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The Meaning of Cleaning: Conflicting Norms About Learning to Clean in an Era of Outsourcing Domestic Work

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to analyse how Swedish mothers, regularly outsourcing cleaning, make use of different discursive resources and negotiate conflicting norms about domestic work when they discuss the role of cleaning in the socialisation of their children. Domestic work is often seen as boring yet character-building, socialising independence, self-esteem, responsibility and work ethic. However, time pressures have led more Swedish families to outsource domestic work, supported by tax deductions for services such as cleaning. Yet, we know little about what this outsourcing means for everyday family life. The study is based on interviews with 12 working mothers, with children aged from 9 months to 15 years, from different parts of Sweden who regularly outsource cleaning. Data was analysed with the critical discursive psychology framework. The analysis shows that mothers value both sons and daughters learning to care for the home, but children's actual participation seemed limited, often restricted to decluttering before the cleaners arrive. Outsourcing cleaning was mainly seen as a strategy to reduce stress, prevent conflicts and maximise family/quality time. Mothers expressed a dilemma between wanting their children to learn domestic skills and outsourcing cleaning to preserve family/quality time. Some stressed the importance of teaching their children to respect the cleaners and their work, while also problematising how cleaning was performed by lower-class, racialised workers. Overall, the study suggests that outsourcing is part of a renegotiation of the socialisation processes in the family, where domestic work is downplayed, while norms of career commitment, paid work, and family/quality time are reinforced, shaping children's orientations towards future citizenship.

Everyday family life contains a variety of mundane practices that shape our understanding of ourselves, and our family relationships. In these everyday family practices are parents expected to support the development of their children 'through the exercise of adequate parental choices and suitable practices and skills' that will turn children into 'responsible and well-functioning future citizens' (Aarsand and Jarvis 2023, p.377). An example of such a practice is cleaning, which Swedish researcher Fanny Ambjörnsson (2018) has identified as a crucial component of becoming a responsible and mature adult. Similar ideas are also evidenced in the variety of advice where today's parents can find help and inspiration on how to engage their children in the everyday domestic work. In such advice, it is stressed that domestic work is not only about cleanliness and order but also serves to build self-esteem and develop a work ethic and a sense of responsibility towards others, thus strengthening the family as a unit (see Hands on as We Grow n.d.).

However, time pressure has come to characterise Western families and everyday life at the turn of the twenty-first century (Gauthier et al. 2004), and this is also the case in Sweden. One solution to this time pressure is that, since 2007, Swedish families have had the opportunity to outsource domestic work through a reform offering tax deductions (SFS 2007, p.346) on services such as cleaning (Skatteverket n.d.).[1] Many Swedish families have seized the opportunity to outsource domestic

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services, cleaning especially, and this presents an opportunity to study changing norms around cleaning, which is the focus of this article. We argue that cleaning your home, or, outsourcing the cleaning, represents two different cultural understandings of cleaning that has different implications for socialising children in the family. Therefore, this article sets out to analyse how Swedish mothers make use of different discursive resources and negotiate conflicting norms about domestic work when they discuss the role of cleaning in the socialisation of their children. This analysis is based on interviews with 12 mothers who live in families that regularly outsource the cleaning of their home.

1 | Previous Research

Parents are expected to adhere to constantly changing cultural beliefs about how to socialise their children into 'good' citizens. Kremer-Sadlik and Paugh (2007: 293) conclude that family life means that 'children are socialized into culturally specific orientations toward work, education, time, morality, responsibility, individualism, success, well-being, and what it means to be a family'. Thus, when children participate in the interactions of everyday family life practices, both actively and as observers, they become socialised into the specific cultural values of a given society. Domestic work has been considered one crucial family practice through which children learn to become 'responsible, independent, and skilled individuals' in preparation for their adult lives (Klein et al. 2009, p.100).

But what types of domestic work should children be socialised into? In Christensen's's (2002, p.82) study, children in northern England described their regular household chores as keeping their rooms neat, but also 'making tea and coffee, setting the table, clearing up, washing up, hoovering, running errands and walking the dog'. Samuelsson (2008) describes similar tasks in a study of Swedish children's participation in domestic work, which included cleaning, vacuuming, taking care of the dishes, cooking, setting the table, putting out the garbage, and babysitting younger siblings. Samuelsson's study also pinpoints how age differences between siblings were part of negotiations about what kinds of domestic work, and how much, children were expected to do.

An international comparison of adolescents' ideas on children and domestic work show different norms relating to the individual or social responsibility underpinning children's participation in domestic work, including differences regarding expectations of carrying out household tasks for payment (Bowes et al. 2001; Klein et al. 2009). Children from the USA, Australia, and Sweden were generally more positive about being paid, while children in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, and Hungary were more likely to oppose it (Bowes et al. 2001). Children also tended to over-report their contribution to domestic work, and older children, particularly girls, were found to take on much of the responsibility for this work (Klein et al. 2009; Goodnow 1988; Christensen 2002). Similar gendered patterns were found in Lam et al.'s (2016) study of European American families, where girls did more housework than boys, and even more of this work when their mothers spent more time than usual in paid labour. Time spent on housework increased for both girls and boys around age 8–14 years, thereafter their work efforts decreased.

Likewise, Samuelsson (2008) reports that payment for domestic work, and increased responsibilities as Swedish children grow older, is seen as part of the process of becoming an adult (see also Bowes et al. 2001; Klein et al. 2009). Similarly, Ambjörnsson (2018) discusses how cleaning is regarded as an important skill in the process of maturing into adulthood in Sweden. According to Ambjörnsson, dealing with one's own dirt and garbage is a concrete skill but also a representation of being a citizen capable of caring for common needs in an egalitarian manner. This involves a gender-equality aspect, meaning that heterosexual couples should share the responsibility for domestic work (Kvist and Peterson 2010; Platzer 2007). Furthermore, including children in the joint responsibility for domestic work, and specifically cleaning, has been an ideal of the 'democratic family' promoted by the Swedish government from the 1960's and onwards (Lundqvist 2019).

However, struggling with the work-life balance has left parents in the Western world, including Sweden, with a guilty conscience and a feeling of not spending enough time with their children (Bäck-Wiklund and Bergsten 1997; Elvin-Nowak 1999; Kugelberg 1999; Kremer-Sadlik and Paugh 2007; Daly 2001; Milkie et al. 2004).[2] Hence, the notion of 'family time' (Daly 2001) or 'quality time' has become an expression denoting parents' desire to compensate for the 'quantity time' they cannot provide their children due to paid work (Kremer-Sadlik and Paugh 2007). Daly (2001) has defined 'family time' as positive experiences during which family members are rested, happy, and enjoying joint activities (see also Christensen 2002; Snyder 2007). Quality time has also been described as 'scheduled activities or special events selected according to the child's (not the adult's) interests'; for example, outings, game nights, or other 'out-of-the-ordinary activities' (Kremer-Sadlik and Paugh 2007, p.288; Daly 2001; Snyder 2007). The purpose of quality time is to create positive family relationships through activities that are '"worthwhile", "dedicated", "meaningful" and "stress free"' (Snyder 2007, p.291). Family/quality time is therefore depicted as time without everyday responsibilities, such as paid work or unpaid domestic work (Daly 2001), and often planned for the weekends (Forsberg 2009).

Concepts such as work-life balance and family/quality time pinpoint central norms in Western contemporary family life, but also shed light on conflicting ideals, such as family/quality time versus paid and unpaid labour. One way of handling these conflicting norms and ideals is to outsource unpaid domestic work. When the above-mentioned tax deduction for outsourcing domestic work was introduced in Sweden, it was described as a reform promoting gender equality, making space for women to devote time and energy to paid labour, allowing for tax deductions on domestic services (SFS 2007, p.346). The reform was also described to facilitate the work-life balance for families with children. One of the few Swedish studies to examine families outsourcing childcare and domestic work, in this case by employing nannies/au pairs, discusses how outsourcing made it possible for parents to work full time, knowing family obligations were being met by someone else (Eldén and Anving 2016, 2019). When relieved of some of the domestic work and care, mothers felt they could spend quality time with their children. A more recent study, focusing on a group of Swedish women with families outsourcing

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cleaning revealed that this was seen as part of the solution to the gender-equality problem, because it relieved them from some of the unpaid work they would otherwise have to do (Silfver and Widding 2024).

However, the above-mentioned tax reform has sparked debate about equity aspects more broadly as it has been perceived bringing new life into old, classed hierarchies where 'maids' were paid to clear up the mess left by wealthy families (Gavanas and Calleman 2013, p.8–10; Gavanas 2006). Scholars have discussed how the outsourcing of domestic work is a class-marked and racialised phenomenon, as the buyers of the so-called Swedish RUT-services[3] are generally white, middle- or upper-middle class families (Gavanas and Calleman 2013; Halldén and Stenberg 2018; Jordansson and Lane 2018; Lane and Jordansson 2020; Riksrevisionen 2020). Simultaneously, workers in the RUT sector are predominantly female migrants from Eastern Europe (Rickne 2021).

We argue that an increasing interest in Swedish families for outsourcing cleaning is an example of changing cultural beliefs about cleaning and family life which have consequences for the socialisation of children, affecting central norms about 'work, education, time, morality, responsibility, individualism, success, well-being, and what it means to be a family' (Kremer-Sadlik and Paugh 2007, p.293). These norms are also permeated by notions of gender, social class, and race, and the debate around the RUT-reform indicated a struggle over the role of cleaning in Swedish households. What outsourcing domestic work means for the socialisation of children is less well known, but a study in the North American context found that children in families outsourcing domestic work tended to participate less in household chores than children in families without such help (Klein et al. 2009). We know very little about what the outsourcing of cleaning means for the socialisation of children in the Swedish context. This article contributes knowledge about this issue, from the perspective of mothers in families who are outsourcing domestic work. Further, the article provides knowledge about central, and sometimes conflicting norms that come into play when cleaning is outsourced.

2 | Theory, Methods and Data

The analysis was based on the framework of critical discursive psychology and the notion that people make use of cultural discursive resources that are creatively reworked when they strive to make sense of themselves and their experiences (Wetherell 2005). Such resources are, for example, concepts, metaphors, or storylines (Davies and Harré 2001), and conflicting norms are often expressed as 'a dilemma of stake or interest' (Potter et al. 1993, p.389). When people use discursive resources, they take part in positioning themselves in different subject positions that can be articulated as problematic and troubled, or, as normal and desirable untroubled positions (Wetherell 1998). Staunaes (2003) argues that people part of the dominant norm can present themselves as untroubled, without the need to explain themselves or their actions, whereas people defined as outside the norm have an urge to argue for their position and behaviour. The analysis was hence aimed at pinpointing discursive resources, central and sometimes conflicting norms, and what was at stake when participants positioned themselves in un-/troubled positions.

Swedish Ethical Review Authority (Dnr 2020-01778) had no objections to the proposed study and during the autumn of 2021, we sought to contact women living with a male partner and a child/children in families outsourcing domestic work on a regular basis. The term 'regular basis' was not strictly defined, but we stated in the study information that we were interested in usage patterns that had potential to free up time for activities beyond household work, influencing everyday family routines. The choice of interviewing women was made since Swedish women, on average, take more responsibilities for household work than men (Statistics Sweden 2022), and that they thereby most likely would be more affected by outsourcing domestic work. We promoted the study on Facebook and the researchers' personal networks, using a snowballing recruitment method (Eldén and Anving 2019; Silfver and Widding 2024). Women volunteering for the study were provided with an information and consent letter explaining that the primary objective was to gain insights into the impact of domestic services on family dynamics and everyday life, from the women's perspectives. They were also given information that participation meant taking part in an interview that was to be recorded and transcribed, how data was to be stored and how they could get information about the results. All women responded with a written consent to participate in the study. No renumeration was given.

We collected data through interviews with 12 women, between December 2021 and January 2022 on virtual platforms due to Covid-19 restrictions, and because participants lived in various places around Sweden. Each interview lasted approximately 1 h, with all but two interviews being conducted by both authors. One author primarily posed the questions, while the other took notes and supplemented with additional questions when necessary. The interviews were semi-structured and began with introductory inquiries about the participant and her family, covering topics such as work, partner, number of children, and their ages. The focus of the interviews was centred on themes such as their everyday family life, their reasons for outsourcing cleaning, approaches to managing domestic tasks before outsourcing, the impact of RUT services on daily routines, dis/advantages of domestic services and thoughts about public debate on RUT-services. The analysis of this data was mainly focused on outsourcing in relation to issues on gender equality (Silfver and Widding 2024). The interviews also covered the women's reasoning about the implications of domestic services for their children, which is the focus of this article. More specifically, we asked questions about what kind of domestic work children can do, and at what age, if their children's domestic work was gendered in any way, if children were paid for doing domestic work, if their children had been introduced to any specific domestic work by their respective parents, and what the women wished for their children's everyday life as adults.

The interviewed women were aged between 36 and 46, Swedish with no migration background and resided in various locations across Sweden, lived with male partners, and had between one and three children aged under 18 (two being the most common). The children's ages ranged from 9 months to 15 years (see Table 1). All participants described their occupations as highly

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TABLE 1 | Research participants' age and number of children (Silfver and Widding 2024).

Name	Age	Number of children living at home
Agnes	36	2 (daughters aged 8 and 5)
Britta	39	2 (1 daughter, 1 son aged 11 and 6)
Cecilia 46	46	2 (1 daughter, 1 son aged 9 and 6)
Diana	39	2 (1 daughter, 1 son aged 9 and 6)
Elsa	40	1 (daughter aged 9 months)
Fiona	38	2 (1 daughter, 1 son aged 8 and 12)
Greta	43	2 (daughters aged 13 and 9)
Helen	44	2 (daughters aged 8 and 5)
Ingrid	44	2 (1 daughter, 1 son aged 8 and 13)
Julia	46	1 (daughter aged 6)
Kristin	44	3 (sons aged 15, 13 and 5)
Lena	44	3 (sons aged 15, 7 and 5)

skilled white-collar work, and all but one stated that they worked full-time hours or more. They provided similar descriptions of their male partners' work arrangements, although it was common for partners to have longer commutes and occasionally to work in a different city than that of the family residence, where most of the women worked. Another characteristic among the participants was their long-term utilisation of domestic services, typically spanning 8 to 10 years. Most of the families bought cleaning services twice a month while a few used such services on a weekly basis. The interviewers shared some of the participants' features, for example gender, class and race-positions, which might have made building trust during the interview easier. However, the interviewers were not living in households with children and were not outsourcing their cleaning, which facilitated asking questions from an outsider perspective.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and subjected to the following analytical process. Initially, both researchers independently conducted open coding by thoroughly reading each transcript. The goal was to identify how the participants made sense of their experiences, noting specific patterns and variations in their perspectives (Magnusson and Marecek 2015). This reading generated several codes, which the researchers subsequently searched for in all the interviews using NVivo software to verify the validity of the initial codes. In the next step, each transcript was re-evaluated in relation to the initial open coding. This process yielded additional codes while eliminating or merging existing codes. Finally, we embarked upon analysing how the participants engaged with discursive resources within their broader sociocultural context (Magnusson and Marecek 2015), namely cultural ideas of why children need to learn how to do domestic work (or not), and why you should outsource cleaning and what this means for children. The analysis also focused on crucial norms at stake and how the women positioned themselves as un-/troubled subjects. The quotes below have been translated from Swedish into English and were slightly edited for readability. To maintain confidentiality, the women were assigned pseudonyms.

3 | Results

In setting the scene, the women described one common motive for outsourcing cleaning, namely, to manage the life-work balance and to maximise time devoted to their children without reducing hours spent on paid labour. Several mothers described the decision to outsource cleaning as a temporary solution at a particularly stressful time in life that had turned out to be a more permanent solution. Consequently, the children came to grow up in families where outsourcing cleaning was the norm. The following analysis centres on two identified storylines, the first focusing on socialising aspects of participating in domestic work, the second on quality time. The analysis ends with teasing out dilemmas identified in the women's storylines.

3.1 | Domestic Work as an Important Part of Socialising Your Children

Several of the women explicitly acknowledged that learning to do domestic work was important for becoming a self-sufficient and responsible person. For example, Cecilia explained that this means children 'must learn how to cook and do the cleaning and all that stuff [...] because that's what it takes to be able to be an adult when the time comes'. Diana also stated that:

> I think I'm of that principle that you have to learn to take care of your home, that you learn this at home to be able to move from [your parents'] home and to take care of your own home. So, they should be able to do everything when they move from home and that means they must be able to take responsibility for everything in their home.

The general ideal was that children should help at home, without getting paid for it, and, as Lena stated, this should include practically every domestic task, 'but at a level they can manage'. Several of the women argued that, starting from a young age, children should pick up their toys, and as they got older, put their plate in the dishwasher after dinner, and their dirty laundry in the laundry bag. Other examples given were that children should learn to put out things for breakfast and then put them away, as well as helping to prepare dinner some nights a week. One strategy to get the children to participate in domestic work was to make it a competition to see who can pick up their toys the fastest. For example, Diana stressed that, when introducing her children to cleaning, it should be fun, playful, and occur during moments when the children are willing to take part:

> Then I've let the kids in and made it a game and [...] my son gets to walk around with a dustpan because it's so much more fun to walk around with a dustpan than to walk around with a duster. And my daughter gets to clean the mirrors, so we make it a fun thing together, so that's been my strategy to let them in and let them clean and vacuum when they want to do it.

Some of the women also explained that it was crucial to teach their sons about gender equality, by instilling norms of

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gender-equal responsibility for unpaid domestic work. For example, Lena said 'when you have sons, it's even more important to see that they help out, if they're going to get married sometime in the future (laughs)'. Kristin, the mother of three sons, stated that: 'I hope they'll [...] make it work and that all the things you've talked about when it comes to helping each other and being there for one another, and [that they understand] it's on them...' The ideal was to get both sons and daughters to help at home, but some mothers were worried that they might unconsciously be treating them differently. According to Cecilia, she and her partner tried to treat their daughter and son in the same way 'but...if someone were to study us, maybe that might not be the case'. Concerns such as these show that the mothers acknowledged that domestic work is indeed gendered as women's work and that this might cause problems in their children's future adult lives.

Even though cleaning was outsourced, most families tried to establish routines in preparation for the arrival of the cleaners. Many referred to this as decluttering which was often done the day before the cleaner came round, with the ambition that the whole family would help and that children were responsible for their own rooms and belongings. Yet, some women also recognised that they did not have very high expectations of their children when it came to domestic work in general. Fiona, for example, noted that her expectations might not be very explicitly communicated to her children. Julia also said that, depending on how hungry and tired family members were, the children were invited to participate in everyday practices to varying degrees. Cecilia explained that siblings arguing about the fairness of the division of domestic chores was also a reason for not involving her children more systematically in everyday domestic work.

To summarise, the women used a storyline describing the importance for children to learn domestic work, and that duties and responsibilities shift and evolve with increasing age, positioning them as untroubled subjects. An awareness of gender equality and the importance of teaching sons to do their fair share in a future (heterosexual) partnership was also included in this storyline. However, some of the mothers articulated a dilemma when giving acknowledgement to the fact that children were not as included in domestic work as they could be. Since this positioned them as irresponsible mothers and troubled subjects, they claimed an alternative storyline to argue for the situation, where the implicitly difficult work-life balance led to a lack of energy which, together with a desire to avoid arguments among children, worked as an explanation to why children were excused from domestic work occasionally.

3.2 | The Importance of Quality Time

All but one of the women worked full time (and sometimes more, including irregular working hours) and were unwilling to cut down on their work. According to Julia, this was a matter of principle and important from a gender-equality perspective. This led to discussions about the difficulties of a work-life balance, in which cleaning was described as boring and a possible source of conflicts. Importantly, cleaning could leave some of the women with a guilty conscience about not spending enough time with their children. Both Greta and Lena talked about this, and Lena explained that:

> Because we feel like, at the weekends, you work like 40 hours a week and then the weekend comes around, one more day a week to clean the house. It felt like we spent a whole day cleaning and tidying up. It was really boring, it's not that much fun. And then we were really exhausted and realised that we hadn't done anything with the kids either.

Similarly, Agnes argued that an important reason for outsourcing cleaning was to create more space and energy for being a 'good' parent:

> I don't feel so locked into parenting when I have this help. [...]I still feel there are a lot of musts when you're a parent, or, there's a lot that needs to be done, and who sets those standards is another question... But we feel that one of the musts is simply removed.

Outsourcing cleaning meant that parents experienced having more time and energy for their children, which Elsa, for example, talked about as quality time. Diana was an exception, however, and stated that: 'I wouldn't say that we've gained the quality time I expected [...] it still feels as if we spend a lot of time on tidying up and cleaning.'

The women gave various examples of activities that became possible when cleaning was outsourced. These could be about the family going on a fun trip or outing or staying at home and just relaxing. It could also be that time was spent on social activities, such as seeing relatives, or friends and neighbours, taking the children to different sporting activities, or helping with the children's schoolwork. The main point, however, was to create the time for other things than cleaning, meaning activities that were often described in terms of quality time. Julia described it as a sense of freedom, and that 'we can do whatever we feel like [...] not having to think, "and now we have to clean"'.

Julia mentioned that another aspect of outsourcing cleaning was that it made it possible to compensate for time spent at work by being emotionally close to her child:

> To me, the most important thing is to spend time together, to be available to Jenny [her daughter]. As I said, I work a lot, but it's really important to me that, like every morning, I'm at home with Jenny and, sort of, accompany her to school and, sort of, get a sense of how she feels and if she's thinking about anything special. And also, when she's about to go to bed in the evening [...] that you get the time to talk a bit. [...] Then you get to know if something troublesome has happened at school or anything.

Some of the women also described how outsourcing cleaning meant quality time for them, because, as Fiona described it: 'Well, you become a bit, maybe a bit happier. That you can let

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your hair down after another week of work and yes, well, enjoy a glass of wine or something.' Fiona also noted that the outsourcing of cleaning was probably most important to her but, if she felt more relaxed and happier, this would benefit the whole family.

To summarise, when the women talked about their paid work, and the difficulties to achieve work-life balance, this put them in a dilemma and positioned them as troubled subjects that is, not enough caring mothers. Some of the women felt the need to explain this situation when arguing for their full-time work as a feminist principle, and therefore a righteous cause. However, outsourcing cleaning seems to be the most powerful argument to avoid the troubled position as a mother pursuing a career, since this enabled them to make use of the storyline of quality time. This means that the examples of family activities that is, quality time, were made possible when cleaning was outsourced, positioning the women as untroubled, caring mothers eager to spend time with their children.

3.3 | Conflicting Storylines Causing Dilemmas

As already described above, some of the women explicitly described learning to do domestic work to become a self-sufficient and responsible individual. Since outsourcing cleaning contradicted that ambition, Elsa, among others, argued that it was important for her children to gain 'a sense that domestic work is important work, or a crucial part of everyday life and that you don't take for granted that, well, that your parents or someone else will do it'. In line with these arguments, Julia also touched upon the dilemma of wanting to teach her children about everyday family life while simultaneously outsourcing the cleaning:

> I mean, it can't be like some kind of magic, that the home is just clean without...Well, that she should understand that we do some parts and we've brought in someone whose job it is to help with other parts, but it is a job. It's something that someone does, like, so she's got, we've been at home like when, when [the cleaning lady] has come or even the former cleaning lady, and like that [...] she's going to get some kind of understanding of what's happening, that you don't just, come home and everything's clean. It could be a tough one to wake up at some point in your life [and realise how things actually work].

Cecilia reflected upon the fact that she, as a child, had to learn how to clean a toilet, as an important life skill, while her children did not. She continued by reasoning that cleaning is considered to be boring, and problematised that such things can be outsourced, in favour of doing pleasurable activities instead:

> I can think in principle that it's kind of a bit strange for the children. [...] I mean, in some ways both children and adults are lazy and then you can buy yourself out of a lot of things that are sometimes a bit boring. [...] We clean a bit in between and they have to clean their rooms a bit. But it's not like they vacuum every week, and I can think that maybe that's not really great. But for family life it's just that this is done completely without conflicts, so it's nice.

Another dimension of outsourcing cleaning was described in relation to what were referred to as 'old' norms about being able to deal with one's own dirt and garbage or adhere to new norms by paying someone else to do this job. Lena claimed that the 'old' norm is contested, and that the new norm among civil servants is to outsource domestic work. However, Cecilia problematised this new norm by referring to power relations and the cleaner as a racialised person belonging to a lower social class, which made her feel a bit awkward:

> Many newly arrived migrants are employed, and few of them understand Swedish. And, you know, it feels... well, that they're going to take care of our dirt in some way. I mean, we pay for it, but still, it feels... well, I don't know. We stay away from home [when the cleaners come].

Cecilia also problematised power relations in terms of the socialisation of children, by a cautionary tale of what happens to children growing up in families who employ cleaners:

> There was some [family] who had cleaning before us... [...] They had a guy who cleaned their house, who had some foreign origins. Very well-functioning. And then they [the family] had a daughter who was maybe six, seven years old or something like that. They also had a sailing boat, so in the summer they'd been out sailing and docked alongside another boat. And in this boat, they had adopted children [of colour] and then this six-year-old said: "Mum look, they have home cleaning on the boat!" Yes, horrible but also comical in a way. But it seems like this has something to do with being in very homogeneous circles.

According to Cecilia, these kinds of stories might be understood as processing the shift to a new norm in which outsourcing is seen as acceptable in the 'homogeneous circles', even though this means also accepting how classed and racialised power relations come into play and that children come to accept these as a normal part of their everyday life. In some families, like Lena's, this meant that the mothers stressed the importance of their children getting to know the cleaner by name and to respect the work that person did. Other women reasoned that a growing service sector is a 'new normal' and this made it more plausible that their children would also buy themselves more time, by using domestic services as adults. Similarly, Helen and Ingrid argued that, if their children were to have the financial means, they would probably outsource domestic work when they had a family of their own.

To summarise, when the mothers make use of two different storylines, conflicting norms and ideals come into play; the importance of leaning domestic work, and the importance of quality time. As already described, outsourcing cleaning positions

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the women as troubled subjects, excluding their children from learning to clean and to take care of the home. This led to arguments about, and examples of, why it was important for their children to learn to respect the cleaners, as well as the domestic work they performed, because it is important work that needs to be done. Others felt uncomfortable in the troubled position of being able to outsource what they considered to be boring things, such as cleaning, to 'the other', thus introducing and reinforcing gendered, racialised, and classed power relations. Yet, by highlighting the importance of quality/family time, and concluding that outsourcing cleaning was a new and socially accepted norm supported by the government, the women argued for their positions as untroubled, caring mothers wanting to spend quality time with their children while adhering to new social norms about outsourcing cleaning.

4 | Discussion

In line with previous research, the women talked about domestic work as skills their children should ideally learn to make them ready to leave the nest, to become self-sufficient and able to take responsibility for their own home and life (Klein et al. 2009; Ambjörnsson 2018; Samuelsson 2008; Bowes et al. 2001). Although hard to tell from the women's storylines, when it comes to concrete skills, it seems that their children mainly learned limited aspects of the task; foremost, the decluttering done before the paid cleaner arrived to undertake the main part of the work. In contrast to previous research, the women did not describe having a system for paying their children for domestic work (Bowes et al. 2001; Samuelsson 2008). Further, the women expressed an awareness of gendered patterns under which girls tend to take more responsibility for domestic work than boys (see Klein et al. 2009; Goodnow 1988; Lam et al. 2016) but said that they tried to treat their daughters and sons equally.

The women clearly described difficulties with work-life balance and said that their paid work made it challenging to find time and energy to care for their children and *also* do the cleaning. This left them with a guilty conscience for not being sufficiently 'there' for their children (Bäck-Wiklund and Bergsten 1997; Elvin-Nowak 1999; Kugelberg 1999; Kremer-Sadlik and Paugh 2007; Daly 2001; Milkie et al. 2004). The solution to this problem was to outsource cleaning and, in line with Eldén and Anving's (2016, 2019) studies, these women embraced the opportunity to spend more quality time with their children. As in previous research, quality/family time was talked about as consisting of joyful moments when family members were rested and engaging in fun and out-of-the-ordinary activities while freed from everyday responsibilities, such as cleaning (Daly 2001; Christensen 2002; Snyder 2007; Kremer-Sadlik and Paugh 2007).

Although the participants in this study is a small and homogenous group, the result from the study opens for more general reflections. For example, the significance the women attributed to paid labour and quality/family time is crucial for understanding the 'culturally specific orientations' (Kremer-Sadlik and Paugh 2007, p.293) here understood as crucial cultural norms conveyed to their children. So, when examining the practices at the centre of these families' everyday lives, we argue that a crucial norm is still the importance of paid work, and that both mothers and fathers should have the opportunity to pursue a career. Another central norm is family/quality time and that family life ought to be free from conflicts and devoted to fun and restful activities. This means that children most likely learn that paid work and family life as 'happy moments' is more important than the unpaid work, in this case cleaning, that is also part of everyday life but outsourced to someone else to take care of.

The main contribution of this study is that it explores what happens in family life and the socialisation of children when parts of the everyday practices are outsourced. That this is not an easy question is evident from the focus on how the participants engaged with cultural discursive resources. For example, when some of the women touched upon the dilemma of ideally wanting their children to learn how to do domestic work, while at the same time outsourcing cleaning. When children are unable to perform domestic work, or to observe their parents doing it, in this case cleaning, there is a risk that they come to believe that it happens 'magically', as one of the women phrased it. This could mean that the desirable characteristics, abilities, and behaviours conveyed in cleaning are no longer a central part of the socialisation of children in these families. Rather, as paid work and quality/family time trump cleaning, this becomes represented as the most crucial norms in the families. According to some of the women, it also seemed natural that their children would grow up to be customers of domestic services in the future. Thus, the socialisation process might in this case imply that the children will turn into future citizens that are both career and family oriented, and ready to act as customers on a growing market of services.

Another important takeaway from this study is how the outsourcing of cleaning implies that these children may learn about gender equality and equity as only applying in a limited sense. For one thing, we argue that, if children do not actually see much of their parents sharing the unpaid work, in this case cleaning, it is more difficult for them to grasp the meaning of gender equality in concrete negotiations about that work. Outsourcing domestic work in general might also risk reproducing the low value of the unpaid work that is often associated with femininity, thereby also risking the reproduction of gender inequality. Moreover, outsourcing cleaning is also about learning a classed position, as families buy these services because they have the means and can afford it. The effort the women put into teaching their children to be respectful to the cleaners, and the work they do, also implicitly conveys the idea that cleaning is a practice that is not valued in a self-evident way. This, in turn, is related to the examples where the cleaner is positioned as 'the other'; namely, a person originating from another country and employed in a low-skilled and low-paid form of work.

The family is an important institution for socialising citizens and Sweden constitutes a specific case where learning to clean one's home is more than an everyday practice, it is also about gender equality and equity (Regeringskansliet 2016). The results of this study highlight how a traditional norm, advocating that domestic work, and especially cleaning, is part of the socialisation process taking place in the home, preparing children for adult life, is under negotiation. Instead, outsourcing of cleaning is being constructed as a new socially accepted norm,

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supported by the government through tax deductions, and by a growing service sector. Arlie Russel Hochschild (2012: 223) has argued that what might happen 'when we pay others to live our lives for us' is that we risk losing 'self-confidence in our own capacities, and those of friends and family'. This study contributes by raising issues of the possible implications of this in society in general and for citizens' ability to take responsibility for common needs.

Furthermore, this study adds to the field by highlighting central norms at stake in contemporary family life. So, we argue that when working-life and norms about family/quality time are (re-)enforced in families, we risk losing sight of important problematisations of everyday life, such as the supremacy of paid labour in relation to unpaid care and work within the family. Or the willingness to question the ideal of family time as primarily about fun and relaxing activities, where constructive conflicts and negotiations become problematic. This might lead to unreasonable expectations for a 'happy family life' and, possibly, a lack of training in how to deal with conflicts and negotiations about not only domestic work, but family life in general. This needs to be further studied. Moreover, since it is known that buying domestic services in Sweden is a racialised and class-marked privilege, it is also crucial to examine the effects on structural power relations when domestic work can be outsourced to less privileged people. Importantly, we need to study these macro-level structures in relation to the socialisation processes in family life from the perspective not only of mothers, but also of fathers and the children themselves. Future research would also gain from observing how everyday family life takes place in practice, when domestic work is outsourced, and the long-term effects of this. Research would also benefit from pursuing comparative investigations of these issues in other cultural contexts, with various understandings of welfare policies and norms about family life.

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Ethics Statement

Ethics approval statement by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (Dnr 2020-01778) was decided 2020-06-25.

Consent

Informed Consent was obtained from the participants.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

Research data are not shared since the participants have only agreed to take part in the presented study.

Endnotes

[1] Similar tax deductions have been found in Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany and Spain (Halldén and Stenberg 2018; see also Raz-Yurovich and Marx 2019).

[2] Interestingly, a study on parents' time-use between 1961 and 2000 in 16 industrialised countries, including Sweden, showed that there had been an increase in the time parents devoted to their children (Gauthier et al. 2004; Neilson 2016, p.51). Hallberg and Klevmarken's (2003, p223) study on Swedish parents' time allocation, between 1984 and 1993, concluded that, for parents to balance paid work and time for children, they had to spend less time on 'private leisure and household work'.

[3] RUT is an abbreviation for 'rengöring, underhåll och tvätt'. In English, cleaning, maintenance and washing.

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