

**LIKE I AM THE KIND OF A BAD MOM WHO WANTED TO GO BACK TO WORK AND
HE IS THE MOST FANTASTIC DAD WHO WANTS TO STAY AT HOME**

**A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON HOW COMMON ATTITUDES AFFECT MOTHERS'
WELL-BEING IN THE FINNISH SOCIETY**

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SATU-MARIA ROERING

Student Number: 1901637

Åbo, Suomi

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Name: Satu-Maria Roering	
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Supervisor: Jan Svanberg	
Abstract:	
<p>The Finnish society is often described as a society where gender equality is on a high level. However, through these kinds of assumptions, the problems regarding, for example, gender equality and parenting often remain hidden. Social exclusion is a process of being unable to fully participate in the society. This thesis seeks to answer the question what characterizes Finnish mothers' experiences of social exclusion and how possible negative attitudes affect mothers' well-being in the Finnish society. By using social exclusion theory, this thesis seeks to shed light on how mothers in Finland are in a less beneficial position in, for example, the labor market and how the gender pay gap creates a loop where mothers find it difficult to escape their excluded position, as they are usually the parent who takes the majority of the parental leave. Moreover, the male breadwinner attitude in Finnish society still exists.</p> <p>The methodology used for the thesis is narrative methodology and analysis. Five Finnish mothers have been interviewed for the thesis and the main focus has been on their experiences regarding the labor market, gender equality and attitudes about motherhood. This thesis highlights some core issues regarding motherhood and gender equality in Finland. These core issues reside in labor market attitudes, work division in relationships and the male breadwinner attitude in general. The major argument in this thesis is that mothers are discriminated against in the labor market and common attitudes regarding gender equality and motherhood establish feelings of frustration and sadness in the mothers. The gender pay gap in Finland creates a loop where women take most of the parental leave and are, therefore, left behind in salary development. Moreover, the attitude persistent today is that women have the main responsibility for the children and for taking care of the home. Traditional gender roles are still persistent in the Finnish society.</p>	
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

From time to time, there is a lot of discussion in the media and by authorities that the birthrate has decreased in the Finnish society. In, for example, Hellstrand, Nisén and Myrskylä's article "All-time low period fertility in Finland: Demographic drivers, tempo effects, and cohort implications" (2020), the reasons for the decrease have been investigated. In their research, the authors learned that even though Finland is considered a country where gender equality is on an advanced level, it does not contribute to an increased birthrate. Mothers in Finland still do most of the domestic work and the group, not wanting children or wanting only one child, has grown. The decrease in the birthrate has been high in all age groups. (Hellstrand, Nisén, Myrskylä, 2020). According to Statistics Finland (2020), the number of children born in 2019 was so low that the last time the birthrate was as low was in 1868 during the year of famine and at the end of the 1830s (Statistics Finland, 2020). Moreover, the media demonstrate this phenomenon in a large scale. In an article about how Finland became the country of low fertility, published in *The Finnish Medical Journal*, Anna Rotkirch, the head researcher at The Family Federation of Finland also explains that the group of childless adults is growing in Finland, and the reasons lie in experiences of uncertainty and responsibility, which have to do with financial and mental responsibility (Rotkirch, 2020). According to Statistics Finland (2021), the birthrate increased in 2020 (Statistics Finland, 2021). Birthrate in Finland is also often discussed in the media. In an article about the birthrate and how the Finnish age distribution is balanced only due to immigration, the journalist Jesse Kuparinen (2021) explains that according to research, no conclusion can be drawn from this minor increase and the birthrate has been low for so long that no increase can compensate for the past decrease. (Kuparinen, 2021). As I have presented, the birthrate is a repeated topic in publications by authorities and the media.

The United Nations (2016) defines social exclusion in the following way:

"Although there is no universally agreed definition or benchmark for social exclusion, lack of participation in society is at the heart of nearly all definitions put forth by scholars, government bodies, non-governmental organizations and others... Overall, social exclusion describes a state in which individuals are unable to participate fully in economic, social, political and cultural life, as well as the process leading to and sustaining such a state." (United Nations, 2016:18).

I became a mother in November 2019 and *mamma* is the best title I have ever had in my life. I am not as tired as I assumed I would be and I do not feel as socially excluded, as I feared I would. Due to how motherhood is discussed, I thought it would be more difficult. The lack of participation that is mentioned in the UN definition of social exclusion was at the core of creating my feelings of uncertainty. Even if I did not feel as socially excluded as I feared I would, I noticed that I socialize mostly with other mothers, and I need to regularly speak to my mother friends about my feelings. I have minimized contact to those who I have felt I have not gotten any support from. I feel like I have been lucky to have been able to make these kinds of changes in my social circle and have needed the support of my family to be able to do so. I understand that this is not an option to everyone.

My motivation to write about this topic is, that as a new mother myself, I noticed how everyone around me seemed to have an opinion on how I should raise my child and be a mother, regardless of if they had children or not. People seem to have strong opinions, sometimes even stronger opinions, if they are not parents themselves. What hurt me the most, especially with a newborn, was the sayings and opinions of the people close to our family. For example, how I should feed my child was something people felt the need to let me know their opinion on. In my opinion breastfeeding is something extremely personal, and does not involve anyone else except the mother and the child. Sometimes the non-stop commenting even felt like it was done on purpose to hurt my feelings. This feeling changed as my child grew and I became more confident as a mother.

On one hand there are these opinions floating around in the society, but on the other hand I have met very little hostile behavior from strangers. I feel that I have mostly been greeted with politeness and have been offered and gotten help. I also feel that there is a change going on in the society regarding motherhood and social exclusion. I feel that the negative image could be shifting. However, now with social media, I feel that the mother role is still today formed to fit capitalism as social media exist only for capitalist reasons in the end.

I am curious if other mothers that are or are not socially excluded share my thoughts and feelings. In my thesis I will be looking at how mothers are treated in the Finnish society. I have interviewed mothers about their experiences on if, how, when and where they have experienced social exclusion and how that has made them feel. My hypothesis is the following:

Mothers that are otherwise socially active members of the society are also affected negatively of the discussion and criticism that floats around regarding motherhood.

An example of this is, for example, how a working mother can be regarded as selfish and not willing to spend time with her children.

The aim with my thesis is to raise awareness about motherhood and the attitudes surrounding it and how it affects mothers negatively in Finland. The aim is to create a better discourse around mothers and motherhood in Finland. In my experience, becoming a parent is stressful as it is and I feel that a new mother would need nothing but support in her new role. I feel that there is pressure from both the social circle and the healthcare.

1.2. Research question

Finnish mothers experience different forms of social exclusion. These may range from labor market discrimination to feelings of loneliness. These experiences are often not adequately discussed in research. My research question is:

What characteristics are there to Finnish mothers' experiences of social exclusion and how do possible negative attitudes regarding motherhood affect mothers' wellbeing in the Finnish society?

I am interested in the feelings that the mothers' experiences bring, because I believe that through that, we can come closer to the main reasons for social exclusion and why mothers experience it. Ben Highmore (2017) discuss the meaning of feelings in the formation of culture in his book *Cultural Feelings: Mood, Meditation and Cultural Politics*. He says the following:

“As a modest claim, I want to suggest that moods and feelings are an important aspect of the world, and that we need to take account of them. More immodestly, I want to claim that unless we attend to moods and feelings we are not engaging in the sociality of social and cultural enquiry. How the world feels to us, and how it has felt to us, is the phenomenal form of the social: this quality is the sense of promise and defeat, of opportunities found and lost, of ease and disquiet, of vibrancy and dourness.” (Highmore, 2017: 12)

Like Highmore (2017) claims, feelings are central to understanding the social life. I have chosen to focus on the feelings because feelings color the everyday life of mothers and children. If mothers feel

anxious about something, it can shadow the journey of motherhood. The society should support instead of create uncertainty in anyone's life that are in vulnerable situations.

1.3.Previous research

Berg (2008) has studied motherhood as cultural expectations, in her doctoral thesis *Motherhood as cultural expectations*, that she has written for Väestöliitto, the Family Federation of Finland. She has analyzed motherhood from the perspective of professionals versus from the perspective of the media and she has then compared these two. I have gotten familiar with her work and will use her thesis as a ground to my research regarding the history of motherhood. Although her research is from 2008, I still find it relatable.

Metsämäki (2018) discusses public breastfeeding in her Master's thesis "*Man känner sig kanske ännu mer som en kvinna efter att man har fått amma två barn*" Makt, materialitet och performativ kvinnlighet i intervjuer om offentlig amning. (Metsämäki. 2018). In her thesis she has interviewed mothers about public breastfeeding and the feelings it brings to the mothers. She discusses, for example, how mothers who do not breastfeed can be viewed as irresponsible and selfish parents. Metsämäki (2018) claims that norms form breastfeeding trends and how mothers breastfeed publicly is guided by the norms. According to Metsämäki (2018) mothers still want to breastfeed discreetly in public and this is due to the surrounding people and the situation they are in. The male gaze is a key element in how and where mothers can and will breastfeed. Mothers also want to be polite and not draw attention towards themselves while breastfeeding in public. Metsämäki (2018) continues that women have internalized the male gaze as something that makes the breast erotic and objectifies women. The mothers Metsämäki (2018) interviewed considered that breastfeeding a baby was more comfortable than breastfeeding a toddler in public. The other citizens opinions about breastfeeding in public therefor made the rules for breastfeeding. It was clear in Metsämäkis' (2018) research, that public breastfeeding brought anxiety to mothers who breastfed their children. (Metsämäki. 2018). What Metsämäki (2018) writes, can also be seen in my interviews, as in the participants changed their behavior sometimes to fit society's expectations. One participant said out front that she did not go to public places that much because taking her breast out in public brought her anxiety.

Ennab Vogel (2020) has studied momshaming in Sweden in her thesis *Mom shaming- an anthropological study of shame related to motherhood*. Ennab Vogel (2020) brings light to the polarized views of different types of mother stereotypes and how the current discussion regarding

motherhood, is very conflicted. The different arenas where motherhood is discussed, for example, social media and health care, have changed the discussion norms around motherhood. In her research she showed that mom shaming is a phenomenon in Sweden and it creates different groups of mothers whose views are conflicted. Mom shaming can criticize mothers and create, for example, behavior and values regarding motherhood. Ennab Vogel (2020) points out that her research showed that it is mothers who shame other mothers and mothers avoid situations where they can be shamed. Mothers can be afraid of being shamed and that can change their behavior. (Ennab Vogel, 2020). This is important regarding my thesis. The mothers I interviewed for my thesis talked about how motherhood and the first year with the baby is a vulnerable time and much of the comment's regarding their motherhood has brought negative feelings. I also recognize myself that I avoided places where I could face shame during my first year of being a mother.

Laney, Lewis Hall, Anderson and Willingham (2015) have studied changes that motherhood bring to womens' identity in their study *Becoming a Mother: The Influence of Motherhood on Women's Identity Development*. They discuss, for example, how mothers' experience ideals when they do not reach the ideals of motherhood and how the feelings are constantly in their lives. (Laney, Lewis Hall, Anderson & Willingham, 2015). This relates to Berg's (2008) research and how the motherhood ideal is set really high and not reachable in reality. (Berg, 2008).

Mulcahy, Parry and Glover have studied mothers' playgroups in their article *Play-group politics: a critical social capital exploration of exclusion and conformity in mothers' groups* (2009). They interviewed mothers in mothers' groups and found out that the groups can function as support for mothers but they can also exclude. (Mulcahy, Parry & Glover, 2009). This article relates to all the research presented above and how mothers behave socially with children and what kind of feelings it can create. It is an important article regarding my thesis because it brings light to how motherhood is created in social settings and how support groups can bring negative feelings into the day-to-day lives of mothers even though the main point of them is to support.

Bergs' (2008) research is the latest research on the expectations on mothers and motherhood in Finland. My thesis brings a newer viewpoint to the topic in the Finnish society. I also look at the topic through using social exclusion theory as a lens.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Method

In his book *Kvalitativ forskning från start till mål*, (2013) (*Qualitative research from the beginning to the end*), Robert Yin explains that what characterizes qualitative research is that it is a way to study human life in real settings. Qualitative research presents participants' opinions and thoughts and shows the way people live their lives. Qualitative research makes space to explain human social behavior and intends to refer to many different sources of information instead of relying on only one. In qualitative research, the main point might be to find a way to tell the participants' opinions and thoughts. (Yin, 2013). Within the context of qualitative research, I will be using a narrative research methodology and analyze the data using narrative analysis. Narratives are the stories people tell about their experiences. Narrative data are often collected through interviews and then analyzed. (Bold, 2012)

Clandinin (2013) argues that narrative methodology has been used more since the early 1990s to study experience within the social sciences. Clandinin (2013) discusses narrative inquiry as the narrative methodology and observes that other methodologies, such as phenomenology, use narratives too. However, narrative inquiry is a separate methodology and includes, besides the individual experience of the participant, the cultural and social aspect and the context in which the participant lives. (Clandinin, 2013, Pheonix, 2008). I have chosen narrative methodology particularly for this reason. Through seeing the cultural and social aspect of motherhood in the Finnish context my research question is best answered.

According to McAlpine (2016), the narrative method has been used in social science to learn how people understand their own lives through their experiences. Within the narrative method, there are different points of view a researcher can use. (McAlpine, 2016). I will use a sociocultural point of view in my thesis. The sociocultural point of view examines common narratives that people use to make sense of their own experiences. During the analysis, the researcher finds commonalities in the data to explain cultural narratives. The ethical issue with narratives is the risk that the researcher adds a meaning to the narrative data that was not there in the narratives told by the participants. (McAlpine, 2016). I have found commonalities in the data that I collected through the interviews. I understand that there is a risk for adding meaning to the story told by the participants in the analysis process. However, I believe that I have succeeded in retelling the story of the participants as it was told by

them. By being mindful of the risks in analyzing narrative data, this research approach can be considered reliable. I have analyzed the data using thematic approach which includes that the researcher tries to find themes in the narratives (Bold, 2012). The themes are labor market and motherhood, gender equality and parenting and attitudes and motherhood.

I have chosen to use interviews as a data collection tool. I interviewed five mothers about their experiences of how they have been treated in society after having become mothers. In the interviews, I focused on possible discrimination and how that has made them feel. I focused on their views and experiences of motherhood and how they have been treated by others in society. I wanted to know how the mothers react to possible negative attitudes and if that has made them avoid certain situations.

The interviews were held through FaceTime or WhatAapp video call, and the audio was recorded with MacBook recorder. The interviews, audio and transcripts, are archived at Cultura, the Archive of Cultural Research at Åbo Akademi University. The interviews were held between January and February 2021. The interview floated freely and discussion was fruitful. I am certain that I had good rapport with the participants and they could express freely and honestly how they felt about the topic. I knew all of them from before and they know I am a mother myself and have opinions about the inequalities that becoming a mother has brought to my life as a woman. The participants remain anonymous and the data are archived according to ethical research practice. The participants will be presented in the following table. I have changed the names of the participants to protect their anonymity:

Name	Number of children	Age of children	Family structure	Occupation/field	Age of participant
Inari	2	Pre-school + school	Co-parents	Business	35-40
Emilia	1	Pre-school	Co-parents	Social field	30-35
Emmy	3	Adult + pre-school	Married	Teacher	35-40
Felicia	1	Toddler	Married	Service field/ student	30-35
Cassandra	1	Baby	Married	Engineer	35-40

Inari is a divorced mother of two and works in business and is career driven. She co-parents with her ex-husband who works in the same field. Her children are older than 5. Emilia works in the social field and has one child. She co-parents with the father of her child who is older than 5. Emmy is a mother of three. She is working as a teacher and she is married. One of her children is an adult and the two younger children are aged 5 and 7. Felicia is a mother of a toddler. She is married and a student. She has worked in the service field. Cassandra is a mother of a baby. She works in a male dominant field and is career driven. Her husband works in the same field as she does.

2.2. Research design

In my thesis, I have divided the theoretical framework into two separate chapters. In the first one, chapter three with the heading *Social Exclusion*, I will first present the different definitions of social exclusion and what the term social exclusion includes. Then I will discuss social exclusion specifically in a Finnish context and after that present research on motherhood and social exclusion. In the fourth chapter, *Motherhood*, I will first review the history of motherhood and then motherhood today. At the end of the chapter, I will present research on attitudes and motherhood. After the theory I will move on to empirical findings. The fourth chapter, *Empirical findings and analysis*, has three themes: labor market, gender equality and attitudes. I will here present and analyze the data I collected through my interviews and group the data according to the themes. In the empirical findings and analysis chapter, I will analyze my data mirroring them to the theories I have presented in chapter three and four. I will end my thesis with a discussion and some concluding thoughts. In this section, I will also present what further research I argue that should be conducted on this theme.

2.3. Limitations

The mothers who participated in the interviews are quite a homogenic group. They all live in urban areas in Finland. They are all middle-class, white, have at least a Bachelor's degree from a Finnish university and are active in the labor market. Differences in family structures can be found. However, I interviewed no, for example, non-white, undocumented or Muslim women who, already prior to being mothers, are socially excluded in the Finnish society. I have also not interviewed any same-sex couple or single parent in that sense that they would have sole custody of their children and be responsible of their children alone. I think that research on different groups experiences of motherhood are important and should be focused on more. Unfortunately, I have not been able to do so in my own thesis, due to many factors of which covid-19 has had the strongest impact.

The participants are mothers from my social circle, from a similar background as mine. I also asked only participants who I knew were able to be interviewed in English, since the language of the thesis is English, although I normally would speak Finnish or Swedish with them. This too has limited possible participants. Due to covid-19, I have not been able to use, for example, a focus group in a mothers' group, since the group activities have been limited due to social distancing. I also asked about the effects of covid-19 in my interviews, even though the thesis is not about that topic. I am aware of the possible effects of the virus and the limitations it has brought on mothers' social well-being, specifically at this time.

Bold (2012) states that:

“The purpose of analysis in qualitative research is to enquire deeply into the meaning of different situations and different people's understandings of the world. It often takes place with small numbers of participants, in a particular context, and for a specific purpose related to a change in practice or an improvement in social conditions. It cannot usually be generalised, yet when small research projects are shared others have similar experiences and stories to tell. Thus it is valid and reliable, in the sense that it is purposeful for the context in which it took place and it has significance for others in similar contexts and places.” (Bold, 2012: 121-122)

This thesis is not generalizable to the wider society, since I have only interviewed five mothers and they have spoken about their personal experiences. As Bold (2012) states, I still think it is valid and purposeful, because I show how women who are otherwise full members of the Finnish society, and are not excluded from, for example, the labor market, experience feelings of social exclusion due to becoming mothers.

Mathieson, Popay, Enoch, Escorel, Hernandez, Johnston and Rispel present social exclusion history and theory in their literature review *Social Exclusion Meaning, measurement and experience and links to health inequalities* (2008). Trends in social exclusion can be studied through global and regional measures. However, qualitative research is limited. Both quantitative and qualitative research is needed in the study of social exclusion. Through using both methods, we can learn about the changes in history and current events regarding social exclusion. (Mathieson, Popay, Enoch, Escorel, Hernandez, Johnston & Rispel, 2008). In my thesis I will use only a qualitative approach due to the fact that my research question is best answered through using a qualitative method.

3. SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Social exclusion is a good lens through which motherhood in Finland can be understood. In my thesis, I specify that the problems that come with motherhood are specific and the context in my thesis is specific, in other words, motherhood in Finland. The term is useful when discussing social exclusion regarding motherhood in a western country, because motherhood has changed through the years and has gone through many breaking points. de Haan (1999) defines social exclusion as follows:

“social exclusion is (or should be) a theoretical concept, a lens through which people look at reality, and not reality itself. (de Haan, 1999:5)

This means that it is a lens used for examining social inequalities in societies. This said, it should be stressed that the experiences of social exclusion the participants in my thesis expressed are their experiences of their reality as mothers in Finland.

3.1. Social exclusion as a theoretical lens

Mathieson et al. (2008) present social exclusion history and theory in their literature review *Social Exclusion Meaning, measurement and experience and links to health inequalities* (2008). The term social exclusion was first introduced in France and spread to Western Europe from there. Social exclusion as a term is argued to be better than the term poverty, because it has been easier to accept and it is more flexible. The problem with the term is that it might hide how people in some areas live under extreme poverty. Social exclusion as a term, might also be used to stigmatize and make it seem like the poor are responsible of their own destiny. However, while making the limitation of the term visible, it is, useful when discussing exclusion, as long as the context is presented. (Mathieson et al.,2008)

Muddiman, in his paper “Theories of Social Exclusion and The Public Library” (1999), explains that social exclusion is a multidimensional term that goes further from poverty to including not having power or having access to services, and being culturally and educationally excluded,. (Muddiman, 1999). Silver (2007) discusses how social exclusion is a process and not a product of a condition in her article “The processes of social exclusion: the dynamics of an evolving concept”. Because it is a process, I argue that narrative analysis is the right method to use in my thesis, as it analyses the stories the participants told about their experiences as mothers [see Chapter 2, Narrative analysis]. Silver (2007) argues that social exclusion is a problematic term to discuss and fight, because it is difficult

to measure. As for poverty, there are thresholds that can be crossed, in other words, limits that state what is poverty and what is not poverty. In this way poverty is easier to measure, but social exclusion does not know these thresholds (Silver, 2007).

The term social exclusion is multidimensional and intertwined with where it is used. It cannot be fought with guaranteeing material wealth for a person who is marginalized, but also has to do with a person being met with honor and respect. Silver (2007) clarifies that social inclusion is having the material goods guaranteed but nonetheless important is having guaranteed social relationships and health. Isolation can lead to not having social support when it is needed. (Silver, 2007). Mathieson et al. (2008) continue that social exclusion has had many meanings and the different meanings have changed over time. Social exclusion has been a so-called umbrella term that has included everything from processes of exclusion to people who are involved in the processes. However, researchers have agreed that social exclusion is a multidimensional term, and it is used for economic, social and, for example, political purposes. Social exclusion is relational and the term brings light on inequalities in power relations in societies. People who are outside the mainstream social systems in societies are at focus when discussing social exclusion. Groups can also be excluded. (Mathieson, et al., 2008) These groups can, for example, be mothers.

Mathieson et al. (2008) discuss that the term social exclusion is used to expose the processes of exclusion that stigmatizes, for example, the poor. Due to the term being multidimensional, it can also expose the multiple processes which exclude. A person can be excluded because they belong to multiple groups that are excluded. Exclusion can happen due to, for example, gender, religion or social class. (Mathieson, et al., 2008) Mathieson et al. (2008) explain that the term is useful when building policies to reduce, for example, exclusion and inequalities. The causes and consequences of social exclusion are many and they vary. (Mathieson et al., 2008).

Mathieson et al. (2008) continue that social exclusion is maintained by when societies fail to see how inequalities in power dynamics and the agency of marginalized groups are linked together. This is why relational exclusion and the processes of it should be studied. Relational social exclusion means that it looks at people's relationships and problems within the relationships regarding power, participation and social integration. It is also a way to look at social exclusion through the inequalities in relationships due to power. By focusing on the relational perspective, societies would bring attention to inequalities, that are caused by unequal power relationships. Social exclusion should always be seen from a relational perspective. This way we can avoid stigmatizing groups and find the

potential of groups to resist exclusion. The term social exclusion can bring attention to diversity, and in this way, it can be relevant from a global perspective. The level of exclusion varies depending on, for example, region and time. The unequal power relationships are at the center in the study of social exclusion. (Mathieson, et al, 2008)

The relational perspective of social exclusion has been studied in, for example, Ellis-Sloans and Tamplins (2019) article *Teenage Mothers and Social Isolation: The Role of Friendship as Protection against Relational Exclusion*. They present that people experience relational exclusion when they do not have relationships or social support. They studied how relationships affected young mothers' experiences of isolation and they present that teenage mothers often lost friends due to their pregnancies but could gain new friendships with other teenage mothers, through their shared experiences. Young parents can also feel stigmatized and social support from peer can have a normalizing effect on their experiences. Mother friends are important to all mothers regardless of age. Social policies, with relational social exclusion in the center should be used to fight exclusion. (Ellis-Sloan & Tamplin, 2019).

Giddens and Sutton (2017) come to the same conclusions and define social exclusion, in their book *Sociology* in the following way: *Social exclusion refers to ways in which individuals may become cut off from full participation in the wider society*. (Giddens, Anthony & Sutton, Philip W, 2017: 543). They also present that when discussing social exclusion, we need to consider the opposite of social exclusion, which according to them is inclusion. Individuals can be excluded from the wider society for various reasons. Why some individuals are socially excluded can be shaped both by the society around the individual and by their own choices. There is a broad selection of factors that can cause that everyone does not have the same opportunities as their peers. (Giddens & Sutton, 2017).

Further on, Giddens and Sutton (2017) presents a division of different kinds of social exclusion. They list exclusion from social relations as one and explain, for example, how being in the labor market brings social relations and being outside the labor force can cause exclusion. They also bring attention to the fact that retired people make the largest group of people who are outside the labor force. Other groups are, for example, those who do domestic work. Being outside the labor market increases the risk for social exclusion but does not exclusively cause it. Being unable to meet family and friends in everyday settings are forms of exclusion. Social exclusion in everyday life can be, for example, being isolated or not having anyone to talk to when going through life changes. (Giddens & Sutton, 2017). This relational aspect of social exclusion is important when discussing motherhood. It is not only the

fact that mothers are outside of the labor market that cause social exclusion but also the possible decrease in social contacts during maternity- and parental leave.

Levitas (1996) presents that the term social exclusion was born from the need to describe poverty and its' consequences, in her article *The concept of social exclusion and the new Durkheimian hegemony*. Social exclusion was compared with labor market integration. Levitas (1996) argues that the term social exclusion hides the inequalities between those who do paid work. Moreover, the term social exclusion does not put value on unpaid work. The fundamental social inequalities cannot be seen using the term social exclusion (Levitas, 2008). Levitas (2008) continues, that the term underclass was used before the birth of the term social exclusion, and according to Stuart Hall, the problem with the term underclass is, that it only makes two groups visible, underclass and the rest. No variation was seen in the group that was not underclass. This division made it possible to hide inequalities in the majority class. Levitas argues, that social exclusion works the same way in hiding the inequalities as the term underclass. (Levitas, 2008).

Levitas (2008) argues that as the term social exclusion was created to discuss the consequences of poverty, it has failed to do so as it does not include unpaid work which is usually done by women. Working population are all drawn under the same line and the term social exclusion hides the differences between workers. Levitas (2008) points out that the full integration of women into the labor market would need men to take more responsibility in caring for the home and children. In 1994, *European Social Policy* made a link between unemployment and social exclusion. Social exclusion has been a core issue in the European Union for a long time. Levitas (2008) article presents that exclusion is multi-dimensional and do not only include poverty. She discusses the problematic way of linking social exclusion and unemployment together. It hides other reasons for social exclusion. (Levitas, 2008).

3.2. Previous research on social exclusion in Finland

Virtanen (2003) presents Social exclusion in Finland in his *Report on Social Exclusion in Finland* (2003). The report analyzes the first *National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion*. He discusses how the trend in Finland is that services are provided for everyone, for-example, childcare, instead of targeting benefits for the excluded, Finland has tried to secure benefits for everyone. Virtanen (2003) quotes a working group in his text that says the following:

“The Nordic welfare model reinforces social cohesion. The aim of a welfare society is to protect and uphold the fundamental rights of its people and reduce inequalities. The idea is to improve equality and well-being so that everyone can live a dignified and secure life and improve their own skills and talents at the different stages of their life. Equality must be promoted so that people receive equal treatment regardless of their gender, age, domicile, disability or ethnic background. Support for equal opportunities allied to social welfare and health care services and income security for all prevents poverty and exclusion. Exclusion may be due to unemployment, lack of education, illness or housing conditions, and combating it requires active measures in all these areas. Social policy also includes the provision of care for those who cannot fend for themselves or demand their own rights. Social protection should be universal, covering both those who are managing well and those who are struggling to make ends meet. This also tends to improve general acceptance of social protection and its financing options. The aim is to keep income differences small and combat poverty.” (Virtanen, 2003:22).

Equal treatment is central to a welfare country such as Finland. However, even though Finland has these aims to reduce inequalities, it has not succeeded to do so in many fields. Motherhood and gender equality are one of these fields that the government has not succeeded to do so, even though it is written in reports such as this by Virtanen (2003), almost 20 years ago.

One example of social exclusion in Finland is ethnic profiling. Keskinen, Alemanji, Himanen, Kivijärvi, Osazee, Pöyhölä and Rousku (2018) have studied ethnic profiling in their article *The Stopped- Ethnic profiling in Finland* (2018). Ethnic profiling is, for example, authority demanding to see identity due to a person’s race. Keskinen et al. (2018) showed in their research that ethnic profiling is present in day-to-day life of people who belong to racialized minorities. The stoppes were mostly not positive encounters and it damaged their trust in authorities. (Keskinen, Alemanji, Himanen, Kivijärvi, Osazee, Pöyhölä & Rousku, 2018).

There is also something called Finnish exceptionalism, which brings awareness towards the unspoken racism and gender inequality that is very present in Finland. In *Complying with Colonialism: Gender, Race and Ethnicity in the Nordic region*, the authors question statements of how the Nordic countries are often viewed as nations with developed welfare, democracy and economic competitiveness with insignificant ties to colonialism. Postcolonial Nordic feminism is a branch of feminism that studies racism and gender inequalities in the Nordic region. Postcolonial Nordic feminisms main points are, that denying, for example, gendered racism leads to a false analysis. (Mulinari, Keskinen, Irni & Tuori, 2009).

In Alemanji's study *Is there such a thing...? A study of antiracism education in Finland* (2016), he argues that it is not popular to discuss racism in Finland. He analyzes racism through Finnish exceptionalism, coloniality of power, whiteness theory and denial of racism. In Finland, there is a belief about being best in education and, for example, gender equality. Exceptionalism then gives an idea of superiority and creates a so-called selective amnesia. Immigrants do not have the same claimed quality. Exceptionalism in Finland is used to ignore non-white population. Hierarchies are maintained this way and exceptionalism creates barriers. Finland having selective amnesia about racism and colonialism means, that people think that these concepts do not exist in Finland. The colonized are seen as inferior and this affects whose knowledge has value. Finland has benefitted from colonialism and Finland and the treatment of Saami can be seen as internal colonialism. In Finland, white Finns can see themselves as racially neutral as if there was no category "white". (Alemanji, 2016). This is one example of social exclusion in Finland and of Finnish exceptionalism.

Keskinen, Stoltz and Mulinari (2020) discuss in their book *Feminisms in the Nordic Region: Neoliberalism, Nationalism and Decolonial Critique*, how Nordic welfare states have favored some groups and therefore created exclusion of others. As the Nordic states deny racism (Keskinen, Stoltz & Mulinari, 2020), and for example Finland claims to be the best regarding gender equality (Alemanji, 2016) as a product, migrant women are marginalized. Intersectionality is key to research privilege and inequalities in the Nordics. (Stoltz, 2020).

Degni, Suominen, El Ansari, Vehviläinen-Julkunen and Essen (2013) has conducted research on Somali-born immigrant women and their experiences of maternity care services in Finland in their article *Reproductive and maternity health care services in Finland: perceptions and experiences of Somali-born immigrant women*. The participants in their study were satisfied with the service they got on a large scale. However, problems with communication and some unfriendly attitudes of health care providers existed. (Degni, Suominen, El Ansari, Vehviläinen-Julkunen & Essen, 2013). In Wikbergs, Erikssons and Bondas (2012) article *Intercultural Caring From the Perspectives of Immigrant New Mothers*, about Finnish maternity culture, they concluded that if there are problems in communication, the immigrant mothers had an increased risk for being discriminated against and being isolated. (Wikberg, Eriksson & Bondas, 2012). These are examples of how Finnish exceptionalism creates exclusion in Finland regarding motherhood. As Finland is being viewed as an equal country regarding gender and race, these kinds of problems are often hidden.

3.3. Motherhood and social exclusion

Byvelds and Jackson (2019) argues that having children and becoming a mother make women face social exclusion. The key in fighting the fact that women feel socially excluded when having children, would be to make them feel included in a community. Maternity leave and, for example, breastfeeding can bring social exclusion to a mothers' life. Mothers can also belong to other excluded groups regarding, for example, sexuality or race. (Byvelds & Jackson, 2019.)

Gosling (2008) discuss womens experiences of social exclusion in her article ““I’ve Always Managed, That’s What We Do”: Social Capital and Women’s Experiences of Social Exclusion”. Gosling discusses how women use social capital to fight their exclusion. She presents Bordieus definition on social capital: *The sum of resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition.* (Gosling, 2008: 2). Gosling interviewed women for her article and show that women who live under poverty use social capital to get by. Social capital has not helped them break free from poverty but they have been able to get by while using networks and being active members of their social networks. All women did not have access to community networks and were sometimes excluded by other members of the communities. Gosling (2008) argues that the responsibility for creating community networks has been on the women in the community. According to Gosling, there needs to be research and policies need to be made to fight women’s poverty. (Gosling, 2008).

Mulcahy, Diana C. and Glover have studied mothers’ playgroups in their article *Play-group politics: a critical social capital exploration of exclusion and conformity in mothers’ groups* (2009). They interviewed mothers in mothers’ groups and found out that the groups can function as support for mothers but they can also exclude. They explain that social capital consist of who one person knows and how one is able to use something the other person has. That something is, for example, material resources or power. The concept of social capital has been critiqued because more weight should be on studying the people’s experiences who get left outside. Social capital should be including studies of women who do emotional labor, but it has been focusing on topics that are, for example, sexless. (Mulcany, Parry & Glover, 2009).

Mulcany, Parry and Glover (2009) found out that gender roles are reproduced in mothers’ groups. In general, the mothers’ groups functioned as support, however, not all mothers had the possibility to

attend. The mothers who attended were similar to each other, in other words, married and middle to upper middle class. The story the mothers told cannot be generalized on all mothers. The groups brought anxiety to mothers if they did something different from the norm of the group regarding motherhood. Groups can also shape the roles of fathers. Mothers in the groups often speak ill about the father for not taking care of the children in a similar way that the mothers do. Therefore it contributes to creating the father's role on a larger scale in the society, as the father is presented as the incompetent parent. If the roles in a family do not follow the norm, in other words, a father would be home with children while mother is the breadwinner, mothers in the study felt uncomfortable with the idea of a stay at home father. One trend is also that women did not let father's parent (Mulcany, Parry & Glover, 2009).

Mulcany, Parry and Glover (2009) continue by presenting research that argues that fathers should take more space in parenting and mothers should give them the space to do so. It would be important that women would not contribute to maintaining the traditional parenting roles by language they use about their partner. (Mulcany, Parry & Glover, 2009).

Mulcany, Parry and Glover (2009) continue that mothers' groups are not only support for the mothers' but also supports the whole families. When mothers get support, they can better care for the family. Mothers' groups do the work for the society as well. The society does not have to provide support when the mothers do the work for them by taking care of each other. Mulcany, Parry and Glover (2009) continue that mothers' groups should be researched more, to be able to break the traditional gender roles and to support mothers who often feel anxiety regarding motherhood and the responsibility it brings. (Mulcany, Parry & Glover, 2009). My thesis is a contribute to the subject because I bring light to how these inequalities regarding parenting still exist today in the Finnish society.

4. MOTHERHOOD

4.1. History of motherhood

In her doctoral thesis *Motherhood as Cultural Expectations* (2008), Berg has studied how motherhood is created by professionals working with family care and the media. She presents research showing that when people have started to idealize motherhood is when the term was born. Motherhood is not an old term and it was first only referred to when speaking of a biological mother. In the Finnish language, it was first used in the middle of the 19th century, when the ideal family form was a nuclear family. (Berg, 2008) Ulrike Zartler (2014) presents Parson and Bale's conception of the nuclear family in her article "How to Deal With Moral Tales: Constructions and Strategies of Single-Parent Families" (2014). According to them, a nuclear family is:

"a legally married, heterosexual couple, residing with at least one (biological) child, with the male adult acting as the primary income earner and the female adult being responsible for caring for husband, household and children." (Zartler, 2014: 605).

The western ideal mother and the birth of the term motherhood can be traced back to 1762, when Jean Jacques Rousseau presented his theory about raising children. At that time, and in Rousseau's publication *Émile*, a woman was a wife and a mother, not a citizen. (Berg, 2008)

According to research presented by Giddens and Sutton (2017), the family has been seen as a form of institution. After industrialization, the importance of the family shifted to concentrate on raising children and socialization. In western countries, the nuclear family was the best fit for economic purposes. All family forms were also measured through the nuclear and ideological family. Marxist theories argue that the nuclear family was functional but their reasons lay in capitalism. Men were in the public sphere and women were in the private sphere, in other words at home. Gender inequalities grew and when women moved to paid employment, they still took care of family-related work on a large scale. The class system is also still maintained by the family. Through the nuclear family, wealth can be passed on from generation to generation. (Giddens & Sutton, 2017).

Berg (2008) shows that the motherhood ideal was created in the 19th century by capitalism, industrialization and gender roles. Women were responsible for the home and men worked in the public sphere. The division of the different roles of men and women existed due to the alleged natural differences of the two genders. Motherhood was considered the natural life goal of a woman and it

was strongly controlled. As the middle class became stronger, Europe became filled with guides related to childcare. At first, these guides concentrated on the physical needs of children and later the psychological ideas became a part of the guides, too. Religion affected how these guides were constructed. Mothers were also supposed to care for children through knowledge based on medicine. The guides were detailed and deeply rooted. (Berg, 2008)

Berg (2008) writes that motherhood in Finland has been seen as a woman's ultimate goal. Being able to have children and caring for them in a heterosexual marriage where the man is the authority was the norm in the 19th century. The physical care for children was the main focus at that time. These roles were strongly impacted by politics, which gained from the norms. The nuclear family was considered the right and only solution to a healthy increase in the birth-rate in Finland. Mothers that did not fit the nuclear family norm were considered a threat. Mothers were categorized into good and bad mothers regarding their class. Poverty was a sign of bad motherhood and a mother who was in the labor market was considered bad. Poor women who came from the countryside were considered unfit to raise children. (Berg, 2008)

Berg (2008) then explains that when, for example, abortion became legal, birth control available and women moved to paid employment, the differences between different mothers became less important. This happened during 1960-1970 in Finland. Motherhood and marriage were not linked to each other anymore at this time and women could choose motherhood due to the new birth control options. There was an increased knowledge in psychology in the middle of 20th century and by this, the importance of economic status decreased when measuring good motherhood. A good mother was someone who could assure a child's healthy psychological development. Researchers argue that today's mothers are required to constantly reflect on their own motherhood. (Berg, 2008).

Berg (2008) continues some researchers argue, that between 1980-1990 is when motherhood became conflicted. As motherhood no longer was a natural choice, for example, popular culture started showing conflicted representations of motherhood. Berg (2008) presents Anthony Giddens theories on how life has become complicated when people question the old traditional ways of life and at the same time do not know how to act in the new. Research claims that when speaking about traditional motherhood, people do not speak about a specific time-period, rather than of different, often unwanted features in how to be a mother. The ideals of motherhood are said to be open for change relatively slowly. (Berg, 2008).

Berg (2008) writes that during time, controlling a mothers' behaviour has been a tool to try to solve problems in societies. Depending on class and family status, women were treated differently regarding motherhood. No effort was put to solve the working-class mothers' problems and mothers were divided into good and bad. Women were controlled through legislation; birth control was forbidden and motherhood was women's ultimate life goal. (Berg, 2008)

4.2.Motherhood today

Berg (2008) argues in her thesis *Motherhood as cultural expectations*, that motherhood is defined and described in different fields of the society. These fields are, for example, political, professional and religious and in these fields, motherhood is produced. Norms and standards for motherhood are created in the different fields and through these, mothers evaluate their own motherhood and re-create the norms. Motherhood has a societal responsibility to it, and it is therefore monitored by authorities. Traditional norms regarding motherhood can be reshaped through the media. It is, for example, important to study how the tensions between authorities and the picture of motherhood is painted in the media, affect mothers' wellbeing in Finland. It is required that mothers feel accepted by the society they live in, in order for them to feel like good mothers. (Berg, 2008).

Berg (2008) presents feminist research that has shown that the ideal about motherhood has been set so high, it is impossible for anyone to reach. Motherhood has been romanticized and become the ultimate life goal for women. Berg (2008) presents the feministic phrase "oppressed by praising" and it means how women have been oppressed by being tied to the children and home. The only good way of being a woman was to take care of others. However, women did not have legal rights to their children before the 20th century in Finland. (Berg, 2008)

Berg (2008) continues that the social institution of motherhood is well known globally. Motherhood is linked with rules and laws depending on the cultural context and we have certain norms and requirements regarding motherhood. Motherhood sets a meaning for women in general regardless of if they have children or not. Motherhood, how we understand it, is created to serve patriarchy and capitalism. This is the reason why we understand motherhood being a woman's ultimate job. (Berg, 2008.)

Berg (2008) points out that institutionalized and personal motherhood are two separate things. This means that the lived motherhood differs from what motherhood, with its rules and expectations, is as

an institution. However, conflicts may arise when they meet. Requirements on motherhood from a cultural and societal perspective can cause a mother to see motherhood as something conflicted and filled with problems. What we consider the behavior of a good mother is, can seem as if it has not changed over the years. However, what we regard as a good mother has in reality gone through drastic changes. Research shows that the history of the word motherhood has not had the same path as, for example, family and the term childhood. Feminism has first studied motherhood through the actual circumstances mothers live in then later looked at motherhood as a social construct and rather as a choice than a destiny. (Berg, 2008).

Giddens and Sutton (2017) point out that feminists have conducted research on families through looking at the experiences of women. Feminist research has divided the problem with unequal family structures into three topics; economy, power relations and caring activities. Through these three topics, research has shown that how the work is divided within the family, has to do with either capitalism or patriarchy. In this way, the strong division of the private and public sphere has lived on. The male breadwinner ideal still exists. (Giddens & Sutton, 2017).

The Social Insurance Institution of Finland, Kela, pays the social benefits during parental leave in Finland (Kela, 2019). Maternity leave benefit in Finland today is approximately four months long, and start approximately one month before the baby is born. (Kela, 2021a). After this, there is a possibility for the parents to share the parental leave period, which is approximately six months long. (Kela, 2021b) The father also has a nine weeks long fathers leave period, out of which he can use three weeks during the mothers leave and six weeks after the parental leave period has ended. (Kela, 2020). After this, a person can still continue to take care of the child at home, until the child is three-years-old. During this time, the parent can get child care benefit. (Kela, 2021c).

The new law that has been in process in the government would include that both parents would get to have 160 days that they could take care of the child. The mother would also get 40 days leave before the due date and parents could give 63 say out of their own days to the other parent. The parental leave benefits could be held until the child is two-years-old. The new law will come in august 2022. (Kela, 2021d).

According to the Finnish institute for health and welfare, in 2019, women earned 16% less in average than men did and women taking longer family leaves affects their wage increase. (Finnish institute for health and welfare, 2021a). Further on, one fifth of the Finnish father's do not take any parental

leave and out of the leave that is possible to share between the parents, only 11% of Finnish fathers use it. After the parental leave benefits, parents can still take care of the children at home until the children are three-years-old. Only 2% of the Finnish fathers use this possibility. Finnish fathers are taking child care leaves radically less than the other Nordic countries. (Finnish institute for health and welfare, 2021b).

Giddens and Sutton (2017) explain that women have now moved to paid employment, into the public sphere. However, according to feminist research the majority of the household tasks are still the women's responsibility. Some research has looked into how household finances are organized in families and seen some unequal power relations there. Moreover, women are responsible for most of the caring activities in families, that also include emotional labor. (Giddens & Sutton, 2017).

4.3. Attitudes and motherhood

In Pettys, Fazios and Briñols (2012) *Attitudes: Insights from the New Implicit Measures*, the word attitude is defined by using Hovland, Janis and Kelleys definition of it:

as "implicit responses" that were "sometimes unconscious" and were "oriented toward approaching or avoiding a given object". Attitudes were contrasted with opinions which were "verbal answers that one covertly expresses to (oneself)". These private opinions were further distinguished from public opinions, which could be susceptible to social desirability motives. (Petty, Brinol & Fazio, 2012:3)

In other words, attitudes can be seen as spontaneous opinions of an event or someone. People can keep the true attitudes to themselves and public opinions can be affected by what is acceptable and what is not. I am using this definition when discussing attitudes in my thesis.

Mother shaming can be tracked back to the Victorian era, where mothers who miscarried were blamed for it. (Byvelds & Jackson. 2019). Harrison discusses miscarriage in her Chapter *As If She Weren't a Mother at All: Narrating Blame and Isolation of Miscarrying Mothers in the Nineteenth Century and Today*, in the book *Motherhood and Social Exclusion*. This thought still exists today and this is why miscarriage seldom is talked about. Even today, the medical terminology of miscarriage includes the word abortion. The terminology can be considered offensive. During the Victorian era, female bodies were covered, and pregnant women were locked inside the house when the pregnancy started showing. Miscarriage was therefor never talked about. Experiencing miscarriage brings feeling of

guilt and isolation to mothers still today and this can be tracked back to the Victorian era. (Byvelde & Jackson, 2019).

Feminist research on family structures has brought attention to how common and political ideals of how a family should be are different from what they are in reality. Those who trust in the ideal family do not like how diverse family structures have changed how we look at family life. Family forms vary, and political debates are still somewhat tied to the normative ideals. Ideals that are portrayed in the media and social policy are different from what family experiences actually are. Families have changed as, for example, women moved to paid employment and by increased gender equality. (Giddens & Sutton, 2017).

Sociologist Morgan suggest to use the term family practices when talking about all family related activities. This term is helpful when discussing different family forms and trying to understand the actual lived family life and why it has changed. Another useful term is family displays. This term explains how people show others how they do family practices. Families use family displays to show family members, other families and other people how they do family practices. An example of this, is children's healthy diet. Parents feed their children in the way, for example, healthy diet is shown in the media, politics, advertisement and schools. Giddens and Sutton (2017) give an example of a study made on how mothers in white middle class families prepared lunch boxes for their children. The lunch boxes were much alike, even though mothers claimed they chose the content individually. It was also the mothers' responsibility to prepare the box. The research showed that the mothers did not feel good about potential criticism they were opened to in this way. (Giddens & Sutton, 2017).

Morgan has talked about how some family practices are performed under pressure and how that can only have a negative outcome for the person performing them. There is something called gendered expectations, that make people choose, for example, to work full-time or do domestic work. In the European Union, there is still a gender pay gap even though we have legislation that should be controlling it. The common attitude has continued to be that work comes second to women and having children comes first. This creates inequalities in the labor market and traditional attitudes of men stand in the way of the change. Research show that before the pay gap is narrowed and women are not as economically dependent on men as they still are now, doing housework will remain the woman's responsibility. Some sociologist says that heterosexual couples "*fall back into gender*" where the man is the breadwinner, when they have children. (Giddens & Sutton, 2017:389).

Giddens & Sutton (2017) presents research that show how mothers are usually the parents that stays at home after a child is born and live up to the traditional expectations. Society expects the mother to enjoy her role. Men can get criticized if they take this role and it is more difficult for women to advance in their careers. These gendered expectations live on, on a deeper level, even though women's opportunities to education and work have changed radically. (Giddens & Sutton, 2017.)

Berg (2008) explains how research regarding women and paid employment has focused mainly on how motherhood has suffered from women becoming a part of the labor force. Women have an opportunity to work. However, their position in the labor market is more insecure. Mothers also still carry the main responsibility for caring for the children and the home. Some research claim that as mothers have become more and more committed to the labor force, they also experience more pressure on caring for the children. Women have the possibility to choose their own lifestyle. However, at the same time they are pressured to find harmony in combining motherhood and paid employment. (Berg, 2008).

Giddens and Sutton (2017) talk about interaction. Adults can be bullied and a person who is bullied feels shame and guilt over what happened and wonder how they themselves are responsible of their own abuse. Individuals form their own view of themselves through relationships and interaction with other people. What kind of interaction we go through, shape our view of ourselves. Bullying is about using power and it is a form of interaction. (Giddens & Sutton, 2017.)

Giddens and Sutton (2017) continue that through studying social day-to-day life and interaction, we can learn. Daily routines form structures and big life changes affect and form the structures in a person's life. Due to social backgrounds, a person can view the same reality differently from other people. Human interaction shapes the social reality. Our daily interaction is connected with social institutions and sociologists have argued that when discussing identity, we should discuss social identity, because our identity is formed by social interactions. Identities are both individual and collective. Stigma can cause that an individual does not have the power to affect what identity is given to them. Giddens & Sutton (2017) discuss the differences of primary and secondary identities, where primary are formed early on in a person's life and secondary identities are connected with our social roles. Further on there is something called a collective identity which means that a person is a member of a larger group of people and identify with the group. Daily interaction can change the structures and peer groups play a significant role in the socialization processes. Socialization happens in families, as a child, which is called primary socialization and also later in a person's life, through the

surrounding society, which is called secondary socialization. Individuals themselves also form the way they socialization process goes. Cultural skills are learned through the process. (Giddens & Sutton, 2017)

Berg (2008) writes about expectations and how they form motherhood. Some research argues that motherhood, as well as other roles are a social construct. We learn, consciously and unconsciously, through cultural influences what motherhood should look like. There are expectations in the society that guide mothers how to behave in a way that is seen as proper behaviour for a mother. The construct and reality affect each other and mothers' behaviour can change the discourse of motherhood. The cultural expectations on motherhood can leave mothers alone with how they experience motherhood and how they trust themselves. How a mothers' identity is formed, is depending on these expectations. (Berg, 2008)

Berg (2008) argues that the guidance for mothers offered by professionals is also used as a form of social control due to the power relationship that is involved. Berg (2008) speaks about motherhood as many different constructs that are in conflict with each other. She offers an example of an ideal mother, who is relatively young but still experienced. The ideal mother should have a separate life from family responsibilities, but still prioritize her family. These discourses are filled with expectations, and mothers in reality are left alone in finding them. A mother can live up to the expectations or risk being unaccepted (Berg, 2008).

Carden discuss how mothers carry the blame for children who do not behave according to what is expected of them in her chapter *Difficult Children, Blamable Mothers? A Historical Perspective* (2019). Blaming mothers for badly behaving children is noticeable in all social classes. This shows also how the responsibility of raising well behaved children are on the mothers. (Byvelds & Jackson, 2019.)

5. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter is divided into three sections subtitled *Labor market and motherhood*, *Gender equality and parenting* and *Attitudes and motherhood*. However, all the topics are intertwined. During the interviews, I noticed how issues regarding the labor market constantly came under discussion. I argue that this is because social exclusion of mothers in the labor market is easiest to grasp and name.

5.1. Labor market and motherhood

Motherhood is a process of high risk exclusion when, for example, labor market is discussed. All the mothers I interviewed shared how they have been treated inappropriately in the labor market because they are women and/ or mothers. When asked about what kind of attitudes they have met in the labor market I received the following answers:

Well when I went back to work after being on maternity leave the second time, I started in consulting, and actually when I met a potential client, who did not become a client luckily, actually they even asked me like straight away that you know how can I work effectively, because I have two small children. So sometimes you meet in the labor market really outdated and horrible people who comment... on motherhood like in a really politically incorrect way. Insensitive way, but I think, yeah, it is also maybe the ones that you remember, probably you have more like positive comments from people but I do not know, as a, especially women if you have like small children that I do not think the labor market has a very positive view on you as a worker. Unfortunately -Inari

Inari's experience shows that women are not and do not feel equal to their male peers in the labor market after becoming mothers. This shows that the common attitude in the Finnish society is that the women have the main responsibility for the children and also that women who work cannot give a hundred percent to their work, because they are mothers and their focus is on the family. I continued by asking why she thinks the labor market does not have a positive view of mothers, and she replied:

Because you are a risk, risk of being home with the sick children and risk of being a bad worker because you do not sleep during the night. And you know... Prejudices. -Inari

Inari shows with her comment that mothers feel much pressure for caring for the children but also that the common attitude is that fathers do not have to be home with sick children or stay up nights with the children. Even if the reality would be that the father is on child sick leave equally, the

perception is that they are not, and therefore, are better workers. This is why I asked Inari if men get the same treatment, and she replied:

I know they do not. Because of the society in Finland, that the mothers have the main responsibility of the kids, and everybody thinks that. – Inari

This comment is supported by Carden's (2019) statement that women are responsible for raising children. Giddens and Sutton (2017) also discuss the male breadwinner mentality. Inari feels that everybody thinks this way in the Finnish society and this is supported by her experiences as a mother in the labor market.

Emilia, who is not working in the business field replied to the same question about attitudes in the labor market in the following way:

I work as a social worker so we have a lot of women in the field. So, I do not get to like compare men and women a lot at my work place. We had this one case actually that one of my colleagues got discriminated when she got pregnant and they usually always renew the contracts always one year at a time, then she got pregnant and did not get her like new one year, they gave it to someone else so that was pretty shocking. That it actually happened also at our work place. It was a big thing and she actually complained about it and in the end they got to, she won the case and they paid her... And it was interesting because of all of our bosses are also women, and there is a lot of women so, somehow you would think that it does not happen there, but yet it happened so it is all learnt and in us as well. – Emilia

Emilia reveals a new shade of the problem "motherhood and the labor market", by observing that it is "in us as well". By this she means that women carry these kinds of attitudes about motherhood as well and women discriminate against women in the labor market. As she also revealed, her employer acted against the law, while discriminating against a pregnant person and this is why they had to pay her a settlement. Even though it is against the law I argue that this is a common problem in the labor market.

Emmy who works in a school has met negative attitudes as well:

Yeah, well I think that in the school world there are a lot of women so, there are a lot of mothers working there and I have never felt that it has somehow been an issue, like when I have applied for jobs I do not think that it has ever been in a very important role. But, I do sometimes think that for example daycare closes at a certain time and sometimes we have some kind of meeting that would probably go on for longer and I have to leave because if I am not there to pick up my kids they are going to take them to childcare, ha ha, I sometimes I

just have to leave earlier, of course sometimes I have to stay home when my kids are sick or something like that and I think that there are people, I think that especially women who do not have children, they respond to that, they think that it is unfair that someone has this ridiculous reason, ha ha, to leave early and they never get to do it... And I think that for the most part it is the, like, I feel very uncomfortable leaving too early because I feel like I am not doing my job in the best way that I could possibly do it but then some days you just have to be a little like have some mercy on yourself and just realize that this is the time, and the kids are small for a very short period of time and this is just one phase and later on I am going to be a different kind of worker hopefully. -Emmy

Emmy expresses feeling like a bad worker and feeling uncomfortable for not being able to contribute fully to her work. This further shows what kind of pressure mothers are under in the labor market. Mothers feel pressure for not being able to fully care for the children and pressure for not being able to give everything to their work. Emmy's reply also shows that she has had to consider and process this deeply and felt bad about not being able to contribute fully to her work. As I continued by asking Emmy if she thinks her husband experiences the same feelings or comments, she continued:

I honestly do not think that he does, usually when one of the kids get sick, I am the one who stays at home, and sometimes we do have to negotiate because as a teacher if I have like an exam or or someone is giving speeches or something like that I, I just sort of have to go to work if there is a choice that he can stay and sometimes it's kind of frustrating because then he has something like one time there was, for example, he had this different day at work, they were going to go I do not even remember they were going to do something fun, it was going to be very refreshing for them, and then I actually had like a serious work day ahead of me, a lot of speeches or something like that and I told him that he has to stay home and he was like mad, ha ha, that he could not participate in that, in the fun... and also well in our family, he works, he has to commute, he has to drive like 45 minutes to his work place and I, I work closer so I am the one who takes the kids to daycare and picks them up so he never has this issue that he would have to leave early or something like that so that is, I do not think that he has ever had any comments about that. -Emmy

Emmy's comments support Inari's thought of how "everybody", also often the fathers themselves, think that it is the mothers' job to take care of the children. This also shows that the attitude in the labor market is that men do not have to make the same kinds of sacrifices regarding matching family life and labor. Due to the fact that the male breadwinner attitude still exists, it is easier for fathers to think that their work is more important and it is the mothers' job to care for the private life, in other words the children.

Regarding motherhood and negative attitudes in the labor market, even Felicia has had bad experiences in her past while applying for jobs.

It is funny because my current occupation is XXXXX and we, we have really good gender equality at work, we do not, we are on the same line, we have the same wage as the men in our job, and in that sense and in that market it does not have a big, it is not a big deal. But yeah, it is weird. But then when I think of my past, past jobs, I remember that I have been asked about getting a family when I was like in my twenties, how I see my future and do I see myself as a parent. And that is not right... I have heard quite many illegal things during my past jobs. But it was not a thing then, nowadays you are more, you know your rights and you know yourself and you are really confident. But I mean when you are in your twenties and you want the job, you answer what they want to hear right. – Felicia

This is also illegal in Finland. Interviewers are not allowed to ask about possible future family plans. When choosing an employee it is against the Equality Act that an employer discriminates against a person due to pregnancy or something else that has to do with gender. (Finlex, 2021) However, this is a problem in the labor market. Women are in a more vulnerable position when applying for jobs. This also supports the idea and common attitude that women are responsible for the children. Women are taught from a really young age that they have the main responsibility for the children and this makes them also realize that it is a deal breaker in the labor market when applying for jobs.

When I asked Cassandra about how she has been treated in the labor market for being a mother and a woman she replied:

Well not much about being a mother since the baby is so small. And well, I am actually going to a new work, in one and a half months yeah, I got a new job ha ha so I resigned about two or three weeks ago and I do not know how they think about if it has anything to do about me being a mom or what, but let us see then, the new company I am going to is a Swedish, so I am hoping they have a little bit more, well how would I say, processed equality plan. - Cassandra

Cassandra did not have any experience of being a mother and being in the labor market yet, but as a woman she explained that she had been questioned especially as she is working in a male-dominant field.

Inari who works in the business field that I interviewed, was very open about the inequalities in their relationship. When asked how political decisions could benefit mothers she wished that it was not an option for the fathers to stay at home with children and she told me the following:

It would support it a lot because the men would realize how much work it is staying home with small kids, and how much work there is at home and how boring it is and how horrible it is sometimes and how fun it is actually to go to work where you get a nice salary and eat

your lunch and go to the toilet alone ha ha. We for instance did not, we divided all the costs fifty-fifty, even though I was not working, with my ex-husband - Inari

This puts the mother at risk for social exclusion because the mother is responsible for her own finances and when not working, they are not earning money. This is also a wider problem, because women in general earn less than men and while not working and getting a social benefit, they have even less money to manage with. Mothers are at risk of sliding into poverty.

When asking the participants how they divided work during parental leave, I learned that all families had different arrangements, but mainly the responsibility for the children and household was put on the mothers:

Parental leave time, well I was home for one year, with both of my kids, so they are two years kind of apart, their births so, with my first born I was at home a little bit over one year, and then I returned to work, and I worked for little bit less than one year, before our second child was born. And as I said earlier that I am divorced, but I was married then with the father of my kids. And, well domestically at home, we did not divide the household work so much. I think even he would agree that I did most of, most of the work at home. -Inari

In the family of Inari, she was the only one on parental leave with both of their children and the father did not take any parental leave at all. She also said that this inequality was one of the major issues in their relationship that then ended in divorce. Emilia stated the following:

Well I stayed home for the whole two years and my partner was working. And yeah, we did not, we did not discuss it so much because I was studying when I got pregnant, so I was going back to school, not earning money, and he had his permanent job so I think we did not talk about it so much but I think we both felt okay with it. When I was home with my son I did not do a lot of housework, I think I just took care of our son, and then when my partner came home we usually like went to the stores me or him or then made food together or I did not feel like I had a lot of pressure to clean the house or cook food or anything like that when I was at home and he was at work. But I feel like I did more of it, that was the case also before we got a child. – Emilia

Emilia feels that both parents felt good about their arrangement. She also did not feel any pressure to do other domestic work. Emmy said the both parents took the maximum leaves that are earmarked for them and she took all the parental leave. About domestic work she explained the following:

Well for the first year I was home, with the both our younger children and while I was home I did most of the cooking and cleaning and shopping and all that you know shopping for groceries and stuff like that. And then when I went back to work um, well we sort of shared

some of the domestic work but um it has mostly been my task to, for example my husband does not cook so I do all the cooking and grocery shopping and um, when they were smaller I think that it was sort of like you can take the kids so that I can do hovering or whatever so so that way I guess somehow it was shared, but I think that for the most part it is on my shoulders to do the work - Emmy

Emmy feels that most of the work load is on her shoulders. This can create conflicts in relationships and also create unnecessary pressure for mothers in the labor market. Women being responsible for domestic work and the male breadwinner attitude can be seen in these kinds of arrangements. Felicia discusses these conflicts in her reply to the same question.

I think I have been kind of like a, not tiger parenting but a tiger mom in that sense that I wanted to take control of everything in the beginning, concerning domestic work, concerning childcare everything. I wanted to have it all. And that is why we had these conflicts as I think quite many new parents have. But when our son got a bit older, we somehow managed to rearrange our roles in this family. And also then concerning labor market in this this moment that we are in, that my husband gives me the time to study as much as I need and then he takes care of our son and also domestic work. Although not in in the same amount that I do. But I think it is, it is also because I want to take care of everything. I don't let him take care of most of the tours in our household – Felicia

Felicia also shared that she was at home for the nine months, mothers' leave and parental leave, and her husband took the maximum of the fathers' leave. Cassandras reply is interesting, because she is the only one that shared the parental leaves equally.

Well we had a long discussion even before trying to get pregnant and how we could, or would divide our parental leaves, and for me it was very clear from the start, that a dad should have equal right to spend time with their kid, and stay at home and since I knew that my husband has been staying at home with his older kids, so I already knew that he is very willing to this also with this youngest one. And that way I was checking the, how long all are all the leaves, then which ones are like only for a mom and how long leave there is for dad and what is the part that we could divide. And then we decided that we try to split it half. And now as we have agreed, um, my husband will be stay at home dad in a few weeks when our baby is six months old and I will stay at home having my yearly vacation for one month, so we are going to be together for one month and then I am going back to work. And domestic work we share very equally and most of the times, of course when I have been more at home, the better the baby sleeps more I have also time to do some household chores here. But, I think as a person I am very strict to my spouse that we share these things, despite of the work we are doing. It is like no others work is more important than others, so we should also be equal at home. – Cassandra

All except one family in my study have had the mother staying at home most of the time and the one family who has divided the parental leaves evenly has had to do the research for it and make conscious

choices regarding it. In four out of five families, domestic work has mostly been done by the mothers. The family who divides it evenly has done so out of a conscious choice.

As the participants in my research have shown, the majority of the mothers took the parental leaves, which is one reason for the loop of gender pay gap and parental leaves to continue existing. As Levitas (2008) observed, for women to be fully integrated into the labor market, the men need to take responsibility at home. I argue that this has not happened in the Finnish society and it will not be solved unless political action is taken to address the inequalities.

If being an active member in the labor market brings inclusion, mothers who are outside of it for their maternity leave period are excluded. Regarding the definition of social exclusion, I argue that having a child and being on maternity leave can cause short-term exclusion from the wider society. Mothers in Finland use the most of the parental leave and are, for example, in a less beneficial position when they do not earn money than they were before their maternity leave. In my research, it became clear that this is an issue in the Finnish society, even though research shows that the Finnish society is often presented as the most equal society in the public discourse. Finnish exceptionalism hides the problems with motherhood and social exclusion.

As I have presented, Finnish mothers fall behind in salary development, as they take most of the parental leaves. This was also the case with the mothers I interviewed. However, in my opinion, the fault is not with the families. As Finnish women earn on average 16% less than men (Finnish Institute of Health and Welfare. 2021), when families decide who will take the parental leave, it is usually financially more profitable for the family, if the mother stays home. This creates a loop in my opinion. The problem can also be seen in research. As Giddens and Sutton (2017) argue, the pay gap between women and men should be narrowed down to be able to share domestic work more equally.

5.2. Gender equality and parenting

When I asked the participants about gender equality, they all agreed that there still is work to be done in the field of gender equality regarding parenting in Finland. Inari had an example of how she was treated after her children started daycare:

There is no gender equality in Finland being a parent, ha ha, I think. that society kind of supports the division of work that we for example had, and well if you for instance compare

to Sweden, where most men also take parental leave and take lots of it. I think in Finland it is still so uncommon that it is kind of not, or when I went to work when my first born and my second born, no actually it even it was worse when we had my second born, he went to daycare when he was under one year old, and he could not for instance walk yet... and I got all the comments, that how can I you know put such a small baby to daycare, to public daycare even, not like some family daycare, and my husband got none, even though I had already been home with him for one year, and he did not want to. So, that is a little bit, or a lot unequal. He got no negative comments, I got all the negative comments... that I was selfish and wanted to go back to work. When actually it was that my husband did not want to stay at home at all. So, that is why the child had to go to daycare. – Inari

This is a difficult problem regarding parenting in Finland. This further shows how the main attitude is that the mother is responsible for the children and also the choices made regarding the children. When the children go to daycare it is the mothers' responsibility to decide when they start and if it is "too early" according to the general attitudes, the mother is "selfish" and wants to go back to work.

I feel like in my case I thought that I wanted to be at home with my child and I felt that breastfeeding was really important so it was kind of a really tight bond from the beginning, because I was breastfeeding and then he was always sleeping next to me and I felt like I was the number one parent at that time so of course it is not equal... of course when the child get's older and when you separate and now we have fifty-fifty, um like we are taking care of him equally. So, both of us has to do our part like 100% of it. So now I feel it is really equal. I feel like I was doing more of it and more of the, like how do you call it, this, taking care of like if a friend at the daycare is having a birthday party and you need to buy a present and you need to buy new shoes and stuff like that that you have in your brain that needs to be fixed. I feel like women carry a lot of that.... So, it is not equal, actually it is not equal now also because I do that still, ha ha,, more than the father. -Emilia

Emilia still has more responsibility of their child even though they are co-parenting. When I asked her how she feels about that she replied.

It is kind of mixed because I think we are so used to these gender roles, that we kind of feel like we want to control everything, and so we want to be doing all those micro-managing things, but I do not know if we really want to when we like look at it from a little bit like further. I do not know I think it is a lot of it is learned and then we kind of accept it. - Emilia

Here we come back to Inari's thought that society supports the unequal division of labor. Emilia thinks of the division of responsibility and norms that kind of guide parents to do what they do. The roles sit so tight in the structures of the society and it is interesting how slow the change is regarding this. Felicia also talked earlier about wanting to be in charge of everything and how that brought conflicts in their relationships.

Emmy thinks the following about gender equality and parenting in Finland:

Hmm, well if I ever have children again I would love to be a father, seems like a very easy thing to do, ha ha. I do not know, because in my case, my husband is about ten years older than me and I think that he has a very, kind of an old-fashioned way of thinking of what is the mothers job and what is the fathers job and I know that his father does cook and he does a lot of stuff... In the summer time my husband is the one who takes care of like cutting the grass and taking care of whatever garden we have or whatever, but he does not really, in the winter time when there is not a lot to do outside, of course he always shovels the snow but in the house he does not have that many tasks that he really takes, of course he has always said and I know it is true, that if I tell him that could you please hover, then yes he is going to do it, but I have always felt that that is, cause I feel like I have to be some kind of a boss like I have to be the one who says you do this and I do that and that is kind of tiring, it would be nicer if he would just understand that he has to participate on his own without me saying about it. But, yeah I think that, he has a very old fashioned like thinking about it and that is just the way it has somehow like I somehow blame myself for not asking him more, ha ha. -Emmy

Inari, Emilia and Emmy all struggle with the same issue; it is expected of the mothers to be in charge. This brings pressure in the mothers' lives and support the division of domestic labor in families. Regarding gender equality, Felicia thought the following:

Big topic. It is quite hard in the beginning because in my opinion and I mean physiologically the mother is a key person to this newborn child, and you somehow live in a bubble with the child, and you tend to forget everything outside the bubble and now when you ask me about gender equality, I do not know if I have ever quite like processed this thought during these years. But I mean, if I, if I look at my parents how they, or their gender equality during our childhood, it was a very different, so I can see an improvement in that, in that sense that the father has the chance to take a leave from work, and also do not know about other employees but my husband's work is really somehow positive towards fatherhood and um, which is kind of rare I think, nowadays, as well but if I look back at my parents, I do not think my father was for example, in the room with my mother during her second labor with my brother, it was not a thing then. But nowadays you are more equal and, the father has the right to be there and also, also at home taking care of the baby, so, in that sense, maybe there is more equality in that sense but a hard question. -Felicia

Felicia is in the same line with Emilia who said that we are so used to these gender roles that there is not much to do about it. Like Felicia said, there has been much of improvement in the fathers' rights to spend time with their children or be present during labor. The new law about parental leave in Finland also makes the opportunities more equal as the parents will have the right to the same amount of leaves. Also the more fathers take parental leave the more common it will become at work places and the it will create a more positive atmosphere regarding fatherhood and parental leave. When asking Cassandra if there is gender equality regarding parenting in Finland, she replied:

Absolutely not. Ha ha, like fathers have been seen like mommy's little helpers no matter how much or little they do with their kids or how independent they are or do they do their own decisions or whatever but they are, every time like mom is in charge, and then dad is very kind to help. And like it is not a hundred percent parenting, it is something they do like for their own will and they could just be not doing it. Like that is never a choice to a mom, like stop being a mom, like doing parenting. And nobody expects that. - Cassandra

Cassandra summarizes the issue with gender equality regarding parenting. Mothers are in charge and it is expected of the mothers to make all choices regarding the children. This is what Inari talked about when she went back to work and got comments on how she could have such a small child in daycare. It was not seen as a choice they made as parents but a choice Inari made as a selfish mother. Emilia talked about being in charge all the time and if women really want to do that or is it only learned. Emmy talked about how they divide domestic work and how she is the one that says who do what. I continued asking Cassandra how this makes her feel and she replied:

Annoyed, mostly. Yeah but I know, I know these attitudes are very old and sit very tight. And only by the changes trying to be an example myself and whenever there is a chance I will openly speak about our choice to share these parental leaves. -Cassandra

Cassandra who shares caring for children equally with her husband, is possibly able to do so because they have shared the parental leave equally and the father has had to take the main responsibility of the child during the baby year. This shows that political decisions can bring gender equality. At current it still is optional for the fathers to take parental leave, and if they would do it more, it could become more equal.

5.3. Attitudes and motherhood

Berg's research is at the core to understanding why the roles sit so tight regarding having children even in the contemporary Finnish society. The problems in the labor market, attitudes about breastfeeding, women doing all the domestic work all come down to the history of motherhood and it being so traditional. Discussing motherhood and pressure with the participants, they said:

You cannot always like, because things do not always go the way you want to, and the kids, your own behavior towards the children is not always what you wish because you are tired or busy or overloaded or something so... I think everybody wants the best for their kids and sometimes you yourself cannot be your best cause you are a human being and not always perfect so, um, but yes when it comes to your children then you would kind of want to be always your best version of yourself and that is not nearly all the time possible. So. it is

frustrating sometimes I think there is a lot of pressure on mothers especially on parents in general as well, but especially on mothers to kind of or women in general who are mothers that you have to you know be perfect at work or perfect wife or girlfriend and perfect mother and everything ... and then take care of yourself really well which is practically impossible. - Inari

Inari talks about the pressure of being a good mother and being a good worker. I think this is a reoccurring theme in the interviews. Mothers are expected to be good workers and also have the main responsibility for the children. Inari also expresses feelings of failure to meet with all the expectations that are put on mothers. Emilia thinks about the attitudes in the following way:

Well, since I am not living in a traditional family, we are separated with my sons father, I feel like I am a, I feel like I am a pretty regular mom, but also a little bit out of the box mom, and maybe in a good way. I think I am pretty laid back, but also when it becomes stressful I can be not so laid back, I have actually had a few comments, that say that I seem to be a great mom, and doing like my own thing with my son and that it looks somehow maybe cozy or laid back, or fun maybe. And that one colleague said that if she ever would be a mom she would hope that she would be like me as a mom, so that was nice to hear. -Emilia

Emilia likes to do her own thing and not follow the norms that much. She also says it can be because she is separated and that already is breaking the norm. Emmy thinks the following about being a mother:

Well, um, I have been a mother for all of my adulthood, I, I had my first born when I was seventeen so I have never been an adult without being a mother and it was a very lifechanging experience to have a child, I think that for the first time in my life I truly understood what it means to love someone so much that you are ready to do absolutely anything. And my kids are the most important thing in my life, it does not stop me from having a career or having other ambitions in life but when it comes down to, they are the most important thing ... with my oldest, people have said that my daughter is terrific and that I have done a good job with her and with her we were, it was just the two of us for a very long time so I sort of take credit for that, ha ha, I think that she has grown up to be a tremendous person and I love her to pieces and I'm very proud of her and I think that somehow shows that I have not done everything wrong that there are things that I have done right as a parent. -Emmy

Emmy's experience shows that she has been stressing about doing motherhood right, and that is one example of how stressful it is to be a mother in Finland. The society has huge expectations on mothers and this is one way of it showing. Inari said being a mother is hard and Felicia is in the same line with that thought. When asking about how it feels being a mother, Felicia replied:

The best job ever. And the hardest as well. It has given me so much. I have always wanted to be a mother. It has been quite like I imagined it to be. I am a, how to say, I am a quite a

confident mother, I know what I believe in, and I know how I want my son to grow up, in which kind of environment. I am really strict about that. And I also want to be a fun mom, like everyone wants to be, and I hope I will succeed in that as well. I am not that strict, my husband is more strict with our son. But I love being a mom. - Felicia

Motherhood has given very much to the mothers I interviewed in general. They speak about motherhood in a mainly positive way and want the best for their children. Cassandra feels that being a mother is naturally a part of being herself:

Motherhood is not like something I can differ from my person itself so it is just like become a part of being me. It is not something separate or distant anymore like I thought when I was pregnant, it maybe felt a little bit that way.. – Cassandra

Motherhood feels natural to Cassandra. Discussing attitudes I will start with Cassandra because she and her husband shared the leaves equally. I asked if she had to convince the father to take parental leave or if they had to convince anyone else:

Well the most easier it has been to ourselves, ha ha, but not that much for others. And I feel it a little bit annoying that I have faced like tens of questions like how can I leave such a small baby with their dad and how are they going to spend their days and am I sure about this since, am I not willing to spend time with my baby. And every time I have to answer that the more important than my will is also the father's rights to spend time with the baby. And as a man my husband has also faced a little bit wonders but they have only been positive like wow like dad of the year, ha ha , and you are, you are very much praised to do this. Everyone is praising him for being so wonderful dad who want to stay home like it would have been wonderful from me to give him this opportunity. Like I am the kind of a bad mom who wanted to go back to work and he is the most fantastic dad when he wants to stay at home. Like it would not be our choice. -Cassandra

I think that Cassandra is at the core in understanding what is wrong in Finland regarding gender equality, parenting and the labor market attitudes. Women are considered to be bad mothers when they want to have a career and men are considered to be fantastic fathers when they want to stay home with their children. Women get behind in the labor market and men win whatever they do. When discussing possible judgement, the participants have gotten from the society, they shared the following thoughts:

Maybe when someone heard that I had a one-year-old children or young children and I had already come back to work, yes, some people commented on that. That I should be home taking care of my children, and not at work. -Inari

Mothers in Finland feel much pressure to succeed in raising children as it is the mothers' job to take care of the children. The common attitude is also that mothers should enjoy being at home (Giddens & Sutton, 2017). This had brought annoyance for, for example, Inari who thought that it should not be a father own choice to take parental leave, and men would notice how, for example, nice it is to go to work instead of staying at home. Here we step on other issues as, for example, Cassandra and Inari both had had experiences and wonders of them not taking care of small children at home when they went back to work. This shows that the traditional gender roles still exist. Cassandra met wonders if she was not enjoying the time she spent with her baby. The fathers of Inari and Cassandras children were not treated inappropriately regarding them taking or not taking care of their children at home. Interviewing Cassandra about them sharing the leaves showed that men get positive feedback if they take parental leave. This is different than Giddens and Suttons (2017) claim that men would get criticism if they stay at home.

I continued by asking Inari how she felt and she replied:

Maybe frustrated that we are actually live in the, well I had my first child in 2013, and the second one in 2016, but in 2000 like year, we still have that kind of opinions. Or sad. Frustrated and sad probably. And annoyed at the person who said it. -Inari

Inari wished the attitudes would change. Inari's experience in the labor market can also be found in Cassandras experience of "Like I am the kind of a bad mom who wanted to go back to work" and her getting questions about her not being willing to spend time with the baby.

When discussing interaction with the participants, Emilia started by replying:

I think when I got pregnant and had my child and when he was still a baby and younger my interactions with other people... surrounded, or it was a lot about the child and being a mother and diapers and breastfeeding and sleeping habits and everything like that but when the child gets older it becomes less less like määrättelevä (defining) for me the part of me being a mother it is not in the focus like or all the time. Because then it was, it was something I chose and I wanted to be first and foremost a mother. Now also, but also other things that I feel passionate about. I feel like I have now more space to flex in between the being a mother and being a woman and being a friend, and being a partner. -Emilia

Emilia says that with a baby a mother is mostly a mother but with an older child a mother has more roles than just a mother. She continued by talking about judgement:

I think all of us have felt that kind of judgement or advice, mainly from my ex-partners mother, mother-in-law was keen on giving advice. I think she would not call it judgement but I took it as judgement a few times. But I think it also involves when you are new with the, like new with motherhood, you take advice also like judgement. But sometimes people could just be quiet. People tend to have a lot of opinions on how you should be a mother. And it is really so much more than people expect of you when you are being a father. When I was a new mother, I guess like because you are so new to everything and you are unsure about many things. I think you listen to them more, or you give them more like weight, the comments, but I think, I think also then I had this, kind of this feeling that somehow okay you can have your opinion but I know what I am doing, most of the time. But when my son gets older I feel less paineita (pressure). And when I am already like out of the ordinary that I do not have like this usual family, so I think that I can do whatever I want. -Emilia

It is clear that a lot of the times, mothers are attacked with advice that feels like judgement. And with a baby, it feels more important than it actually is. When discussing going to places with the children, Emilia continued that:

I think I have avoided places for my own mental health and also for everyone else's sake, ha ha, not going to places that I know my child would be bored and make a lot of noise and stuff like that. But I am not sure if I would have wanted to go to those places but now when I say this I am thinking is this also like something that society tells me to think, that I do not even want to do those things.. well if it would be more okay to bring kids to different places then maybe I would like it, if it would be more normal, I do not know. But I was using cloth diapers and we are vegetarians and my child is still sleeping next to me and I was breastfeeding him for two years, I think that I did a lot of these things and did not listen to people saying he should be in his own bed or I should stop breastfeeding him, so I feel like a lot of things I did not listen to, to other people's opinions. I feel like people should just stop caring about what other people do with their lives and with their parenting. I think parenting would need to be seen as something, something really normal and like I do not know why it is so, why people have a lot of opinions about it because it is so normal. A lot of people have children and become parents why is it so, ha ha, I cannot find the word. Like why is it such a arka aihe (sensitive subject), when it is so normal. -Emilia

Emilia questions her own choices of where she has taken her son and she the whole attitude about parenting. This shows that there is that kind of bad attitudes regarding parenting that make mothers feel anxiety over. Emmy speaks about loneliness:

In a certain way maybe, well of course when I was seventeen, and had a baby, I would not even have anyone, like none of my friends had kids and then, um, when I went to study in the university, most of my friends did not have kids and um well I guess it was for a very long time kind of lonely in a way that, of course I had friends that, I became friends with people who did not have kids and we did get to spend time, but I could not always participate because sometimes I just had to stay home, I could not have my daughter to spend time somewhere else all the time and then later on with the younger kids, I have for example this one friend who has, who have the two kids and they have like they've been born like a week apart both

of them so we spent a lot of time on our maternity leave, and I think that it was, it was a blessing because for the most part I was again very lonely... - Emmy

The experience of loneliness is in line with relational social exclusion. Not having peer or social contacts brings feelings of loneliness and feelings of being socially excluded. Emmy also said it is hard to combine life with children to the surrounding life. I continued by asking her if she thinks fathers have the same kinds of problems:

With their friends..., I do not think it has been easy for him either. -Emmy

Emmy's answer shows that even father's experience difficulties in combining being with children and living life to the fullest. Emmy felt that her husband also felt lonely. Of going to places with children, Emmy said:

I do not think that they behave very well, and it is very stressful because I am always worried that they are going to like drop something or mess something up. If I had to I would, I do not think that I honestly do not care what other people think. We do and before this whole covid thing, we did used to go to the restaurants every once in a while, and for the most part they behaved pretty well in those, of course with a very small child, I did always feel that it was, a little inconvenient because, well for example our son was a screamer, he screamed for hours, I was not able to watch any domestic series because I needed subtitles so that I could follow the story, so I think I avoided those situations quite some time. I think that and also, I breastfed my children for quite some time so that was somehow I guess an issue. I used to breastfeed at like public places but I never felt very good about it. It was not, well I mean who wants to take out their boob in in front of everyone else and do that, so. Nowadays maybe they have places where you can do that in a peaceful place and that is, that can encourage people to go out but, truthfully when the kids were very small I think that I was so tired, that the idea of going somewhere was just very stressful so I did not do that a lot. It was always a like total mayhem to go somewhere and when you are really tired, you do not want that so.. -Emmy

Emmy talks about it being difficult to go to places with children because the children will not necessarily behave well and according to the expectations of others and because of breastfeeding. When asking Felicia to describe her interaction with people. Had it changed before and after she had children, she explained the following:

No, I do not believe so. I might have gotten a bit lazy. And, maybe I am too confident to somehow take people's reactions in consideration and somehow, you just do not give a shit anymore. To speak it out. As much as I did before, it was a huge part of my life always thinking about what other people thought of me and my actions and everything but nowadays you somehow let it go because you have this tiny human in your hands and that is what matters the most and yeah. Small things do not bother me anymore. But otherwise I think I stayed quite the same and my yeah my values are still the same. -Felicia

Felicia does not think that she thinks about what other people think. I continued by asking her if she had gotten any judgements, opinions or advice and she replied:

I believe that I think so but the people who did or comment or say something, did not know that they were kind of attacking me. Because when you are a mother, you tend to take everything, even though I just said I do not give a shit, but concerning motherhood, and in the beginning, you are quite vulnerable, so, I remember this one time we were, we had this baby swimming classes, and then I put my son on the stool in the locker room, and then this old lady came by, and then she started holding my child, and then she just said that I am just holding you child so he does not fall off this chair, and for me it meant that I am a bad mother, that somebody has to come and take care of my child because she thinks the child is going to fall down from the chair and I was not observant enough to realize that. So, these are the things you might take a bit hard on yourself, if somebody thinks you want to harm your child in that sense. She judged me. And then the worst person to judge is your husband's mother. But as I said it is easier now, and I am in that stage that I do not give a shit anymore so. But the first year is hard. You are trying to find yourself as a mother and then you are really vulnerable. - Felicia

I continued by asking Felicia if she changed her behavior due to other people's opinions and she replied:

I have to say I have not changed my actions or my opinions because when my son was two months, we did a tour in a Michelin star restaurant with my friends. We had five strollers, and five under half-year-old babies and we went to have lunch in a Michelin star restaurant in Helsinki City. And you should have seen the faces when we walked in. And we did it because we could. We did not want to have a Michelin star lunch, we would have been fine with you know a ten euro lunch somewhere in Helsinki but we wanted to do that because we have never seen small children in fine restaurants. In Finland we are still in that stage that you have to keep your children away from all public places until they can behave, but how can they behave, if you never take them anywhere, so that was the point for that, and I have always before the whole pandemic, XXXXX has been with me everywhere. Fine restaurants, he was three months when we took our first trip, I did not if he cried or anything because that is normal, children do cry. But if we do not ever take them places, they will never learn and people will never learn. We still have attitudes towards children in our country. Don't you dare take that child to a restaurant, and it might be that if they cry, people think that they will ruin their dinner, but I think people who are really wasted during dinners are really annoying and ruins my, my perception of that so no, I have not changed my actions in any way I believe. -Felicia

This goes in line with Emilia's thought on how to normalize having children. Felicia did not feel she had been excluded from happenings:

Certainly, but I mean they are events or happenings that I do not mind being excluded from, I mean, everything that has to do with long dinners and, friend dinner or restaurant nights or, or something to do with alcohol, might be excluded but I do not think, I do not like the word in that sense excluded because I do not believe that I have been. -Felicia

The pressure mothers today experience can also be tracked down to, for example, how motherhood was controlled before. Mothers were guided strongly by authorities and mothers should raise the children according to literature that was meant to control mothers. Still today, mothers are the ones who feel anxiety if their children, for example, behave badly in public. This is one of the major results in my study. Felicia talked about children not being welcome in the society, and also that how could children learn to behave if they are never taken to any public places. The majority of the participants felt that children that cried in public places were bothering others, hence the choices of going to places caused pressure for the mothers. Research shows that mothers get the blame for badly behaving children. (Byvelds & Jackson, 2019). Interaction shapes motherhood, and the interviews showed that all mothers had been more or less criticized in some way in their day-to-day lives. If a mother is bullied by someone or the society for making their own choices that differ from the collective identity, it can cause anxiety and pressure. Interaction from people (Giddens & Sutton, 2017). And with this, motherhood is also formed through interaction.

Emmy discusses important issues regarding motherhood and going to places with children. I argue that her experiences are really common regarding feeling lonely, breastfeeding, father's loneliness and avoiding public places. Could this be fought by making parenting "normal" like Emilia suggested? Would Emmy also feel comfortable to go places if it would be more normal. Emmy's experience and feeling about public breastfeeding can be an example of the problems with the internalized male gaze.

When asking Cassandra about possibly changing her behavior, she replied:

Not really towards all the people, of course the covid situation has just been a real struggle since we have not been anywhere, we have been stuck inside home. I was thinking about going to some mom coffees and whatever baby groups but there have not been none. So, I have only seen my few friends. But maybe my attitudes towards small children are more like calmer now, since I understand better how hard it can be to keep the baby happy and quiet and for example in the busses or whatever public transportation I have, it can be a really hard situation for a mom if the baby just starts screaming, nothing will help so, I am more emphatic and patient in those situations. - Cassandra

These thoughts go throughout the interviews and it somehow shows that children are actually not welcome in the society because they do not behave according to society's expectations. This at least is the experience of the mothers and that way they might change their behavior to suit the expectations by not going to places or, like Felicia, making a statement by going to a Michelin star restaurant with babies.

I asked Cassandra about opinions, advice, judgement from someone regarding her being a mother and she replied:

Well, no one has questioned it so straight from me, if I would not want to be at home. It is just general wondering, like, it is not a normal situation. And it is like would it not be a fantastic opportunity to spend a year at home. Okay maybe it would but I think it would be very wrong to do for the dad. And also I just found out a few weeks ago that if mom wishes she can keep all the parental leave days and nobody even asks from the dad if they want to have. Mom just can apply all the days for herself, and that is it. So, it does not sound very equal to me. And one case where I have got judgement about being a mom is when XXXX was, she was maybe two weeks old. She was born with caesarian section so, I was in a little bit pain after she was born, and it was maybe the second time when I was out with her pushing a stroller. She was asleep at first but then she started crying and I had listened to a book with earphones when I was walking, and the baby started screaming and I started shushing her, but still some women came to me like hey, do you hear, your baby is crying, will you not do anything like you do not hear her cry, you have those earphones like okay, I really do, are there that kind of earphones even existing which would block a baby cry that well? It was like well thank you for your kind words, I really hear my baby cry, I try to do my best to keep her quiet and happy.
-Cassandra

And on how it made her feel, she added:

Well I was like okay it has been two weeks since baby is born and I am already judged by strangers, which never happened before. Like they already knew better than I do, what to do. And that was a very stupid assumption like have they not ever tried these noise cancelling earphones, they do not block noises like that. -Cassandra

Both Felicia and Cassandra has had comments from strangers about something they are doing with their babies. This is very odd and does not happen in any other field in the society. It is somehow okay to comment on mothers' behavior. I asked Cassandra if she changed her behavior she replied:

Well the few times I have and I have been like in the shopping center or restaurant, there have not been so many times, because of this situation, well, I have left the places if the baby has been crying so much that other people are annoyed, or I feel that I am disturbing others. Maybe that is one of the clear examples of how my behavior has changed. -Cassandra

Although she has changed her behavior because her child has been crying in public, she thinks that children are welcome in the society:

Yeah, I have not faced any, any kind of intolerance in that way that made me feel like I am not welcome somewhere with the baby. It is more that my assumptions about that people do not want to hear babies screaming, since I remember very well how I felt before I had a baby of my own. -Cassandra

Cassandra is sure that she will be excluded from situations and happening in the future because she has children.

Children crying is a theme that goes through all the interviews regarding changing behaviour because of children and children being welcome in the society. All mothers discussed this in some way except Inari who said she had not changed her behaviour. This is in line with the research by Clarissa Carden, who spoke about Women having the main responsibility of raising children, and therefore women are to blame if children do not behave according to the norms.

Policies regarding motherhood are important, and I asked my participants how political decisions could benefit mothers and gender equality regarding being a parent. All participants had ideas:

I do not think it should be a choice if the man stays home with the small kids because the mother do not have a choice either. -Inari

So, I think there is some problem with the like normal family unit and expectations that the society and the people in the family has of it. I think there needs to be some like, that there is no other option, I do not know how to like fix the laws of like taking care of the child like during parental leave and that the men get more involved and that the women let them be more involved and that it's somehow more equal from the beginning. Of course there is these biological things that like breastfeeding and this in the beginning but then and somehow, and the attitude that also the men like that it is, well of course the men have to, let go of something to be more involved in the parenting and the woman can maybe gain something in the labor market when they let go of being the managers at home so I think both needs to loose and also get more of in exchange. -Emilia

Both Inari and Emilia support the idea that political decisions should be made so that the fathers would have to take parental leaves. Emmy has a different idea of making the labor market more equal. She says that:

There is a very simple solution to that, I think that the maternity leave money should be taken from both the mother and the father, so with that we would bring tons of equality to women,

and I think that they have been talking about, they have to take the time like, you are going to be home for six months and you are going to be home for six months, and I do not think that that is going to work because, on the other hand we should be encouraging women to breastfeed, and if we are telling them that you cannot stay home with the baby because the father has to stay home with the baby, then we are stepping on other issues. And the best way to bring, to make it even is that you take the money from the both of both. So that that would be a very important thing. I do not understand why they have not already done this. This is a very simple thing in my mind.- Emmy

When asked if political decisions are the ones who can make a difference, she added:

Yes, exactly, yes, and not the kind that that, splits the time, the kind that splits the money because that is simple. And that would bring, that would actually help also all the women who do not want to have children. This is not something that would only help the mothers, this would actually bring people, because then it would make a difference, if you have a woman and a man, applying for a job, you would not, I mean because the father might have to pay for the father's baby just as well so, that would make things even. -Emmy

Emmy's suggestion would in fact make the labor market more equal, and help families to have more opportunity to share the leaves. At least then, the question of which parent stays home with the child would not be a financial issue.

People need to change their attitudes, labor market is a hard thing because, if you put your child into daycare when they are nine months and the maternity leave, or is it parental leave is over, everyone at work says that the child is too young to be in childcare, but then if you stay home for two years, that is too long, although people say that the best place to be for a child is home, but then if you take two years off work, I mean it is so hard to come back. Depends on your work, I have a, in that, in that sense my work is really good for maternity leaves, because it does not change that much. But I mean, in a hectic job, staying at home for two years is too long. So it is a dilemma and it is, they say that it is, you have to stay at home for a longer period of time but then if you do stay, it is also too long, so... it is a new thing in Finland for fathers to stay at home. I think actually my husband is one of the, the rare people or the rare fathers who did take advantage of the whole father leave. And I mean that is kind of short, short period of time. But then for the fathers to stay at home for a longer period of time, would be something really new. I mean, yeah but the attitudes, the attitudes should change but how, I do not know. I do not know. People having more children. That is the problem in Finland. - Felicia

Felicia brings out a new topic in the interviews regarding attitudes. Both Inari and Emilia think that attitudes change after political decisions are made. Felicia thinks Finnish families should have more children, and that would change the attitudes in the labor market too. Cassandra replies to the same question in the following way:

Yeah, they would but only if the parental leaves could be shared more equal. I like these new suggestions where there are months that you can, you can more freely share between parents. I think that many many women think that like breast feeding is, is not possible if they are not staying at home for a year. Well I am breast feeding and I am going to continue it despite I am going back to work. So, I do not think that is really a problem. Most of the women all around the world are breastfeeding their babies when they are working. So, it is a very rare situation like globally that women could stay at home for this long. But I still respect those views so I, I do not like the idea about forcing mothers back to work when their babies are small but for more chances to share the leaves. - Cassandra

Cassandras points are interesting because she is the only one of the participants who shared the parental leaves fifty-fifty with her husband. She thinks the choices should be voluntary but there should be more options to share the leaves. Unlike Emmy, she thinks it is possible to share the leaves and breastfeed.

As can be seen in my interviews, mothers think that political decisions need to be made to bring more equality in parenting. It can, for instance be the kind that was suggested by the mothers I interviewed, that forces the fathers to take parental leave, or the kind that splits the money. I argue, that parental leave benefits cannot be voluntary for the fathers, because in that way, attitudes in the labor market could shift into the day-to-day lives of the Finnish families. Moreover, Emmy's suggestion of dividing the costs of parental leave benefits between the parent's employers is good regarding the labor market and gender equality.

Cassandra who I interviewed was pregnant when the first wave of covid19 started. She described herself feeling sad about her maternity leave while she was so isolated:

It has been a little bit sad since this, this baby is going to be my only one, we do not want more children and since I have, I am this old, kind of, for a mom, I have had plenty of time to think about it earlier like, if I had a baby, what would I do? And I had some expectations and when I was pregnant there were not any support groups for anything, it was not enjoyable "sit in the cafés for the last days before labor", I have been stuck at home for so long and a year ago when this covid situation started, when no one knew how bad it would be, I have been extra careful, and I have been distant working, for all the time I have been at work so, we are all getting very tired about this just staying at home and seeing each others faces. Well maybe it was a good thing to spend, spend half a year home before getting this baby, at least we know that we get along well enough, so we have not had any, any like a big troubles. And since my maternity leave is kind of short, I would have enjoyed sitting in café's, going to some baby swimming or whatever, but now it have not happened. -Cassandra

This topic, the effects of covid19 on motherhood, will need further research in the future. Cassandra has suffered from relational exclusion during her pregnancy and after having her child.

In the interviews I gave examples on different kinds of commenting mothers had had during the time they had been mothers, and it not only shapes their own perception of them as mothers but also the norms about motherhood are formed in this way. While the atmosphere, as can be seen in the interviews, is so negative regarding motherhood, the image as a whole is negative. Like Felicia said:

You are trying to find yourself as a mother and then you are really vulnerable. – Felicia

Mothers also carry the responsibility for shaping these norms and the society in Finland does not contribute in making it better for the mothers. However, the new legislation on parental leaves is an improvement in my opinion, it does not necessarily bring more gender equality as it still is voluntary for the fathers to take parental leave. I think also collective identity, as presented by Giddens & Sutton (2017) forms the mother role more than any one family's choices regarding gender equality. As it is now, mothers are left alone in living up to the conflicted expectations that they face. Like Felicia stated, labor market is hard, because whatever a mother does, it is wrong. If they stay at home for a long time it is not good as they should have their own life and be a part of the labor market. However, going back to work when being a mother of a small child, a mother faces much criticism for her choices. This experience was clearly shown by Cassandra and Inari.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Due to the fact that the term social exclusion is multidimensional makes it is a perfect lens through which motherhood in Finland can be viewed. As Mathieson et al. (2008) have argued, social exclusion still exists because the societies do not react to unequal power relationships. (Mathieson et al., 2008). This is an issue in the Finnish society regarding motherhood because, as can be seen in my interviews, women who are socially active members of society, are discriminated against in the labor market and take much of the responsibility regarding domestic work. Gender equality does not exist and is hidden due to Finnish exceptionalism and the fact that Finland as a country wants to market itself as being the best regarding gender equality. The results in my thesis say otherwise. Besides being discriminated against in the labor market and being responsible for most of the domestic work, mothers have to face inappropriate attitudes and opinions in their day-to-day lives.

While Levitas (2008) argued that the term social exclusion has failed to address unpaid work, I argue that as long as the context is made clear, social exclusion can be used to discuss the problems with motherhood in Finland. The term social exclusion can bring awareness to issues with gender equality and labor market discrimination as long as the context is clear. Research has also shown that women living in poverty can manage, by being members of community networks but do not escape being socially excluded in this way. (Gosling, 2008). I argue that it clearly does not help that women create their own mothers' groups and discuss issues regarding motherhood and gender equality there, because the issues are well known. Despite these groups, as can be seen in my results, nothing major has really happened to, for example, narrow the gender pay gap or men taking more responsibility regarding domestic work.

The National Action Plan against poverty and Social Exclusion has not succeeded regarding equal treatment of, for example, mothers in the labor market. One reason for this is that Finnish exceptionalism hides issues regarding gender equality in the Finnish society. I argue that the attitudes about motherhood that still exist today can be tracked down to the history of motherhood and how the ideal mother should be. The fact that the participants in my thesis had met terrible attitudes in the labor market shows that there is still work to be done and actually the traditional gender roles have not changed that much. As Giddens and Sutton (2017) showed, the ideal of the male breadwinner still exists. This can be seen in the interviews as Inari, Emilia, Emmy and Felicia all took the most of the parental leave and take care of most of the domestic and emotional work.

I want to also point out that four out of five of the mothers that I interviewed thought that they had the main responsibility regarding domestic work and caring for children. When asking Inari if men met the same kind of inappropriate treatment in the labor market as the women did, she replied:

I know they do not. Because of the society in Finland, that the mothers have the main responsibility of the kids, and everybody thinks that. - Inari

I think this comment is good to describe the frustration that mothers today feel about having the main responsibility. To solve these kinds of problems and to create more equality men need to take more responsibility at home and the way to do this is by political decisions that support the narrowing of the gender pay gap.

I want to highlight two comments regarding gender equality and parenting:

There is no gender equality in Finland being a parent, ha ha, I think. that society kind of supports the division of work that we for example had- Inari

Absolutely not. Ha ha, like fathers have been seen like mommy's little helpers no matter how much or little they do with their kids or how independent they are or do they do their own decisions or whatever but they are, every time like mom is in charge, and then dad is very kind to help. And like it is not a hundred percent parenting.. -Cassandra

Inari and her ex-husband had traditional roles, in other words, Inari took care of most of the domestic work and the children. Cassandra who had put much thought into being equal in parenting and made conscious choices to succeed in it thought that the general attitude is that fathers are incompetent as parents, as Mulcany, Parry and Glover (2009) also found in their study.

Mulcany, Parry and Glover (2009) also discussed how men should take more space in parenting and how women should let them do so. (Mucany, Parry & Glover, 2009) The results of my study show that the traditional attitudes about parenting can be tracked down to the history of motherhood, and that makes it basically impossible for women to change these attitudes. The only ways to change the attitudes are political decisions regarding parenting and gender equality.

I have shown in my research that traditional gender roles exist in the Finnish society. Regarding my research question: *What characteristics are there to Finnish mothers' experiences of social exclusion and how do possible negative attitudes regarding motherhood affect mothers' well-being in the Finnish society?* I can say that I have shown that Finnish mothers experience social exclusion in the

labor market and by society's judgement over them not necessarily living up to the traditional gender roles. Attitudes in the labor market and attitudes about mothers having the main responsibility of taking care of the children and domestic work still exist in the Finnish society. This does not bring well-being to the mothers' lives, quite the opposite. Political decisions should be made to narrow the gender pay gap. Attitudes about motherhood change after these decisions are made.

The current trend seems to be that fathers in Finland who do take care of their children also receive much praise for it, and they can create a better image of themselves while parenting. This result is not in line with Giddens & Sutton (2017) who argued that fathers are criticized if they take the caring-for-children role in the family. I want to end by quoting Cassandra: *Like I am the kind of a bad mom who wanted to go back to work and he is the most fantastic dad when he wants to stay at home.* This is where the problem regarding equal parenting and attitudes lies.

While writing my thesis I found that future research should be conducted on at least two topics. The 1950s mothers were housewives and the 1980s mothers were the first mothers who were in the labor market. Do the 80s mothers' group think that the one and only accomplishment is to bring gender equality, is being in the labor market and that they have reached it already? As a result of this, the millennial mothers grow up with an illusion of gender equality, and when they have children the illusion is broken. Does this lead to a) increased divorce rates b) families only having one child? Both these groups are growing.

Future research should also be conducted on motherhood and covid19 in Finland. Being unable to meet family and friends in everyday settings is a form of exclusion. Social exclusion in everyday life can be, for example, being isolated or not having anyone to talk to when going through life changes. (Giddens & Sutton, 2017). Cassandra was pregnant and on maternity leave when the first wave of covid19 reached Finland. She described her feeling as sad for being isolated. Becoming a mother is in my opinion one of the most major changes in a woman's life. It is important to have a peer in this situation. Especially during covid19, there have been little or none of the usual activities that are organized for mothers. Mothers in otherwise vulnerable situations are especially at high risk of becoming excluded from the society. The aftermath of covid19 is a very important theme for future research and development of social policies. The relational social exclusion approach is key when making new policies regarding the effects on motherhood that covid19 has had. Future research should include this group's experiences of motherhood. Moreover, it would be very important that

future research included the experiences of immigrant mothers in Finland and social exclusion. Lastly, fathers' experiences of gender-equal parenting should also be included in future research.

SUMMARY IN SWEDISH- SVENSK SAMMANFATTNING

I denna avhandling med titeln *Jag är den typen av dålig mamma som ville gå tillbaka på jobb och han är den mest fantastiska pappan som vill stanna hemma- en kvalitativ studie om hur allmänna åsikter påverkar mödrars välmående i det finska samhället*, diskuteras och problematiseras hur den ofta gömda ojämlikheten mellan könen speglas in i vardagen av finländska familjer. Den sjunkande nativiteten i Finland diskuteras ofta i finländska medier och av de finländska myndigheterna. Orsaker är många, men attityder kan påverka detta fenomen. Finländska mödrar upplever olika former av social exkludering, bland annat inom arbetsmarknaden. I denna avhandling svarar jag på frågan om vad som är typiskt i finländska mödrars upplevelser av social exkludering och hur möjliga negativa attityder gällande moderskap påverkar mödrars välmående i det finska samhället. Målet med avhandlingen är att öka kännedom om detta ämne och att kunna bidra till en förbättring.

Jag har använt narrativ metod i avhandlingen och intervjuat fem finländska mödrar om deras erfarenheter efter att de fått barn. Narrativ är de berättelser människor delar om sina erfarenheter (Bold, 2012). Enligt Lynn McAlpine (2016) används den narrativa metoden i samhällsvetenskap till att förstå hur människor uppfattar deras liv via deras erfarenheter. (McAlpine, 2016). Efter intervjuerna har jag analyserat materialet under tre teman; arbetsmarknad och moderskap, jämlikhet och föräldraskap samt attityder och moderskap. Intervjuerna hölls över videosamtal och är arkiverade i Kulturvetenskapliga arkivet Cultura vid Åbo Akademi. Avhandlingens resultat är inte generaliserbart i och med att deltagarna var så få och talade om sina egna erfarenheter. Deltagarna som grupp var relativt homogen. Avhandlingen har två teorikapitel varav det första har rubriken social exkludering och andra har rubriken moderskap. Efter teorikapitlen presenterar jag det material som jag har samlat i samband med intervjuerna. Sedan analyseras materialet och jag avslutar avhandlingen med en sammanfattning.

Förenta nationerna (2016) definierar social exkludering som ett fenomen där en person inte är en fullt aktiv medlem i samhället. Det är ett tillstånd och en process där en person inte deltar fullt i det kulturella, -sociala, - politiska eller ekonomiska livet i samhället. (United Nations, 2016). Anthony Giddens och Filip E. Sutton (2017) delar upp social exkludering i olika sammanhang, det vill säga, att man kan vara exkluderad från sociala relationer eller till exempel arbetsmarknaden. (Giddens & Sutton, 2017). Ruth Levitas (2008) konstaterar att termen social exkludering inte har inkluderat obetalt arbete som ofta görs av kvinnor. (Levitas, 2008). Jag påstår dock att social exkludering är en

bra utgångspunkt i diskussionen om moderskap ifall man klargör kontexten, det vill säga moderskap i det finska samhället.

Mulcany, Parry och Glover (2009) diskuterar könsroller i mammagrupper och har kommit fram till att könsrollerna reproduceras i dessa grupper. Mammagrupper är grupper som stöder mammor i deras vardag, men alla mammor har ändå inte möjlighet att delta. I deras studie kom de fram till att mammorna har känt ångest ifall de inte har agerat enligt gruppens förväntningar. Grupper formar också om papprollen. (Mulcany, Parry & Glover, 2009). Berg (2008) klargör att bilden om den ideala modern skapades för att stöda kapitalismen, industrialiseringen och könsrollerna. Män arbetade och kvinnans jobb var att ta hand om hemmet och barnen. Bilden om den ideala modern kan inte nås i verkligheten på grund av att ribban är så hög. (Berg, 2008). Tanken om den manliga försörjaren existerar även idag. (Giddens & Sutton, 2017).

Folkpensionsanstalten i Finland betalar ut sociala förmåner till personer som bor i Finland. (Kela, 2019). En mamma kan få moderskapspenning i cirka fyra månader (Kela 2021a). Efter detta kan föräldrarna dela på föräldrapenningen som kan fås i cirka sex månader. (Kela 2021b). Utöver detta, har pappan nio veckors pappaledighet. (Kela 2020). En förälder har rätt att sköta barnet hemma tills hen är tre år gammal. (Kela, 2021c). Den nya lagstiftningen om föräldraledigheter förbereds i riksdagen. Enligt den nya lagstiftningen har föräldrar samma mängd föräldraledighetsdagar. (Kela, 2021d). Enligt Institutet för hälsa och välfärd (2021), tjänade kvinnor i medeltal 16% mindre än män. Kvinnor blir efter i löneutvecklingen på grund av långa föräldraledigheter. (Finnish institute for health and welfare 2021a). En femtedel av finska pappor höll inte alls föräldraledighet år 2019. Föräldrapenningen som kan delas mellan föräldrarna användes av endast 11 % av papporna och endast 2 %, av de föräldrar som tog hand om barnet hemma efter att föräldraledigheterna tagit slut, var pappor. (Finnish institute for health and welfare, 2021b).

Enligt Giddens & Sutton (2017), sköter kvinnorna majoriteten av allt hushållsarbete, även om de nu arbetar också utanför hemmet. (Giddens & Sutton, 2017). Berg (2008) förklarar att forskning om kvinnors förvärvsarbete mest har fokuserat på hur moderskap har lidit efter att de börjat arbeta utanför hemmet. Mammor känner ökad stress över att ta hand om barnen när de börjat arbeta utanför hemmet. (Berg, 2008). Carden (2019) påpekar att mammor i allmänhet beskylls ifall barnen beter sig dåligt. Detta beror på att den allmänna attityden är att det är mammorna som ansvarar för barnuppfostran. (Byvelds & Jackson, 2019).

I min avhandling har jag visat att de traditionella könsrollerna existerar även i dagens Finland. Jag har svarat på min forskningsfråga, om *vad som är typiskt i finska mödrars upplevelser av social exkludering och hur möjliga negativa attityder gällande moderskap påverkar mödrars välmående i det finska samhället*. Finländska mödrar upplever social exkludering i till exempel arbetslivet och de döms ifall de inte lever upp till de sociala förväntningarna. Attityderna på arbetsmarknaden och uppfattningen att mammorna har huvudansvaret gällande barnen existerar även idag. Mödrarna lider av detta tankesätt. Politiska beslut gällande föräldraledigheterna borde fattas för att minska skillnader i lönen mellan könen. Attityder om föräldraskap ändras efter att politiska beslut har fattats.

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