others (whether that be adults or other children).

Parents and non-parents

In the UK, an individualized narrative around parenting (in policy as well as academic and media discourses) increasingly presents children as a morally loaded ‘lifestyle choice’ for which parents should (and do) take sole and full responsibility (Bristow 2014). Thus an antagonism between parents and non-parents has become increasingly visible as a form of social categorization – most notably in the workplace, particularly around parents’ entitlement to leave and flexible working. As the press would have it, this has become a battle between the ‘breeders’ and the ‘child-free-by-choicers’, with campaigns for ‘personal leave’ to be available to employees for reasons other than child care (Bristow 2014, see also Rosen and Suissa, this issue).

In the UK, childcare is understood as the responsibility of the family unit, with many scholars pointing out that the assumption childcare should rest with the individual parents is not only an expression of a neoliberal, individualistic era (Gillies 2009, Fraser 2013), but also one which exacerbates a segregation between parents and non-parents. This could arguably also be framed as part of a general loss in social responsibility for raising the next generation.

Instead, the suggestion here is that if we took a societal conception of raising children, this could lead to a society-wide organised system of care for children, and corresponding re-organisation of the work-place. Working with similar ideas of sociality, but from a social policy perspective, Sandel notes that the challenge for contemporary policy-makers is to ‘imagine a politics that takes moral... questions seriously, but brings them to bear on broad economic and civic concerns’ (2009: 262). Looking at institutions in the US such as national service and public schooling, for example, he rejects a utilitarian approach to the common good that prioritises the maximisation of welfare, on the grounds that justice should not become a simple ‘matter of calculation’ rather than of principle. He also rejects the choice-oriented (or ‘freedom-based’) approaches of both libertarians and liberal-egalitarians for failing to provide anything other than ‘individual preference’ as the guiding principle on public policy design. Instead, revisiting ideas from Aristotle, he argues for the cultivation of virtue and reasoning on questions of policy in which ‘value’ to the common good becomes paramount. To use the idea of the common good is not to imply that children are a resource from which we all stand to benefit. Rather, this focus on virtue and
what we really ‘value’, socially, is helpful in discussions around parenting/childing as a more societal endeavor, in that it helps us think beyond the more typical, neoliberal framings of relations of social reproduction, which tend to rest on ideas of competition, individualisation or familisation (e.g. Gillies 2011).

To this extent, with a social understanding of the importance of childcare for all, the tensions between parents and non-parents described might well be lessened, as they would not be pushed back onto individuals and employers (Bristow 2014). This makes this an interesting issue to compare with Norway, then, since there the state demonstrates a financial commitment to children’s care through heavily subsidised childcare and flexible working arrangements for parents – seemingly without courting the tensions mentioned above. Indeed, preliminary research suggests that this tension (between parents and non-parents) is not one that is considered culturally salient as a form of social labelling, and certainly not one voiced in the media (Bendixsen and Danielsen 2018).

And what of children? Theoretically it is interesting to consider whether this represents a different vision of the family life to that in the UK, and how, if at all, an increasing ‘intensification’ of parenting outlined above is likely to alter this. The Nordic states are frequently held up as the ‘gold standard’ of equality legislation, but how that actually works itself out in practice is generally less clear-cut (Simonardottir 2016). Certainly, the role of children themselves as active participants in being or shaping ‘the future’ (Rosen and Suissa, this issue) is reflected in a commitment to children’s rights at the level of policy and practice in the Scandinavian context (Qvortrup 2009). Clearly, children are active participants in building relations with adults (and between adults) in ways that span the parent/non-parent boundary, something which is often eclipsed by the narrow focus on ‘parenting’ in policy and indeed academic discourse (Patico, this issue, discusses adult-child interactions in a US school).

**Migration and intergenerational change**

Taking a historical angle, essential to exploring notions of social trust over time, the second example is that of intensive parenting and intergenerational relationships, with special attention to issues of migration, diversity and coherence (Bendixsen and Danielsen, 2018; Franceschelli, 2018).

Scholars working on parenting culture in the UK have observed that one of the negative effects of a more intensive, expert-driven individualistic approach to parenting is the impact on intergenerational transmission. A cultural context that views parents as inadequate in the face of the task of ‘building tomorrow’ means that parents have become seen in need of ever more expert guidance in carrying out this task (Lee et al., 2014). Arguably, this contemporary, expert-based parenting culture has not only had an effect on parents’ own subjectivities, but it has magnified a disruption to any sense of cultural transmission between grandparents, parents and children. Grandparents are routinely presented (in the UK) as not to be trusted as they are ‘out of touch’ or not ‘up to date’ on the most recent parenting methods and advice. Children, by contrast, are often instrumentalised in schemes to ‘educate’ parents about, for example, healthy
eating or environmentalism (Furedi 2008). It is crucial then to consider intergenerational shifts in parenting culture, as well as at the effect of an individualization of parenting on those intergenerational relationships themselves.

As UK and Norwegian societies become ever more globalized and ‘multicultural,’ new parenting norms, ideologies and practices are emerging, not least at the instigation of children themselves who often act as interlocutors for their parents (and grandparents) – something that is of particular concern for the state and notions of social coherence and nation-building (Crafter and Iqbal 2016).

In the context of rising ethno-nationalism and historically high levels of migration, Gullestad has written about the Norwegian model of social equality as one which champions ‘sameness’ rather than ‘difference’, in contrast to the ‘multi-cultural’ model usually promoted in the UK (2002). Working in urban contexts of high migration in Norway (and, importantly, in the context of the ascension of a right-wing party to power) Bendixsen and Danielsen have explored how notions of diversity (and disruption) are experienced by Norwegian parents (2018). Encouragingly, they document parents’ accounts of concern about ‘other peoples’ children’ in this context, as part of efforts to extend ‘intensive’ parenting beyond the nuclear family, seeing socialization as a collective endeavor through what they term ‘inclusive’ parenting. Thus, as the work of Vergara (this issue) also acknowledges, we also need to think about how an intensification of parenting in certain contexts has the potential to create coherence within – as well as between – particular groups, as part of this process of ‘integration’ not least as a product of children’s engagement in these social networks (see also Author, 2013).

In London, Vincent et al’s work on children’s friendships (2017) also makes an argument about the importance of peer relations to the building of social solidarity, particularly in ‘super diverse’ contexts. Focussing on friendships across ethnic and class differences they highlight both the potentials and challenges of relationships between children across class boundaries, not least when these are mediated by parental anxieties, seeing these as examples of ‘efforts to forge relationships across difference’ (2017: 1987). However, these are recognized to be fragile ones under threat from a declining sense of social trust as part of a wider ‘hostile environment’ towards migrants (Guardian 2017).

This issue therefore highlights some of the problems of thinking about parenting as simply an individualistic matter, as it is so often framed in policy discourse. In contexts of historically high migration (and a rise in right-wing, nationalist rhetoric across Europe) a risk-conscious, neo-liberal understanding of social reproduction threatens attempts to build social trust and arguably encourages a turn away from ‘others’, whether from different cultural backgrounds, or arguably even a different generation. A more social conception allows space for an appreciation of peer and other adult-child relations in the creation of social relations.

**Fertility and inequality**
The final example looks particularly at how the intensification of parenting has differently affected would-be parents in the UK and Norway, in the context of different regulatory regimes, suggesting that an individualized approach is corrosive to notions of solidarity and trust between citizens. In a more individualised, intensive parenting culture, which stresses personal fulfilment through parenthood, becoming a (biological) parent has not only become seemingly more feasible for many couples, but the social role has been inflated in congruence, frequently being framed as a ‘human right’ (Strathern 1993). In line with a focus on tensions (Rosen and Newberry 2018, Rosen and Suissa, this issue), then, this example considers how the inflation of the parenting identity has led to feelings of exclusion and segregation at the wider social level, for those who cannot ‘achieve’ it (Author 2017). These issues are particularly timely, given recent debates in each country about how far the state should pay for couples to receive fertility treatment (recent headlines in the UK reveal that in many areas of the country, IVF treatment will be scrapped on the National Health Service due to cost-cutting, Independent 2017).

Recent work on the subject of egg-donation explores these issues around individualisation and social reproduction in a cross-cultural comparative framework (Marre et al 2017). In the UK, individuals are (currently) able to receive treatment with donor eggs on the NHS, where in Norway, this is currently prohibited due to concerns about coercion (although the Biotechnology Council has advised changing this law, Melhuus 2005). Instead, patients seeking treatment through egg donation typically engage in what has been called ‘fertility tourism’ or ‘Cross Border Reproductive Care’ in search of egg-donors, with Spain being one of the most popular destinations (Pennings and Gurtin 2012, Marre et al 2017). This example therefore prompts us to think about ‘trust’ and ‘solidarity’ not only in access to reproductive technologies, but also ‘what counts’ in the creation of kinship and national communities, not least as this relates to any children born as a result of that treatment (Cheney 2018).

In thinking about the relationship between the intensification of parenting, reproductive technologies and neoliberalism it is important to think specifically about the nature of ‘individualisation’. As both a product of an intensified parenting culture, as well as one of its greatest catalysts, reproductive technologies could be read as the example par excellence of the individualisation of a social problem. Instead, if we take a more social view, this might better be understood as a problem with the way society is structured (in terms of, for example fertility decline and the pressure to become established in one’s career). Instead, infertility is increasingly tackled in ways that makes individuals accountable for their reproductive trajectories, emphasizing and enabling ever further the importance of the biological relation (Inhorn and Van Balen 2002).

The problem then, is that paradoxically, many individuals (and couples) seeking fertility treatment narrate their inability to have children as a form of social exclusion (from a peer group), whilst those who are parents also report a sense of segregation from society as a whole. In both cases, this individualization is antithetical to the case of family life and social reproduction, which has traditionally been about creating connections (see Author 2017). Roman’s work in Sweden (2014), for example, reveals the paradox of individualization in the
contemporary era: having children is itself considered a 'risk project', minutely planned by couples to counter the threat to individual autonomy and therefore family life itself.

Whilst of course children are not ‘active’ participants in the forging (or breaking) of these relationships between fertile and infertile adults, it is nevertheless critical to think about the notion of ‘the child’ in these debates, even when this is at the conceptual (or rather, pre-conception) level. In Cheney’s work, for example, we see how ‘the best interests of the child’ is configured in debates around international commercial surrogacy, usually from within a children’s rights perspective. She argues instead for the importance of empirical work with children conceived by such arrangements, and a theoretical perspective which has relationality at heart (2018, see also Lee, Macvarish and Sheldon 2017, who look at the ‘Welfare of the Child’ question with respect to the policing of potential parents). These kinds of questions prompt us to think about the relationship between individualisation and community relations as they relate to the role of the state in subsidising treatment (and by extension, who can afford to become a parent at all). An individualized perspective on ‘parenting’ plays into a more divisive approach to reproduction and the redistribution of resources across society, and thus has potentially corrosive effects on relations of solidarity.

Discussion: Solidarity, care and the ‘common good’

Bringing together insights from childhood with work in parenting culture studies, in parallel with ideas around social solidarity, the article suggests that concepts such as ‘gemeinschaft’ (Tonnies) ‘trust’ (Eriksen) or the ‘common good’ (Sandel) can be useful in re-thinking the way social reproduction is framed, in both academic and policy debates. Certainly, childhood studies helps us see the ways in which ‘parenting culture studies’ too readily eclipses the perspectives of, and potential for, children to build social relations, helping us re-think underlying notions of socialisation, authority and categories of adulthood and childhood in turn.

Politically, rhetoric in Europe has been increasingly focused on the individual’s private ‘choices’, meaning that structural challenges to collective duties of care often fall outside the remit of equality and anti-discrimination policies (Browne 2013, Baird and O’Brien 2015). But how free are people – as parents, non-parents or even children – to make these ‘choices’ about their work and home lives? In the context of cuts to public services (in the UK) on the one hand, and the obsession with parenthood on the other, what is society actually doing about being and raising children? In this particular political climate, childcare and reproduction provides an interesting ‘litmus test’ for policy-makers in thinking about a range of other issues relating to the allocation of state resources. This also clearly has implications for what Eriksen (and indeed Marx, Tonnies and Weber) say about solidarity, particularly in the context of rising diversity. In taking a more social perspective on the question of reproduction, the ways that we – children and adults (parents and non-parents) – care for each other can be foregrounded, and therefore made central to project of building social solidarity. To this extent the ‘reading across’ of the two fields of parenting culture and childhood studies can be fruitful to this endeavour.
Further, through a comparative perspective, this paper aims to re-frame the debate around ‘parenting’ as one beyond the individual family, to become one of the ‘common good’, from which we all – parents, non-parents and children, have a stake in. This opens up, it is hoped, new avenues in how we could approach the ‘problem’ of raising the next generation as a societal rather than an individual one.

**Conclusion**

This paper has explored the relationship between ‘parenting’ and trust, and the ideas of adulthood and childhood on which it rests. Thinking about parenting as a societal endeavour, whereby all of us – children, parents and non-parents care for each other - challenges the individualised model of the neoliberal ‘parent’ and ‘child’ within the new ‘parenting culture’ and helps us approach the question of building social solidarity afresh. The suggestion is that an' intensification' of parenting has a potentially corrosive effect on notions of trust and social cohesion, looking at the potential implications of this through three examples. Whilst a social democratic welfare state infrastructure (as seen in Norway) clearly goes some way to curbing the worst excesses of a more neoliberal individualised ‘intensive’ parenting culture evident in the UK, it’s clear that the spread of this culture is on the rise, creating novel tensions and forms of inequality in the Nordic context. To put it another way, how long will Norwegian parents continue to leave their children in prams outside shops?
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Use of this framework is not to argue for a return to romanticised forms of 'gemeinschaft' society (where forms of stratification and exclusion were arguably more pronounced) but rather to see how these heuristic concepts might help us think through shifting conceptions of trust and its implications for social reproduction.

As is discussed further below, this correlates with historically lower levels of migration to Norway than either the UK or the US.

Recent changes in Norway's government, have led to proposals for a reduction in the amount of non-transferable parental leave to 10 weeks, making this an interesting time to explore these issues.

This commitment to gender equality seems to be shifting in these 'elite' families, where may women, unusually for Norway, stop work or move to part-time hours so as to focus on a more intensive form of mothering.

This intersects with the availability of contraception, abortion and the new reproductive technologies which have meant having children is ever more a 'choice'
Introduction

What is the relationship between the way we raise the next generation and wider social relations? Drawing on theoretical discussions around risk and trust this paper ‘thinks through’ the subjects of parenting and social solidarity, with the aid of a comparative perspective.

Many scholars, particularly in Anglophone countries, have observed that mothers and fathers are now expected to do much more explicit ‘parenting’ than in the past (Hays 1996, Lee et al. 2014). This has led to theorisations of an ‘intensification’ of parenting, linked, in particular, to (neo)liberal welfare states (Lareau 2003, Nelson 2013, see also introduction, this issue). For the purposes of a comparative look into the reception, rejection, transformation and potential effect of these discourses, Norway has been chosen as a ‘social democratic’ state with an alternative historical orientation to the UK on questions of welfare and equality.

In particular, the paper considers the effect of a more individualistic narrative around parenting on notions of solidarity and trust in the two settings. This provides a means of discussing broader theoretical concerns around risk and responsibility, especially as they intersect with our ideas of childhood and adulthood. In short, the paper suggests that an individualised understanding of ‘parenting’ is problematic, as it has potentially corrosive effects on notions of social solidarity – a phenomenon arguably visible in the UK already. Whilst this has been tempered by Norwegian social democracy, this is changing with the global spread of neoliberal ideologies.

By drawing on theories of social trust and the ‘common good’ (Eriksen, 2014; Tonnies, 1887; Sandel 2009) to analyze the rise and impact of intensive parenting, the paper uses insights from both parenting culture and childhood studies to argue for a societal conception of parenting where the ways that we – including children and adults (parents and non-parents) – care for each other is central to the potentials and challenges of building solidarity. To make this argument, the paper considers three examples in social reproduction where tensions might be expected to be particularly pronounced, such as between parents and non-parents, between fertile and infertile citizens, and between the generations, in the context of rising migration. In bringing insights from childhood and parenting culture studies to bear on both academic and policy understandings of parenting, it explores how we – children as well as adults – are active in shaping ideas about good parenting and social solidarity, both within and beyond family units. In short, an individualised perspective on the ‘parenting’ relationship is not only highly reductive, it is also damaging to the project of building tomorrow.

‘Intensive’ parenting

Parenting has long been considered of great importance when it comes to the transmission of social norms and values, the continuation of kinship, family and household, and for reproducing local and national communities (Barlow and Chapin, 2010). It is understood here as an element of ‘social reproduction’, as
used by feminist scholars. As part and parcel of the perpetuation of gender and class relations:

Social reproduction includes the care and socialization of children and care of the elderly or infirm. Social reproduction includes the organization of sexuality, biological reproduction, and how food, clothing, and shelter are made available. Most social reproduction occurs within the family unit...variations in the distribution of the work of social reproduction are affected by the family, market, community, and state. (Laslett and Brenner, 1989: 381).

Recent sociological work has also situated ‘parenting’ as critical for understanding contemporary changes in society – particularly in the US and the UK but also further afield (Author 2013). Drawing attention to broader socio-cultural processes within those societies that have cast contemporary child rearing as a highly important yet problematic sphere of social life, this work starts from the premise that raising children has become a more complex task, culturally, than it used to be in the past. Furedi, for example says the following:

Child-rearing is not the same as parenting. In most human societies there is no distinct activity that today we associate with the term parenting. In agricultural societies, children are expected to participate in the work and routine of the community and are not regarded as requiring special parenting attention or care ... The belief that children require special care and attention evolved alongside the conviction that what adults did mattered to their development. These sentiments gained strength and began to influence public opinion in the nineteenth century. The work of mothering and fathering was now endowed with profound importance. It became defined as a distinct skill that could assure the development of character traits necessary for a successful life ... Once children are seen as the responsibility of a mother and father rather than of a larger community the modern view of parenting acquires salience. (Furedi, 2002, p. 106)

From this point of view, a trajectory towards placing particular significance on the role and contribution of the parent, using their ‘skills’ to ensure a child’s ‘successful life’, has a long history. However, despite its long history, it is also recognized that ‘parenting’ has acquired specific connotations more recently, certainly within neoliberal Euro-American settings. If one looks closely at the question of raising the next generation it will become clear this is rarely discussed as a communal task or the responsibility of adult society as a whole. Rather, it is discussed as an individualized ‘parenting strategy’ (whether it be around discipline, eating and sleeping patterns or otherwise).

Chiming with work done by modernization theorists (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1999) a key conceptual assumption is that children are particularly vulnerable to risk in the early years, such that a developmental ‘blueprint’ can be set during this period, engendering a highly deterministic, heavily loaded understanding of the parenting relationship (see also Macvarish 2016, Burman 2017, introduction, this issue). In a neoliberal era, with its emphasis on self-management, ‘good’
parents are therefore reflexive, informed consumers, able to account for their
‘parenting strategies’ (Murphy, 2003, Author 2013). Recognizing the gendered
dimension to these changes, much work in the US and the UK has drawn on the
concept of ‘intensive mothering’ (Hays, 1996) in understanding the experiences
of contemporary women to describe a kind of interaction with their children that
is ideally ‘child-centred, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor intensive,
and financially expensive’ (Hays, 1996: x, see also Lee et al., 2014).

In the introduction to this special issue, the editors elaborate on the inevitable
relation between the ‘vulnerable child’ and the ‘risky parent’, noting that in such
conceptions ‘the child’ becomes merely an ‘outcome’ of parental input, and a
trope rather than an active contributor to the parent-child relationship. Alanen
and Mayall’s (2005) suggestion that ‘childing’ be the logical partner to
‘parenting’ is a welcome intervention, and whilst this paper focuses largely on
the parental experience of the relationship, this is not to endorse the idea that
socialization or ‘parenting’ is a unilateral or ‘downwards’ process. Indeed, much
work in childhood studies has highlighted the extent to which children are active
in caring relationships across the generations and beyond (e.g. Alanen, 2011,
Spyrou, Rosen and Cook 2018). In challenging this academic lacunae, and
thinking through children’s roles (as conduits, mediators and agents) in building
and breaking solidarities, it is critical that we take into account both their
positions of being ‘socialised’ and ‘cared for’ but also their role in caring for and
socializing others, whether children or adults.

Of course, the perception of what is a ‘good parent’ (or ‘good child’) is culturally,
historically and ideologically rooted, and affects individuals in different ways
according to a range of intersectional factors. However, the traction of this more
individualised and competitive approach to parenting is intimately linked to
wider cultural norms as well as state infrastructures, which differ dramatically in
terms of welfare and resources for education and care (e.g. lack of school places,
which puts extra pressure on parents to ‘go the extra mile’ (Lareau 2003, Nelson
2010)). Drawing on classical theoretical concerns, this article therefore asks how
we might use ideas like ‘trust’ and ‘solidarity’ to challenge popular, policy and
indeed academic understandings of ‘parenting’, which tend to conceptualize it as
an individualized relationship. Instead, what might be gained in thinking about it
as more social endeavor that necessarily involves all adults and children?

Theoretical context: Parenting, social solidarity and trust

The Norwegian anthropologist Eriksen has argued that the recent turn towards
‘intensive’ or ‘paranoid’ parenting (Furedi 2008) represents a shift in our very
notions of personhood, responsibility and trust (2015). Using insights from
classical social theorists, Eriksen evokes debates about the relationship between
‘gemeinshaft’ and ‘gesellschaft’, as used by thinkers such as Tonnies and Weber
in particular (Tonnies 1887, Weber 2012). For Weber, these are ideal types
referring to social relationships based on informal, personal and ‘community’
ties in the former, and indirect, formal or ‘society’ ties in the latter (2012). The
term is used here in this Weberian sense to refer to a sense of social cohesion
and commitment to others, which is not only kin-based, but formed from a sense
of ‘we-ness’ more broadly (Westerling, 2016). Solidarity of this sort matters in
thinking about the project of 'building tomorrow'; that is, to discussions and decisions about who counts as a member of the ‘we’ – a highly politicized issue in the context of ethno-nationalism (Rosen and Suissa, this issue), but not one necessarily determined by that, either within or beyond transnational borders. Solidarity, as understood here, is premised in many ways on an idea of trust and shared values, and this paper asks how trust is impacted by the rise of neoliberal, risk-conscious intensive parenthood, considering other means by which we might cultivate a sense of social solidarity.

Certainly, Eriksen suggests that there has been a loss of community or ‘trust’ in recent years, as part of the turn towards the ‘risk society’ that Giddens et al. describe (Giddens 1999). He gives the example that in the past, mothers in the UK would leave prams outside the shop whilst they carried out errands, or informally arrange for friends to do the school run; today, this would be unthinkable (and probably a prosecutable offence). To this extent, the loss of ‘solidarity’ or ‘trust’ might best be read as one consequence of the growing individualization of adult-child relations, itself a product of a more neoliberal turn in the management of personal and family life: one cannot trust others to who do not have as much of a stake in that child’s future (and see Rosen and Suissa, this issue, on how this has become politicized in the UK). Arguably this has even extended to intimate and family relations, such that the mother cannot trust anyone – event her partner or parents – to look after her child in the ‘right’ way (Wolf 2011; discussed further below).

Further, in line with work on risk consciousness, whether this is an actual or an imagined loss of social cohesion the effects are the same: People do not leave their children outside shops because they perceive solidarity, or ‘trust’ to have eroded (see also Bristow 2014). A focus on these conceptions therefore has important implications for both theory and policy. Arguably, the notion that the adult generation has a responsibility for nurturing the next generation was historically something that was taken for granted (Furedi 2008). Even if as an adult one was childless, for example, this did not mean that one was indifferent to the next generation (see Rosen and Suissa, this issue).

Today (in the US and the UK at least) Furedi argues that something has changed, in part as a result of contemporary political shifts. Now that parenting has become more individualized, he argues that there has been an estrangement from responsibility. The presumption of generational responsibility that has historically underpinned child-rearing has become disorganized. This means, he argues, that there has been a breakdown in the very notion of adult (and indeed childhood) identity. Whilst this can of course be welcomed in some sense – breaking down traditional power relations, for example – Furedi identifies this as a historically novel development, such that adults are no longer confident in their ability to act as authority figures per se to the next generation. Instead, parents are positioned, by policy makers at least, as both omnipotent and yet the ultimate cause of their children’s problems, and in need of expert guidance. And whilst ‘good parenting’ in this model is ostensibly child-centred, it is arguably one where children qua children are eclipsed as participants in ‘building tomorrow’ and understood merely as outcome of parenting skills (again, this intersects with Rosen and Suissa’s argument, this issue)
Furedi diagnoses this as a crisis of adulthood, where being a ‘grown up’ is no longer valued (or socially signified) in the same way as the past – in line with the shift towards uncertain, ‘liquid’ or ‘reflexive’ modernity that Bauman describes (2005). Because of this confusion, relationships between adults and children are ever more subject to juridification – that is, to rules about both formal and informal contact (see Bristow 2014 on the increased policing of adult-child relations in the form of CRB checks or similar in the UK, for example). This is historically and culturally specific: in Japan, for example, small children – aged only 2 or 3 – routinely take the subway alone, without parental supervision (Dixon 2015). Dixon notes that one reason for the unusual degree of independence of Japanese children is not (only) self-sufficiency, but rather, ‘group reliance’. He observes that children learn early that ‘any member of society can be called on to help or serve others’ and that a ‘sense of trust and cooperation occurs, often unspoken or unsolicited’ (Dixon 2015, see also Hendry, 1986, on neighbourhood based ‘techniques of training’ for young Japanese children).

By contrast, where children might once have relied on adults to help them when they encountered day-to-day adversity, today, in the UK, many adults would be wary about getting involved with a child they were not related to, and children are taught from an early age about ‘stranger danger’ and to be suspicious of unknown adults. As Bristow argues, recognition that some adults may harm children has become transposed, in the form of society-wide regulatory projects regulating inter-generational contact, into the sensibility that all adults should be vetted in case they might pose a danger to children (2014). To give a more extreme example, in New York, a woman who let her 9-year old ride the subway was labelled ‘the world’s worst mom’ (Washington Post 2015). In short, a substantive element of the interpersonal relationship (between adults and children) gets lost in this transformation of personhood in the new parenting culture (see also Ramaekers and Suisa, 2011).

As is examined below, this has had a knock-on effect on social solidarity or ‘trust’ more broadly – to the extent that active suspicion and resentment between adults (whether parents or not) about their caring rights and responsibilities are becoming increasingly commonplace. In parallel, children themselves have become de-responsibilised, leading some to argue that we need to return to a more ‘free-range’ approach to parenting (Skenazy, in Lee et al 2014.) recognizing children as willing and able to take responsibility for themselves from a much earlier age. At the same time, critics have noted that this continues to rely on a deterministic, individualized model of the parent-child relationship. Instead, these authors advocate that that the ways in which we engage in processes of social reproduction should be understood as precisely that – social (Bristow, 2014, Lee et al 2014.).

In the three examples discussed below, areas of potential social tension are explored in more depth, probing specifically why a more individualized approach to parent-child (or adult-child) relations is problematic. The suggestion is that relations between parents and non-parents (for example) act as a ‘pressure point,’ indicating where a sense of social solidarity is particularly under threat from a more individualized understanding of ‘parenting’. A more
stratified perspective on the question of social reproduction (i.e., with a shared sense of responsibility for raising the next generation) by contrast, opens up new avenues for the re-imagining of social trust.

State infrastructure and social reproduction: A comparative perspective

Norway and the UK have deliberately been selected as comparative case studies for the purposes of this paper. Like the Japanese example, traditionally, Norwegian society has been understood as one where neoliberal individualization, and the effects thereof, would be less far-reaching than the UK, given a different historical, political and cultural orientation towards social justice, family life and social cohesion. Eriksen, for example, suggests that the loss of trust he describes in the US and the UK has not been experienced in Norway to such an extent – parents will still leave their prams outside shops, and arguably the effects of this individualization of the responsibility for child care are less extreme (2014).

Esping-Andersen’s seminal (if controversial) Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism categorises Norway as one of the ‘social democratic’ welfare states. He says of these states: ‘The ideal is not to maximise dependence on the family, but capacities for individual independence (2006: 169). The state opts to ‘take direct responsibility of caring for children, the aged and the helpless.’ It is committed to ‘allow women to choose work rather than the household’, providing substantial state-provided child-care from an early age. Taxes are typically high, but in general this is understood by citizens to be in their best interests as a society more broadly, giving the state a high degree of legitimacy (Eriksen 2014). It is also crucial, argues Eriksen, to building a sense of community coherence and safety: in place of the need for competitive or intensive parenting, parents in Norway know that they can rely on the state to provide for their children, and competition for nurseries, schools and universities (for example) is less intense.

In opposition to this ‘social-democratic’ model, the British system has been classified as a (neo)‘liberal welfare state’ (Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser, 2011). Here, Esping-Andersen notes that the main features are ‘means-tested assistance, modest universal transfers or modest social-insurance plans’; ‘Benefits cater mainly to a clientele of low-income, usually working class, state dependants’ (2006: 167). Taxes tend to be lower than in social democratic states and a narrative of the ‘(un)deserving poor’ dominates discussions of public finances (Guardian 2012). Not surprisingly (like the US, which might be said to be an even more extreme example) this infrastructure has been linked to the pervasive appeal or spread of intensive parenting, where individual parents must work hard to ‘cultivate’ their children in a concerted way, to ensure their success in life (Lareau 2003).

The commitment to foster the capacity for individual independence seen in many Nordic states does not sit easily with the more ‘intensive’ model of parenting, described above, which stresses the importance of ‘familisation’ (individual, family-based, and embodied care for children), rather than allowing for a more socially based or shared model. Indeed, it sits much more easily in liberal welfare states like the UK, with their implicit support for the traditional model of the family and a stay-at-home, usually female, carer.
Recently, to counter this ‘gender inequality’ in parenting in the UK – and its knock-on effect on men and women’s working lives – there have been efforts to get fathers more ‘involved’ in parenting. Fatherhood has become politicized, with many calling for better ‘work-life balance’ policies to alleviate gender inequality in parenting (such as split parental leave and flexible working policies, Author 2014, Baird and O’Brien 2015, Twamley and Schober 2019). Many of those calling for these changes look to the Scandinavian countries as an example of ‘best practice’ – since many of them have long embodied a commitment to ‘equality’ and fairness at the legislative level.

Norway, for example, operates the ‘use-it-or-lose-it’ system whereby a substantial amount of parental leave is allocated to the partner or father but is lost to the family unit if not taken up (Bradnth and Kvande 2009); this leave is paid at or nearly at full salary. Similarly, childcare is almost fully subsidized and represents an average expense of less than 5% in terms of household outgoings (the OECD average is 12%, Daycare Trust 2014, Statistics Norway 2015). By contrast, the UK technically operates a system of ‘Shared Parental Leave’ whereby a mother can ‘transfer’ leave to her partner, but this is typically unpaid or paid at a very low statutory rate at less than a quarter of the average wage. Furthermore, childcare on average amounts to 30% of disposable household income in the UK (ibid), making decisions around working patterns a particularly fraught one for many parents, again linked to wider intersectional concerns. (These economic constraints do not just affect parents, of course; see Vergara et al., this issue on children’s ‘ethical reflexivity’ around debt management in neoliberal settings as part of caring relationships within families).

The suggestion here is that these state infrastructures represent (and inform) different cultural ideas around family life (for all members), reproduction and social solidarity more widely. In turn, these expectations are reflected in other social institutions, such as schools or indeed the media itself. There is therefore an interesting process of mirroring going on in each location (of parenting culture and social policy respectively) that makes these two countries ideal case studies for an investigation into the iterative relationship between social norms and state infrastructure.

**Changing cultures of parenting: diffusion and cohesion**

In Norway, preliminary research indicates that a similar trend in parenting culture has been observed to that in the UK, with scholars noting that it has gradually become more ‘intensive’ as part of a turn towards a more neoliberal agenda, albeit not to such a great extent. Frønes (2007) describes contemporary Norway as ‘parent-oriented’, noting that parents invest more time and energy in their children than ever before, and where parenting tasks are becoming more demanding. Like the UK, contemporary parenting has therefore been defined as ‘involved parenting’ – a parenthood that centres on the child and the child’s needs, and where parents bear a fundamental responsibility for the child’s future. Aarseth and Andersen’s (2012) work on middle class parents, as well as Bendixsen’s and Danielsen’s research on parenting and diversity, also shows how family-life has become a project to be managed and worked at (2018).
Indeed, this is particularly the case for the newly ‘elite’ families in Scandinavia reported as grappling, historically for the first time, with wanting their children to be socialized according to social values of ‘sameness’, whilst also making them competitive in the increasingly global capitalist market and therefore invest in them in ways familiar to US and UK parents, often with the aid of nannies or au-pairs (Aarseth 2018).

Indeed Aarseth’s work in Norway in particular brings to the fore the question of individualism/collectivism. What scholars of ‘parenting culture’ in neoliberal contexts observe is that the task of raising the next generation has become highly fragmented and detailed, with a keen focus on the everyday practices of daily life (such as practices around eating or sleeping). Rather than ‘socialising’ children into a set of shared social values, a more individualised perspective means that the aim is to raise ‘successful individuals’ who are able to ‘be themselves’ (Author 2013, and clearly this is premised on a highly reductive vision of ‘the child’). This sits well within an intensive parenting ethos, but less well where there is a focus on communality, sameness and ‘being social’ (see also Bach 2017 on the Danish case).

In thinking anthropologically about the politics of cultural translation (see Author 2013) this paper considers the ways in which messages about ‘good parenting’ are mobilized by various actors, including children – and adopted, resisted or reconfigured in these two cultural settings. In terms of resistance to this model of ‘parenting’, for example, Eldén and Anving (talking about middle class families in Sweden, 2019) include accounts from children, who are largely skeptical of the intensive ‘quality time’ approach to childcare, and are instead keen to spend time with their parents, during mundane activities of cooking and bathing, rather than having this ‘dirty work’ outsourced to an au-pair.

In general, however, whilst there are signs of growing stratification and increasing visibility of neoliberal discourses in Norway, there are important differences between the UK and Norway, specifically around gender (Gullvåg Holter 2014). Whilst in the UK researchers have explored if and how more intensive forms of fathering is ‘on the rise’ (Shirani et al 2012), Norwegian research indicates that a more active role for fathers and norms promoting a shared parenthood has been developing for some time (Lorenzen 2012, Bjornholt 2014), and point to their shifting role in Norwegian society (Aarseth 2011). In part, this is explained by a policy context which has long championed an ‘equality’ ethos.

Certainly, knowledge concerning the cultural presumptions underlying ways of ‘doing parenthood’ (or ‘doing childhood’) is essential for understanding how trust, belonging and support for central societal values are preserved (and changed) particularly in the context of a culturally plural and increasingly cosmopolitan setting (Bendixsen and Danielsen 2018). How has this more individualized model of parenting diffused differently in Norway and the UK in accordance with different cultural and political histories (that is, according to gender, ethnic and class differences)? Is it the case that Norway is following in the footsteps of the UK in terms of the intensification of parenting, or is this too simplistic a way of framing this issue?
Parenting, childhood and social antagonism: Three examples

The suggestion here is that an individualised approach to parenting, so common in policy, which stresses the importance of the parent-child relationship to ultimate outcomes not only eclipses other social relations key to the parenting relationship, but also has the potential to erode notions of social trust or solidarity. Thus the three examples which follow focus on areas of hypothetical tension relating to ‘parenting’ and social reproduction, as a means of thinking through the potentials and challenges of building social trust in using a more societal conception of raising children. To do this, this section draws on work in childhood studies to articulate the ways in which children are engaged in building and breaking solidarities, caring and being cared for being socialized and socializing others (whether that be adults or other children).

Parents and non-parents

In the UK, an individualized narrative around parenting (in policy as well as academic and media discourses) increasingly presents children as a morally loaded ‘lifestyle choice’ for which parents should (and do) take sole and full responsibility (Bristow 2014). Thus an antagonism between parents and non-parents has become increasingly visible as a form of social categorization – most notably in the workplace, particularly around parents’ entitlement to leave and flexible working. As the press would have it, this has become a battle between the ‘breeders’ and the ‘child-free-by-choicers’, with campaigns for ‘personal leave’ to be available to employees for reasons other than child care (Bristow 2014, see also Rosen and Suissa, this issue ^)

In the UK, childcare is understood as the responsibility of the family unit, with many scholars pointing out that the assumption childcare should rest with the individual parents is not only an expression of a neoliberal, individualistic era (Gillies 2009, Fraser 2013), but also one which exacerbates a segregation between parents and non-parents. This could arguably also be framed as part of a general loss in social responsibility for raising the next generation.

Instead, the suggestion here is that if we took a societal conception of raising children, this could lead to a society-wide organised system of care for children, and corresponding re-organisation of the work-place. Working with similar ideas of sociality, but from a social policy perspective, Sandel notes that the challenge for contemporary policy-makers is to ‘imagine a politics that takes moral... questions seriously, but brings them to bear on broad economic and civic concerns’ (2009: 262). Looking at institutions in the US such as national service and public schooling, for example, he rejects a utilitarian approach to the common good that prioritises the maximisation of welfare, on the grounds that justice should not become a simple ‘matter of calculation’ rather than of principle. He also rejects the choice-oriented (or ‘freedom-based’) approaches of both libertarians and liberal-egalitarians for failing to provide anything other than ‘individual preference’ as the guiding principle on public policy design. Instead, revisiting ideas from Aristotle, he argues for the cultivation of virtue and reasoning on questions of policy in which ‘value’ to the common good becomes paramount. To use the idea of the common good is not to imply that children are a resource from which we all stand to benefit. Rather, this focus on virtue and
what we really ‘value’, socially, is helpful in discussions around parenting/childing as a more societal endeavor, in that it helps us think beyond the more typical, neoliberal framings of relations of social reproduction, which tend to rest on ideas of competition, individualisation or familisation (e.g. Gillies 2011).

To this extent, with a social understanding of the importance of childcare for all, the tensions between parents and non-parents described might well be lessened, as they would not be pushed back onto individuals and employers (Bristow 2014). This makes this an interesting issue to compare with Norway, then, since there the state demonstrates a financial commitment to children’s care through heavily subsidised childcare and flexible working arrangements for parents – seemingly without courting the tensions mentioned above. Indeed, preliminary research suggests that this tension (between parents and non-parents) is not one that is considered culturally salient as a form of social labelling, and certainly not one voiced in the media (Bendixsen and Danielsen 2018).

And what of children? Theoretically it is interesting to consider whether this represents a different vision of the family life to that in the UK, and how, if at all, an increasing ‘intensification’ of parenting outlined above is likely to alter this. The Nordic states are frequently held up as the ‘gold standard’ of equality legislation, but how that actually works itself out in practice is generally less clear-cut (Simonardottir 2016). Certainly, the role of children themselves as active participants in being or shaping ‘the future’ (Rosen and Suissa, this issue) is reflected in a commitment to children’s rights at the level of policy and practice in the Scandinavian context (Qvortrup 2009). Clearly, children are active participants in building relations with adults (and between adults) in ways that span the parent/non-parent boundary, something which is often eclipsed by the narrow focus on ‘parenting’ in policy and indeed academic discourse (Patico, this issue, discusses adult-child interactions in a US school).

**Migration and intergenerational change**

Taking a historical angle, essential to exploring notions of social trust over time, the second example is that of intensive parenting and intergenerational relationships, with special attention to issues of migration, diversity and coherence (Bendixsen and Danielsen, 2018; Franceschelli, 2018).

Scholars working on parenting culture in the UK have observed that one of the negative effects of a more intensive, expert-driven individualistic approach to parenting is the impact on intergenerational transmission. A cultural context that views parents as inadequate in the face of the task of ‘building tomorrow’ means that parents have become seen in need of ever more expert guidance in carrying out this task (Lee et al., 2014). Arguably, this contemporary, expert-based parenting culture has not only had an effect on parents’ own subjectivities, but it has magnified a disruption to any sense of cultural transmission between grandparents, parents and children. Grandparents are routinely presented (in the UK) as not to be trusted as they are ‘out of touch’ or not ‘up to date’ on the most recent parenting methods and advice. Children, by contrast, are often instrumentalised in schemes to ‘educate’ parents about, for example, healthy
eating or environmentalism (Furedi 2008). It is crucial then to consider intergenerational shifts in parenting culture, as well as at the effect of an individualization of parenting on those intergenerational relationships themselves.

As UK and Norwegian societies become ever more globalized and ‘multicultural,’ new parenting norms, ideologies and practices are emerging, not least at the instigation of children themselves who often act as interlocutors for their parents (and grandparents) – something that is of particular concern for the state and notions of social coherence and nation-building (Crafter and Iqbal 2016).

In the context of rising ethno-nationalism and historically high levels of migration, Gullestad has written about the Norwegian model of social equality as one which champions ‘sameness’ rather than ‘difference’, in contrast to the ‘multi-cultural’ model usually promoted in the UK (2002). Working in urban contexts of high migration in Norway (and, importantly, in the context of the ascension of a right-wing party to power) Bendixsen and Danielsen have explored how notions of diversity (and disruption) are experienced by Norwegian parents (2018). Encouragingly, they document parents’ accounts of concern about ‘other peoples’ children’ in this context, as part of efforts to extend ‘intensive’ parenting beyond the nuclear family, seeing socialization as a collective endeavor through what they term ‘inclusive’ parenting. Thus, as the work of Vergara (this issue) also acknowledges, we also need to think about how an intensification of parenting in certain contexts has the potential to create coherence within – as well as between – particular groups, as part of this process of ‘integration’ not least as a product of children’s engagement in these social networks (see also Author, 2013).

In London, Vincent et al’s work on children’s friendships (2017) also makes an argument about the importance of peer relations to the building of social solidarity, particularly in ‘super diverse’ contexts. Focussing on friendships across ethnic and class differences they highlight both the potentials and challenges of relationships between children across class boundaries, not least when these are mediated by parental anxieties, seeing these as examples of ‘efforts to forge relationships across difference’ (2017: 1987). However, these are recognized to be fragile ones under threat from a declining sense of social trust as part of a wider ‘hostile environment’ towards migrants (Guardian 2017).

This issue therefore highlights some of the problems of thinking about parenting as simply an individualistic matter, as it is so often framed in policy discourse. In contexts of historically high migration (and a rise in right-wing, nationalist rhetoric across Europe) a risk-conscious, neo-liberal understanding of social reproduction threatens attempts to build social trust and arguably encourages a turn away from ‘others’, whether from different cultural backgrounds, or arguably even a different generation. A more social conception allows space for an appreciation of peer and other adult-child relations in the creation of social relations.

*Fertility and inequality*
The final example looks particularly at how the intensification of parenting has differently affected would-be parents in the UK and Norway, in the context of different regulatory regimes, suggesting that an individualized approach is corrosive to notions of solidarity and trust between citizens. In a more individualised, intensive parenting culture, which stresses personal fulfilment through parenthood, becoming a (biological) parent has not only become seemingly more feasible for many couples, but the social role has been inflated in congruence, frequently being framed as a ‘human right’ (Strathern 1993). In line with a focus on tensions (Rosen and Newberry 2018, Rosen and Suissa, this issue), then, this example considers how the inflation of the parenting identity has led to feelings of exclusion and segregation at the wider social level, for those who cannot ‘achieve’ it (Author 2017). These issues are particularly timely, given recent debates in each country about how far the state should pay for couples to receive fertility treatment (recent headlines in the UK reveal that in many areas of the country, IVF treatment will be scrapped on the National Health Service due to cost-cutting, Independent 2017).

Recent work on the subject of egg-donation explores these issues around individualisation and social reproduction in a cross-cultural comparative framework (Marre et al 2017). In the UK, individuals are (currently) able to receive treatment with donor eggs on the NHS, where in Norway, this is currently prohibited due to concerns about coercion (although the Biotechnology Council has advised changing this law, Melhuus 2005). Instead, patients seeking treatment through egg donation typically engage in what has been called ‘fertility tourism’ or ‘Cross Border Reproductive Care’ in search of egg-donors, with Spain being one of the most popular destinations (Pennings and Gurtin 2012, Marre et al 2017). This example therefore prompts us to think about ‘trust’ and ‘solidarity’ not only in access to reproductive technologies, but also ‘what counts’ in the creation of kinship and national communities, not least as this relates to any children born as a result of that treatment (Cheney 2018).

In thinking about the relationship between the intensification of parenting, reproductive technologies and neoliberalism it is important to think specifically about the nature of ‘individualisation’. As both a product of an intensified parenting culture, as well as one of its greatest catalysts, reproductive technologies could be read as the example par excellence of the individualisation of a social problem. Instead, if we take a more social view, this might better be understood as a problem with the way society is structured (in terms of, for example fertility decline and the pressure to become established in one’s career). Instead, infertility is increasingly tackled in ways that makes individuals accountable for their reproductive trajectories, emphasizing and enabling ever further the importance of the biological relation (Inhorn and Van Balen 2002).

The problem then, is that paradoxically, many individuals (and couples) seeking fertility treatment narrate their inability to have children as a form of social exclusion (from a peer group), whilst those who are parents also report a sense of segregation from society as a whole. In both cases, this individualization is antithetical to the case of family life and social reproduction, which has traditionally been about creating connections (see Author 2017). Roman’s work in Sweden (2014), for example, reveals the paradox of individualization in the
contemporary era: having children is itself considered a 'risk project', minutely planned by couples to counter the threat to individual autonomy and therefore family life itself.

Whilst of course children are not ‘active’ participants in the forging (or breaking) of these relationships between fertile and infertile adults, it is nevertheless critical to think about the notion of ‘the child’ in these debates, even when this is at the conceptual (or rather, pre-conception) level. In Cheney’s work, for example, we see how ‘the best interests of the child’ is configured in debates around international commercial surrogacy, usually from within a children’s rights perspective. She argues instead for the importance of empirical work with children conceived by such arrangements, and a theoretical perspective which has relationality at heart (2018, see also Lee, Macvarish and Sheldon 2017, who look at the ‘Welfare of the Child’ question with respect to the policing of potential parents). These kinds of questions prompt us to think about the relationship between individualisation and community relations as they relate to the role of the state in subsidising treatment (and by extension, who can afford to become a parent at all). An individualized perspective on ‘parenting’ plays into a more divisive approach to reproduction and the redistribution of resources across society, and thus has potentially corrosive effects on relations of solidarity.

Discussion: Solidarity, care and the ‘common good’

Bringing together insights from childhood with work in parenting culture studies, in parallel with ideas around social solidarity, the article suggests that concepts such as ‘gemeinschaft’ (Tonnies) ‘trust’ (Eriksen) or the ‘common good’ (Sandel) can be useful in re-thinking the way social reproduction is framed, in both academic and policy debates. Certainly, childhood studies helps us see the ways in which ‘parenting culture studies’ too readily eclipses the perspectives of, and potential for, children to build social relations, helping us re-think underlying notions of socialisation, authority and categories of adulthood and childhood in turn.

Politically, rhetoric in Europe has been increasingly focused on the individual’s private ‘choices’, meaning that structural challenges to collective duties of care often fall outside the remit of equality and anti-discrimination policies (Browne 2013, Baird and O’Brien 2015). But how free are people – as parents, non-parents or even children – to make these ‘choices’ about their work and home lives? In the context of cuts to public services (in the UK) on the one hand, and the obsession with parenthood on the other, what is society actually doing about being and raising children? In this particular political climate, childcare and reproduction provides an interesting ‘litmus test’ for policy-makers in thinking about a range of other issues relating to the allocation of state resources. This also clearly has implications for what Eriksen (and indeed Marx, Tonnies and Weber) say about solidarity, particularly in the context of rising diversity. In taking a more social perspective on the question of reproduction, the ways that we – children and adults (parents and non-parents) – care for each other can be foregrounded, and therefore made central to project of building social solidarity. To this extent the ‘reading across’ of the two fields of parenting culture and childhood studies can be fruitful to this endeavour.
Further, through a comparative perspective, this paper aims to re-frame the debate around ‘parenting’ as one beyond the individual family, to become one of the ‘common good’, from which we all – parents, non-parents and children, have a stake in. This opens up, it is hoped, new avenues in how we could approach the ‘problem’ of raising the next generation as a *societal* rather than an individual one.

**Conclusion**

This paper has explored the relationship between ‘parenting’ and trust, and the ideas of adulthood and childhood on which it rests. Thinking about parenting as a societal endeavour, whereby all of us – children, parents and non-parents care for each other - challenges the individualised model of the neoliberal ‘parent’ and ‘child’ within the new ‘parenting culture’ and helps us approach the question of building social solidarity afresh. The suggestion is that an ‘intensification’ of parenting has a potentially corrosive effect on notions of trust and social cohesion, looking at the potential implications of this through three examples. Whilst a social democratic welfare state infrastructure (as seen in Norway) clearly goes some way to curbing the worst excesses of a more neoliberal individualised ‘intensive’ parenting culture evident in the UK, it’s clear that the spread of this culture is on the rise, creating novel tensions and forms of inequality in the Nordic context. To put it another way, how long will Norwegian parents continue to leave their children in prams outside shops?
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Use of this framework is not to argue for a return to romanticised forms of ‘gemeinschaft’ society (where forms of stratification and exclusion were arguably more pronounced) but rather to see how these heuristic concepts might help us think through shifting conceptions of trust and its implications for social reproduction.

As is discussed further below, this correlates with historically lower levels of migration to Norway than either the UK or the US.

Recent changes in Norway’s government, have led to proposals for a reduction in the amount of non-transferable parental leave to 10 weeks, making this an interesting time to explore these issues.

This commitment to gender equality seems to be shifting in these ‘elite’ families, where may women, unusually for Norway, stop work or move to part-time hours so as to focus on a more intensive form of mothering.

This intersects with the availability of contraception, abortion and the new reproductive technologies which have meant having children is ever more a ‘choice’.
Introduction

What is the relationship between the way we raise the next generation and wider social relations? Drawing on theoretical discussions around risk and trust this paper ‘thinks through’ the subjects of parenting and social solidarity, with the aid of a comparative perspective.

Many scholars, particularly in Anglophone countries, have observed that mothers and fathers are now expected to do much more explicit ‘parenting’ than in the past (Hays 1996, Lee et al. 2014). This has led to theorisations of an ‘intensification’ of parenting, linked, in particular, to (neo)liberal welfare states (Lareau 2003, Nelson 2013, see also introduction, this issue). For the purposes of a comparative look into the reception, rejection, transformation and potential effect of these discourses, Norway has been chosen as a ‘social democratic’ state with an alternative historical orientation to the UK on questions of welfare and equality.

In particular, the paper considers the effect of a more individualistic narrative around parenting on notions of solidarity and trust in the two settings. This provides a means of discussing broader theoretical concerns around risk and responsibility, especially as they intersect with our ideas of childhood and adulthood. In short, the paper suggests that an individualised understanding of ‘parenting’ is problematic, as it has potentially corrosive effects on notions of social solidarity – a phenomenon arguably visible in the UK already. Whilst this has been tempered by Norwegian social democracy, this is changing with the global spread of neoliberal ideologies.

By drawing on theories of social trust and the ‘common good’ (Eriksen, 2014; Tonnies, 1887; Sandel 2009) to analyze the rise and impact of intensive parenting, the paper uses insights from both parenting culture and childhood studies to argue for a societal conception of parenting where the ways that we – including children and adults (parents and non-parents) – care for each other is central to the potentials and challenges of building solidarity. To make this argument, the paper considers three examples in social reproduction where tensions might be expected to be particularly pronounced, such as between parents and non-parents, between fertile and infertile citizens, and between the generations, in the context of rising migration. In bringing insights from childhood and parenting culture studies to bear on both academic and policy understandings of parenting, it explores how we – children as well as adults – are active in shaping ideas about good parenting and social solidarity, both within and beyond family units. In short, an individualised perspective on the ‘parenting’ relationship is not only highly reductive, it is also damaging to the project of building tomorrow.

‘Intensive’ parenting

Parenting has long been considered of great importance when it comes to the transmission of social norms and values, the continuation of kinship, family and household, and for reproducing local and national communities (Barlow and Chapin, 2010). It is understood here as an element of ‘social reproduction’, as
used by feminist scholars. As part and parcel of the perpetuation of gender and class relations:

[s]ocial reproduction includes the care and socialization of children and care of the elderly or infirm. Social reproduction includes the organization of sexuality, biological reproduction, and how food, clothing, and shelter are made available. Most social reproduction occurs within the family unit...variations in the distribution of the work of social reproduction are affected by the family, market, community, and state. (Laslett and Brenner, 1989: 381).

Recent sociological work has also situated ‘parenting’ as critical for understanding contemporary changes in society – particularly in the US and the UK but also further afield (Faircloth 2013). Drawing attention to broader socio-cultural processes within those societies that have cast contemporary child rearing as a highly important yet problematic sphere of social life, this work starts from the premise that raising children has become a more complex task, culturally, than it used to be in the past. Furedi, for example says the following:

Child-rearing is not the same as parenting. In most human societies there is no distinct activity that today we associate with the term parenting. In agricultural societies, children are expected to participate in the work and routine of the community and are not regarded as requiring special parenting attention or care ... The belief that children require special care and attention evolved alongside the conviction that what adults did mattered to their development. These sentiments gained strength and began to influence public opinion in the nineteenth century. The work of mothering and fathering was now endowed with profound importance. It became defined as a distinct skill that could assure the development of character traits necessary for a successful life ... Once children are seen as the responsibility of a mother and father rather than of a larger community the modern view of parenting acquires salience. (Furedi, 2002, p. 106)

From this point of view, a trajectory towards placing particular significance on the role and contribution of the parent, using their ‘skills’ to ensure a child’s ‘successful life’, has a long history. However, it is also recognized that ‘parenting’ has acquired specific connotations more recently, certainly within neoliberal Euro-American settings. If one looks closely at the question of raising the next generation, for example, it will become clear this is rarely discussed as a communal task or the responsibility of adult society as a whole. Rather, it is discussed as an individualized ‘parenting strategy’ (whether around discipline, eating and sleeping patterns or otherwise).

Chiming with work done by modernization theorists (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1999) a key conceptual assumption is that children are particularly vulnerable to risk in the early years, such that a developmental ‘blueprint’ can be set during this period, engendering a highly deterministic, heavily loaded understanding of the parenting relationship (see also Macvarish 2016, Burman 2017, introduction, this issue). Recognizing the gendered dimension to these changes, much work in
the US and the UK has drawn on the concept of ‘intensive mothering’ (Hays, 1996) in understanding the experiences of contemporary women to describe an idealized, child-centred, expert-guided interaction with their children (Hays, 1996: x, see also Lee et al., 2014, see introduction, this issue).

In the introduction to this special issue, the editors elaborate on the inevitable relation between the ‘vulnerable child’ and the ‘risky parent’, noting that in such conceptions ‘the child’ becomes merely an ‘outcome’ of parental input, and a trope rather than an active contributor to the relationship. Alanen and Mayall’s (2005) suggestion that ‘childing’ be the logical partner to ‘parenting’ is a welcome intervention, and whilst this paper focuses largely on the parental experience of the relationship, this is not to endorse the idea that socialization or ‘parenting’ is a unilateral or ‘downwards’ process. Indeed, much work in childhood studies has highlighted the extent to which children are active in caring relationships across the generations and beyond (e.g. Alanen, 2011, Spyrou, Rosen and Cook 2018). In challenging this academic lacunae, and thinking through children’s roles (as conduits, mediators and agents) in building and breaking solidarities, it is critical that we take into account both their positions of being ‘socialized’ and ‘cared for’ as well as they ‘caring for’ and ‘socializing’ others, whether that be children or adults.

Of course, the perception of what is a ‘good parent’ (or ‘good child’) is culturally, historically and ideologically rooted, and affects individuals in different ways according to a range of intersectional factors, such as class or ethnicity. Nevertheless, the traction of this more individualised and competitive approach to parenting is intimately linked to wider cultural norms as well as state infrastructures, which differ dramatically in terms of welfare and resources for education and care (e.g. lack of school places, which puts extra pressure on parents to ‘go the extra mile’ (Lareau 2003, Nelson 2010)). Drawing on classical theoretical concerns, this article therefore asks how we might use ideas like ‘trust’ and ‘solidarity’ to challenge popular, policy and indeed academic understandings of ‘parenting’, which tend to conceptualize it as an individualized relationship. Instead, what might be gained in thinking about it as more social endeavor that necessarily involves all adults and children?

**Theoretical context: Parenting, social solidarity and trust**

The Norwegian anthropologist Eriksen has argued that the recent turn towards ‘intensive’ or ‘paranoid’ parenting (Furedi 2008) represents a shift in our very notions of personhood, responsibility and trust (2015). Using insights from classical social theorists, Eriksen evokes debates about the relationship between ‘gemeinshaft’ and ‘gesellschaft’, as used by thinkers such as Tonnies and Weber (Tonnies 1887, Weber 2012). For Weber, these are ideal types referring to social relationships based on informal, personal and ‘community’ ties in the former, and indirect, formal or ‘society’ ties in the latter (2012). The term is used here in a Weberian sense to refer to a sense of social cohesion and commitment to others, which is not only kin-based, but formed from a sense of ‘we-ness’ more broadly (Westerling, 2016). Solidarity of this sort matters in thinking about the project of ‘building tomorrow’; that is, to discussions and decisions about who counts as a member of the ‘we’ – a highly politicized issue in the context of
ethno-nationalism (Rosen and Suissa, this issue), but not one necessarily determined by that, either within or beyond transnational borders. Solidarity, as understood here, is premised in many ways on an idea of trust and shared values, and this paper asks how trust is impacted by the rise of neoliberal, risk-conscious intensive parenthood. It also considers other means by which we might cultivate a sense of social solidarity.

Certainly, Eriksen suggests that there has been a loss of community or ‘trust’ in recent years, as part of the turn towards the ‘risk society’ that Giddens et al. describe (Giddens 1999). He gives the example that in the past, mothers in the UK would leave prams outside the shop whilst they carried out errands, or informally arrange for friends to do the school run; today, this would be unthinkable (and probably a prosecutable offence). To this extent, the loss of ‘solidarity’ or ‘trust’ might best be read as one consequence of the growing individualization of adult-child relations, itself a product of a more neoliberal turn in the management of personal and family life: one cannot trust others to who do not have as much of a stake in that child’s future (and see Rosen and Suissa, this issue, on how this has become politicized in the UK). Arguably this has even extended to intimate and family relations, such that the mother cannot trust anyone – even her partner or parents – to look after her child in the ‘right’ way (Wolf 2011; discussed further below).

Further, in line with work on risk consciousness, whether this is an actual or an imagined loss of social cohesion the effects are the same: People do not leave their children outside shops because they perceive solidarity, or ‘trust’ to have eroded (see also Bristow 2014). A focus on these conceptions therefore has important implications for both theory and policy. Arguably, the notion that the adult generation has a responsibility for nurturing the next generation was historically something that was taken for granted (Furedi 2008). Even if as an adult one was childless, this did not mean that one was indifferent to the next generation (Rosen and Suissa, this issue).

Today (in the US and the UK at least) Furedi argues that something has changed, in part as a result of contemporary political shifts. Now that parenting has become more individualized, he argues that there has been an estrangement from responsibility. The presumption of generational responsibility that has historically underpinned child-rearing has become disorganized. This means, he argues, that there has been a breakdown in the very notion of adult (and indeed childhood) identity. Whilst this can of course be welcomed in some sense – breaking down traditional power relations, for example – Furedi identifies this as a historically novel development, such that adults are no longer confident in their ability to act as authority figures per se to the next generation. Instead, parents are positioned, by policy makers at least, as a risk factor – both omnipotent and yet the ultimate cause of their children’s problems, and in need of expert guidance. And whilst ‘good parenting’ in this model is ostensibly child-centred, it is arguably one where children qua children are eclipsed as participants in ‘building tomorrow’ and understood merely as outcome of parenting skills (again, this intersects with Rosen and Suissa’s argument, this issue)
Furedi diagnoses this as a crisis of adulthood, where being a ‘grown up’ is no longer valued (or socially signified) in the same way as the past – in line with the shift towards uncertain, ‘liquid’ or ‘reflexive’ modernity that Bauman describes (2005). Because of this confusion, relationships between adults and children are ever more subject to juridification – that is, to rules about both formal and informal contact (see Bristow 2014 on the increased policing of adult-child relations in the form of CRB checks or similar in the UK, for example). This is historically and culturally specific: in Japan, for example, small children – aged only 2 or 3 – routinely take the subway alone, without parental supervision (Dixon 2015). Dixon notes that one reason for the unusual degree of independence of Japanese children is not (only) self-sufficiency, but rather, ‘group reliance’. He observes that children learn early that ‘any member of society can be called on to help or serve others’ and that a ‘sense of trust and cooperation occurs, often unspoken or unsolicited’ (Dixon 2015, see also Hendry, 1986, on neighbourhood based ‘techniques of training’ for young Japanese children).

By contrast, where children might once have relied on adults to help them when they encountered day-to-day adversity, today, in the UK, many adults would be wary about getting involved with a child they were not related to, and children are taught from an early age about ‘stranger danger’ and to be suspicious of unknown adults. As Bristow argues, recognition that some adults may harm children has become transposed, in the form of society-wide regulatory projects regulating inter-generational contact, into the sensibility that all adults should be vetted in case they might pose a danger to children (2014). To give a more extreme example, in New York, a woman who let her 9-year old ride the subway was labelled ‘the world’s worst mom’ (Washington Post 2015). In short, a substantive element of the interpersonal relationship (between adults and children) gets lost in this transformation of personhood in the new parenting culture (see also Ramaekers and Suissa, 2011).

As is examined below, this has had a knock-on effect on social solidarity or ‘trust’ more broadly – to the extent that active suspicion and resentment between adults (whether parents or not) about their caring rights and responsibilities are becoming increasingly commonplace. In parallel, children themselves have become de-responsibilised, leading some to argue that we need to return to a more ‘free-range’ approach to parenting (Skenazy, in Lee et al 2014) recognizing children as willing and able to take responsibility for themselves from a much earlier age. At the same time, critics have noted that this continues to rely on a deterministic, individualized model of the parent-child relationship. Instead, these authors advocate that that the ways in which we engage in processes of social reproduction should be understood as precisely that – social (Bristow, 2014, Lee et al 2014).

In the three examples discussed below, areas of potential social tension are explored in more depth, probing specifically why a more individualized approach to parent-child (or adult-child) relations is problematic. The suggestion is that relations between parents and non-parents (for example) act as a ‘pressure point,’ where a sense of social solidarity is particularly under threat from a more individualized understanding of ‘parenting’. A more stratified
perspective on the question of social reproduction (i.e., with a shared sense of responsibility for raising the next generation) by contrast, opens up new avenues for the re-imagining of social trust.

**State infrastructure and social reproduction: A comparative perspective**

Norway and the UK have deliberately been selected as comparative case studies for the purposes of this paper. Like the Japanese example, traditionally, Norwegian society has been understood as one where neoliberal individualization, and the effects thereof, would be less far-reaching than the UK, given a different historical, political and cultural orientation towards social justice, family life and social cohesion. Eriksen, for example, suggests that the loss of trust he describes in the US and the UK has not been experienced in Norway to such an extent – parents will still leave their prams outside shops, and arguably the effects of this individualization of the responsibility for child care are less extreme (2014).

Esping-Andersen’s seminal (if controversial) *Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* categorises Norway as one of the ‘social democratic’ welfare states. He says of these states: ‘The ideal is not to maximise dependence on the family, but capacities for individual independence (2006: 169). The state opts to ‘take direct responsibility of caring for children, the aged and the helpless.’ It is committed to ‘allow women to choose work rather than the household’, providing substantial state-provided child-care from an early age. Taxes are typically high, but in general this is understood by citizens to be in their best interests as a society more broadly, giving the state a high degree of legitimacy (Eriksen 2014). It is also crucial, argues Eriksen, to building a sense of community coherence and safety: in place of the need for competitive or intensive parenting, parents in Norway know that they can rely on the state to provide for their children, and competition for nurseries, schools and universities (for example) is less intense.

In opposition to this ‘social-democratic’ model, the British system has been classified as a (neo) ‘liberal welfare state’ (Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser, 2011). Here, Esping-Andersen notes that the main features are ‘means-tested assistance, modest universal transfers or modest social-insurance plans’; ‘Benefits cater mainly to a clientele of low-income, usually working class, state dependants’ (2006: 167). Taxes tend to be lower than in social democratic states and a narrative of the ‘(un)deserving poor’ dominates discussions of public finances (*Guardian* 2012). Not surprisingly (like the US, which might be said to be an even more extreme example) this infrastructure has been linked to the pervasive appeal or spread of intensive parenting, where individual parents must work hard to ‘cultivate’ their children in a concerted way, to ensure their success in life (Lareau 2003).

The commitment to foster the capacity for individual independence seen in many Nordic states does not sit easily with the more ‘intensive’ model of parenting, described above, which stresses the importance of ‘familisation’ (individual, family-based, and embodied care for children), rather than allowing for a more socially based or shared model. Indeed, it sits much more easily in liberal welfare states like the UK, with their implicit support for the traditional model of the family and a stay-at-home, usually female, carer.
Recently, however, to counter this ‘gender inequality’ in parenting in the UK – and its knock-on effect on men and women’s working lives – there have been efforts to get fathers more ‘involved’ in parenting. Fatherhood has become politicized, with many calling for better ‘work-life balance’ policies to alleviate gender inequality in parenting (such as split parental leave and flexible working policies, Faircloth 2014, Baird and O’Brien 2015, Twamley and Schober 2019). Many of those calling for these changes look to the Scandinavian countries as an example of ‘best practice’ – since many of them have long embodied a commitment to ‘equality’ and fairness at the legislative level.

Norway, for example, operates the ‘use-it-or-lose-it’ system whereby a substantial amount of parental leave is allocated to the partner or father but is lost to the family unit if not taken up (Bradnth and Kvande 2009); this leave is paid at or nearly at full salary. Similarly, childcare is almost fully subsidized and represents an average expense of less than 5% in terms of household outgoings (the OECD average is 12%, Daycare Trust 2014, Statistics Norway 2015). By contrast, the UK technically operates a system of ‘Shared Parental Leave’ whereby a mother can ‘transfer’ leave to her partner, but this is typically unpaid or paid at a very low statutory rate at less than a quarter of the average wage. Furthermore, childcare on average amounts to 30% of disposable household income in the UK (ibid), making decisions around working patterns a particularly fraught one for many parents, again linked to wider intersectional concerns. (These economic constraints do not just affect parents, of course; see Vergara et al, this issue, on children’s ‘ethical reflexivity’ around debt management in neoliberal settings as part of caring relationships within families).

The suggestion here is that these state infrastructures represent (and inform) different cultural ideas around family life (for all members), reproduction and social solidarity more widely. There is therefore an interesting process of mirroring going on in each location (of parenting culture and social policy respectively) that makes these two countries ideal case studies for an investigation into the iterative relationship between social norms and state infrastructure.

**Changing cultures of parenting: diffusion and cohesion**

In Norway, preliminary research indicates that a similar trend in parenting culture has been observed to that in the UK, with scholars noting that it has gradually become more ‘intensive’ as part of a turn towards a more neoliberal agenda, albeit not to such a great extent. Frønes (2007) describes contemporary Norway as ‘parent-oriented’, noting that parents invest more time and energy in their children than ever before, and where parenting tasks are becoming more demanding. Like the UK, contemporary parenting has therefore been defined as ‘involved parenting’ – a parenthood that centres on the child and the child’s needs. Aarseth and Andersen’s (2012) work on middle class parents, as well as Bendixsen’s and Danielsen’s research on parenting and diversity, also shows how family-life has become a project to be managed and worked at (2018). Indeed, this is particularly the case for the newly ‘elite’ families in Scandinavia reported as grappling, historically for the first time, with wanting their children
to be socialized according to social values of ‘sameness’, whilst also making them competitive in the increasingly global capitalist market and therefore invest in them in ways familiar to US and UK parents, often with the aid of nannies or au-pairs (Aarseth 2018).

Indeed Aarseth’s work in Norway in particular brings to the fore the question of individualism/collectivism. What scholars of ‘parenting culture’ in neoliberal contexts observe is that the task of raising the next generation has become highly fragmented and detailed, with a keen focus on the everyday practices of daily life (such as practices around eating or sleeping). Rather than ‘socialising’ children into a set of shared social values, a more individualised perspective means that the aim is to raise ‘successful individuals’ who are able to ‘be themselves’ (Faircloth 2013, and clearly this is premised on a highly reductive vision of ‘the child’). This sits well within an intensive parenting ethos, but less well where there is a focus on communality, sameness and ‘being social’ (see also Bach 2017 on the Danish case).

In thinking anthropologically about the politics of cultural translation (see Faircloth 2013) this paper considers the ways in which messages about ‘good parenting’ are mobilized by various actors, including children – and adopted, resisted or reconfigured in these two cultural settings. In terms of resistance to this model of ‘parenting’, for example, Eldén and Anving (talking about middle class families in Sweden, 2019) include accounts from children, who are largely skeptical of the intensive ‘quality time’ approach to childcare, and are instead keen to spend time with their parents, during mundane activities of cooking and bathing, rather than having this ‘dirty work’ outsourced to an au-pair.

In general, however, whilst there are signs of growing stratification and increasing visibility of neoliberal discourses in Norway, there are important differences between the UK and Norway, specifically around gender (Gullvåg Holter 2014). Whilst in the UK researchers have explored if and how more intensive forms of fathering is ‘on the rise’ (Shirani et al 2012), Norwegian research indicates that a more active role for fathers and norms promoting a shared parenthood has been developing for some time (Lorenzen 2012, Bjornholt 2014), and point to their shifting role in Norwegian society (Aarseth 2011). As noted, this is partly explained by a policy context which has long championed an ‘equality’ ethos. ii

Certainly, knowledge concerning the cultural presumptions underlying ways of ‘doing parenthood’ (or ‘doing childhood’) is essential for understanding how trust, belonging and support for central societal values are preserved (and changed) particularly in the context of a culturally plural and increasingly cosmopolitan setting (Bendixsen and Danielsen 2018). How has this more individualized model of parenting diffused differently in Norway and the UK in accordance with different cultural and political histories? Is it the case that Norway is following in the footsteps of the UK in terms of the intensification of parenting, or is this too simplistic a way of framing this issue?

**Parenting, childhood and social antagonism: Three examples**
The suggestion here is that an individualised approach to parenting, so common in policy, which stresses the importance of the parent-child relationship to ultimate outcomes not only eclipses other social relations key to the parenting relationship, but also has the potential to erode notions of social trust or solidarity. Thus the three examples which follow focus on areas of hypothetical tension relating to ‘parenting’ and social reproduction, as a means of thinking through the potentials and challenges of building social trust in using a more societal conception of raising children.

**Parents and non-parents**

In the UK, an individualized narrative around parenting (in policy as well as academic and media discourses) increasingly presents children as a morally loaded ‘lifestyle choice’ for which parents should (and do) take sole and full responsibility (Bristow 2014). Thus an antagonism between parents and non-parents has become increasingly visible as a form of social categorization – most notably in the workplace, particularly around parents’ entitlement to leave and flexible working. As the press would have it, this has become a battle between the ‘breeders’ and the ‘child-free-by-choicers’, with campaigns for ‘personal leave’ to be available to employees for reasons other than child care (Bristow 2014, see also Rosen and Suissa, this issue)

In the UK, childcare is understood as the responsibility of the family unit, with many scholars pointing out that the assumption childcare should rest with the individual parents is not only an expression of a neoliberal, individualistic era (Gillies 2009, Fraser 2013), but also one which exacerbates a segregation between parents and non-parents. This could arguably also be framed as part of a general loss in social responsibility for raising the next generation.

Instead, the suggestion here is that if we took a *societal* conception of raising children, this could lead to a society-wide organised system of care for children, and corresponding re-organisation of the work-place. Working with similar ideas of sociality, but from a social policy perspective, Sandel notes that the challenge for contemporary policy-makers is to ‘imagine a politics that takes moral... questions seriously, but brings them to bear on broad economic and civic concerns’ (2009: 262). Looking at institutions in the US such as national service and public schooling, for example, he rejects a utilitarian approach to the common good that prioritises the maximisation of welfare, on the grounds that justice should not become a simple ‘matter of calculation’ rather than of principle. He also rejects the choice-oriented (or ‘freedom-based’) approaches of both libertarians and liberal-egalitarians for failing to provide anything other than ‘individual preference’ as the guiding principle on public policy design. Instead, revisiting ideas from Aristotle, he argues for the cultivation of virtue and reasoning on questions of policy in which ‘value’ to the common good becomes paramount. To use the idea of the common good is not to imply that children are a resource from which we all stand to benefit. Rather, this focus on virtue and what we really ‘value’, socially, is helpful in discussions around parenting/childing as a more societal endeavor, in that it helps us think beyond the more typical, neoliberal framings of relations of social reproduction, which
tend to rest on ideas of competition, individualisation or familisation (e.g. Gillies 2011).

To this extent, with a social understanding of the importance of childcare for all, the tensions between parents and non-parents described might well be lessened, as they would not be pushed back onto individuals and employers (Bristow 2014). This makes this an interesting issue to compare with Norway, then, since there the state demonstrates a financial commitment to children’s care through heavily subsidised childcare and flexible working arrangements for parents – seemingly without courting the tensions mentioned above. Indeed, preliminary research suggests that this tension (between parents and non-parents) is not one that is considered culturally salient as a form of social labelling, and certainly not one voiced in the media (Bendixsen and Danielsen 2018).

And what of children? Theoretically it is interesting to consider whether this represents a different vision of the family life to that in the UK, and how, if at all, an increasing ‘intensification’ of parenting outlined above is likely to alter this. The Nordic states are frequently held up as the ‘gold standard’ of equality legislation, but how that actually works itself out in practice is generally less clear-cut (Simonardottir 2016). Certainly, the role of children themselves as active participants in being or shaping ‘the future’ (Rosen and Suissa, this issue) is reflected in a commitment to children’s rights at the level of policy and practice in the Scandinavian context (Qvortrup 2009). Clearly, children are active participants in building relations with adults (and between adults) in ways that span the parent/non-parent boundary, something which is often eclipsed by the narrow focus on ‘parenting’ in policy and indeed academic discourse (Patico, this issue, discusses adult-child interactions in a US school).

**Migration and intergenerational change**

Taking a historical angle, essential to exploring notions of social trust over time, the second example is that of intensive parenting and intergenerational relationships, with special attention to issues of migration, diversity and coherence (Bendixsen and Danielsen, 2018; Franceschelli, 2018).

Scholars working on parenting culture in the UK have observed that one of the negative effects of a more intensive, expert-driven individualistic approach to parenting is the impact on intergenerational transmission. A cultural context that views parents as inadequate in the face of the task of ‘building tomorrow’ means that parents have become seen in need of ever more expert guidance in carrying out this task (Lee et al, 2014). Arguably, this contemporary, expert-based parenting culture has not only had an effect on parents’ own subjectivities, but it has magnified a disruption to any sense of cultural transmission between grandparents, parents and children. Grandparents are routinely presented (in the UK) as not to be trusted as they are ‘out of touch’ or not ‘up to date’ on the most recent parenting methods and advice. Children, by contrast, are often instrumentalised in schemes to ‘educate’ parents about, for example, healthy eating or environmentalism (Furedi 2008). It is crucial then to consider intergenerational shifts in parenting culture, as well as at the effect of an
individualization of parenting on those intergenerational relationships themselves.

As UK and Norwegian societies become ever more globalized and ‘multicultural,’ new parenting norms, ideologies and practices are emerging, not least at the instigation of children themselves who often act as interlocutors for their parents (and grandparents) – something that is of particular concern for the state and notions of social coherence and nation-building (Crafter and Iqbal 2016). In the context of rising ethno-nationalism and historically high levels of migration, Gullestad has written about the Norwegian model of social equality as one which champions ‘sameness’ rather than ‘difference’, in contrast to the ‘multi-cultural’ model usually promoted in the UK (2002). Working in urban contexts of high migration in Norway (and, importantly, in the context of the ascension of a right-wing party to power) Bendixsen and Danielsen have explored how notions of diversity are experienced by Norwegian parents (2018). Encouragingly, they document parents’ accounts of concern about ‘other peoples’ children’ in this context, as part of efforts to extend ‘intensive’ parenting beyond the nuclear family, seeing socialization as a collective endeavor through what they term ‘inclusive’ parenting. Thus, as the work of Vergara (this issue) also acknowledges, we also need to think about how an intensification of parenting in certain contexts has the potential to create coherence within – as well as between – particular groups, as part of this process of ‘integration’ not least as a product of children’s engagement in these social networks (see also Faircloth, 2013).

In London, Vincent et al’s work on children’s friendships (2017) also makes an argument about the importance of peer relations to the building of social solidarity, particularly in ‘super diverse’ contexts. Focussing on friendships across ethnic and class differences they highlight both the potentials and challenges of relationships between children across class boundaries, not least when these are mediated by parental anxieties, seeing these as examples of ‘efforts to forge relationships across difference’ (2017: 1987). However, these are recognized to be fragile ones under threat from a declining sense of social trust as part of a wider ‘hostile environment’ towards migrants (Guardian 2017).

This issue therefore highlights some of the problems of thinking about parenting as simply an individualistic matter, as it is so often framed in policy discourse. In contexts of historically high migration (and a rise in right-wing, nationalist rhetoric across Europe) a risk-conscious, neo-liberal understanding of social reproduction threatens attempts to build social trust and arguably encourages a turn away from ‘others’, whether from different cultural backgrounds, or arguably even a different generation. A more social conception allows space for an appreciation of peer and other adult-child relations in the creation of social relations.

**Fertility and inequality**

The final example looks particularly at how the intensification of parenting has differently affected would-be parents in the UK and Norway, in the context of different regulatory regimes, suggesting that an individualized approach is corrosive to notions of solidarity and trust between citizens. In a more
individualised, intensive parenting culture, which stresses personal fulfilment through parenthood, becoming a (biological) parent has not only become seemingly more feasible for many couples, but the social role has been inflated in congruence, frequently being framed as a ‘human right’ (Strathern 1993). In line with a focus on tensions (Rosen and Newberry 2018, Rosen and Suissa, this issue), then, this example considers how the inflation of the parenting identity has led to feelings of exclusion and segregation at the wider social level, for those who cannot ‘achieve’ it (Faircloth 2017). These issues are particularly timely, given recent debates in each country about how far the state should pay for couples to receive fertility treatment (recent headlines in the UK reveal that in many areas of the country, IVF treatment will be scrapped on the National Health Service due to cost-cutting, Independent 2017).

Recent work on the subject of egg-donation explores these issues around individualisation and social reproduction in a cross-cultural comparative framework (Marre et al 2017). In the UK, individuals are (currently) able to receive treatment with donor eggs on the NHS, where in Norway, this is currently prohibited due to concerns about coercion (although the Biotechnology Council has advised changing this law, Melhuus 2005). Instead, patients seeking treatment through egg donation typically engage in what has been called ‘fertility tourism’ or ‘Cross Border Reproductive Care’ in search of egg-donors, with Spain being one of the most popular destinations (Pennings and Gurtin 2012, Marre et al 2017). This example therefore prompts us to think about ‘trust’ and ‘solidarity’ not only in access to reproductive technologies, but also ‘what counts’ in the creation of kinship and national communities, not least as this relates to any children born as a result of that treatment (Cheney 2018).

In thinking about the relationship between the intensification of parenting, reproductive technologies and neoliberalism it is important to think specifically about the nature of ‘individualisation’ (Faircloth and Gurtin 2017). As both a product of an intensified parenting culture, as well as one of its greatest catalysts, reproductive technologies could be read as the example par excellence of the individualisation of a social problem. Instead, if we take a more social view, this might better be understood as a problem with the way society is structured (in terms of, for example fertility decline and the pressure to become established in one’s career). Instead, infertility is increasingly tackled in ways that makes individuals accountable for their reproductive trajectories, emphasizing and enabling ever further the importance of the biological relation (Inhorn and Van Balen 2002).

The problem then, is that paradoxically, many individuals (and couples) seeking fertility treatment narrate their inability to have children as a form of social exclusion (from a peer group), whilst those who are parents also report a sense of segregation from society as a whole. In both cases, this individualization is antithetical to the case of family life and social reproduction, which has traditionally been about creating connections (see Faircloth 2017). Roman’s work in Sweden (2014), for example, reveals the paradox of individualization in the contemporary era: having children is itself considered a ‘risk project’, minutely planned by couples to counter the threat to individual autonomy and therefore family life itself.
Whilst of course children are not ‘active’ participants in the forging (or breaking) of these relationships between fertile and infertile adults, it is nevertheless critical to think about the notion of ‘the child’ in these debates, even when this is at the conceptual (or rather, pre-conception) level. In Cheney’s work, for example, we see how ‘the best interests of the child’ is configured in debates around international commercial surrogacy, usually from within a children’s rights perspective. She argues instead for the importance of empirical work with children conceived by such arrangements, and a theoretical perspective which has relationality at heart (2018, see also Lee, Macvarish and Sheldon 2017, who look at the ‘Welfare of the Child’ question with respect to the policing of potential parents). These kinds of questions prompt us to think about the relationship between individualisation and community relations as they relate to the role of the state in subsidising treatment (and by extension, who can afford to become a parent at all). An individualised perspective on ‘parenting’ plays into a more divisive approach to reproduction and the redistribution of resources across society, and thus has potentially corrosive effects on relations of solidarity.

**Discussion: Solidarity, care and the ‘common good’**

Bringing together insights from childhood and parenting culture studies, in parallel with ideas around social solidarity, the article suggests that concepts such as ‘gemeinschaft’ (Tonnies) ‘trust’ (Eriksen) or the ‘common good’ (Sandel) can be useful in re-thinking the way social reproduction is framed, in both academic and policy debates. Certainly, childhood studies helps us see the ways in which ‘parenting culture studies’ too readily eclipses the perspectives of, and potential for, children to build social relations, helping us re-think underlying notions of socialisation, authority and categories of adulthood and childhood in turn.

Politically, rhetoric in Europe has been increasingly focused on the individual’s private ‘choices’, meaning that structural challenges to collective duties of care often fall outside the remit of equality and anti-discrimination policies (Browne 2013, Baird and O’Brien 2015). But how free are people – as parents, non-parents or even children – to make these ‘choices’ about their work and home lives? In the context of cuts to public services (in the UK) on the one hand, and the obsession with parenthood on the other, what is society actually doing about being and raising children? In this particular political climate, childcare and reproduction provides an interesting ‘litmus test’ for policy-makers in thinking about a range of other issues relating to the allocation of state resources. This also clearly has implications for what Eriksen (and indeed Marx, Tonnies and Weber) say about solidarity, particularly in the context of rising diversity. In taking a more social perspective on the question of reproduction, the ways that we – children and adults (parents and non-parents) – care for each other can be foregrounded, and therefore made central to project of building social solidarity.

Further, through a comparative perspective, this paper aims to re-frame the debate around ‘parenting’ as one beyond the individual family, to become one of the ‘common good’, from which we all – parents, non-parents and children, have a stake in. This opens up, it is hoped, new avenues in how we could approach the
‘problem’ of raising the next generation as a societal rather than an individual one.

**Conclusion**

This paper has explored the relationship between ‘parenting’ and trust, and the ideas of adulthood and childhood on which it rests. Thinking about parenting as a societal endeavour, whereby all of us – children, parents and non-parents – care for each other challenges the individualised model of the neoliberal ‘parent’ and ‘child’ within the new ‘parenting’ culture and helps us approach the question of building social solidarity afresh. The suggestion is that an ‘intensification’ of parenting has a potentially corrosive effect on notions of trust and social cohesion, looking at the potential implications of this through three examples. Whilst a social democratic welfare state infrastructure (as seen in Norway) clearly goes some way to curbing the worst excesses of a more neoliberal individualised ‘intensive’ parenting culture evident in the UK, it’s clear that the spread of this culture is on the rise, creating novel tensions and forms of inequality in the Nordic context. To put it another way, how long will Norwegian parents continue to leave their children in prams outside shops?
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i Use of this framework is not to argue for a return to romanticised forms of ‘gemeinschaft’ society (where forms of stratification and exclusion were arguably more pronounced) but rather to see how these heuristic concepts might help us think through shifting conceptions of trust and its implications for social reproduction.

ii This commitment to gender equality seems to be shifting in these 'elite' families, where may women, unusually for Norway, stop work or move to part-time hours so as to focus on a more intensive form of mothering.

iii This intersects with the availability of contraception, abortion and the new reproductive technologies which have meant having children is ever more a ‘choice’