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# **Singles' Relations**

Seven life stories against the background of normative nuclear familism

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## ABSTRACT

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In this thesis, I draw attention to what at first glance might look like the opposite of family life – those living by themselves – people who at times are stereotyped as deviants even in research. The aim is two-fold. Firstly, I am interested in how those living by themselves arrange and construct their social connections, such as friendship, family or kinship and work life. Secondly, I am interested in understanding their experiences and reflections about dealing with and relating to expectations of couplehood and family. My theoretical framework begins in intersectionality, and furthermore, I present an alternative thinking to the either-or perspective that dichotomises between singles and families by introducing *normative nuclear familism*. *Normative nuclear familism*, builds on a gradient understanding of family practices, with the heterosexual nuclear family as hegemonic. I argue that theories of individualism, pure relations and welfare state actions are biased by *normative nuclear familism*. My empirical material consists of seven life stories of four men and three women with differences in ethnicity, class and age, living by themselves. In my narrative analysis I focus on central themes, turning points and language use. My findings are that most of these seven single living persons are deeply embedded in family practices, although others than nuclear family practices. They are open to meeting a partner, until they have done family properly, then it can be rejected. The younger men believe in love-facilitating powers that will make them change and enter coupledom, for the women, a decision about having children seem to forego finding a partner.

Key words: single living, family, normative nuclear familism, gender, life course, life story

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Dear Participants

I would like to thank my participants for sharing their life stories with me. In this thesis, I have tried to be true to your life stories and your experiences.

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Dear Eskil, Alve, Tove, Oskar and Martin

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## 1 Introduction

Singles – do they have relations? Are not being single equivalent with being alone? Or could it be that singles are embedded in relationships, that they practice family, as well? If so, how are these practices perceived and interpreted compared to the “correct” way of living, in a nuclear family.

In western contemporary society, we face numerous ideas and expectations of how to live our lives in order to accomplish desirable goals. Many of us want to get educated and perhaps invest in efforts that will lead to a career. Most of us also want to meet a partner to share our life with and have children. It may happen that life does not turn out as expected and some may strive for other ways of living than is expected and for one group, this seems to happen. Research claims that the numbers of single living or never married increases in western society (Reynolds 2008; DePaulo, Moran & Trimberger 2007; Forsyth & Johnson 1995; Beck & Beck-Gershwin 1995). In this study I am interested in understanding how those living alone, experience and practice their lives in relation to friendship, family, work and the dream of couplehood and children – the family creation, and what it mean for the single subject if he or she does not reach or prolong these demands of work, couplehood and parenthood.

My major concern lays in the presupposition that (heterosexual) nuclear family life is one of the pillars holding up the main floor of our societal building, metaphorically speaking. In earlier essays, I have been exploring this pillar. In this master thesis I am reflecting over the effect of living one’s life in the shadow of this architectural component of our societal building, though the meaning of family and its shadows changes while life and context change. People who are not coupled, Shelley Budgeon (2008) states, are usually excluded from sociological studies because of a biased and hierarchically valued understanding of sexual partnership, leaving some people’s experiences of society neglected. However, some research about single living is done within the field of religion, concerning marriage and within psychology, concerning psychic well-being. I find it interesting, though, to enter this topic from the field of family theories. I attempt to draw attention to what at first glance might look like the opposite of family life – those living by themselves.

In Sweden, it is socially accepted to cohabit without being married. Many Anglo-Saxon studies<sup>1</sup> of this subject, however, are concerned with being married or not. Even though most

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. Forsyth & Johnson 1996; McGoldrick, Monica & Carter 2005

cohabiting partners in Sweden one day do marry, it would be misleading to use marriage as a synonymous concept for couplehood in Sweden. Still, cohabitation benefits from the idea of marriage and is understood as “a ‘normal’ progression for sexual partnerships” (Budgeon 2008:304). The category of those who are living by themselves is heterogenic and includes divorced, single parents, widows and widowers, as well as those who never have had a long-lasting romantic relationship or never cohabited with a partner. Labelling them “singles” is not quite right, neither the labels bachelors nor spinsters. These words hold different connotations where the concept of bachelors connotes negatively to homelessness and destitution (Nilsson 1999), as some kind of outsider position. The single concept, Kristina Engvall (2005) claims, is not just a definition of marital status. It connotes a chosen lifestyle as dating, urban and modern in Sweden. In this study, it is not the image connotation of singleness that is the point of origin, though some of the participants may identify themselves as single. The participants’ common denominator is that they live by themselves and it is the experiences from the single living that are my focus. Still there might be prejudices and discriminations surrounding singleness that influence the experiences of single living. Though, I believe life can be lived in different ways and that people usually find ways of arrangements, in order to be satisfied with their lives. It is therefore interesting to find out how embedded those living by themselves are in family practices.

All of us are exposed to discourses of marriage, cohabitation, heteronormativity, family life and children, as well as a good work with a good income, as some desirable meanings of life. Since single living persons are placed and place themselves at the borders of these overlapping discourses they may experience these discourses more intensively, in accordance with Michel Foucault (2003). I intend to represent the single persons’ understanding of these competing ideas and how they create content and conditions in life. I would like to understand how being without a family of their own, creates other stories and strategically explanations about themselves and the hegemonic idea of life destiny. I attempt to find out the way my participants relate to, struggle against, compromise with and perhaps reject these discourses.

When I surveyed research articles and literature, I found tendencies that some research to utilize a deviant perspective on single people, whether it is career women, bachelors, spinsters left on the shelf or young urban “Sex and the City” women, where singleness is understood as the opposite to couplehood and family. I intend to reach beyond these stereotyped images of living alone by presenting an alternative thinking to the either-or perspective that dichotomises between singles or couples. I will introduce my perspective *normative nuclear*

*familism*, a gradient understanding of family practices in relation to the nuclear family that is compatible to my intersectional perspective. I also collect my own empirical material, carrying out seven life story interviews and, furthermore, utilising narrative analysis to clarify the significance of the variation in my empirical material.

### **1.1 Aim and Research Questions**

The aim of this thesis is two-fold. Firstly, I am interested in how those living alone arrange and construct their social connections, such as friendship, family or kinship and work life. Secondly, I am interested in understanding their experiences and reflections about dealing with and relating to expectations of couplehood and family. Consequently, I aim to find out how single living persons create meaning and satisfy their lives in the absence of a partner and a family of their own, i.e. not according to the norm of living one's life in a heterosexual nuclear family. I wonder if they develop other kinds of life goals, maybe influenced by their socio-cultural positions, or if they see work life as more accentuated and important and, most of all, I wonder how they practice their relationships with friends or family.

As a point of departure, I focus their relations, their social embeddedness and their family practices. I consider that people try to live their lives in constellations that (may) fulfil their lives. To have or not to have a partner or family may not necessarily be of major concern, or seen as a problem. Through life story interviews I attempt to capture the seven participants' experiences of their single living. Through the complexity in the participants' life stories, I intend to shed light upon and understand the following research question.

*How do these women and men, living by themselves, experience and practice their lives in relation to friendship, family, work and the dream of couplehood and children, and what does it mean for the single subject if he or she does not reach or prolong these demands of work, couplehood and parenthood?*

To develop this overriding question I will analyse these topics.

*How is single living explained by the participants? What are their experiences of their way of living? How do they comprehend and talk about their belongings?*

*How do the participants position themselves in relation to couplehood, family and children? And how do they experience and deal with its expectations and norms?*

*How do they say their identity is affected by their single living and is it possible to distinguish gendered experiences in their identity?*

The questions address both men and women and I will, however, see how their life stories part. I have an intersectional perspective with a special focus on gender.



## **1.2 Disposition**

I begin by sketching the historical development of changes in how family, work and its legislations have influenced each other and contemporary statistics of single living. Thereafter I present trends in contemporary research about singleness, work life and couplehood. In my theoretical framework, I develop, in an intersectional thinking, fluid identities and embeddedness, the concept of *normative nuclear familism*, and discuss it in relation to individualisation and the welfare state. Hereafter, in the methodological part, I contextualize my epistemological position and argue for my choice of life story interview and narrative analysis method. Furthermore, I reflect upon my experiences from the empirical collecting. I present the participants shortly and then the analysis follows in two parts. Firstly, I discuss the participants' friendship, family relations, work life, and secondly, their dreams of couplehood and children. I end my thesis by discussing the complexity and embeddedness of the single living and their relation to *normative familism*, which usefulness I also intend to evaluate.

## **2 Background**

In this part I show how legislation connects work and family and how couples and singles have been viewed in a western context particularly applied to the Swedish society. Much of the research is focused on family, children and laws, though, singleness is viewed as a problem or as an ignored phenomenon. I also discuss statistical findings in relation to theoretical explanations.

### **2.1 Civil rights and work legislation influence marital status**

During the 17<sup>th</sup> century employment was directed to the household, involving the whole family in the work practices, not only the employed husband/father. When he died the wife, son or daughter could take over the office or the business (Ohlander 2005). This possibility was closed off when handymen were claiming their superiority over female production in the households and employment became more individualized (Wiesner in Artaeus 1992).

Throughout the last centuries, women have been counteracted and their possibility to provide for themselves has been reduced, almost forcing them to marry men or stay with their father in order to be provided for. In the 1734 legislation, women were excluded from civil rights, from most education and from well-paid positions in the labour market. According to Ann-Sofie Ohlander (2005) only unmarried women could, by the 1860s, demand authority and

hereby get access to certain educations and occupations. Though, if married, they had to leave their employment, which was a reason for staying unmarried. Especially working class women had to work, which gave rise to a practice of unmarried cohabiting. Not until the 1920s, also married women obtained these civil rights. During the period between 1850 and 1936, about 25 per cent of the women were unmarried throughout their lives.

Janet Flink and Katherine Holden (2009) state that the discrimination towards women was twofold. While unmarried, women were seen as an occasional workforce, while as married, they had to leave the labour market. On the contrary, unmarried men were considered to need employment on a permanent basis, and the possibility to have a career and a good salary, in order to be able to marry and become a family breadwinner. During periods with shortage of jobs, women workers were counteracted, making it difficult for them to get by without a husband. Susanna Hedenborg and Ulla Wikander (2003) state, that women's work was denigrated and they received lower pay than men for similar work. Access to higher education was restricted and not until 1928, did girls get access to secondary schools run by the government, which enabled them a possible entrance to the university (Ohlander 2005).

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Irene Artæus (1992) claims, mothers and fathers were treated legally differently when their partner died. Widowers with small children were compensated for the absence of a mother and wife, while widows had to maintain household duties and provide for the family by themselves.

## ***2.2 The welfare state interferes with family ideals***

An important ideological change is emphasised by Åsa Lundqvist and Christine Roman (2009). They have studied several official governmental reports in the 1930s in Sweden where the multi-provider family model was turned into a family model with a male breadwinner and a female consumer and caregiver. The change was seen to give rise to tensions between men and women, and caused decreasing birth rates. Maternity and childcare, as well as child allowances to the mother were introduced, when Swedish family policies, which previously focused on population growth, now included motives for justice and social policy as well.

In the late 1950s, the number of divorces was increasing, resulting in an interest in the spouses' intimate relationship, and the workforce shortage during the financial growth in the 1960s made it possible for women to wage work. Workforce was also imported from outside of Sweden (Lundqvist & Roman 2009). The second wave of feminism worked to politicise the personal in family life, tradition, culture and everyday life. Andro-centrism and sexism

grounded in sex division of labour and subordination of women in the couple relationship was criticised Nancy Fraser (1995) states, and according to Marie Osmond and Barrie Thorne (1993), motherhood and the naturalness of the nuclear family were questioned.

Since the 1970s, equality between the sexes has been a political goal in Sweden, although, family practices have not altered very much. Ulla Björnberg & Anna-Karin Kollind (2003) argues that the man still is the family's primarily provider, while children and family is the primary reason to why women choose to work part time. This has effects on a personal level as well as on a societal level, especially if the couple separates Carol Smart states. Then the male breadwinner's less close relationship to his children might be even smaller, and the female's less close relationship to the labour market might, due to the benefits system and low pay for women make it difficult for her "to become a self-sufficient independent citizen" (Smart 2004:104-5). The Swedish society is said to be the most gender equal with its access to subsidized public childcare. However, according to Mary Daly & Katherine Rake (2003), it is organized on the basis of employment.

### ***2.3 An increase of one-person households***

In the USA the number of adults living alone has more than doubled in the twenty-five years following the 1970s (Klitsch 1994). The demographic trend in Europe shows a decline in marriage, which, according to Anna Sandfield and Carol Percy (2003) indicates a decline in its moral necessity. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Sweden, about 20 per cent of the women stayed unmarried their life. As more women entered the labour market and could afford to live as singles, single households increased from 20 per cent in 1960 to 40 per cent in 1990, according to Engvall (2005). However, to draw conclusions from such a short period is risky.

Reported tendencies show that the increase of single women is greater than that of single men, which might explain the notion of the feminisation of single households, however in younger years males are more frequent. The one-person households differ in age, sex, marital status, social class and geography where the most growing sub-group, according to Ray Hall, Philip Ogden and Catherine Hill (1997), is considered female, urban, well-educated and mobile. Male one-person households may accordingly be rural, unskilled, uneducated and stuck in the countryside. Male and female one-person households differ also in age and composition. The number of single living men exceeds the number of women in the age group 25-44. For those 45-64, single living women are slightly more numerous than single living men. Single women have, to a larger extent, children, compared to men (FoB90 SCB, see appendix 1).

Lorrain Davies (1995) has found that single men earn less than family men, while on the other hand, single women earn more than family women do. Though for single parents, the financial situation has deteriorated in Sweden during the last decade, despite directed social transfers to counteract child poverty (Nyman, SCB 2008). Today, 25 per cent of children of single living parents are considered poor, to be compared with 10 per cent for children with cohabiting parents (Heggeman, SCB 2008).

### **2.3.1 Having children**

Even though children contribute to the hegemonic femininity by offering motherhood, it brings possibilities to close and lasting ties to another human being differently than a partner. To be childfree implicates for women a possibility to work and for men a possibility not to work (Veevers 1980 in Agrillo & Nelini 2008), by avoiding the traditional breadwinner-housewife pattern. While some singles grieve the loss of a spouse, Kathy Berliner, Demaris Jacob and Natalie Schwartzberg (2005) state, others grieve the loss of children (or both). Being without a mate (of the opposite sex), may put emphasis on the questions of children, even though single women themselves have the option to choose to have children. Men lack, however, this “autonomy”, though adoption might be an alternative, fictitious at least. But men’s wellbeing is stronger connected to having a partner than having children, however, as Pearl Dykstra and Renske Keizer (2009) has found, men become more socially engaged in community if they become fathers.

## **3 Single living and different understandings**

Evaluating men’s and women’s singleness, Davies (1995) departs from certain general assumptions in which men are understood to benefit more from marriage than women, since women are caring and nurturing and doing domestic work, and therefore, men will suffer more from singlehood. Contrary to this, she found that the recourses of single men and single women appeared to be more similar than different. Some researchers stick to their prejudices or change them as Davies does, others challenge them from the beginning. In this chapter, I discuss two kinds of explanations, usual in this research field. Scholars that reject the stereotyping of singles and argue for other ways of explanations are often single themselves.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> As Bella DePaulo, Jill Reynolds and Ellen Trimberger

### ***3.1 Explained as deviants***

Asking students for their perception of singles, Bella DePaulo, Rachel Moran and Ellen Kay Trimberger (2007) found stereotypes as “less socially mature, less well-adjusted, and more self-centred and envious than married people (though also more independent and career-oriented)” (252, parenthesis in original). However, this does not explain how singles’ experience their lives, though these kinds of stereotypes common theme in some research about singleness. Being single is presumed somehow deviant while desirable family life is considered to be higher valued and wished-for. Below, I present some of the argumentation.

Non-married persons are known to have poorer mental health compared with married persons, according to Kaisla Joutsenniemi et al. (2006), and effects on mental health may be different for men and women. Bella DePaulo and Wendy Morris (2006) reject this argument and state that the group of singles is slightly unhappier from the beginning. Craig Forsyth and Elaine Johnson (1995) argue that single people weigh independence, loneliness, privacy and freedom differently than married people. However, this social psychological difference is based upon results from Charles Waehler’s (1991) study, where Rorschach’s ink-tests were carried out on 28 never-married Caucasian men. Finally, Forsyth and Johnson claim that a single lifestyle is pathologic unless it is seen as a transient state, while the increased acceptability of staying single at worst becomes “normal deviance /.../ to our most valuable resource, the family” (101). This devaluation of single life is biased and hides normative thinking of couplehood and naturalization of the nuclear family, as well as biased assumptions about gender. DePaulo, Moran and Trimberger (2007) are critical to the usual explanation of singles’ friendship as a compensation for not having a spouse. Rather they state that singles may prefer to maintain a diversity of relations instead of investing most of their relational capital in one person.

However, structures in society may counteract and devalue the practice of single living resulting in material, economic, social, and perhaps mental and bodily consequences as well, and can be another explanation to Joutsenniemi et al.’s findings. DePaulo (2006) states, for instance, that single men are often paid less than married men and renters prefer married couples to single people as tenants.

### ***3.2 Differing in relation to life course or discourse***

Berliner et al. (2005) explain from their psychological view that marriage is a way to prove adulthood to one’s parents and that it is harder for daughters to achieve the status of adulthood

without a marriage. They perceive single people as having trouble locating themselves in the normality of the life course, since they “need to confront the expectations of marriage / .../ and understand the impact of living a life that deviates from the norm” (364). Looking at a description of the “normal” life course, this makes sense. A “normal” life course is occupied with aspects of developing intimate long-lasting relations “committed to mutual growth” and care for a family and inherit, as well, notions of the importance of a work career (McGoldrick & Carter 2005). In line with this reasoning, the probability of marriage decrease with age and, according to Davies (1995), when single status turns out to be enduring, the implications and meanings of singlehood will be accentuated.

Berliner et al. (2005) develop the idea that single people, in their need for coping with their deviance from the normal life course, acclimatize and bring gendered practices together. By integrating and focusing on a career and earning money as well as maintaining relations and caretaking, singles are able to fulfil a good quality of life. In contrast to the coping of a misfit with normal life course, Berliner et al. disclose that the singles and married are segregated for two related reasons. First, singles are seen to be a threat to married life, and second, singles avoid the life of the married to keep away from painful feelings of loss. While segregated, “feelings of isolation from mainstream life as well as to idealized fantasies of married life” (ibid:368) can emerge. Experiences of this segregation cannot only be explained by a misfit with a “normal” life course, I believe. This seems to imply that there are (too) few options for desirable life goals in contemporary society. Trimberger (2005) criticises likewise that the only available culturally sanctioned option for middle aged women is to choose to live in an “egalitarian couple sharing work and family life” (xx), however, she argues for a greater acceptance for long-term single life, and its compatibility with the marriage culture.

Focusing on women, Jill Reynolds and Margaret Wetherell (2003) on the other hand, reject the idea that singles suffer by not following an ordinary, normative life trajectory. Instead they claim singleness should be understood as a discursively constructed social category. They assert that single women have “dilemmas of self-representation” since there are too few available positive positions/subjections to choose from. The shortage of valuable positions leaves the women to play with available contradictory and complex aspects of singleness, both positive and denigrated constructions, such as personal deficit and social exclusion, as well as independence and choice, self-actualization and achievement. Some of the singles in their study were able to distance themselves and develop a more reflexive involvement in those positions as they “account and talk about the dilemmas per se rather than alternating

between each side of them as experiential truths” (ibid:507). However, in my view, the shortage of available and eligible positions is due not only to the hegemonic power of a normative life course, but to family life as well. Thereby the normative life course proclaiming family life can neither be abandoned nor ignored.

Jan Macvarish (2006) interprets singleness as a sorrow in a marriage-oriented culture, not only because of the fact itself, but due to the failure connotations of prolonged singleness. Hereby, singles experience a social pressure. To counteract the stigma of singleness, single women express interest in becoming coupled, though, in order to avoid a victimized position they also have to present themselves as satisfied with the current status (Byrne 2003 in Macvarish 2006).

It is plain that singles are explained as the opposite of married or coupled people. It is an either/or relation in how singles are perceived, without positions in-between, though wished for. To exceed this either/or perspective and to offer further positions, I will introduce a gradient thinking on family relations below in my theoretical framework.

### ***3.3 Bachelors and female marriage resisters***

The account of singleness as female and urban responds to male rural singleness. Two Swedish dissertations study this phenomenon, while another study female marriage resistance.

Bo Nilsson (1999) writes about older bachelors, living in the Swedish countryside. Their lives are seen as not fulfilled, as failed lives. They hold independence, physical ability and a capacity for work as a high ideal, which these men seem to use to outweigh their marginal position. They explain their bachelor position as being caused by taking responsibility for ageing parents and/or younger siblings, as shyness or by earlier relationships. When illness and injuries threatens their worldview and self image, they reflexively become more tentative. The younger single countryside men in Lissa Nordin’s (2007) study, wished to avoid loneliness and its social limitations by finding a female partner. It was necessary to meet the woman correctly, through romantic love, i.e. correct romantic feelings where a correct femininity could respond to the men’s masculinity. Gender identity hereby, emerges as the result of the effect each gender has on the other. Nordin understands coupledness as a heteronormative project of romantic love by activating and planning a coupled social future. She states that people outside the boundaries of coupledness “risk being denied a meaningful future with the possibility for change and personal development and cannot appear as fully adult, independent and successful people” (2007:288). These non-fulfilled, failed bachelor

lives, build stories on work ability and responsibility, looking for correct romantic feelings when meeting a woman. Anna Adeniji (2009) deconstructs the Swedish ideal that men and women create couples and marry in equal relationships. She stresses the differences and connotations of married (i.e. unsingle) and single (i.e. unmarried). The dichotomous and hierarchical thinking concerning these concepts emphasise that marriage is the easy, comfortable choice, supported by legislations and religion that gets power in society as a naturalized phenomenon in heterosexual coupledness. With this in mind, it is time to develop my theoretical framework.

## **4 Theory**

In this chapter I base and develop my theoretical framework on feminist theories. Firstly, I argue for how an intersectional perspective on class, ethnicity, age and gender, as useful concepts for my analysis, enables me to include the interplay between their different axes of power (Lykke 2009). However, the single living slips between the powers of these concepts, calling for another approach. A concept to capture discursive differences in practicing normative nuclear family and other family practices is required. I therefore, secondly, develop the concept of *normative nuclear familism*.

### ***4.1 An intersectional approach***

My participants have different connections to the labour market, different educations, different ethnicity and gender and ages spread from 37 to 66. Below I will argue for the praxis of intersectionality and give brief reviews of fruitful intersectional understandings. Finally I discuss gender more closely.

Class, ethnicity, age and gender can all be understood as social and cultural constructions, even though they operate somewhat differently and have different origins. Common in many theories is the thinking of hierarchical dualistic relations, which are the foundations for intersectionality, as well. Catherine Egeland and Randi Gressgård (2007) mean that intersectionality facilitates understandings without using binary, oppositional categories. However, I consider the concepts still being based on hierarchical dualistic relations, but the outcome becomes differentiated. Social life is complex and practicing an intersectional approach in my analysis of the participants' life stories, facilitates comprehension of their



social life and dealing with different stratifications that, according to McClintock, come “into existence *in and through* relation to each other” (1995: 5, emphasis in original).

Intersecting class and gender, Joan Acker (2006) argues for a broadening of the male definition of work as only paid work, to include both paid and unpaid work, i.e. domestic work including bearing and caring for children and others and subsistence production for the household. She defines class as “differing and unequal situations in access to and control over the means of provisioning and survival” (ibid:55). Ethnicity is created through relational and processual distinctions between groups and builds upon ascribed differences between these groups. It predetermines gendered differences through patriarchal regimes of power, leading to different ethnic experiences for men and women (Brah 1996). Turning to age, it ascribes norms for different ages through an institutionalised life course that engages biological, chronological, psychological and social changes. Krekula, Närvänen & Näsman (2005) state that life course cooperates with gender and defines what is expected at different ages. Though, life course works discursively, rather than representing real stages in life. In line with James Holstein and Jaber Gubrium (2007), people make comparisons according to age related stages in order to understand and interpret one’s own experiences.

Even though gender is a social construction we have bodies as well. In relation to Judith Butler (2000), who states that both sex and gender are results of a cultural sexuality system, where imagination of ‘true’ and natural ‘gender’ consists of depositions from repeatedly performances of the gender norm, the sexed body is as well part of the social construction. In her compulsory heterosexuality (Nilsson 1999), Butler states that coherence between gender, sex and sexuality is demanded. Heterosexuality and heterosexual relations are not pre-given conditions, rather they are influenced by societal structures and ideologies. Being single indicates a “deviation from normative heterosexuality” (Sandfield & Percy 2003:481) and is a form of social stigmatization.

Single living may connote differently in relation to different ages, gender, ethnicity and socio-economic conditions, but furthermore, it is strongly related to heteronormative couplehood and its nuclear family. Inherent and exaggerated in the practice of nuclear family are gender relations between men and women, which, according to Heidi Hartmann (2008), contribute to the gendered inequality in both work life and family life. Women’s low wages make them dependent on their husbands for income support, while they simultaneously have to do domestic work for them. The men profit on their higher salaries and the gendered domestic

work division. This intersection between gender and family is not often talked about as an intersection, though I would find it fruitful in my material to be able to do that. Together with an intersectional thinking, identities can be understood as being partial and fluid.

#### **4.1.2 Identities as intersections**

Corresponding to intersectionality is an understanding of identity and subjects as non-uniform. There are, for example not only differences between males and females or between women or men, but also within each woman and each man (Braidotti 1994 in Lykke 2008). Subjectivity and identity can be seen, as Chris Barker (2008) says, as partial and processual, influenced by power in discourses and as changeable in relation to time, place and usage. They are created through narratives, and are consequently fluid, and produce themselves “through the combined process of being and becoming, belonging and longing to belong” (Yuval-Davis 2006 in Riessman 2008:8).

Changes in life can occur suddenly or slowly while ageing. Greater changes often imply changes in identity as well. The sociology professor Helen Ebaugh (1988) discusses the path from one identity to another in order to become an “ex”, claiming that while changing position an individual tries to deemphasize the previous identity by finding new ways of presenting the self. In this process social reactions must be faced, which, depending on which identity the society desires, may stigmatize either the previous or the new identity.

However, discourses influence identity. When it comes to analysing discourses about desirable family lives, the intersectional approach becomes vague. The stories about a single life do not correspond to these concepts that are inscribed in the fields of couplehood, family, and organisation. These theories build upon normative life courses with normative practices. The theoretic bulk lies traditionally in coupledness and family, their relations and contextual arrangements. Singles are focused as the deviant position.

#### **4.2 *Developing Normative nuclear Familism***

I do not consider that nuclear family is the ultimate way of practicing intimate relations, instead I find it too narrow in its practice, containing lots of demands of (unpaid) care work and domestic work that usually are unequally performed by the parents. I attempt to elaborate with the presence of a family in one’s life as a resource but also as a discursive norm to respond to, in order to reach a concept useful for both intersectional and discursive thinking.

### **4.2.1 Family practices and embeddedness**

Developing my thoughts, I need diversity in the understanding of family and I find David Morgan's (2004) family practices useful. Rejecting an institutionalised understanding of the family as nuclear family, he argues for a focus on family practices, that families are what families do. These views open up for other possible constellations than limiting the family idea to the nuclear family. Consequently, other family practices than nuclear family practices can be considered as family, though the nuclear family is seen as the norm.

Another crucial perception is the embeddedness that Smart (2008) places individuals in. She states that individuals are embedded "in the context of the other lives with whom they are linked" (ibid:44), such as wider kinship. They are embedded in a web of relationships which include previous and following generations. Hereby, those living by themselves are offered embeddedness by linking themselves to their extended family, to previous generations and to the succession of different generations even if they do not have a partner or a nuclear family of their own today. By embedding those living alone in the context of the past, in their relational webs and sense of location they can be understood to practice family.

### **4.2.2 Singlism and matrimania**

Searching for a tool to deal with family as a norm, but also a resource, I turned to DePaulo's (2008) concept of singlism, which she coined to be able to reveal "single people and the ways they are marginalized and stigmatized". She compares it to matrimania as the "glorifying of marriage and coupling" (ibid:10). Since my study does not focus the discriminatory effects, as such, rather the relations that singles arrange for themselves in order to fulfil their lives, the concepts of singlism and matrimania do not solve my question. Matrimania may be the first step in the motion where the nuclear family is the goal. However, I find them useful for my further discussion about the privileging of the nuclear family idea.

### **4.2.3 Familism**

The concept of familism is used in studies about collectivistic cultures, for example, focusing adolescents' attitudes to supporting their parents and to placing family well-being above those of the self (Ghazarian, Supple & Plunkett 2008). By placing familism in collectivistic cultures and opposing it to a highly valued western individualism, it is devalued. However, I find the word useful. I intend to present and examine an altered version of familism. Instead of focusing children's care for parents in familism (Ramos 2004 in Parveen & Morrison 2009), I incorporate a gradient of family practices where the western nuclear family is the norm every

family practice is compared to. It is a *normative nuclear familism* that includes the practice of singlism and matrimania, and subordinates other ways of practicing family.

### **4.3 Normative nuclear Familism**

My point of departure is the understanding of Swedish nuclear family life as a social and cultural construction. The Swedish nuclear family ideology is based upon heterosexual couples living together by means of love,<sup>3</sup> with their two or three children. This idea of the romantic couple relationship and its prolonging – the nuclear family, works discursively. Drawing upon Foucault's notion of power as decentralised and embodied, as working in every instance in society and producing obedient subjects. The mobility and changeability in discourses are present in its competing and cooperating battles, embodied in institutions and hegemonies (Foucault 2002). When individuals try to fulfil the norm, they subordinate themselves to the discourse. To choose not to fit with the expected, one risks not to be understood, to be socially punished and made different (Forsberg 2009). Accordingly, there is an interest for individuals to obtain nuclear family. Practicing this family construction gives credit and status, making the individual understandable and praised.

The socially and discursively constructed practice of *normative nuclear familism* stands for the hegemonic ideal, where other constructions of family practices are subordinated. It is in relation to this we have to relate, strive for, and long for. Family practises that do not match the hegemonic variant are subordinated. The gradient concerns other constructions of family practices, such as families with many children, lone parents, collectivistic families, homosexual parents, or practices through siblings' families. These diverse family practices are less valued in relation to nuclear family practice, though, the opposite of the hegemonic nuclear family life, I would say, might be the non-familised practice by lone single persons.

One could also argue that family life is a transient stage, though I state it is long lasting, both in an ideational manner and in praxis. Being a parent may, even after the children have moved out, provide status and offer opportunity to take part of the children's obtained or produced statuses. Furthermore, it contains some obligations to the children even though they are adult.

Utilising a processual and fluid understanding of identity, the positions offered by usual intersecting concepts, can partly be chosen or rejected. Hereby, to choose to describe oneself

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<sup>3</sup> Shelly Budgeon and Sasha Roseneil define the hegemony of the conventional family as "founded on a co-residential heterosexual relationship, rooted in a romantic love attachment" (2004:128), though they do not involve children.

as divorced or widowed instead of single indicates one's former relationship and higher valued position. The women in Sandfield's and Percy's (2003) study, constructed their single status as temporary, as pre-marriage or because of marriage failure.

To strengthen the relational focus and explanatory power among the intersectional practice, I suggest adding this concept of *normative nuclear familism* to the intersectional matrix. Jeff Hearn (1998) defines being fatherly and breadwinning as part of the hegemonic masculinity. Instead these can be understood as intersections between male gender and family. Likewise, intersections between female gender and family give rise to being motherly and caring for children and husband, as well as taking responsibility for family relations (Haavind 1987).

#### ***4.4 Normative nuclear familism influences other theories***

As I see it, part of this *normative nuclear familism* is a discursive passion for the nuclear family and a fear of its dissolution, as in Anthony Giddens', Ulrich Beck's, Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim's and Zygmunt Bauman's theorising and as the basis for the welfare state actions. By idealising the nuclear family they strengthen its hegemonic position in society. Below I present their major arguments and discuss them in relation to *normative nuclear familism*.

##### ***4.4.1 Individualisation or normative nuclear familism?***

Giddens (1992), Beck (1998), Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2001) and Bauman (2003), have been central in family sociology since the 1990s, while claiming that society becomes more individualised. They state that family life is changing and is lived differently than before. Divorces increase and the numbers of marriages decrease (Beck 1998). They believe that the individualisation process in society increases singleness, which might reduce family living.

In modern society, traditional ways of thought and practice, such as inequality, must be thrown off, Giddens says (1999 in Gauntlett 2008:105). Instead we lean upon modern reflexivity, where we have to argue for our actions (Kaspersen 2003). I would say that they utilize discourses of progressive modernity, individualisation, individualised choices and equality. As Bauman (2002) and Beck (1998) argues when they identify changing coupling and family ideals, during the last 40-50 years. The ideal, referred to, back in the 1960s was a breadwinner-housewife ideal that did not last long (Roman 1994). However, choosing this relate to this gendered nuclear family as an everlasting creation, its status is strengthened and normalised.

In the process of individualization, Bauman (2002) sees that marriage no longer lasts forever and terms of employment are deteriorating increasing insecurity. Instead of marrying and having children for traditional reasons, Giddens claims, we live in pure relationships where individuals hold on to each other only as long as the relation satisfies them (Giddens in Gauntlett 2008). However, in the narrow sense that Giddens view pure relations, most family practises are ignored. Family practices are a constantly doing, I would say.

Believing in equality and non-traditional actions, Giddens ignores discursive and structural power relations. Smart (2008) considers Giddens to ignore paying attention to differences in class, gender, etc., and who, in fact, has access to make non-traditional choices. Changes do occur, but compared to men's positions at work and in family, women's can be considered as continuing. Children's long-lasting financial and social dependence on their parents (mothers), Sara Irwing (2004) argues, contradicts the freedom of choice. Life pattern choices are hence a story telling of gendered class fractions. Individualisation is thus a desirable illusion, where nobody has to carry out domestic work, childcare or relational work (Eldén 2009).<sup>4</sup>

Feminist research has shown that women, contrary to be released from domestic work at home, hardly get emotional support or have access to spare time at home (Hartmann 2008; Acker 2006; Björnberg & Kollind 2003; Hedenborg & Wikander 2003; Holmberg 1993; Osmond & Thorne 1993; Haavind 1987). Instead they are made responsible for the emotional marriage work, to nurture relations and resolve difficulties in their couple relationship and in the family (Haavind 1987; Maushart 2001 in Sandfield & Percy 2003).

#### **4.4.2 Welfare state actions and *normative nuclear familism***

Normative nuclear familism is also present at the welfare state level. According to Daly and Rake (2003) Swedish family discourses draw upon traditional heterosexual nuclear family values.<sup>5</sup> Living by oneself makes an exception. Family discourses are also related to traditional values in a very segregated labour market and to traditional labour division in informal, unpaid work as well. Besides playing a central role, especially for women, as an employer, the welfare state defines social policy, good care, redistribution of earnings and supporting 'income' from other than paid work. These definitions more subtly affect men's and women's lives, and have consequences for women's capacity to earn an income and for

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<sup>4</sup> See Sara Eldén (2009:27-34) for a further discussion.

<sup>5</sup> bearing the idea of dual-earner family, with both parents working while the children are in (pre-)school

their dependency on the family. By defining a welfare politics based on gendered nuclear family presuppositions individuals are affected not only on an ideological level, but on a structural level as well.

## **5 Methodological reflections, methods and participants**

Since this is a new research area for me, and since some of the previous research focus on the deviation of those living alone, I find it important to listen to the views and stories of those living alone. Therefore, qualitative inquiry is an obvious choice. A research interview can, as Soyini Madison (2005) puts it, be a conversational situation open to individual subjectivity and collective belonging. I choose life story interview method, since it allows me to put human experience and life circumstances at the centre of study. People's knowledge about their own lives can bring forward reflections of relational and discursive phenomena, necessary for bringing light into the issue of living alone.

My control over the choice of interviewees was minor, since I made use of the snowball method. This study has no intention of being representative, though, the seven participants had variation in gender, ethnicity, class and age. Every participant was interviewed once, and the interviews lasted for about two hours.

### ***5.1 Reflecting and situating knowledge***

It is tempting to assert that I as a researcher discover the truth about the reality and that I, innocently, contribute with an objective and universal knowledge. This would have legitimized my research as objective, non-affected and true (Haraway 1988), working for the best of everyone. Although, I have high ideals and attempt to be humble and true, I cannot speak for everyone, in fact, for hardly anyone. By writing this thesis, I create a new story, originating from my ontological and epistemological understanding, my selection and interpretation of my theoretical framework, the field that I am a part of. These aspects influence how I understand my participants' life stories and disclosed experiences. Additionally, my own and my participants' understandings and expressions of experiences are historically, culturally and contextually dependent (Flax 1992). Since we can only understand in relation to our own situation (Haraway 1998; Lykke 2008) the researcher must be visualized in the research process as an active agent who interprets and produces knowledge.

To reach a justifiable objectivity corresponding to her claims, I describe below my background, my mental and physical limitations and possibilities.

My scientific journey started in my youth, when I studied natural science with its positivistic understanding, later I discovered critical theory when I came in contact with sociology but got inspired by poststructuralist understandings, which I increasingly engaged in gender studies. During these intellectual moves, I married and had children and realized the power of societal discourses and norms but also their contradictory expectations and intersecting consequences. I take a position of female, middle-classed, heterosexual, white, Swedish, middle-aged, healthy and besides, familised, slightly outside normative nuclear familism.

## ***5.2 Narrative inquiry***

Below I argue for my methods and describe how I collect my empirical material through life story interviews.

### **5.2.1 Life story interview**

I find life story interviews suitable for my purpose of study. Life story interviews enable a deeper and maybe different understanding when obtaining complex and contradictory experiences of a person's life understood from her or his own interpretation. The empirical material does not necessarily centre around special events, instead, as Leonard Webster and Patricie Mertova (2007) state, an extensive amount of material is produced. Through life story interviews, detailed accounts, connections and explanations between events in the participants' lives may emerge. Being sensitive to the active and self creative human thinking, it opens up for a multiplicity of stories that are not limited by direct questions (Hinchman & Hinchman 1997 in Davies 2005). The participants get the opportunity to be part of and influence what is central and to decide what importance different stories have (Esseveld 1988) and what they will represent. It is vital to acknowledge that individuals' life stories change by context and occasion and new experiences can give rise to re-interpretations of earlier features in life and can be connected in several ways, as well as be understood against numerous interpretive horizons. The interviewees are looking back on their lives from the point of the interview, making the life story to a "retrospective construction" as well as a "construction for the moment" (Holstein & Gubrium 2007:12).

The actual comings and goings of life give rise to subjectively experienced and interpreted experiences (Johansson 2005) and I would like to emphasise, though, that the told stories are not equivalent with their lived lives. Rather, the stories are created in the present where old



experiences, memories and ideas are re-interpreted and influenced by the knowledge the participant has about his/her life today (Czarniawska 2005; Widerberg 1995). Accordingly, it is a construction influenced by the retrospective overarching understanding of their lives. Furthermore, what can be said and understood, which narratives can be told are influenced by the social and cultural context during the interview situation (Adelswärd 1997 in Johansson & Öberg 2008; Holstein & Gubrium 2007). Consequently, I consider the empirical material as interpreted excerpts from the participants' lives, not their actual lives, but stories created during the interview session, co-constructed by our occasionally established relationships.

Life stories often have patterns. Some scholars state that male and female identities can be distinguished from their different stories (Järviluoma, Moisala & Vilkkö 2003; Bertaux-Wiame 1981), though Johansson and Öberg (2008) argue that the stories may vary in relation to one's power position in class, race, ethnicity, sexuality and generation. I would say that we have different experiences which influence what we can tell and unequal heterosexual relationships give rise to gendered stories. The participants in my study may have several similar experiences and I wonder if it is possible to distinguish between the men's and the women's experiences from single living.

### **5.2.2 Narrative analysis – acknowledging central themes and language use**

Since we organise lived experiences into stories of importance, narrative analysis has the possibility to include “human experiences in a complex (and constantly changing) world with needs that are not easily reached using traditional approaches” (Webster & Mertova 2007:114). By extracting and focusing on critical events in those narratives of experience, descriptions can be manageable. Catherine K Riessman (2008) characterises narratives as long sections of talk. However, not everything said in an interview is a narrative. Reflections about life are another source to knowledge.

I intend to analyse my empirical material narratively, by paying attention to both content and form. Firstly, I begin by acknowledging central themes and turning points in the participants' lives, paying attention to the impact of the interview situation on the participants' choice of narratives. However, Kerstin Sandell (2005) stresses the need for contextualizing and analyzing power to get hold of different meanings of the normal, while Riessman (2008) points out that personal narratives, embracing remembering and sense making of the past, are told in order to argue, persuade, engage, entertain or mislead the audience. Narratives need

therefore to be analysed contextually, highlighting power relations by relating personal narratives to society.

Secondly, to make use of this advice, I intend to draw attention to the participants' language performances and repertoires. This coincides with my belief that conversation sequences are embedded in and provided to us from history (Wetherell 1998 in Edley 2001). Language is actively used, though dialogic intentions, historical meanings and future responses (Bakhtin in Riessman 2008) must be acknowledged. As Nigel Edley points out, sequences that are easy to choose are those that seem culturally true and by identifying these, the process of naturalisation and normalisation may be distinguished. I therefore pay attention to choice of words, personal pronoun, and to passive or active grammatical form (Johansson 2004). To acknowledge both content and form provided in the life stories and by contextualising them I hope to avoid distorted interpretations.

In order to preserve the context, life story presentations often publishes lengthy excerpts from the interviews instead of taking bits and pieces (Riessman 2008). However, due to limited space, subordinated clauses and digressions have sometimes been erased from the excerpts.

### ***5.3 The process of collecting my empirical material***

Collecting empirical material by carrying out interviews require careful preparations. My procedure was: access to interview persons, an interview guide, finding place and time for an interview, carrying them out, transcribing them, embodying them and then distancing myself from them to enabling analysis.

#### **5.3.1 Access to participants**

I advertised for participants at the local shopping markets, however, the one who responded never showed up to the interview. Meanwhile, I worked to find participants by using the snowball method recommended by Karin Widerberg (2002) or respondent driven sampling, asking friends and acquaintances if they knew anyone living alone. The snowball method builds on a social and interactional knowledge (Noy 2007), facilitating my access to the participants. Among those who agreed to participate was one career woman who later found no time for an interview. She told me she had several single friends, but later in an email, she explained that

I do not have time to call around to get you other participants. I have too much work to do. I am sorry. If I call them [the friends] I may have to meet them and explain and so on. Actually, it was a while since I met people. The time [to do this] does not exist. (mail contact February 23)

It became obvious that those helping me to contact participants sometimes viewed the participant as single more than they did themselves. Asking the recommended participants, there were different reactions. Some found my choice of topic illogical and provocative while some found it interesting. I was reassured that being single was not a problem. Some defended their status as if I pitied them, by choosing this topic and they were unsure if they could contribute at all. I explained that my intention was not to make them explain any strangeness, rather to try to understand the stories they construct about single living.

A reflection I made is that my outsider family position might have influenced the participants, making some of them hesitant and defensive, wondering about biased approaches. This difference, as well as closeness or difference in age, heterosexual expectations and gender influenced the relationship during the interviews. My effort was therefore to create a setting during the interviews that enabled trust and confidence between me and the participant, decreasing the distance between us (Crewe & Maruna 2006).

### **5.3.2 Interview guide**

The interview guide followed a script, starting at the present time and thereafter, entering childhood, youth and life expectations. Then adult life follows the path to the present, where relations and singleness were talked about (see appendix 2). I interviewed both males and females, and wrote the interview questions in a non-gendered and non-sexist manner, using partner instead of husband or wife and directing questions to the participant by using “you” and “your” life, to avoid ascribing them gendered and regulated practices, as Helen Aarseth and Marianne Olsen (2004) assert.

### **5.3.3 Carrying out the interviews**

Some of the interviews took place at cafés and some in the participants’ homes. In one café interview, it was terribly crowded and noisy. We were often interrupted and I had difficulties hearing what the participant said. A quiet and peaceful place is preferable.

Most of my participants spoke freely about themselves and explained comprehensively the circumstances that had influenced their lives. The different interview settings created different situations and expectations, forcing me to be flexible in how to approach each participant. To different degrees, I was either expected to be a questioner, or to dig the experiences out of the participant, or to be a supportive listener, hardly getting through to those participants that knew they had a story to tell. These differing settings created tensions and frustrations and sometimes I hesitated to ask further questions. However, my participants were sensitive to my

responses and we managed to stick to the planned themes throughout the interviews. Other interviews took the form of conversation with mutual turn-taking.

The participants did not consider their single living as a major problem or part of their identity – it was nothing they usually think of. I was puzzled at the beginning by this, especially as their recommender did not seem to have a problem identifying them as singles. It was difficult to talk about something they did not recognize, however, I hoped I would find complexities and contradictions when looking deeper into their stories during the analysis. According to Paulina de los Reyes and Diana Mulinari (2005), important information is not only gathered through what is seen and heard, but unspoken presumptions, silences and abandonments are also important aspects to notice. To encourage the participants to reflect upon their single status and what the impact of living by oneself has meant for them in their lives, I added some more questions about their single living.

Transcribing the interviews was an emotional work. I focused on understanding the participants' narratives and experiences from their point of view, embodying their life stories. The process of determining the meaning in a narrative is, according to Riessman (2008), an interpretative process, where re-reading give rise to new understandings and interpretations, since the interpreter's perspective changes during the analysis. Starting my analysis more explicitly, I read each interview carefully and closely one by one several times, noting particularities and major themes in each and similarities and differences between them. By letting the life stories interplay with each other, I could compare similarities and differences and through these get hold of nuances and complexities. This procedure allowed important experiences and turning points in one story to bring light on silences in others and by this, enhancing the number of available interpretations. The individual story is not changed though, but other aspects than the participant thought were of importance may be highlighted.

#### **5.3.4 Ethical considerations**

The participants were informed about the purpose of the interview, both when I first contacted them and before the interview as well, that I am interested in their experiences and reflections from life, that they have the right not to answer questions, and that they are made anonymous. I gave them the opportunity to read and comment upon their transcribed interview in order to get their informed consent to publish them. If they did not respond I should consider their silence as an acceptance. This was maybe not the best procedure, because I do not know if a non-respond implies an okay or an unnoticed mail.

The quotations from the participants are translated into English, and hereby, some of the meaning may be altered, since the participants' own words are mediated through my understanding and limited by my translation skills. In order to strengthen their validity, these quotations will be numbered and their original will be put in appendix 4. My overall impression was that I got several personal stories and I feel great empathy and respect for the participants' way of dealing with their life experiences.

#### ***5.4 Presentation of the participants***

All participants live by themselves. One is, however, dating in a fresh romantic relationship. Seven interviews are carried out and my participants have diversity in their experiences. My participants are heterosexual men and women, from 37 to 66 years old. Two participants are immigrants, four have been married and two have children. They all have secondary school degrees, while some have further education. One is retired and one is unemployed, the others work. Below follows a short presentation of them.

**Hans**, 66, married a Swedish woman and migrated to Sweden from Germany as a young adult. He lost his identity when lacking skills in the Swedish language. He was semi-skilled, but in Sweden, he had to start working as a technician, but strived for higher positions, which he later reached. He lived family life until his three children were grown up and his wife wanted a divorce. He had a new relationship with a woman and moved in with her, but it did not work out well and when he got another job he moved out and the relation ended. Single living for ten years. (February 18, 2010, in his home)

**Katalin**, 62, love-migrated from Balkan to Sweden after her academic education. She was married for ten years, and then she suddenly became widowed. Because of that, she lost custody of their designated adoption child and simultaneously their common friends abandoned her. These traumatic events caused her great sorrow and puzzlement in life. Hereafter she has had a few love relationships, but never been cohabiting again. She invested in her parents and in her siblings' families, though staying in Sweden. She is working as a teacher, but had to fight unemployment once and has lately only been offered part time employment. Single living for 25 years. (February 2, 2010, at her workplace)

**Peter**, 54, is interested in technique and studied to become a technical engineer. He worked as an engineer until he was 39, then he became unemployed. He continued his education to become a teacher. He got temporary posts and was unemployed in-between. At the time of the interview his unemployment insurance is running short and how to get by is his main distress.

He has, except for a three months cohabiting in his youth, not had any serious couple relationship. Single living for 34 years. (March 9, 2010, at a café)

**Lena**, 44, is working as an assistant nurse and works extra at nights, driving a taxi. When she grew up she had to take care of her siblings since her mother was ill and her authoritative father was away at work. As an adult, she worked abroad for some years, then married and had a child. Five years later, she and her husband divorced and the child lived every other week with her until she got the custody. Meanwhile she got a new partner but when the child grew older and became an outspoken teenager the man left. Finding the men in their lives always choosing the easy way out, Lena and her child were in a crisis. Now she was waiting for her oldest child to move from home next summer. Single living: 4 years (March 12, 2010, at a noisy café)

**Ville**, 42, likes drawing and works as a graphic designer. He has upper secondary school. He was head-hunted by different companies causing him to move between Sweden and London. Now he has a company but finds the variation in income a problem and has applied for a bus driver education. He married once, but when they moved to a house and she wanted children he split up. He has tried some relations after that, but he hesitates and seems confused about serious relations and cohabiting. Single living: 4 years (March 9, 2010, at a café)

**Johan**, 37, has upper secondary school. He has had different jobs, but none for longer than three years and, he has moved around a lot in southern Sweden. He works now with children, but as low paid it is not seen as a future career. Instead, he wants to start a business of his own. He has had a five-year relation with a much younger woman, but they never cohabited and partly because of the age difference, he did not see a common future together with her. The relation ended two years ago. Single living: 17 years, single status: 2 years. (February 11, 2010, in his home)

**Helen**, 37, decided early, having listened to her parents' quarrel about money, to get an education and a well-paid job. She studied first in Sweden and then in Germany, where she stayed for seven years working as a technical engineer. She has had two one-year long relationships, though she never cohabited. When her father died, she moved back to Sweden to support her mother and little sister. She stayed with them, while getting herself a job career and a social platform. Two years ago she moved into her own place. Single living: 17 years (except for the stay at her mother), single status: 8 years. (March 4, 2010, at her workplace)

## 6 Analysis

This analysis consists of two sections. It begins with contextualizing and envisaging the participants' experiences in relation to the normative life course. I focus on their relational practices in friendship, family and work life in order to embed them in and contextualise their life stories and experiences. The section ends with a short discussion. In the second section, I go deeper into questions of couplehood and children. This section also ends with a discussion.

### 6.1 Practicing friendship

Friendship in this material seems to reflect the participants' own habits or interests. Friendship is possible to choose, to change and it varies in size and intensity.

#### 6.1.1 At the margin of the normalised life course

The participants in this study have experiences that do not match the prospect of the normative life course or a lifelong heterosexual relationship. During the interviews, I asked them to imagine their adult life when they were young.

I don't think I imagined myself when I was 40 years old, where I wanted to be, or if I would make a career or have family and children. I didn't think like that, it was rather (.) (5 sec) /.../ that's the normal that it turns out like that, that you live in a couple relation and have children and the little puppy. You thought that's what it's like by then. I don't think I thought that's what I want. (Malin: It will be?). Yes, that's it, it will be so. But it hasn't (.) yet. But, I don't think I thought of how I wanted it. You think of what to do next. /.../ (Malin: Quite a lot has happened.) It has happened things all the time, so it hasn't turned out dull, or made you wondering about: ugh, I don't want it this way. In fact, I guess I want it the way I have it now. (Helen:1)

Typically, Helen never actually wished for adult obligations as such, rather, she expected to live a life course story, and neither is Johan.

I guess I didn't have a clear picture of, you know, how it would be when I was older, if I would have children or not. /.../ but on the other hand, now I'm only guessing, but maybe it was a self... like you didn't think about it, but that's for sure, you should have a wife and children and a job, but (.) or yes, because you hardly thought the opposite, that no, I won't have wife and children, but it was more a matter of course to, yes, to create a family later on, I imagine. But I cannot remember thinking: *I will have two children and I will live over there and I'll be working with that*. Nothing so determined I don't remember that kind of thoughts... (Johan:1)

The heteronormative family ideal is taken for granted as part of an expected life course, though they make a clear distinction between expectations in life and their own wishes. This distinction, made by those that never have cohabited, can be made because they do not fulfil the norm. If they were in another position, practicing nuclear family, they would have had easier to embrace the idea of the normative life course progress. When the discourse of adult life does not turn out, they have to reflect on and explain the mismatch.

Different images of singles' friendship are prevalent in contemporary society. Friendship, understood as a local tribe to which individuals belong can, according to Michel Maffesoli, offer other kind of relations than family can (Jacobs 1997). The image of female friendship given in "Sex and the City", I consider to be more of a safe, supportive port in the hunting for the male partner. A different image appears in my participants' friendship. When Helen's friends have children, her own position becomes palpable and the question intensifies for her.

And all of them start having children now, or have got and have little toddlers. And, but no, I don't want that. And all of a sudden you start to become an outsider, you haven't been that before, you know what I mean? That you all of a sudden don't fit in anymore. Or not fit in, it's not that, but it's... I don't know how, 'cause it's not that I sit and ponder: *hmm, do I want to have children or don't I?* It is just sometimes you think: *But wait! Soon I have to make an active decision.* (Malin: Is it children you think of?) Yes, it's there time is running out, it's there the shortage of time. (Helen:2)

She realises she is starting to become an outsider who differs from her friends in practices and choices. The outsider position comes with age, and the deviation increases while ageing. One solution is to choose younger friends or friends of the same age living by themselves. These young childless participants tend to have intense leisure or sports activities. Helen, Johan and Ville orient themselves to younger cohorts of friends who are single. Hereby, their way of living is just like everybody else's, they do not differ from the others in practice.

Most of my friends are younger. I don't socialize very much with people my own age, since it is mostly... when I socialize... when I go and have a beer, like when I'm at competitions, it's mostly younger people, though they start to come, to grow somewhat older, so it's very mixed. My social life consists of 18-19 and up to my own age. Of course, I have friends from my old class that I still see. /.../ Then I have, what makes it easy is, I think, that I have quite many who are in exactly the same situation as me. I have many good friends in Farawaytown that are [athlete coaches] and whom are singles, as if there is a jinx on it. But I have also old athlete buddies that have started to get married and have children. I think it would have been worse if you would have, felt like: *Shit, everybody has married and everybody has children – what are you doing?* But now we are, now I've such a big social life, and I think that's really important, that it's a crucial issue for me to... to feel at home anyhow. It doesn't feel as if I'm strange... but we are a huge bunch of people... who get on well together, even though more and more of them meet couples and have children. (Johan:2)

However, it becomes more obvious that they differ in age when even younger friends get coupled and have children. In a way they are growing too old to be included in the normality of single identity, and by passing the line they need to change identity. While we, during the interview, talk about their friends, they realise that these also are single and that they actually do not have experiences of dinner parties, solely with couples. Helen though, tells me about dinner parties she has attended and about a friend's experiences.

But then, most of the dinner parties, there are several [friends] that are (.) singles kind of, or (.) they come by themselves when their partner is at another party or is doing something else or is busy. But I haven't been at a "true" couple dinner. [A friend] told me about his, many of his



friends have children, and he was invited to, on New Year's Eve, to some couples with children. And then he felt awkward, they sit and talk about diapers [laughter]. (Helen:3)

They have friendships consisting of a mix of couples and singles. It seems hard to be together with those who are coupled and live family life, because the differences in life practices become too apparent. However, it is a flexible stage that suits both sides of couplehood. The mix between singles and couples can, according to Trimberger (2005), be seen as a bridge between the different stages of singlehood and couplehood. The presence of other singles among their acquaintances does not draw attention to their own singleness and their single status becomes normalised. By attaching both single and coupled relations, they hold both possibilities open, which may avoid a total implosion if their current situation changes. Others, as Katalin, stress the change in friendship relations when becoming single, which for Katalin happened suddenly, and aggravated her life crisis.

### 6.1.2 From coupled to single friends

According to Ebaugh (1988) people often exit several roles at a time, causing considerable personal strain and this was the case for Katalin. She and her husband lived a coupled life with coupled dinner parties where they were supposed to reciprocate by inviting those who had invited them. When she was 34 years old, her husband died all of a sudden and thereby she lost custody of their adopted child. In her grief, their friends' actions confused her.

And then it was friends, or people, it was several of those married couples, with or without children, who liked us /.../ then I have lost quite a lot .. I did not understand, I thought it was my fault, because I was sad, I was inconsolable and like that. (.) But four or five years later, one of them I had lost contact with, calls and ask me to (.) let her come and visit me a whole day, just her and me. So, she comes and says: *I have something to confess and something to apologise for. You know, when you were alone, you were twice as lonely since we kind of stopped..* And what happened was that, the men, or her husband came home from work and said: *Ooh, have you called Katalin, have you called Katalin, how is she?* When they came together, there were two places not seated. Then she has .. thought that I am suddenly (.) a rival. Because her husband suddenly has room for me. And these girls have been talking about it: *she is so...yea, all of a sudden.* I have later experienced that some, divorced women, and men as well, but divorced women have also experienced, that suddenly when I showed up at a dinner party with my husband, it was okay, but when I came alone, I was odd and was competing with the hostess or someone else. Because when we are conversing, the hostess is fixing and carrying and lifting and all that, and you are here and conversing and are twittering, twittering. And she who was my friend, you know... A person is, I would surely be the same, a bitch huh, you understand, aha? (Malin: Mm). /.../ I invited them all to these great events, but when they were at my place it was always that cheeky tone, *oh dear, really, oh, why*, it was a grieving process, it was an enormous sense of loss. Because of that I lost their company, but I have got myself other acquaintances, that I met on Sundays at the golf court. I never played golf, but I was a very good caddy. (Katalin:1)

The coupled dinner parties, with explicitly structured gender roles, were the basis for their friendship. One's partnership was the guarantee for not laying hands on someone else's partner, preventing the inherent attraction games in heterosexual relations. After the death of her husband, she appears to be a threat to the other couples' security. Ebaugh (1988:168-9)

implies that the process of becoming an ex might force you to change friendships. However, in this case, it was not her exit process that caused the change, rather it was the friendship's behaviour she saw as the reason for its ending. She was hindered from taking part in the former friendship grounded on coupledom, and had to find friends based on another commonality than couplehood. Their exclusion of her can be understood as their stigmatization of her new identity, a reaction she has to face in this process of becoming an ex (Ebaugh 1988). Instead of reaching closer to the desirable hegemonic nuclear family, she loses it completely, both partner and child. She is no longer considered trustworthy in her singleness and gets denigrated. When it is hard to continue practicing friendship that is built upon couplehood, family bonds may bridge these difficulties.

## ***6.2 Practicing family relations***

There is a need for belonging, a place in history and connections between relatives of different generations. Some of the participants develop strong relations to their parents and to their siblings' families. Hereby, they practice family. But these family practices differ from nuclear family practices and are devalued and subordinated to normative nuclear familism, therefore, they have to be argued for. I understand that there is a gradient of family practices, not an either/or.

### **6.2.1 Practicing relations to parents and siblings' families**

After the war in the Balkans, Katalin's parents and siblings ended up in different countries. Katalin was not able to visit her parents for a year, until she got a Swedish passport. It became important to stay longer, when visiting them.

I don't know if it would be the same if I wasn't alone. But I don't think I would have had them [the parents] in second or umpteenth place. If I had my own children, they would for sure be in first place, but they would not in first place, they would be in the same situation as I am if I had any. But I think I would never have less for my parents, since they haven't got too much. It is true, they've got all my spare time, but if there was no war it would be completely different. I would go there, but on flying visits and maybe not every vacation, but every second, but now I am there. It takes my time but I get very much in return. Now I have only him [dad] left and it is only us two. How tomorrow will be, I don't know. (Katalin:2)

Living in different countries may strengthen her wish to create strong connections with her own parents and to take on great responsibility for them. Though in developing these relations she not only fulfilled expectations of being a daughter, she also created strong connections to her sibling's families and children.

(Malin: ... when family life didn't turn out, your husband died and there was no child, did you (.) try to find different meanings in life?) I think the meaning is to live the life and, or (.) yes, it was to let my parents and siblings get more out of me, when they still had me and when I did not have the

other and when I still had them. The meaning was to become a sister and daughter much, much more. Okay, daughter and sister I have always been, but after all, I was daughter and sister on the other side of Europe. And then afterwards, I was closer, more often. It was (.) their everyday became important for me, before the war as well. /.../ they were first in my thoughts, in my plans and in my business, like that. And then, they **are** my family. They are my family. I know they are kin, but they are my family. Both mum and dad and my sibs and their families. /.../ It's possible I have cultivated, developed it on basis of... /.../ But when I think of my own, I think of myself in relation to them. (Katalin:3)

Even though the expectations about singles' availability can be intense, she seems happy to have managed to embed herself strongly in this family of hers, despite the geographic distance. Being a single female immigrant with her family in another country might as well intensify the need of belonging. Her strong emphasis that they are her family indicates that this view is not accepted in society, though to her they are family. If she had had a family herself, thus not being single and available, she would probably not have been expected to arrange her life in relation to other kin's needs, though it is not only supportive expectations between relatives that are occurring. It is also wishes of giving support; financial, emotional and practical support. When Helen's father died, her mother and ten-year old sister were left in grief, and she was working and living abroad.

My father fell ill and ... First I hesitated during the spring in Germany, he fell ill at Christmas time, just after Christmas. So I planned to move back home to support him. Then he died that summer. I came home during the summer, used all the holidays I had, then when he died... /.../ and then after the funeral, I went back [to Germany] and worked all that year. I thought, but it was quite hard for mum and sis. /.../ It didn't work out. Mum called and was quite despaired, 'cause things didn't work and how was she supposed to fix things? (Malin: With the house, you mean?) Yes, both with the house and with finances. (Malin: She turned to you?) Yes. She has tendencies to exaggerate everything. What can be a problem turns into a problem; somehow, it already is a problem. Additionally, my sis didn't feel well. Then I thought it would be much easier to help if, you felt so helpless down there. You weren't able to come home and switch the bulb. Well it was that simple, but if you were living nearby, it would be easy to visit. So I was thinking about that and resigned from my job, without telling mum and sis. I ended my job in the beginning of May, bought a ticket and went home, and then I rang the doorbell. /.../ Mummy was on the phone, she said: *Is it Helen?* I think she was quite moved when I came home. (Helen:4)

Living alone in another country seems to accentuate feelings of belonging. Helen's older brother has a family of his own and lives in Sweden. Still the mother turned to Helen to get support and Helen responded to the request. Persons that deviant from proper comportment, as runners in relation to walkers become "open persons" that others have the right to assault or yell at (Goffman 1963 in Collinsson 2008). These single persons are open persons in a somewhat different meaning. They are both in a form of expected accessibility, but others may have the right to interfere in their lives. The intersection between gender and normative nuclear familism demands Katalin and Helen, as single daughters, to take responsibility for their parents' well-being. Without a family of their own, their obligations should be directed to their previous nuclear family. However, intersection between normative nuclear familism

and gender works differently for Ville. His connections to his previous nuclear family seem to be more voluntarily. During the interview, Ville speaks comprehensively about his mother and sister and her child or “*our first little child*” as he calls it. He is involved in his sister’s life and supports her when she is down.

Sis has had some real, maybe like a real divorce-... *Yes, but come to my place, we can look for apartment ads.* Then you notice that, then she goes home and some days later her misery is gone. This, just to do something, we think what might happen and apartments, you can live there. (Malin: Check alternatives?) Yes, but just to live it out and imagine the decision: *Shit, now I am on my way!* It’s quite good to put oneself into that situation, how will it be next week when I sit here in my one-room flat? Will I still think it is fun? That’s my concept. (Malin: Then you see each other a bit?). Yes, we do, some times a week at least. I go visit Adam [the child], my mother, yes, it is very practical, and my entire family lives there now. The ones who are alive, they live there. /.../ So, on Valentine’s Day, I went home and picked up my sis and we went out and had dinner and then I drove her home three hours later. She really liked it ... (Ville:1)

Ville takes great responsibility for his sister, helping her to deal with her problems. His picture of her being alone in her apartment is not that positive and may reflect his own experiences of breaking up from his marriage.

In this section, I have shown three participants that are investing a lot in their parents, siblings and sibling’s children. Two other participants have families of their own, though their experiences are quite different.

### **6.2.2 Departed nuclear families**

Having children in common can be a reason and a possibility to make friends with one’s ex. Family bonds can heal and endure over time.

My ex wife is having her 60th birthday (Malin: aha) in June and wanted me to come. We have become good friends, it was really hard the first years after the divorce, for some time I had the kids and the grandchildren and everything. But she came down two weeks ago and cooked and filled the fridge and such, (Malin: mm) she was really nice (Malin: mm). I feel that I’m alone, but I have my children and their partners, and my ex, and a couple of good friends, with whom I ate supper today. /.../ Then I have my good friends, my good old friends from Germany, they call me and keep in touch, send an e-mail. I have a few that are interested in the destiny of my life. (Hans:1)

Hans has several people around him that involve themselves in his life, assisting him when he is ill. There is a breadth within the sources of his relations – childhood friends, adult friends, ex-wife, and his children, though his relation with his ex-wife still follows traditionally gendered family relations. While reflecting upon life, Hans is happy with and proud of his children and the prolonging of life they are offering him by bringing him grandchildren.

They [the children] are some kind of proof of that you accomplished something in life. Bringing up three kids, (Malin: mm) and that they are really talented all of them. And that they are nice, good at cooking. They are good parents, much more involved than I was. I think I worked kind of much when they were small. They are really extraordinarily good. (Hans:2)

As proofs they last longer than his work life that otherwise is central to him. He contrasts his own absence in his children's lives to their new practices, influenced by the Swedish equality debate of involved parenthood (Forsberg 2009). He does not tell any stories about the children when they were small, no interfering with them. His own life and interest (work, education, house renovation, hobby and friends) get space in the talking. Maybe this is what it should be for a man – to work hard and then, when you have retired you see your offspring being well and giving you grandchildren. Relations are not only continuous but something to talk about and to be proud of. This talk of pride over his children is different from talk about intimacy and closeness. His stories strongly contrast the way Lena views her life.

Family life does not always generate an easy life and practicing family outside the nuclear family norm accentuates several consequences. Lena has had two couple relations. Her first partner, she experienced, was not capable of dealing with relational problems.

But he didn't think anything was wrong, everything was fine. Or, when he was angry, he went to the gym. (Malin: Did he tell why, later?) No, he was just (.) grumpy and low and went training and I had to take care of everything and he went training. I felt that this won't work, we won't get this to work together. I left him in June, when the child was five. (Lena:1)

The mismatch in perception of their relationship between her and her first husband, shows a common displacement of power in heterosexual relationships where the woman is made responsible to work out the relations in the family (Haavind 1987). The child often acted his frustration out and this was intensified when, first his father, and later his stepfather, accused him of being the cause of the adults' relational problems. The child's life got troubled, which affected both Lena's family and her ex-husband's family.

He had several times before told me: *I want to live with you mummy. We have to talk to daddy about that. That's not something that is up to me to decide, not until you are twelve. Do you want us to talk with daddy together?* (Lena:2)

When Lena got custody of her child, her ex-husband had to pay child support, but refused to pay for anything else. The support was on one hand an economic help, but on the other, it turned into an economic struggle between the parents, where she was the one who had the overall responsibility. She met a new man who was a more caring father, however, this relation also came to an end.

He was twelve and started to become a real teenager and he opposed [his stepfather] and they never agreed. /.../ And [the child] was loud and didn't always think, it just came out of him and he still had these outbursts. And then (.) we bought a house and moved in at the end of March. In May, my husband tells me he wants a divorce because he can't stand my child! He didn't manage to be a teenager parent... (Lena:3)

Taking care of the relations in Lena's two couple relationships, was hard to succeed in, acting from a female subordinated position. She also had to solve the relationship between her out-acting teenager and his stepfather, which was an even harder task. Giddens (1992) pure relation seems far-off, instead Lena views her relationships very concrete and ordinary, as a work to be done, with differing results. The child blamed her for a long time, as I see it, directing his disappointment at her for not being able to keep the family together and for not being able to protect him from himself and his fathers' emotional violence. She had to deal with his bad temper all alone, since he was with her all the time without any support from her two ex-husbands. In relation to Giddens' (1992) freedom of choice, this freedom was attributed the men in her life who could choose to abandon the family when it suited them, while at the same time, the child became strongly attached to her and her life. Now, wanting to be released from her duty as a parent, she has made it clear that he has to leave home when he finishes school, taking responsibility for his own actions in life.

I have let him know that after graduating school in the middle of June next year. The first of July (.) he will have to move out, then my parental responsibility is over. I love my son above everything, I really do, but he has to take care of himself. (Malin: Mm) and how he will solve this, I do not know. I will be there, but he won't stay here. He has to find a way to take responsibility for his life. (.) to stand on his own. (Malin: Mm) because, today he sees me as a, a waitress, as someone that is supposed to do everything for him and it doesn't work. A couple of months ago, when we discussed this, he said: *But mum, then it is actually your fault (.) of I (.) go on social welfare and don't have a place to live. Then it is your fault if I walk the street begging for money for alcohol /.../ if I become an alcoholic. No, I say, it is not my fault, it is your choice. You decide how your life is gonna be, you choose and you have to take the consequences for those choices.* (Malin: He tried to do the same as his father's...). Yes, we talk, our relation is rather good, we still fight, but he is beginning to realize. He thinks it is really tough to grow up. (Lena:4)

Her efforts in trying to get their lives working cause her lot of stress and feelings of failure. Her son also thinks it is her fault, directing his own difficulties in life towards her. Haavind (1987) has shown that the outcome of a person's child's life is of importance for that person's self-respect and Lena felt that she had failed as a mother. She recently had conversational therapy, where she learned to re-interpret what had happened and could understand her parental actions as courageous instead of miserable. Because of this trauma, her life has centred a lot on her child and now she is longing for a life of her own.

Compared to Hans' stories of his family life that consisted of renovations, snow clearances, and work, Lena's story telling reveals how her family life has become embodied and turned her life upside down. These different consequences may occur in the intersection between gender and normative nuclear familism.

### **6.2.3 Low-intense family relationship**

Johan's and Peter's relations to their families of origin are low intensive. Johan's parents are healthy and have each other, while Peter's parents are deceased. Johan's sibling has family while Peter's sibling has a partner but is childless. Since their siblings live quite far away, they do not see each other frequently, only on major occasions and/or vacations. Johan and Peter do not talk spontaneously about their family of origin, on my request they answer briefly where they live, or have lived and when they meet, but nothing about their relations.

(Malin: Do you have any contact with him?) Yes, well, I have. My brother lives in Far-far-away town for the moment and has lived in Far-away town for a long time with his girlfriend and they have their first child. Yes, we meet at least a couple of times a year. I celebrated Christmas with them, so... erm sure I do meet them. (Johan:3)

Compared to especially Katalin's, Ville's and Helena's detailed and sensitive stories about their family relations, this silence becomes intense. Johan's family relations are in some way inactivated, at rest, which explains the notable silence in his stories. Considering Peter, having only one kin to relate to, he seems quite exposed and vulnerable, especially since his social network is sparse as well. Spoken silences are present in Peter's talk about his relations.

## **6.3 Practicing work life relations**

A third major part of life is work life. The participants show different approaches to work. Some invest very much for different reasons, while others have turned their hobby or interest into paid work. By working, they provide for themselves and eventual dependents. Being the only one available to bring money in is insecure and long-lasting unemployment strikes hard, emphasising their vulnerability.

### **6.3.1 Working hard to become a breadwinner**

After immigrating to Sweden, Hans became a father and was hard hit by his breadwinner ideals. Hans started to work before finding out the opportunities for getting a study grant to learn Swedish. Lacking language skills, he had to take manual labour.

... after about one-and-a half years we moved back to Sweden. And we, she was carrying our first child by that time. And that was (.) that became a turning point. (Malin: for you?) For me (.) totally. Because I did manual labour, I didn't know how to speak Swedish, had to work at the assembly line at [the plant], didn't know the language and... it never got threw... you had good opportunities in those days, as a foreigner, for example you could go to the adult education college for a year, you could study all facets (inaudible) of life in Sweden and language and everything, but I only had, I was so trained that you should work to get money, the money /.../ In Germany the husband should traditionally provide for the family. It was that idea that drove me when I came to Sweden, that I should get a job and work. (Hans:3)

Understanding his actions from an intersection between normative nuclear familism and masculinity, he is pushed into a position where he should be a breadwinner but also be

fatherly, as Hearn (1998) states. However, being a breadwinner seems to be more important, while coinciding with the masculine working ability. Being a father seems to be a major part of being fatherly.

The intensity of his workload is visible when he explains why he did not manage to continue his interest, while, at the same time he experienced his life crisis. When immigrating to Sweden he loses language and culture, his ability to tell jokes, his good position in his fellowship, his easygoing work, and so, he loses his identity. He finds that he has to grow up and work for the first time in his life. Working hard, working extra and travelling long commuting hours, he has very little time for himself and for his family, leaving most of the child care work to his wife. In comparison to the freedom and variation in his former job, his work and breadwinner ideals make his life really tough. The language-influenced identity crisis, which he often returns to, exaggerates his feelings of vulnerability. He lets his life focus on struggles in work life, which, as his stories indicate, is the engine of his life (story), and this keeps him away from home. Despite his absence, Hans's family was very present in his life. It has been the reason to fulfil his duty as a breadwinner and a father and the family had been the central place for him to return to after work.

### **6.3.2 Working hard to survive/match expenditures**

While for Hans the responsibility of being a breadwinner integrated with his desire for better positions, for Lena work was much more a question of surviving. As a lone parent, with a growing youth at home, with regular and occasional expenditures, and no full time employment at her regular work, she started driving a taxi some years ago.

Today I work as an assistant nurse, with all the different duties there are and I work as a taxi driver at the weekends as well. I felt I needed a new challenge when I divorced. /.../ I think it is exciting to meet these people. I often drive at night. (Malin: Do you work full time?) No, I don't. I worked full time until August 2009, then I had to reduce to 75 per cent, right now I work 90 per cent. There is plenty to be done, but it's fun. /.../ Much in my life has been about surviving. I think I manage because I think what I do is fun and partly I am driven by an earlier situation, when I studied years ago, when we were short of money. (Malin: To have a margin?) Margin and margin. I don't think we had that, but just to survive. I have realized what a teenager costs – much and suddenly. He is not at the age where he accepts what I try to give him, rather he is influenced by his peers and though he is grateful for what he gets, and if we find cheaper alternatives, he can agree about them but you can imagine the expenses for food. /.../ We have an open home with many teenagers visiting, from two to six or seven. They come to us and it is hard to say no, but sometimes I have to. Sometimes they do a raid in the fridge and things like that. (Lena:5)

Working in a low-paid female part time work with the state as employer, she has not money enough to pay the rent and buy food. Still she is responsible as the breadwinner for her child and has to find new ways of earning money. She gets herself an additional job to improve her economy, but being away at work reduces her ability to taking care of her child. In a way, she



has no choice. Lena's relationships to her parents are not so good and being without their support, it is important to her to manage to take care of herself and her son.

### 6.3.3 Consequences of unemployment

Hans tells me emphatically about the time when his employer outmanoeuvred and fired him and some other workers from the company, accusing them of being absent from work without permission. Late in life he becomes unemployed.

It was worse than the divorce, that you are innocent. /.../ I was in such a group, for 50 year-olds who are unemployed, there were those groups. And there was a man there, who was in his 50's and who had the greatest educations and skills, and he was unemployed. So I thought – *I know my line of business and hardly that, I'm just a controller*. It felt, it felt... like a total depression in this group (Malin: yes) so I thought that I had to do something for myself. I got in touch with a municipality, and I got a temporary job at the administration... (Hans:4)

Other events than becoming single are accentuated and become important in his life. To be innocently accused was hard to bear, and becoming unemployed at that age was frightening. His new employment later became permanent and lasted until his retirement.

Political decisions had an impact on Katalin's work life. After 22 years, she became redundant overnight and turned to the Swedish employment agency, but it was a degrading experience when they thought she could work as checkout girl.

*... but to work as a checkout person in the market, I don't know how to do it. Yes, but you learn!* Okay, but wait. /.../ *We know you are trustworthy*. Damn you! Damn you! I said: *give me the teacher-list*. I found three ads and reply all three and Distant Town calls first and wants me. /.../ I work full time for a couple of years, then I got this part time position with a promise to get more. /.../ I am needed at school, but damn, I am only employed 40 per cent and I think it is shameful. But, I am not in the situation where I can be proud and just quit. I think I have to, if I will be at peace with myself, I have to accept it. I do not suffer more than I enjoy working, but it hurts. (Malin: I can see that). It does. By the way, they say: *why do you take it? You are old, you can cut down* and things like that and I do not suffer hardship, but... I can and I want to continue working and something I do well, so it is stupid not to work. At the same time, since I have family or (.) my dears ... in the Balkan, who don't have as good a life as I have. I've made the decision to support them, but that is not the primary, it is the respect that society should show to the group of people that I belong to, that is – an older woman (.) with an education. It does not matter where I come from, because that has nothing to do... I refuse to believe that. It is an older woman in this situation /.../ (Katalin:4)

In her work she feels degraded. She invests in her work, working more hours than she is paid for, but she gets no approval. As an ethnic woman, working with other immigrants, both their ethnicities devalue her status at work. There are, however, political decisions about lack of resources for immigrants. Being able to work in positions that use her education, she can refuse her ethnic identity as the reason to her degrading experiences. She understands herself as an older educated woman with a responsibility for her family; her parents and siblings' families. She does not focus her on immigrant position or her living by herself.

Peter is also worried about his pension, but his situation has come to a stage where he has gradually been excluded from the labour market. Coming from a working class home, he studied to become an engineer, though it took him almost ten years to reach the exam.

Two years later you were very popular among the companies in Studytown. /.../ Then it was fun for the money, but then you didn't pass the exams and then you had to take a study break and then you had to work. Maybe it took quite a long time from start to the final graduation /.../ then you should start working and there is to explain why it took such a long time. Maybe I didn't get the best job opportunities... there was a small company that was placed in Village and he knew about me before I knew about him and he chased me. Well chase and chase, but head hunting. And I guess I started there, it was in 1988-89, and I was placed in Village. /.../ and moved here in the autumn 1990, coming along with the company's move. Then the next spring – summer the company went into liquidation. I had a feeling about it since he had to get a loan to pay the salaries. And this was in the beginning of the recession coming there. It was not that good for my career. (Peter:1)

Working in the computer field, he started to become old at the age of 40 and younger competent persons were preferred. He worked on occasional jobs, but did not succeed to get permanently employed. As unemployed he was offered to study one year for a teacher exam with a study grant equivalent to his unemployment support.

The problem with that education was that when I finished, there was no shortage for teachers any more. And then it became hard to find jobs. I worked on a practical vocational school but the pupils on that school had no interest at all. Then I got, then I replied to a job in Neartown and started there in spring 2005. Was there... it was only possible to get term employment. So I was there in autumn 05 too, then I was unemployed in spring 06, then I was back there in 06/07, [working full time]. But it was then that the subsidy for local adult education was withdrawn. I had quite a long temporary employment in autumn 07 in the local adult education in Othertown, not full time though, and then erm... in March 08, it must have been then I was in Smalltown, only for a month, though. But thereafter there hasn't been any. It is almost two years since I had an employment. (Malin: Yes) And how does one manage that? (Malin: Yes) For such a long time you cannot be on the dole, do you think? (Peter:2)

Peter's employment becomes shorter, more occasional and less frequent as time went by. His efforts seem huge, but sporadic and none-focused, and they have not worked his way. For the moment he is in an unemployment arrangement, but the future looks not so promising and almost no teaching jobs are offered. Claiming his academic position, which is the only symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1993) he has, he cannot take a job as a worker. Then he will lose this identity. Peter has almost none family relation nor friendship and he has no work. He is extremely aware of his situation and I am as well. I have difficulties asking about his future and he has difficulties answering. We both lean on clichés and hackneyed phrases.

(Malin: How do you imagine the future, further on when you have retired? How do you think about your life?) Well... I do not know, actually. I think I have difficulties to be on a pension, not being entitled to it. I use to make a joke when they, especially when she I usually assist with the computer says, when she sees me smoking: *It's dangerous, you're gonna die. It doesn't matter, I won't get any pension anyway.* I haven't thought of that, how I see myself. And it has not been any dream to go at it like a madman to live happy the last five or ten years then. Maybe it was more *carpe diem*, seize the day, you live in the present. (.) (hesitating). I don't think it's necessary to

plan that far into the future, I still don't know how life will turn out. (Malin: No-no). More than a day, maybe you should consider, but several years... (Malin: No, the pension is still far away). Ten or twelve years if you work till you are 67. Did you hear that they are older, those who retire, I heard on the news a couple of days ago. (Peter:3)

The difficulties of getting a job make it difficult to look into the future with confidence, and without a job he cannot provide for himself. The shortage of money makes him hesitant to reach the future and sometimes he has to borrow from his brother.

Comparing Katalin and Hans with Peter, he places himself in a passive voice. Things happen to him while the others place themselves as active. To use active or passive voice reveals their perception of the happenings and must be understood in the light of available power resources in life (Johansson & Öberg 2008). The word use is also influenced by the knowledge of the result. Katalin and Hans can describe themselves in an active voice, since they managed to solve their unemployment. Peter's efforts become concealed and marginalised, though all the temporary jobs he has had, he most certainly has applied for.

#### **6.3.4 Working to succeed or fulfilment of security**

Helen has worked hard to get herself an education and a job with advancement possibilities and she recently became a manager. She decided as a child to get a good education and a good job and follows the path she set up for herself.

... to study [...] was the obvious thing to do. That's what I thought when I was a child, when my parents were short of money at home and... When they [the parents] built the house something went wrong, the mortgages were high, big debts and there was a shortage of money, simply spoken, yes, there were quarrels (.) about money sometimes. I know that I decided that I will get that kind of a job where I don't have to worry about money. /.../ so I made up my mind quite early in life, that... No, but I know that I was thinking and then it was so obvious. (Helen:5)

She works hard, but is very modest about where these efforts will bring her and unexpectedly, she has no goals in life.

... my work fills my days, very much, it's a matter of (.) both time, and outside work as well. (Malin: How? You work at home, you mean?) Yes, I often bring work home or read since it is interesting, or since I, or if I cannot let go of it. /.../ (Malin: What are your goals in life?). I don't have any goals. For me, things just happen. It... I have no goals and no ambitions. (Helen:6)

She works to fulfil herself in different areas, engaging in other activities as well. Her life gets packed. Her strong commitment to work, while not explicitly heading for higher positions, bears fruit and anchors her in the company that rewards her for her dedication. Helen represents partly, the modern self-fulfilling highly-educated woman who invests a lot in her work. A well-educated woman with a high position might face difficulties being understood as an attractive woman (Billing 2006). The hiding of her career, by declaring goals and

ambitions to others than herself, may be a way of dealing with this conflict. By performing this strategy she does not challenge the male organisation code.

#### **6.4 Summing up social relations**

Friendship has lately been considered to replace family. However, in my material both friendship and family practices are important and they fill different functions. Friends often share their interests, look like them and are people they have fun with. Relatives offer other possibilities to arrange one's life that friendship does not always provide. In the participants' stories, relatives seem to offer a network stronger than friendship, and its strength works intergenerational. Work is an arena for social relations, as well. Especially in social occupations, work with children seems to be appreciated. Only Lena mentions supportive relations at work, though she does not talk of other friends, indicating that there is shortage of time to engage in relations and activities outside family. It is visible in their work stories that it is a place where they can nurture their identity. Work seems to be a social connection, where the social relations with work mates not always are chosen or requested.

#### **6.5 Dreams of couplehood and other stories**

This section deals with the participants' talk and reflections about love, couple relations and children.

##### **6.5.1 The power of love – an ability to change**

Johan broke up from a five-year relationship two years ago. He says he feels quite safe about being single and living by himself, but still he tries not to worry.

Erm and I also say to myself that I, maybe it's true self-denial, I don't know, but I am rather alone than, kind of (.) than (.) panicking about meeting someone. I'm not the one that... there are many typical examples of those who cannot be by themselves, who come from one relationship and enter another. But I have not... I have no problem being alone like that. Meanwhile, I feel that I probably anyway... of course I want to have a family and meet somebody and so on, but not at any price. It is not totally necessary. It isn't, so to be single is, I guess ... for sure it is... then if you are going to meet someone, you have to (.) you have to be in the milieus where you can meet people of a like mind. And then I am in quite wrong settings for the moment. It's tough, I guess I have to join a dog breeders' organization or something. [laughter] (Johan:4)

Contrasting himself to desperate mate seeking, he argues for his own laid back behaviour. He reveals his desire for family life, but even if he knows what to do in order to enhance his chances he does not look actively for a partner. Not to any price, he says, but later on in the interview, he hesitates.

(Malin: But what if you don't find anyone, or create family and have children and things like that... 'cause you don't seem to want to give up anything for a relationship, do you?) No, but yes, maybe I do. One knows what it's like to fall in love. Then you can change quite a lot I think, so I

think it is important to meet someone you fall for... (Malin: someone you will invest in?) Yes, if we relate to my former relationship, then, then I wasn't ready to do that for several reasons, it was (.) too risky, the big age difference (.) and stuff like that. But if I would meet someone in (.) if I would find someone who: *this can (.) this can be it*, then I think I (.) will be prepared to invest a bit, for sure. (Johan:5)

It is the romantic love that is the magic that will make heterosexual relations work and the dream come true. Johan bears this glorified dream that love will make him change, that a correct partner is necessary for everything to turn out (more) right, as Nordin (2007) also states.

Lena says her child is longing to experience the happy nuclear family, but she is worried and marked by the earlier relationships and the effects her partner's actions have had on her and on the child's life.

He has got a negative view of relationships. He thinks he is "the man in the house", he has looked for someone to be in command, someone more than me. In his world we should be a nuclear family, but he is still proud of me and tells his friends that I am his mother. /.../ But I'm worried and feel that it is needless to expose him to that [new men that maybe also leave]. The fear that it won't work if the person leaves us. (Lena:6)

The child wants a nuclear family and so does she, but their experiences tell her not to. She puts the difficulties in herself, that she now is scared to let anyone in to get close to her and her family. This doubtful approach is turned upside down when she meets a man and feels the connection between them as a "fantastic communicative correlation".

I have big difficulties with relations. I am scared to let anyone into my life, to let anyone in too close. And I do not know what will happen and I am scared that they won't get along with my child, what will happen to him, and it is not okay. It is easier to be by myself. (Malin: Mm) (5 sec) We actually let someone in. I met a man. /.../ The first time we talked to each other, we talked two hours on the phone. The first time he invited me for dinner, we talked 14 hours at a stretch! We could talk about everything and suddenly, after a couple of weeks he actually lived with us. He got along very well with my child and he, he really liked him. /.../ But he lived with us for seven weeks and took part in our family, he *chose* to become part of our family. And we, we, gradually... I don't know how he managed [to get into our family] that way, because we are quite careful with relationships. Then one day, he leaves one morning and never comes back. He went back to his ex. (Lena:7)

Lena is not only by herself, she has her child to consider. Lone mothers with sons are often aware of the culturally presumed need of a father as a male role model for their sons (Trimberger 2005). However, the men in Lena's and her son's lives have not been good role models. Instead Lena has learnt that she needs to be reluctant and scared and that she cannot control the men's actions and influences in her family. To get a husband has not generated stability, but insecurity. However, previous decisions can be altered, as when she meets this man who listens to her and enjoys taking part in her family life. His actions symbolise acceptance of her as a mother and of her troubled family – she is chosen despite all problems

and despite all bad experiences. Lena may have something to achieve by choosing a man. When becoming more familised, approaching the hegemonic nuclear family by involving a man in her family, she reaches more privileged positions. She and others may see her family as more complete. A man brings her symbolic status (Bourdieu 1993) and recognition of her and her family, but he also increases insecurity and reduces her power in family.

### 6.5.2 Being ambivalent

Ville is not the only one who is ambivalent, though dealing with his divorce his confusion gives rise to reflections instead of fixed stories. After some good years, Ville and his wife start having problem. Reaching the house-owner and family level, the problems intensify.

My work was very demanding. /.../ we planned for the future, but I did not think it was fun. (Malin: What kind of plans?) Like moving to bigger, to get a house and stuff like that. She both studied and worked and was always tired /.../, wanted more and more seldom to go out (.) together. It was like... *Do we still like each other?* Then we found a house /.../ then when we moved there, it didn't make a difference at all. And then... I collapsed and thought: *What the hell, what is this? Do I still like this person? How can I be so miserable?* Ehh, so it was quite tough. Ehh, walked around like a zombie at work, they said. (Malin: Mm) /.../ I could not stand being here and got myself an overnight apartment, just to cut off and feel my own feelings. I sat there [inaudible] and breathed. It was hard. *Okay, I want to be here instead of over there, it isn't nice.* (Ville:2)

During this period, he worked very hard at work. The heavy workload, together with the problems in the relationship and the house owner renovation expectations, caused several demands and duties that he hardly managed. Later during the interview, Ville realizes the last straw that made him make up his mind; the possibility of being responsible for children.

I still loved her, but I couldn't, we couldn't live like this, she.. yeh, right, I forgot to tell. Right. She stopped taking her pills. We had talked about hormones and things, but she stopped taking them without telling (.) and then... I have rejected this, it's like a line in the sand. *Okay, for now it is only us, but if there come other persons into the picture, children, then it is time to change my priorities: Oh, I do not know what I want.* ... and that kind of (.) that was actually one of the reason, even though I had forgot it. I thought it was tough that we didn't have a talk about it, but maybe we couldn't, you know, she had herself a child soon after. (Malin: But did you talk about having children?) No, not at all. (Malin: But you did talk about hormones?) Yes, from a health point of view. But not that she should stop and then I thought... I did not think much, but I thought: *Shit! Now I really have to make up my mind. Is this what I want? Do I want this one to be the mother of my children? Is it supposed to be like this always?* It was a really tough decision, it was. (Ville:3)

Children are seriously involved in the creation of the development of couplehood. Ville understands a child as a reason to abandon his own hesitations and continue the relationship. By transferring his responsibility for the couple relation into an act of taking responsibility for the child, Ville avoids the risk of being the one blamed, if the couple relationship does not work out. Instead his actions can be seen as being fatherly. But he also needs to be honest

with himself and his partner. Is responsibility for children greater than that for oneself and the adult relationship? The question arises.

(Malin: What was it that you didn't want?) I guess I ... it did not feel right. I wanted more joy, more life. Not a project but a life. And I, see, I am pro family and children and everything, but it has to be (.) right. It cannot be just an accessory. It has to be a part of life, right. (Malin: Mm, it must feel right). Yes, it may be a mishap but I wonder if it isn't better if it just happens. You should have children straight away, not wait and see. /.../ ... it must be right. But if someone suddenly turns out to be pregnant, then all that is positive has to be identified and it would probably be real good. (Ville:4)

He wants to let fatherly actions solve his irresolution, to make him act properly and correctly, and to cease his bewildered attempts that hurt his partner when he regrets.

It is not like, you do not take a decision to live alone, I believe, or for this long, I have lived by myself quite long without a steady relationship. It is just because I haven't met someone that I feel I really, that I wanted, I guess. But they say: *You have to try and give it a chance*. But if I give it a chance and I am not sure, then I am afraid I'll blow it again. Now I am heading into something that I am not sure of, but how the hell can you be sure? So, it's a conflict, I cannot be sure and not really... time goes by and I like... well. The longer I keep trying, the more will I hurt the other one when backing out. (Ville:5)

Ville works through his emotions discussing his wish to be in a relation and his desire to be and live by himself, finding out that he always wants the other way around.

It's the human syndrome, to always miss what you don't have, I guess. That's what I feel. I've started to learn that now, and that's damn good. If you don't know it's a syndrome acting on you, then it isn't easy. You may think: oh no, it wasn't this, oh no, it wasn't this, it wasn't this. (Ville:6)

This "human syndrome" seems to be about a wish of following the discourses of coupledness, getting together, and his desire to be alone. Being in a new relationship Ville can admit his desire to be alone.

For the moment, I am by myself. I met this person recently, but... we don't see each other more than... she works maybe late and wants company at night... kind of. /.../ I have found out that you don't really have to live together with another if you don't want to. Or I do not need that – I believe now when I actually meet someone slightly. And that's a major difference, the thought of having someone, then you don't need meeting anyone, or if you don't have anyone to meet. *But what about me? Am I always supposed to sleep alone?* Then you meet someone and sleep together for three days, and then I wonder: *Oh, can't I be alone in bed sometime?* It turns upside-down so quickly, it scares me! It's a real pain in the neck. I don't get it. It's scary. (Ville:7)

When he is not in a relationship, he feels outside coupledness. Ville struggles with the discourses that devalue single living and cherish couplehood and family life. He cannot be truly satisfied when he is on his own, but he cannot feel free when he is in a relationship. He searches for the answer within himself and thinks that there must be something wrong with him. He has, however, embodied the discourse of coupledness and normative nuclear familism, containing a straight line from couple relation to the hegemonic nuclear family, but struggles to resist them.

Helen understands that she must change her way of living in order to meet somebody and to continue a relationship. This opposes her belief that meeting somebody is something that is supposed to just happen.

And now, now I have (.) absolutely no (.) time, as it is. If I would give another person more of my time as it is, I actually don't know what time that would be. (Malin: What you might cut down on?) Yes. (Malin: Relationships take time). And, especially in the upstart. I can imagine that if you have lived together in a couple relationship and know each other well and have been together for a long time, that there is more (.) tolerance towards... Then there is a security in the relation and you don't have to be together all the time. It is possible to live and practice one's activities and work and there is a common ground. I doubt anyone would accept a start where: *Thursday in two weeks, will that do?* Well, I don't know... (Helen:7)

She imagines a contrasting life, where work is subordinate to couple relations.

If you have a boring job, and then, when it ends you let go of it, then... you would have more time, more, both kind of physical time or real time and more time to think, you know time to reflect upon one's life situation and what you want with life, then maybe you would have started... then maybe you would have more time to (.) to someone else to think of... (Malin: If you wouldn't have an interest in your work, you mean and got home by four o'clock and do nothing?) yes, then I would... and maybe also at work, if you have a job where you sit assembling small parts and don't use your head very much, then you would have time figuring out what you did yesterday and what to do tonight and this weekend. Then you would have, you would have more to fill your mind with. (Helen:8)

She may, as well, prioritise differently when she reduces her investment in her sports career.

But, to have a relationship just to have a relationship, that will be more (.) after [the big competition], when you have more time, when you start feeling lonely, that now I want to share my life with someone. But it is so awful to live together with others [whispering]. I enjoy very, very much to live by myself. (Helen:9)

Helen pushes the relationship into the future. She talks about a future relationship like talking about a stereotyped cliché, something that is put upon her as something she is expected to desire. But for the moment she thinks that her job and active life hinder these fantasies to take place inside her mind. If her engagement in work was different or maybe after her athlete career ends, then she will adapt to and desire the discourse of couplehood. But for the moment, she does not want to cohabit with someone, though she hardly dares to express her delight about living by herself.

There are silences in Peter reflections over relationships in his life story. These silences, I interpret, are due to the absence of experiences. He argues that living alone is not too bad, but by contrasting it to couplehood and to his experiences of being invisible for women, he shows that he somehow grieves his situation.

I believe everybody should live alone for a longer time to be able to appreciate living together more. /.../ I guess my mother hoped for grandchildren. [Laughter], I remembered now when you're asking [if he has experienced others' expectations], those times I talked to Louise, and with Richard as well, I have been asked about the women. *Yes, I know they exist, but I don't know if they know I exist.* (Peter:4)



To be invisible may symbolize that women do not see in him a possible mate. His invisibility confuses him and when he once met a woman, he did not know how to handle or bring the relationship forward.

We met sometimes and kept in touch for several years, but we were alike... /.../ neither she nor I were very socially. /.../ I guess we had a more friendly than a romantic relationship. I kind of never knew what she was up to, and she probably did not know about me, because none of us said anything. We just met, like that. That she was a vegetarian was a disadvantage. (Peter:5)

The relationship came to nothing five years ago and he stated that since she was a vegetarian he still had to cook. To put forward her faults he and his actions can hide behind them. He hides his longing for belonging behind these male chauvinistic declarations.

### 6.5.3 To be able to refuse coupledness – when you have done it correctly

Hans has had two relationships and thinks two are quite enough. He has no desire for having a steady partner anymore, but wonders why.

There must be a reason behind all this, that I want, I don't want. I just want a dancing-partner. I don't want a steady partner any more, (Malin: no) That's what I think. I've had offers, you know, but it's, I haven't felt any (.) desire to... (Hans:5)

Just as Hans no longer wants to live together with somebody, so has Katalin abandoned all thoughts of new relationships.

(Malin: Your husband passed away quite early, have you had some other relationship afterwards?) I have had a couple, but they either came at the wrong moment, or I was too choosy, or I don't know, it was just something... I have had a relationship some years, but I never cohabited, you know separate living. But then it didn't, I don't know... maybe I am choosy, but I don't know. Maybe my parents were in crisis and I prioritized them and when this wasn't accepted I didn't think that I should give up my parents. And then it is like... it is wonderful to meet someone that fits you. It is the most beautiful, but after you have lost it, then it can be a curse. (Malin: What? How?) Because, very few can reach this, achieve you know. And then, you don't put up with something so-so or average. Maybe it was... mine, it's probably not *wrong with everyone else* [in a different voice], but, but, but (.) no thanks! In the shop-window there are nice clothes, you go and try on a marvellous coat, you afford it and it suits you and then, no thanks, I can do without. /.../ (Malin: you don't want to adjust, not give up...?) No, but why should I lower mine... needs or demands or something? A certain standard, I may be isolated. I am not curious, I haven't looked or something, I have not... in one way I have had mine. And I know how good it was and I know how wrong it can go... (Katalin:5)

Katalin let her deceased husband and their beautiful relationship, be an excuse for not finding a reason to adjust her way of living to someone else. A relationship does not counterbalance sacrificing parts of life such as independence and the opportunity to be yourself as original as you want to, to listen to yourself and to see to your own needs and wants.

### 6.5.4 Adjustments to a partner

Through their experiences they know that relations demand adjustments. The younger imagine, if their lives only had been different or they themselves had been different, maybe it

would have been easier to work couplehood and family life out. They believe in the capacity of romantic love and pure relationships.

It's hard figuring out how it will work to live together all the time, every day. To come home and don't have a room where you can be alone. I'm glad I've learned that I think it's difficult. (Ville:8)

Though, while Giddens writes about pure relationships as a living reality, these participants talk about it as an imaginary state. They have to change and adjust themselves in order to make it work. They want the luxury of being lazy and undisciplined. In all interviews, except for Lena's, there is a persistent talk about being able to throw their clothes wherever they stand and do the dishes whenever they want to, and not because someone else wants them to. They want to take care of themselves instead of compromising with a partner. It is practical, though Helen thinks it may be too good.

No one cares if I throw my jeans on the carpet, no one complains, or if I do the dishes tomorrow instead of tonight. On the other hand you have to clean everything by yourself. But it is always practical not to need to, or comfy not to have to take someone else into account. Maybe even too comfy 'cause I don't need to take *anyone* into account... (Helen:10)

They believe in love as the incitement that will bring them and their lives to change in order to engage in a relationship. They are reluctant to make this change by themselves. All participants view satisfaction as living their lives as they do, while Helen, Johan, Ville and Lena also exhibit wishes for a future partnership, but contrary to Reynolds' and Wetherell's (2003) shortage of available positions, I would rather say as Trimmerger (2005:216), that it has more to do to with unidentified culturally in-between categories. Hence, it is possible to have positions and identities that do not fit into the dichotomy between single and coupled. They are still somewhere in the intersectional matrix of normative nuclear familism.

## ***6.6 Children and parenthood***

Time is running out to become a parent, but while it is more a question of having a child for Helen, Johan and Ville have to find a partner in the first place. However, their lives are filled with happenings, work and activities and their decisions concern the immediate future.

### **6.6.1 Children as belonging and prolonging**

However, to have children is a big issue, at least for Helen, who imagines what she might miss if she decides not have any children.

I don't know, it's more a fear of being alone in one's later years, you know... somehow, it's... Children means family, when you... both when you have the children at home but also later when they have families of their own and and you get grandchildren, then it is sort of a family there. And if you don't have any children, then it is.. [making a sound]. (Malin: You are on the outside?) Yes, then you are on the outside. My older brother lives in Farawaytown otherwise I could have...

(Malin: been there more often?) Yes, sneaking on his family. Now I hope for my sis. [laughter]. And it is good, 'cause her boyfriend won't move far away. But it is nothing I want now, it's more, it's more that, when you are older, that you maybe regret, that you stand alone. (Helen:11)

Helen does not want to have children right now. She would rather relate to coming nephews or nieces. But soon she has to decide whether to have children or not. She reasons about the necessity of making up her mind before time run out.

It's more recently that I have started to wonder: *Hmm, do I want to have children or not? /.../* That's what, or I never thought of that before. And now it's highlighted by a two years older friend who tries to have children, but had miscarriages and is now starting to panic, maybe it's too late! *Too late for what?* Very naïve, I am. /.../ mostly I don't think of it, but what I think is that soon, soon I will just... *Now* I absolutely don't want any children but (.) will I wake up one day when I am 45 or 50 and wonder: *Shit, why didn't I do it?* That's what I think, not that I want children now, but a fear, or not a fear, a... (Malin: That you'll regret?) Yes, or that you wake up, or that you will regret when you're older. On the other hand I don't want to have it **now**. Besides, there has never been (.) time or a wish earlier, so I really don't know. (Helen:12)

Helen struggles with the demands of following a normal life course and normative nuclear familism. To diverge from these paths is a grave decision and she is anxious that she will regret later on.

After Katalin recovered from the crisis that the death of her husband and the lost custody of her child caused, she found that having a child just because she wanted to was selfish and irresponsible.

When I recovered, I was over 40 and then I thought it could be irresponsible to have a child with any person. (Malin: Because time was running out?) Because I had to have a child... What happens that day, when I, and the child is a teenager, and I say *Why did I ever had you?* I want to spare the child that and especially me myself. I am not at all happy not having children, but I have give (.) quite a lot to young people, since I have stayed in this occupation for 40 years, so I have had that. I have worked with every age and I am quite a good aunty, even granny-aunty, he will be ten next week and he accepts me, thinks I am quite okay. And that's good for someone he meets so seldom. (Katalin:6)

She has give vent to her longing for children through her work, through engaging in and supporting children in school and being an aunt and even grand-aunt.

That nobody has my genes, it is a sorrow for humanity [laughing]. No, but, at the same time ... I have not contributed to create a human being that is so faulty as I am, with all my problems. You know, bad nerves, bad sight, crummy toes and so on. Especially, to be such a difficult person as I am. Nobody can ever say they inherit my bad teeth or something. This is a caricature, but if not, I could cry myself (.) like inconsolable. But I am not the first one or the only one in the world, in history, who didn't have children, and I am not the first one or the only one who has been widowed at young age, and not necessarily got a substitute, so... (Katalin:7)

Katalin tries to share her pain with others in her situation, and caricatures her genes in order to handle the sorrow. To get a new man would to her mean to get a substitute. Katalin also lives by the device of couplehood as a lifelong commitment.

Neither Peter nor his only brother has children and he tells me that he has been asked about the extinction of his kin.

Any children won't happen here, but you never know. Some say: *but then you mean your family will die out now*. There are so many lunatics who have children anyway. On the other hand there haven't been so many serious relationships, so the thought hasn't appeared. (Malin: No) And no one has contacted me from the occasional connections I have had, so there has probably not turned out any there either. (Peter:6)

Children are something that happens, and that they happen is his last hope, since there have not been any serious relationships in his life. Earlier, he once imagined that either there should be lots of children or none.

I have never longed for becoming a father, so to speak, or to raise any children. (Malin: But what do children mean?) What their function is? *What function do they fulfil?* (in a different voice) [laughter]. Yes, when they changed the pension scheme, they have a function to fulfil! [laughter]. No, I don't know. To keep my genes alive, to continue the existence of the specie. (Malin: well) Strict biologically they do, don't they? (Malin: Yes, but socially then?) [Hesitating and thinking] I don't know. I have actually nothing against them as long as they mind their own business. No, but, certainly, they must exist, right? But I have, kind of, not understood what's fascinating about them, maybe that's why I don't have any children. (Peter:7)

He has an emotional and social distance when talking about children. He has sparse knowledge or experience of close relations, considering both children and adults. The shortage of experiences limits the way he can talk and feel about relations. Instead he centres his talk on themes about bodies and appearances and interprets personal changes as change in political values.

Johan has many contacts to children and youth in his work life and thinks he has a good life.

I would say: *Look – I have managed!* But on the other hand, you could say: *you sit here all alone with a lousy wage*. But, you know, well, it's about how happiness and life quality is defined. And... as long as I haven't been burned out and haven't needed to look for help, I consider I am, that I have kind of made it. Yes, I am happy, you know and I still like what I am doing, even if I have dreams of (.) becoming more financially independent, of course. It would feel good to find, to create a family and so on, of course, but what the hell – take it as it is! (Johan:6)

Johan is right in his statement that happiness and life quality has a definition. It is not only personal but must be approved by others to be valid. He redefines it in relation to health, independence and enjoyable practices, while rejecting demands on family creation and expectations of a good income.

The talk of losing one's genes indicates that the phenomenon children is constructed biologically and evolutionarily and has meanings that are hard to avoid. In a discussion of wonderful relations to children, Ville suggests adoption as a choice, but regrets it immediately.

In one way I feel, sometimes I get amazed that people think children are such a big part of themselves, that they are a prolonging of themselves, but they aren't. They become different persons that you build together ehm... and that must be what's fantastic, that journey. /.../ I wouldn't see it as a failure if I didn't get the opportunity to send my genetic code into the future. I believe we have this time right now to leave one's mark on and it's not for sure that you leave your mark on your children in a positive way, who knows? Or? Mine at least. You can always adopt. (Malin: Would that be an alternative?) Well, it's a good deed for someone who doesn't have somewhere... but it's not the same thing, I think. (.) There still is a connection, a genetic connection, oops, now I erased that it wasn't a prolonging of myself. (Ville:9)

At the end Ville himself finds the contradiction in his talk and the wish of having children of his own appears. It seems to be important to have children of one's own flesh and blood, when imagining one's own children.

### ***6.7 Summing up the longing for couplehood and children***

These single living participants claim that they like living by themselves. They arrange their lives in comfortable and enjoyable ways. They fulfil themselves at work, they fulfil their need of relations by practicing friendship or family bonding, and they satisfy their longing for children through work with children or through connections with sibling's children. However, some want to reach closeness and soul mates, though they are not sure if they are willing to invest what is required to reach this stage.

They have embodied several discourses of desires. They have to relate to discourses of couplehood and normative nuclear familism, but also to discourses of independency. They feel the contradictory desires and struggle to solve the competing demands by different arguing, drawing upon different resources. However, outside and in relation to the discourse of normative nuclear familism, men and women seem to be on equal footing, though fulfilling it disclose gender differences. Age and embodied experiences from couple relations or family in relation to the normative life course, seem to be the basis of the participants' reflections. The two youngest, Helen and Johan, seem to still be able to push the decision into the future, while middle aged Ville and Lena, already are in this future stage. They have not yet succeed in doing couplehood and family life correctly, and have to continue trying. Having failed to fulfil several adult obligations, Peter experiences a marginalisation that seems to confuse him and keep him out of most social relations. Hans and Katalin made family the correct way once, and can therefore easier resist further attempts.

The decision-making process about having children or not is stressed in Helen's and Katalin's stories. They know that having children is in their power and ability, and that the decision is theirs. In the childless men's talk, children are somewhat more abstract and they do not talk

about children in terms of decisions. To get a child, the men primarily need to get a partner. Not until they are coupled, the question of children seems to arise.

## **7 Concluding Discussion**

Most of my participants discuss their single status as comfortable and delightful. Even though some are divorced or widowed they do not use this experience as an explanation for their single living. Instead they express it as their own desire (except for those in their 40s), though still they hold the possibility open for an eventual partner (except the older). They contrast their wish for living by themselves with the problems they find in adjusting their lives to someone else's, as they must in a relationship. Their stories indicate that all three women and two of the men are deeply embedded into family practices. Those who work with children appreciate these relations. All (except for Peter) engage in their work out of interest, for money and for social relations. Work activates them and gives acknowledgements, social connections and belonging. They also have a network of friends that consists of a mix between single and couples, though these relations seem to be within their own gender. Further research is needed about friendship relations between men and women in order to better understand the pressure of heterosexual couplehood and normative nuclear familism.

Some of the participants have experiences that counteract the romanticism of couplehood. They have experiences of couplehood as threatening to their health and wellbeing, to their child or to the relations with their parents, and also to their own habits and practices. The question arises: Why bother about finding a partner? The discourses of coupledom and normative nuclear familism affect both men's and women's lives. In their single living they seem to be de-gendered somehow, their gender is not explicit in their thinking about getting a partner or not. I consider this to be due to couplehood and normative nuclear familism being of equal importance for men and women. Even though their rewards and costs are somewhat different, the desire to meet a partner differs more by age, or experiences, than by gender in my material.

The participants' own experiences of life influence how they understand themselves in relation to couplehood, family and children and the way they express their experiences in their life story. Helen and Johan, who are young and have never been involved in a serious relationship, have no experience enabling them to choose whether to couple or not. They seem to be young (and inexperienced) enough, to still be able to argue that meeting a partner

does not matter. Katalin and Hans have had their families and are older. They can refuse further relations. Lena, who failed in her womanly ascribed duty to solve the relations in her families, has to continue searching for new partners. Likewise, Ville, who backed out from his serious relationship at the last minute, is still confused and needs to solve that by looking for relationships. Peter has slightly different experiences, since women have not been available for him. He hardly considers they will be either. His lack of relational practices makes it impossible for him to talk about these subjects during the interview. According to Peter, his major problem is his exclusion from the labour market which creates a permanent economic setback. Not having an employment also interferes with his masculine expectations of career and breadwinning. The fact that he should be at the peak of his career now, considering his age, also causes him a lot of distress.

Applying an intersectional analysis, gendered, classed, ethnic and aged relations become most visible in employment and in relation to normative nuclear familism. In employment, as when well-educated Helen talks about her absence of work ambitions, I consider this to be a strategy to not challenge the male organisation code. Furthermore, in well-educated immigrant Katalin's story about the recommendation to work as a check-out girl, her gender and ethnic background become visible. In relation to normative nuclear familism, intersection with gender is visible when Hans' ex-wife still cooks and cares for him and in Lena's exposed position as a single mother, having to sort things out when the men leave. However, in my participants' talk about living by oneself, gender intersecting practices are not obvious. Just like Sara Ahmed, I do not "*begin with the categories race or gender as if they were things in front of me*" (Tuori & Peltonen 2007:259). Instead, I had this phenomenon of those living by themselves as the point of origin, trying to understand the processes that produce some kind of stigmatisation.

To be able to deal with the processes of deviation in the analysis of single living, I developed the concept of normative nuclear familism. The effects of normative nuclear familism become visible when interference with discourses of gendered practices and nuclear family on the one hand and in the singlism, devaluing single living and their family practices on the other. The strengths of this concept are that it can deal with nuclear family as a desirable discourse that intersects with gender, ethnicity, class and age. Furthermore, it acknowledges other kinds of family relations as family. It enables a re-interpretation of these practices and its devaluing understanding of them. These practices need to be disclosed and revalued as significant relations in social networks. Further research is required. However, the concept is not

designed to include the importance of friendship. Utilizing normative nuclear familism, I found that all but one of the participants, in this study, have embedded themselves in social contexts. They have friends, connections to children through work or relatives, and they practice family. Instead of the hegemonic nuclear family, they embody other constellations of family practices. They engage in their parents' lives, they engage in their siblings' families and in their nephews or nieces. Practicing nuclear family is usually time consuming and the possibility, or the need, to invest in siblings' families may be diminished. This indicates that those living alone can be seen as a resource to the others, but they can also be considered to choose to practice family life differently, giving priority to their wish of independence in single living, while having access to families of others, relations they more easily can choose to cherish or hold as a relational reserve.

All participants were not willing to label themselves as single. Those who were divorced or widowed used these labels in describing their identity, connoting higher status than being considered as an ever single. Some were hesitant to label their status. This may be due to the lack of middle positions, that there are no appealing or representative words to use.

I do not consider that single and couples or family are the only dichotomised positions available. Instead I emphasise that life can be lived in different but meaningful ways. My ambiguous material, I believe, shows how the participants deal with their different life circumstances and life events which give rise to a variety of different constellations.



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**Interviews:**

Hans, February 18, 2010

Katalin, February 2, 2010

Peter, March 9, 2010

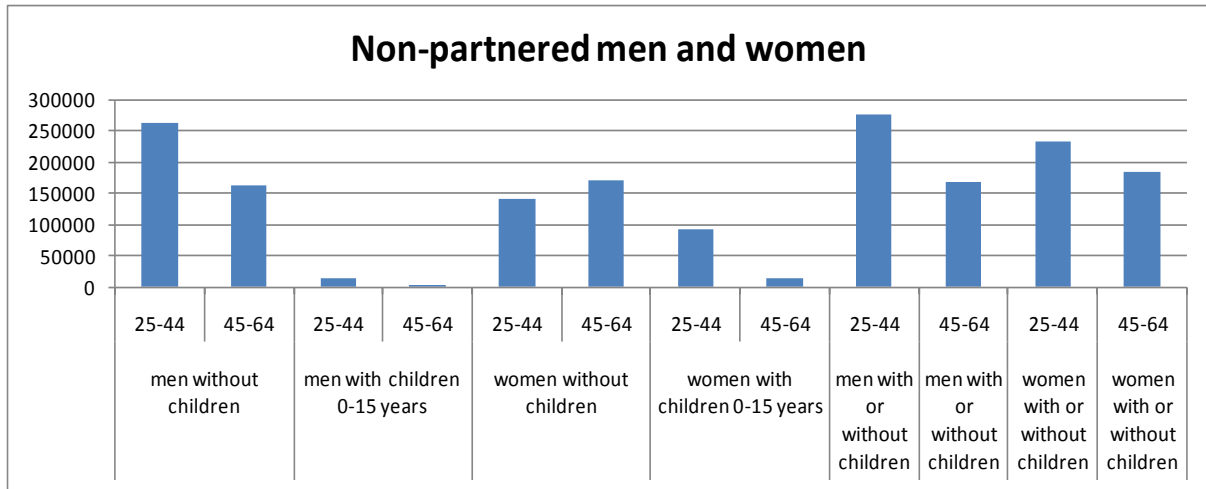
Lena, March 2, 2010

Ville, March 9, 2010

Johan, February 11, 2010

Helen, March 4, 2010

## Appendix 1



**Figure 1. Single living in Sweden in 1990 (FoB 1990, SCB)**

This is a figure of a temporary and static appearance of the Swedish conditions in 1990. Grown-ups still living with their parents but not partnered, are not included.

There is no Swedish statistics about living by oneself after 1990.



## **Appendix 2**

### **Life story interview – a translation**

#### **Today**

Please, tell me about yourself. Where, when and how you are. Describe where you are right now in life (living, work, interests, relations). Tell me about your family.

What do you work/did you work with? (when and what, subjects for rejoicing, difficulties) Education?

What do you like to do, what do you choose?

#### **Childhood and adolescence**

Family relations – parents and siblings. Can you give me a picture of how it was like to grow up in your family?

Relations during adolescence? Friends and romances? Did you go out with a partner?

#### **Adulthood**

Dreams – Expectations and ideas about adulthood when you finished school. What did you want from life? What did you imagined

- Choice of occupation
- Work life
- Partnership
- Children
- Family life

Important leisure activities or hobbies?

Have you had any romantic relationship earlier in your life? How was it? What did you experience? What was important for you in the relationship? What do you think about them now? Have you looked for Miss/Mr. Right? How? Still? What kinds of relations do you have, or what kinds would you like to have?

#### **To live be oneself**

How was it like to get single? To go from a relationship/family to become single? How did your social relations react?

How do you usually describe yourself (and your marital status)? When did you start consider yourself as single? Tell me about it. Was it your choice or a coincident (chance or choice)? Possibility to influence your life?

Tell me about your experiences from living alone. Easy things and harder? Weigh the pros and cons.

What does it mean today to be single? Ideas and ideals?

How have couplehood or singlehood influenced your, and others, understanding of yourself? How do you think the one or the other condition has influenced your practices in life (the way you live)? Wishes, choices, thoughts, dreams, actions...

What does it mean to have/ not to have children? Do you want children or not? Compare it to when you were younger.

What is important for you to feel fine? Friendship and closeness? Is it different for men and women to live alone? Other things that matter?

How do you think about the coming future for your personal status? Your remaining working life?/ the pension. Relations, new and old? Hobbies?

### **Reflecting questions**

How do you think of your life today? Compare with your earlier dreams. Do you regret something or are pleased with something? Re-interpretations of your experiences? Do you wish your life to be different?

Changed approaches? How would you describe how you have changed during life? The way you look at things. Have you developed new goals and other meanings in life since you became single?

Insights in life? Do you have any important negotiations and insights? Are the conditions in society good for single living people?

## Appendix 3

### Life story interview – in Swedish

#### Nutid

Börja med att berätta om dig själv. Var, när och hur du är. Beskriv var du befinner dig just nu i livet (boende, arbete, intressen, relationer). Berätta vem som ingår i din familj.

Vad arbetar du med/har arbetat med? Utbildning? (när och vad, glädjeämnen, svårigheter).

Vad tycker du om att göra, vad väljer du?

#### Uppväxten

Familjerelationer – föräldrar och syskon. Kan du berätta, så att jag får en bild av hur det var att växa upp i din familj?

Relationer under tonåren? Kompisar och förälskelser? Var du ihop med någon?

#### Vuxenlivets början och vidare...

Drömmar – När du gått ut skolan och hela livet låg framför dig, hur tedde det sig? Vad ville du ha ut av livet? Vad hade du för tankar och drömmar när du var ung, om

- yrkesval
- arbetsliv
- parrelationer
- egna barn
- familjeliv

Fritidsintressen som varit av betydelse?

Har du haft någon parrelation/familj tidigare i ditt liv? Hur utvecklades relationen/rna? Hur upplevde du dem? Vad var viktigt för dig i relationen? Vad tänker du om dem nu? Har du letat efter och funnit ”den rätta”? Hur? Gör du det fortfarande? Vad har du/skulle du vilja ha för relationer?

#### Att bo/leva ensam

Hur var det att bli ensamstående? Att gå från parrelation/familj till ensamstående/självbo? Hur reagerade omgivningen?

Hur beskriver du dig själv (och ditt civilstånd)? När började du först betrakta dig som ... *ensamboende*? Berätta vad som hände? Eget val eller tillfällighet (choice or chance)? Möjlighet att påverka ditt liv?

Vad är dina erfarenheter av att leva själv? Vad är lätt/svårt att göra? Fördelar och nackdelar med att leva själv?

Vad betyder det att leva själv i dagens samhälle? Idéer och ideal?

Hur har du upplevt att parhet eller singelhet påverkat synen på dig själv – din egen syn på dig själv och andras syn på dig själv? Hur tror du att det ena eller andra tillståndet inverkat på dina livspraktiker (ditt sätt att leva)– önskningar, val, tankar, drömmar, handlingar...

Vad betyder det att ha/inte ha barn? Önskar du barn eller inte? När var normen om tvåsamhet och familj stark?

Vad är viktigt för dig för att du ska må bra? Vad har du för önskemål/behov och hur tillgodoser du dem? Vänskap och närhet? Är det speciellt att vara just kvinna/man och bo själv? Eller är det annat som också spelar roll?

Vad har du för tankar och drömmar om den tid som kommer nu för dig själv? Ditt kvarvarande yrkesliv/pensionen och relationer, nya och gamla? Dina intressen?

## **Reflekterande frågor**

Hur ser du på livet idag? Om du jämför dina tidiga drömmar med hur livet blev, hur tänker du då? Är det något du ångrar eller är speciellt nöjd med? Reflektioner och (om)tolkningar av dina upplevelser? Önskar du att ditt liv skulle blivit annorlunda?

Förändrade synsätt? Hur skulle du beskriva att du har förändrats under livets gång? Har du förändrat ditt sätt att se på saker och ting? Har du utvecklat nya mål och andra frågor om livet och dess mening efter att du blev singel?

Insikter i livet? Vilka förhandlingar och insikter har varit och är nu av betydelse? Har samhället ställt upp och stöttat ditt livsval?

## Appendix 4

### Interview excerpts in Swedish

Helen, Johan, Katalin, Ville, Hans, Lena och Peter i ordning.

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jag tror inte **jag** tänkte hur jag såg mig när jag var 40 år, var jag ville vara då, om jag skulle göra karriär eller ha familj och barn, så tänkte jag inte, utan det var mer . (5 s) /.../ För det är det normala, att det blir så, att man lever i en parrelation och har barn och tänker att man har lilla vovven. Man tänkte att det är så det är då. Jag tror inte jag tänkte att det är så jag vill ha det. (Malin: Det blir?) Ja, så är det, det blir så. Men så har det inte blivit (.) ännu. Men, jag tror inte **jag** tänkte på hur jag ville ha det. Man tänker på vad man vill göra härnäst. /.../ (Malin: Det har hänt en del?) Det har hänt saker hela tiden, som gjort att det inte blivit långtråkigt, eller att man börjat fundera på nåt, att usch, så här vill jag inte ha det. Samtidigt vill jag nog ha det som jag har det, nu. (Helen:1)

Och alla de börjar ju få barn nu, eller har fått och har små knattar. Och, men nej, det vill inte jag. Helt plötsligt börjar man bli en outsider, det har man inte varit tidigare. Förstår du vad jag menar, att man helt plötsligt inte längre passar in längre. Eller inte passar in, det är inte det, utan det är... jag vet inte hur. för det är inte så att jag sitter och funderar, hm, vill jag ha barn eller inte, det är bara ibland man tänker. Men vänta! Snart måste jag göra ett aktivt val. (Malin: Är det barn du tänker på?) Ja, det är väl det som tickar, där är väl där det finns en tidsbrist. (Helen:2)

Men sen så de flesta middagarna, så är det fler som är . singlar liksom, eller . så kommer de själv för att partnern är på en annan fest eller gör nåt annat eller är upptagen, men jag har inte varit på en sån här "äkta" parmiddag. [En vän] berättade att hans, många av hans kompisar har barn, och han var bjuden på nyår hem till några par med barn. Och då kände han sig väldigt bortkommen, de sitter och pratar om blöjor (laughter). (Helen:3)

min pappa blev sjuk, så .. först gick jag och tvekade den våren i S, han blev sjuk i juletid, precis efter jul. Så skulle jag flytta hem för att vara stöd för honom. Sen dog han på sommaren. Jag kom hem på sommaren, tog ut all semester jag hade, sen när han dog, så bara, / ... / Och sen efter begravningen stack jag ner och jobbade det året, ett år där nere. Så gick jag och tänkte, men det var rätt svårt för mamma och syrran. / ... / Det funkade liksom inte. Morsan ringde och var rätt förtvivlad, för att **det** funkade inte, hur skulle man göra det. (Malin: Med huset, eller?) Ja, både med huset och med ekonomin. (Malin: Vände hon sig till dig?) Ja. Hon har en tendens att förstora upp allting. Allt som kan bli ett problem blir ett problem. Det är liksom redan ett problem. Plus att lillsyrran inte mätte bra. Så då tänkte jag att det skulle vara så mycket enklare att hjälpa till om, man kände sig så hjälplös när man var därnere. Man kunde inte bara komma hem och byta en glödlampa. Nu var det ju inte nåt så enkelt, men om man bodde nästgårds, så var det bara att svänga in. Så gick jag och tänkte på det och gick och sade upp mig utan att säga något till mamma och lillsyrran. Så slutade jag jobbet i början på maj, köpte en flygbiljett och åkte hem, sen ringde jag på dörren. / ... / Morsan pratade i telefon, så hon bara, *Är det Helen?* Jag tror hon blev rätt tagen när jag kom hem. (Helen:4)

att plugga, det var självklart att det skulle man göra. Det hade jag tänkt när jag var liten, då var det ont om pengar hemma och... Det blev fel när de byggde huset, det var stora lån, mycket skulder och det var ont om pengar helt enkelt, ja, det blev bråk . om pengar ibland. Då vet jag att jag tänkte jag ska ha ett jobb så att jag aldrig behöver oroas för pengar. /.../ Så jag bestämde mig väldigt tidigt att nä, men jag vet jag satt och tänkte och sen var det så självklart (Helen:5)

... mitt jobb fyller min vardag, väldigt mycket, både vad gäller tid, och även utanför jobb. (Malin: Hur då? Jobbar du hemma, menar du?) Ja, jag tar gärna med mig nåt hem och läser för att jag tycker det är intressant, eller för att jag, eller om det är nåt man inte kan släppa. / ... / (Malin: Så vad har du för mål i livet?) Jag har inga mål. Utan för mig händer bara saker. Det... jag har inget mål och inga ambitioner. (Helen:6)

Och nu, nu har jag . absolut ingen . tid liksom. Om jag skulle ge en annan person mer av min tid liksom, så vet jag inte riktigt vilken tid det skulle vara liksom. (Malin: Vad du skulle dra in på?) Ja. (Malin: Relationer tar tid). Och speciellt i en början. Jag kan tänka mig att om man har levt i en parrelation och känner varandra väl och har varit ihop länge, att då finns det mer . tolerans mot... Då finns det en trygghet i relationen och man behöver inte vara ihop jämt, utan man kan leva och ha sina aktiviteter och jobb och så finns det en gemensam grund. Jag har

svårt att tro att det skulle finnas någon som skulle acceptera en i början om: *Torsdag om två veckor, passar det?* Liksom, jag vet inte... (Helen:7)

Om man hade haft ett tråkigt jobb, och sen när man slutar, så släpper man allting, då... hade man haft mer tid över, mer, både liksom fysisk tid eller reell tid och mer tanketid, alltså tid att fundera över sin livssituation och vad man vill med livet, då kanske man hade börjat.. då skulle man kanske haft mer tid till.. till nån annan att tänka på... (Malin: Om du inte hade haft intresset för ditt jobb, menar du och då, kl 4 åkt hem och satt dig?) Ja, då hade jag... och även på jobb kanske, om du hade haft ett jobb där du sitter och monterar en liten grej och inte behöver använda skallen så mycket, då hade man kunnat sitta och tänka på vad du gjorde igår, och vad man ska göra ikväll eller vad du ska göra i helgen. Då skulle du ha, då hade du haft mer att fylla skallen med. (Helen:8)

Men att ha en relation bara för att ha en relation, det tror jag blir mer . efter [she ends her athlete career], när man börjar få lite mer tid, när man börjar känna sig ensam, att nu vill jag dela livet med någon. Men det är så jobbigt att bo med andra (viskande). Jag trivs väldigt, väldigt bra själv. (Helen:9)

Det är ingen som bryr sig om jag slänger jeansen på mattan, det är ingen som klagar, eller om jag diskar imorgon istället för ikväll, samtidigt måste man ju röja allt själv. Men det är alltid praktiskt att man inte, eller **bekvämt** faktiskt att inte behöva ta hänsyn till nån annan. Till och med lite för bekvämt. För jag behöver ju inte ta hänsyn till någon... (Helen:10)

Jag vet inte, det är väl mer en rädsla för att man blir ensam på äldre dar, alltså... På nåt sätt så är ju... barnen betyder ju familj, när man.. dels när man har barnen hemma och sen även när barnen får egna familjer och och man får barnbarn, så då blir det liksom en familj där. Och har man inga barn så blir det liksom helt... [ljud] (Malin: Är man utanför det?) Ja, så är man utanför det. Min storebror bor i J, annars hade jag kunnat, (Malin: vara mer där?) Ja, snylta på hans familj. Nu står hoppet till lillasyster. Hahah. Och det är bra, för hennes kille, han kan inte tänka sig att flytta härifrån. Men det är ingenting som jag vill nu, det är mer nog, det är mer att när man blir äldre, att man ångrar sig, att man står själv. (Helen:11)

Det är mer nu som jag har börjat fundera *hmmm, vill jag ha barn eller inte. /.../* Det är sånt som, eller **jag** har inte tänkt på det innan. Och nu kommer det upp så här, från en kompis, som är två år äldre, som försöker skaffa barn, som fått missfall och hon börjar ju få panik över att det kanske är kanske för sent. *Vadå för sent?* Väldigt naivt sådär. /... / För det mesta funderar jag inte på det, men det jag tänker på, att snart, snart så kommer jag bara.. **Nu** vill jag absolut inte ha barn, men . kommer jag att vakna upp när jag är 45 eller 50 och undra, *shit, varför gjorde jag inte det?* Det är **så** jag tänker, inte att jag vill ha barn nu, utan en rädsla, eller inte en rädsla, en.. (Malin: Att du kommer att ångra dig?) Ja, eller att man vaknar, eller att man ångrar sig när man är äldre. Samtidigt så är det inget jag vill NU. Det har aldrig funnits . tid eller vilja tidigare heller, så, jag vet inte riktigt. (Helen:12)

jag hade nog ingen klar bild liksom över, av hur det skulle se ut när jag blev äldre, om jag skulle ha barn eller . eller inte. /... / Fast samtidigt, nu gissar jag bara, men det kanske var.. en själv.. alltså man tänkte inte på det, men det var klart att man skulle ha fru och barn och ett jobb, men . eller jo, för man tänkte knappast på motsatsen, att nej, jag kommer inte ha fru, jag kommer inte ha barn, utan det var nog mer en självklarhet att ja, man bildar väl familj så småningom, kan jag tänka mig. Men jag kan inte minnas att man gick så att man hade funderingar att jag ska ha två barn och jag ska bo där och jag ska jobba med det, inget så bestämt har jag inget minne av att de tankarna fanns... (Johan:1)

Jag har ju mest yngre kompisar, jag umgås inte sådär jättemycket med folk i min egen ålder, utan det är ju mest,... när jag umgås... när jag går ut och dricker öl, när jag liksom är på tävlingar, så är det mest med yngre människor, även om de nu också börjar komma upp lite i och bli lite äldre, så det är väldigt blandat. Jag har en umgängeskrets som är från 18-19 och upp till min egen ålder, såklart, jag har ju kompisar från min gamla klass fortfarande som jag umgås med. /.../ Sen så har jag, det som gör att det känns rätt så lugnt är, tror jag är att jag har ganska många som är i **exakt** samma situation som jag är. Jag har väldigt många bra kompisar upp i [another town] som är [athlete]tränare och som är singlar, precis som om det gått spöke i det ungefär. Samtidigt som jag har gamla [athlete]kompisar som har börjat gifta sig och skaffat barn. Jag tror att det hade varit värre om man hade varit, känt att *shit, alla hade gift sig och alla har barn – vad håller du på med?* Men nu är vi, nu har jag så stor umgängeskrets, jag tror det är jätte viktigt, alltså det är nog en viktig faktor att jag... jag känner mig hemma ändå, det känns inte som om jag är konstig.. utan vi är ett stort gäng som.. som trivs fortfarande, även om det då såklart blir fler och fler som hittar par och skaffar barn. (Johan:2)

(Malin: Har du någon kontakt med honom?) Ja, jo det har jag. Brorsan bor i Ö nu, har bott i S en längre period med sin tjej och har fått sitt första barn. Jo vi träffas ju minst ett par gånger per år. Firade jul med dem, så att eh visst träffar jag dem. (Johan:3)

Ehm och jag intalar mig också att jag, det är kanske ren självförnekelse, jag vet inte men, jag är hellre ensam liksom . än och . panikartat ska hitta någon. Jag är inte den som, Det finns jättemånga typexempel på de som inte klarar att vara ensamma, som bara går från ett förhållande till ett annat. Men det har jag inte.. Jag har inga problem att vara **ensam** så. Samtidigt så . känner jag att jag är nog ändå... klart att jag vill ha familj liksom och träffa någon och skaffa barn och så vidare, men inte till vilket pris som helst. Det är inte livsviktigt. Det är det inte. Så att vara singel är väl att... det är klart att sen... ska man då hitta någon så gäller det ju.. det gäller att röra sig i rätt miljö för att träffa likasinnade. Och där är jag nog lite i fel miljö just nu. Det är svårt, jag får väl börja i någon kennelklubb eller nåt. Haha (Johan:4)

(Malin: Om det nu inte blir så att du hittar nån, bildar familj och får barn och så... för du ger inte upp vad som helst för en relation...?) Nej, fast ja, det kanske jag gör, man vet ju hur det är när man blir kär. Då kan man ändra på rätt så mycket, tror jag, så jag tror att det gäller att hitta någon som man faller för.. (Malin: som man vill satsa på?) Ja, om man går tillbaka till mitt tidigare förhållande då, så var jag nog inte beredd att göra det av olika anledningar, för det var för . stor risk liksom, stor åldersskillnad . och lite så, men om jag skulle hitta nån i... om jag skulle hitta nån som, det här . kan bli nåt, då tror jag att jag . är beredd att satsa liksom, satsa lite grann helt klart. (Johan:5)

Jag, jag skulle vilja säga att titta - jag har ju klarat mig. Men samtidigt skulle man kunna säga att du sitter ju här ensam med en pisselön. Men liksom, ja, det handlar om definitionen på lycka och livskvalitet. Och.. Så länge jag inte har gått in i väggen eller behövs söka hjälp, så är anser jag är, jag har lyckats liksom, ja jag är lycklig alltså, jag trivs fortfarande med det jag gör. Även om jag har . drömmer om att . bli lite mer ekonomiskt oberoende, såklart. Det hade varit skönt, självklart hitta, bilda familj och såhär, men vad fan – ta det lite som det kommer. (Johan:6)

Och då var det alltså vänner, eller folk, det var flera, såna äkta par med eller utan barn, som tyckte om oss. / ... / Sen har jag förlorat en hel del [after her husband died], jag förstod inte, jag trodde det var mitt fel, för jag var ledsen, jag var otröstlig och så där. . Men fyra, fem år senare så ringer en utav de som jag då hade tappat kontakten med och ber mig att . att låta henne komma hem till mig på en **heldag**, bara hon och jag. Och så kommer hon och då säger hon att *jag har nåt att erkänna, och jag måste be om be om ursäkt. Du vet, när du blev ensam, så blev du dubbelt ensam, eftersom, vi hade också liksom slutat.* Och då ville det sig så att, mannen, eller, hennes man kom från jobbet och sade *Åh har du ringt Katalin har du ringt Katalin, hur har hon det?* När de träffas är det två platser som inte är besatta. Då har **hon** i sin tur .. tyckt att jag är plötsligt . **rival**. För hennes man plötsligt **har** . plats för mig. Och sen har de här tjejerna snackat om det : *ska hon va så...* ja, alltså plötsligt. Och det har jag senare erfart att en del, skilda kvinnor och män med för den delen, men skilda kvinnor har också upplevt, plötsligt när jag kom till middag med min **man** så var det okej, men när jag kom ensam, då var jag udda och då konkurrerade jag med värdinna eller någon annan . för när vi sitter och konverserar då ska värdinna in och bära och lyfta och allt det där, och du är här och konverserar och är lite sådär fågelkvitter, kvitter. Och hon som var min vän, alltså.... En människa är, säkert skulle jag vara likadan alltså, ragata va, men förstår du aha? (Malin: Mm). /.../ Jag bjöd de till de här stora grejorna, men när det var hos mig så var det alltid de här tonerna, *ock, ack, oj, varför*, det var ändå sorgearbete, det var en enorm saknad. På det sättet har jag förlorat det gänget där, men jag har skaffat mig andra bekant, som jag träffade på söndagarna, på golfbanan. Jag har inte spelat golf, men jag var en väldigt bra caddy. (Katalin:1)

Jag vet inte om det skulle vara likadant om jag inte var ensam, men jag tror inte att jag skulle ha dem i andra, eller femtielfte hand, om jag hade mina egna barn skulle de säkert vara i första hand, men de skulle inte vara i första hand, utan de skulle vara i samma situation som jag är, om jag hade nån. Men jag tror aldrig jag skulle ha mindre för mina föräldrar, för de har inte fått **för** mycket. Visserligen har det varit så att **all** min fritid, men.. om det inte var krig, skulle det vara helt annorlunda. Jag skulle åkt dit, men på blixervisit och kanske inte varje lov, utan varannan ledighet, men nu är jag där. Det tar mig tid, men jag får väldigt mycket tillbaka. Nu har jag bara honom [pappan] och det är bara vi två. Hur det är i morgon vet jag inte. (Katalin:2)

(Malin: ... när det nu inte blev familj, när mannen dog och när det inte blev nåt barn, har du då försökt hitta andra **mål** i livet då?) Jag tror att målet är att leva livet och, eller . jo. det var att se till att mina föräldrar och mina syskon får mer ut av mig, när de ändå har mig och när jag inte har det andra och när jag ändå har de. Det var målet, att bli syster och att bli dotter, mycket, mycket mer. Okej, dotter och syster har jag alltid varit, men

trots allt var jag dotter och syster på andra sidan Europa. Och sen efter, blev jag närmare, oftare. Det blev . deras vardag blev viktig för mig, även före kriget. /... / det var de som var först i mina tankar, i mina planer och i mina göromål och så där. Och sen **är** de ju min familj. De är min familj. Jag vet att de är släkt, men de är min familj. Både mamma och pappa och sen mina syskon och deras familjer. /... / Det är ju möjligt att jag har odlat, utvecklat genom att det blev.. /... / Men när jag tänker på mig själv, då tänker jag på mig själv i relation till dem. (Katalin:3)

... men kassan på snabbköpet, jag vet inte hur man gör. *Ja, men du lär dig!* Jaha, men vänta. /... / *Om dig vet vi att du är pålitlig.* Fan heller! Fan heller! Då sade jag: *hit med jobblistan, jag hittar* [tre kommuner]. Jag sökte alla tre och [Distant town] ringer först och vill ha mig. /... / Jag jobbade heltid i ett par läsår, så fick jag det här med 40 % med löftet att jag skulle få mer. /... / Jag behövs på skolan, men jag är lik förbaskat bara anställd på 40 % och det tycker jag är skamligt. **Men**, jag är i den situationen att jag inte kan vara stolt och bara ge fan i allt, utan jag tycker att jag måste, om jag ska ha någorlunda ro med mig själv, så är det att gilla läget. Jag lider inte mer än att jag njuter av att arbeta. Men det skaver (Malin: jo det förstår jag) det gör det. I och för sig, säger man *varför ska du ha det? Du är ju gammal, du kan ju trappa ner* och allt det där och jag lider inte nöd, men.. jag kan och vill jobba fortfarande och ett och annat gör jag bra, så det är dumt att inte jobba. Samtidigt har jag på grund av att jag har familj eller.. de mina... på Balkan, som inte har det så bra som jag har det. Jag har tagit på mig att hjälpa till där, men det är inte första, utan det är den där anständigheten som samhället ska uppvisa mot den grupp av människor som jag hör till, det är alltså – äldre kvinna (.) med utbildning. Det berättar ingenting om att jag kommer nånstans ifrån, för det är inte det som... det vägrar jag tro på, utan det är äldre kvinna som är i den situationen. (Katalin:4)

(Malin: Din man gick ju bort rätt tidigt, du har inte haft nån annan relation?) Jag har haft ett par relationer, men antingen kom de i otid, eller så var jag för kräsen, eller jag vet inte, det bara blev . inte något som var .. jag har haft en relation under några år, men inte så att jag delade bohag eller nåt, utan särbo kallades det. Men sen blev det inte nåt. Jag vet inte... kan hända också att jag är kräsen, men jag vet inte. Kan hända att jag hade mina föräldrar i kris, som jag prioriterade då, när det visade sig att det inte . accepterades, då tyckte jag inte att jag skulle offra föräldrarna. Och sen är det också så här att.. det är härligt att . få träffa någon som . passar en. Det är det finaste, men sen därefter när du förlorar det, då kan det vara en förbannelse. (Malin: Vaddå? Hur då?) För att det är väldigt få som kan komma dit. Uppnå så här. Och så nöjer man sig inte med hälften eller halvdant. Det var kanske, jag vet inte, . det är säkert mina, det är säkert inte så att *det är fel på alla andra (med förståll basröst)*, men, men, men . nej tack. Det finns ju så fina grejor i skyltfönstret, du går dit och provar en kappa som ser fantastisk ut, du har råd och den passar, och sen.. nej tack, jag avstår. /.../ (Malin: Man vill inte anpassa sig, inte ge upp..?) Nej, men.. varför ska jag sänka **mina..** behov eller krav eller nånting. En viss standard.. kan hända att jag är (.) isolerad. Jag är inte nyfiken, jag har inte gått och sökt, jag har inte... På ett sett har jag haft mitt. Och jag vet hur bra det var. Och sen vet jag hur snett det har gått ... (Katalin:5)

när jag blev frisk var jag över fyrtio och då tyckte jag att det kunde vara oansvarigt att bara skaffa sig barn med vem som helst. (Malin: För att tiden höll på att ta slut?) Därför att jag ska tvunget ha barn.. Vad händer den stunden, den dagen då jag och då barnet är tonåring och så säger jag *”varför har jag skaffat dig”* det ville jag förskona det barnet, men framförallt mig ifrån. Jag är inte **alls** glad att jag att jag inte har barn. Jag har gett då . en hel del till unga människor, då jag har stannat hos dem i 40 år, i yrket, så jag har haft den där. Jag har jobbat med alla åldrar och jag är en rätt så bra faster. Till och med gammelfaster, han fyller tio nu om en vecka och han accepterar mig, tycker jag är helt okej. Det är rätt så bra för en som jag träffar så sällan. (Katalin:6)

Att det inte är någon som bär på mina gener, är ju synd för mänskligheten hahaha. Nej, men samtidigt.. har jag inte bidragit att skapa nån människa som är så ofullständig som jag själv är. Som har alla mina problem. Du vet, man har dåliga nerver, man ser inte så bra, synen är inte som den ska, krokiga tår och sådär. Framförallt sättet att vara, att få vara så svår människa som **jag** är. Då får ingen säga att de har ärvt mig och brås på mina dåliga tänder, eller så. Det här är att karikera, men om man inte gjorde det, så skulle man kunna gråta sig . alltså otröstlig. Men eftersom jag inte är den **första** eller den **enda** i världen i livet i historien som inte hade barn, och jag inte är den första och enda som blev änka i ung ålder, och inte tvunget skaffade sig substitut, så... (Katalin:7)

syrran har haft några såna riktiga, det kanske varit såna riktiga skilsmäso-.. *ja, men kom hem till mig så kollar vi lägenheter*, så märker man så åker hon hem och sen några dagar senare har det gått över. Just det här att göra nånting, så tänker vi här vad som händer och lägenheter, du kan bo här. (Malin: Kolla upp alternativ?) Ja, men bara för att leva ut och ta det här beslutet, *shit, nu är jag på väg*. Det är nog rätt så bra att leva sig in i situationen, hur är det nästa vecka, när jag sitter här i min etta, kommer jag fortfarande tycka att det är roligt. Det är iaf mitt koncept. (Malin: Då träffas ni lite grann?) Ja, det gör vi, träffas någon gång i veckan iaf. Jag åker och hälsar på



Adam, min mamma, ja, det är väldigt praktiskt, hela min familj bor ju där nu. De enda som är i livet, de bor ju där. /... / Så, på alla hjärtans dag körde jag hem och hämtade min syrra, så gick vi och käkade middag och så körde jag hem henne efter tre timmar. Det tyckte hon var jätteroligt... (Ville:1)

Sen bodde vi tillsammans och hade det väldigt bra. Sen började vi få problem. Hon är sån som är väldigt såhär... inriktad på framtiden, medan jag är mycket i nuet. Jobbet var väldigt ansträngande. / ... / Vi planerade för framtiden, men jag tyckte inte det var så kul. (Malin: Vilka planer var det?) Flytta till större, skaffa hus och alla de här grejorna. Hon pluggade samtidigt som hon jobbade. Hon var alltid trött /... /, ville mer och mer sällan gå ut (.) tillsammans. Då blev det liksom såhär: *Tycker vi fortfarande om varandra?* Så hittade vi ett hus, /... / Sen när man flyttade dit märkte man att det var ingen skillnad över huvud taget. Och då.. rasade jag väl ihop rätt rejält. Tänkte *vad fan, vad är detta. Tycker jag fortfarande om den här människan? Hur kan jag må så dåligt?* Ehh, så det var ganska jobbigt. Ehh, Gick omkring som en zombie på jobbet, sades det. (Malin: mm). /... / Jag stod inte ut att vara här, utan sökte en övernattningslägenhet, bara för att stänga av och känna efter. Så satt jag där [ohörbart] och andades. Och det var jobbigt. *Jaha, jag vill vara här istället för där borta, det känns ju inte roligt.* (Ville:2)

jag älskade henne fortfarande, men kunde liksom inte, vi kan inte leva såhär, hon... ja, just det, det hade jag glömt berätta. Just det. Hon hade börjat sluta med p-piller. Vi hade pratat mycket om hormoner och sådär. Men hon hade slutat ta dem utan att säga till eh och då blev det ju, jag har förskjutit detta. Det är lite som linjen i sanden. Okej, nu är det bara vi, men kommer det fler personer in i bilden, barn, då är det nog dags att avprioritera ”*åh, jag vet inte vad jag vill*”. ... och så har jag liksom . det var nog faktiskt ett av skälen, fast jag hade faktiskt glömt det. Just att jag tyckte det var jobbigt att vi inte hade en berättelse om det, men vi kunde kanske inte prata om det, alltså hon skaffade ju barn ganska så snabbt sen. (Malin: Men, ni hade pratat om att skaffa barn?) Nej, ingenting alls. (Malin: Men hormoner hade ni pratat om?) Ja, ur hälsosynpunkt. Men inte att hon skulle sluta och då tänkte jag . . . jag tänkte inte så mycket, men då tänkte jag *shit! Nu måste jag verkligen ta ett beslut här. Är det det här jag vill? Vill jag att den här ska vara mor till mina barn? Ska det vara så här alltid?* Det var nog en stor droppe som fick bägaren, den var ganska full här. (Ville:3)

(Malin: Vad var det du inte vill ha då?) Jag ville nog ... det **kändes** bara inte rätt. Jag ville ha mer glädje, mer liv, alltså mer liv. Inte ett projekt, utan ett liv. Och jag, liksom, jag är för familj och barn och allting, men det måste vara . rätt. Det får inte bara vara en assecoar. Det måste vara som en del av livet, liksom. (Malin: Mm, det ska ju kännas rätt). Ja, det kan vara en slump, jag undrar om inte det är bättre att det bara händer, man borde skaffa barn direkt, inte hålla på och vänta. /.../ ... det måste vara rätt. Men om någon helt plötsligt skulle bli med barn, då blir det bara att rota fram allt det där som är positivt, det blir säkert jättebra. (Ville:4)

det är så att man tar inte ett beslut på att leva själv, tror jag eller så pass länge, jag har ändå levt själv ganska länge utan ett fast förhållande, utan det är bara för att jag inte har träffat nån som jag känner att jag verkligen, man har velat, antar jag. Men de säger – *du måste försöka och ge det en chans*. Men om jag ska ge det en chans och jag inte är säker, då är jag rädd för att jag blåser någon igen. Nu går jag in i nånting, som jag inte är säker på, men hur fan kan man vara säker,. Så det blir en konflikt, för jag kan inte vara säker och inte riktigt, det går en tid, sen går jag såhär, njaäea. För att ju längre jag håller på, ju mer sårar jag någon när jag backar ut. (Ville:5)

Det är särskilt det mänskliga syndromet, att man saknar alltid det man inte har, tror jag, så känner jag i alla fall. Jag har börjat lära mig det nu vilket är jäkligt bra. Om man inte vet om att det är ett syndrom som påverkar en, då är det fan inte lätt. Då tror man att nähä, det var inte det här, nähä, det var inte det här, nähä, det var inte det här. (Ville:6)

Alltså, jag är ju själv nu. Jag träffade den här personen ganska nyligen, men... vi hörs ju inte mer än att.. hon jobbar kanske sent och vill ha sovsällskap.., liksom ja. /.../ Jag har kommit fram till att man faktiskt **inte** behöver leva med nån annan om man inte vill. Eller **jag** behöver inte det, jag har inte de behoven – tror jag nu när jag faktiskt träffar nån ibland. Och det är en jäkla skillnad, bara tanken på att man har nån, så behöver man inte träffa nån, eller om man inte har nån, som man inte träffar. *Men jag då? Ska jag alltid behöva sova själv?* sen när man träffat nån och sovit tillsammans med nån i tre dagar, så undrar jag: åh, tänk om jag kan få ligga själv nån gång. Det går så snabbt, så det skrämmer mig! Det är jättejobbigt. Jag fattar inte det. Det är läskigt. (Ville:7)

Jag har svårt att se hur det ska gå och bo ihop med nån hela tiden varje dag. Komma hem om man inte har ett rum, där man kan gå in själv. Jag är glad att jag har lärt mig att jag tycker det är svårt. (Ville:8)

På ett sätt känner jag, ibland blir jag lite förvånad på att folk tror att barn är en så stor del av dem själva, att det blir en förlängning på dem själva, men det är det ju inte. Det blir en annan person, som du bygger ihop ehm.. och det måste ju vara **det** som är grejen, som är det fantastiska, den resan. /.../ Jag skulle inte se det som ett

misslyckande om jag inte fick skicka vidare min genetiska kod in i framtiden. Jag tror vi har den tiden vi har just nu för att sätta vår prägel och det är inte säkert att vi präglar våra barn på ett positivt sätt, vem vet? (Malin: Mm). Eller? Mina i alla fall. Man kan ju adoptera. (Malin: Skulle det vara ett alternativ?) Nja, då gör man ju en god gärning för nån som inte har nånstans.. men det är inte samma sak, tycker jag. . Det finns ändå en koppling där, en genetisk koppling, eh, nu suddade jag ut det som handlade om att det inte var en förlängning av mig själv. (Ville:9)

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... min före detta fru fyller 60 (Malin: jaha) i juni och ville att jag skulle komma upp. Vi har blivit goda vänner, de första åren efter skilsmässan var det . väldigt kärvt, ett tag hade jag barnen och barnbarnen och allting. Men hon kom ner . för två veckor sen och hälsade på och lagade mat och fyllde frysen och så, (Malin: mm) så hon var jättesnäll (Malin: mm). Det jag känner är att jag är ensam, men jag har . mina barn och deras partners, och min före detta, sen ett par goda vänner, som jag åt lunch med idag. / ... / Sen har jag mina goda vänner, mina gamla goda vänner från England, så de ringer och hör av sig och skickar e-mail och så. Så jag har några som är intresserade utav mitt livs öde. (Hans:1)

De är ett sorts bevis för att man har lyckats med nånting i livet. Fostrat tre barn, (Malin: mm) och att de är jätteduktiga alla tre. Och att de är trevliga, duktiga på att laga mat, duktiga på att fostra barn, mycket mer involverad än vad jag var. Jag jobbade nog rätt mycket när mina var små. De är ju, de är oerhört duktiga. (Malin: Mm). (Hans:2)

... efter 1,5 år ungefär flyttade vi tillbaka till Sverige . och vi, hon väntade vårt första barn i samma sväng. Och det blev . det blev en omställning. (Malin: För dig?) För mig . total omställning, för jag fick . kroppsarbete, jag kunde inte svenska, fick ställa mig på löpande bandet, kunde inte språket och.. det nådde aldrig fram ... man hade mycket god möjlighet på den tiden, som invandrare, man kunde gå till folkhögskolan på ett år till exempel, man kunde läsa alla facetter [ohörbart] om livet i Sverige och språket och allting, men jag hade bara, jag var så tränad att man skulle jobba för att få in pengar, pengarna / ... / I Tyskland skulle mannen, traditionellt skulle mannen försörja familjen. Det var ju det som drev mig när jag kom till Sverige, att jag skulle ut och jobba. (Hans:3)

Det var värre än skilsmässan, att man var oskyldig. / ... / Jag var på en sån här grupp, för 50 och arbetslös, det fanns såna grupper. Och det fanns en gubbe där som var i 50 årsåldern som hade såna fantastiska utbildningar och erfarenhet och så, och han var arbetslös. Så jag tänkte – jag kan min bransch och inte ens det, jag är kontrollant. Det kände, det kändes . totalt depression i den här gruppen, (Malin: ja) så jag tänkte att jag måste göra nånting **själv**. Så jag tog kontakt med H kommun, så jag fick ett vik på förvaltningen ... (Hans:4)

Det måste ju kanske finnas en anledning bakom det, att jag vill, jag vill inte, jag vill bara ha en danspartners, att jag själv vill inte ha en fast kompanjon längre, (Malin: nej), så tror jag. Jag har haft erbjudande, alltså, men det är, jag har inte känt nån (.) lust med. (Hans:5)

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Men han tyckte ingenting var fel, allting var jättebra. Eller när han var arg åkte han till gymmet. (Malin: Berättade han inte sen?) Nej, han var bara (.) sur och ledsen och åkte och tränade och jag fick sköta allting och han åkte och tränade. Jag kände att detta kommer inte fungera, vi kommer inte att kunna fungera tillsammans. Jag lämnade honom i juni, när barnet var fem. (Lena:1)

Han hade vid ett flertal tillfällen sagt att *jag vill bo hos dig mamma. Det måste vi prata med pappa om, för det kan inte bara jag bestämma, inte förrän du är tolv. Vill du att vi ska prata med pappa tillsammans?* (Lena:2)

Han var tolv och började komma in i riktiga tonåren och gick emot [styvpappan] och drog inte jämt. /.../Och [the child] är ju då högljudd och tänker inte alltid, utan det bara kommer och fick fortfarande de här utbrotten. Och sen så . Vi köpte hus och flyttade in i slutet av mars, i maj säger min man att han vill skiljas för han står inte ut med mitt barn! Han klarade inte av att vara tonårsförälder... (Lena:3)

Han har fått veta att när han tar studenten på mitten av juni nästa år. Den förste juli (.) 2011, då flyttar min son hemifrån, för då är mitt föräldraansvar över. Jag älskar min son över allt annat, det gör jag verkligen, men han **måste** stå på egna ben. (Malin: Mm). Och hur han kommer att göra detta, det vet inte jag. Jag kommer att finnas där, men han kommer inte att bo här. Han måste hitta ett sätt att ta ansvar för sitt eget liv. . stå på egna ben. (Malin: Mm). För idag ser han mig som en en betjänt. Någon som ska göra allting för honom och det funkar inte. För några månader sen när vi diskuterade detta, så sade han. *Men mamma då är det faktiskt ditt fel . om jag . går*

*på socialen och inte har någonstans att bo. Då är det faktiskt ditt fel om jag går på gatan och tigger pengar /... / till sprit. Om jag blir alkoholist. Nej, säger jag. Det är inte mitt fel. Det är ditt val. Du väljer hur ditt liv ska se ut, du väljer och du får ta konsekvenserna för de valen.* (Malin: Han försökte göra samma sak som hans pappor...). Ja, vi pratar, vi har en ganska bra relation vi ryker fortfarande ihop, men han börjar se. Han tycker det är jättejobbigt att bli vuxen (Lena:4)

Jag jobbar idag som undersköterska med allt vad det innebär och jag jobbar även som taxichaufför, extra på helgerna. Jag kände när jag skilde mig att jag behövde en ny utmaning. / ... / Det är spännande att möta människorna. Jag kör mycket nätter. (Malin: Jobbar du heltid?) Nej det gör jag inte, jag jobbade heltid till aug-2009, sen fick jag gå ner till 75, just nu jobbar jag extra, ca 90 %. Det är mycket att hinna med men det är roligt. / ... / Mycket i mitt liv har handlat om att överleva. Jag tror att jag orkar därför att jag tycker det jag gör är roligt och dels för den här att, drivande av att vi har suttit i en situation, då jag studerade för många år sen, då jag vet vad det innebär att inte ha råd att handla hem mat och betala hyran. (Malin: Just att ha en marginal?) Marginal och marginal vet jag inte om vi har, men just att överleva. Jag har insett med åren vad en tonåring kostar, mycket och plötsligt. Han är inte i den här åldern att han köper vad jag försöker ge honom, utan han påverkas också av kompisar och även om han är väldigt tacksam för det han får, och hittar vi billigare alternativ, så kan han gå med på det. och matkontot ska vi inte tala om. /... / Vi har ett väldigt öppet hem och vi har många tonåringar hemma, allt från två extra till sex-sju extra. De kommer hem till oss och det är svårt att säga nej, men ibland måste jag. Det händer ju att de gör en raid i kylen och så. (Lena:5)

Han har fått en negativ syn på förhållanden. Han anser att han ”är mannen i huset” och har sökt någon som tagit kommandot, sökt någon utanför mig. I hans värld ska det vara kärnfamilj, men han är ändå stolt över mig och berättar för sina kompisar att jag är hans mamma. / ... / Fast jag är orolig. Känner att det onödigt att utsätta honom för det [män som lämnar]. Rädslan över att det inte ska fungera om personen lämnar oss. (Lena:6)

Jag har jättesvårt med relationer, jag är jätterädd att släppa in någon i mitt liv, släppa in någon för nära, för jag vet inte vad som ska hända. Och jag vet inte vad som ska hända och jag är rädd att de inte kommer överens med mitt barn, vad ska hända med det? Och det är inte okej, så då är det lättare att vara själv. (Malin: mm) (5 sec) Vi släppte faktiskt in någon. Jag träffade en kille, / ... / Första gången vi pratade med varandra, pratade vi två timmar i telefon. Första gången han bjöd hem mig på middag, pratade vi **14 timmar i sträck!** Vi kunde prata om alla saker och helt plötsligt efter ett par veckor, så bodde han i princip hemma hos oss. Han kom jättebra överens med barnet och han, han tyckte verkligen om honom. / ... / Men han bodde hemma hos oss i sju veckor och han tog del i vår familj, han *valde* att bli en del av vår familj. Och vi, vi, efter hand, jag vet inte hur han gjorde [för att ta sig in i vår familj]. på det viset, för vi är ganska så här försiktiga med förhållanden. Sen en dag, så går han en morgon och kommer inte tillbaka, då gick han tillbaka till sin före detta. (Lena:7)

Efter två år blev man väldigt populär bland företagen däromkring i Jönköping / ... / Sen så tyckte man det var roligt för pengarna, men sen klarade man inte tentorna, och då fick man ta studieuppehåll och då behövde man jobba. Det tog kanske lite väl lång tid från det att jag började tills att jag blev helt färdig. /... / sen skulle man jobba och det är ju lite att förklara varför det tog så lång tid. Jag fick kanske inte de bästa erbjudandena.. Det var ett litet företag som var placerat i [Village], och han visste om mig, innan jag visste om honom och han jagade mig. Tja, jaga och jaga, men headhunting. Och jag började väl där, det var väl då 88-89, så var jag placerad i [Village]/ ... / och flyttade hit hösten -90, hängde jag med företaget hit. Sen våren, sommaren efter, så kursade företaget. Jag hade det på känn då, för han fick ta lån för att kunna betala lönerna. Och det var i början då på den första lågkonjunkturen som kom där. Karriärmässigt var det inte så bra. (Peter:1)

Problemet med den utbildningen var att när jag var färdig, då var det ingen brist längre. Då var det problematiskt att hitta jobb. Jag hamnade på en yrkesskola och de som gick där de var absolut inte intresserade. Då fick jag då, då sökte jag jobbet i B och började där vårterminen 05. Gick där, det kunde bara bli terminsanställning. Så var jag där hösten 05 också, så var jag arbetslös våren 06, sen var jag tillbaka där 06/07, [på ett heltidsvikariat]. Men det var då de började dra in de bidragen från komvux. Jag hade ett rätt långt vikariat hösten- 07 på komvux på [Othertown], inte heltid förstås, och sen eh, mars- 08, måste det varit, då var jag i [Smalltown] på komvux, visserligen bara en månad. Men efter det har det inte blivit ett dugg. Det är snart två år sen jag jobbade. (Malin: Jaja). Och hur lyckas man med det? (Malin: Ja ja), Så länge kan man inte ha Akassa, tänker du? (Peter:2)

(Malin: Hur ser du på framtiden? Lite längre fram, när du blir pensionär. Hur tänker du då om livet?) Jaa... jag vet inte, som sagt. Jag tror jag får väldigt svårt att ta pension. Jag säger på skämt lite grand, när de där, särskilt då när hon jag brukar hjälpa med datorn säger, när hon ser mig röka. *Det är ju farligt, du kommer dö.* Det spelar ju ingen roll, för jag kommer inte få nån pension ändå. Jag har inte tänkt på det, hur jag ser mig själv. Och det har

inte varit nån dröm att man skulle jobba halvt ihjäl sig för att man skulle leva lyckligt de sista fem-tio åren då. Det var väl mer, *carpe diem*, fånga dagen, man lever i nuet. . (tveksamt) Jag tycker inte det är nån större mening att planera så där jättelångt in i framtiden, jag vet ändå inte hur det kommer se ut. (Malin: Nej, nej). Längre än en dag borde man kanske fundera, men flera år. (Malin: Nej, det är ju långt till pensionen.) 10 eller tolv om man ska jobba till 67. Hörde du att de blivit äldre, de som tar pension, hörde jag på nyheterna för några dagar sen. (Peter:3)

Jag tror att alla människor borde leva lite längre tid med sig själv för att uppskatta parrelationen mer /.../ Min mor hade väl hopp om barnbarn. Hahaha. Det vet jag iofs, nu när du säger det [om han känt av andras förväntningar], men de gångerna jag pratat med Louise, och också med Richard, då har jag fått den där frågan om kvinnorna. Ja, jag vet att de finns, men jag vet inte om de vet att jag finns (Peter:4).

Vi träffades några gånger och höll kontakt i flera år, men bägge två var lite så där. /.../ Varken hon eller jag var sådär jättesociala egentligen. /.../ Egentligen var det nog mer en vänskaplig relation än en romantisk relation. Jag visste liksom aldrig riktigt var jag hade henne, hon visste nog inte var hon hade mig, för ingen sade någonting eller nåt sånt direkt. Vi bara träffades sådär. Nackdelen var ju att hon var vegetarian. (Peter:5)

Några barn blir det väl inte här heller, men man vet aldrig. Några säger *men då menar du att din släkt dör ut nu då*. Det finns så många galningar som skaffar barn ändå. sen har det ju inte varit så många seriösa förhållanden, så då har tanken inte. (Malin: Nej). Och ingen har hört av sig till mig av de tillfälliga förbindelser jag haft, så det har nog inte blivit något där heller. (Peter:6)

Jag har aldrig haft någon längtan efter att bli far, om man säger så, och uppfostra nåt barn. (Malin: Men vad betyder barn?) Vad har de för funktion? Vad fyller de för funktion? Hahaha. Ja, nu när de har gjort om pensionssystemet, så fyller de väl en. Haha. Nej, jag vet inte. För släkten vidare, artens fortbestånd. (Malin: Jojo). Rent biologiskt har de väl det. (Malin: Men jag tänkte mer socialt). Njanjanja. Jag vet inte. Jag har liksom ingenting emot dem, så länge som de sköter sig själv. nej, självklart, de måste väl finnas. Men jag har liksom inte förstått tjusningen med dem, det är kanske därför jag inte har några barn. (Peter:7)