

Childhood as a Product of Parental Time Management

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ABSTRACT Childhood is defined as a period of preparation. In this sense the child is not regarded as a full member of society but only has the status of a future member. It does not count for itself, but it needs investments to get a value. As such it appears to be something that has to be produced - a product. One of the main investment resources is (parental) time. Whereas there is an undivided agreement about the importance of spending time with and for children, the ideas vary, how to spend the time, how much of it and who should do it. Constants and variations of parental time investments shall be shown in an analysis of parents' advisers published in Germany in the last 50 years. The contribution will compare three models of time usage prevailing in certain periods of time. In which way instructive proposals of how to spend parental time define and shape childhood shall be shown in a deconstructive way.

Time becomes a socially structuring factor by separating childhood as an independent stage of life. Childhood as a category defined by time gives its members a specific social status. This status is part of a power relation manifested by generation, which means it is based on age and so determines the distribution and maintainance of social resources.

Each society requires its very specific offspring. Particularly highly industrialized societies demand a special geared socialization which is necessary to produce compatible labour forces and reliable citizens. At least since the establishment of the bourgeoisie the bringing up, the socialisation of children is supposed to be guided carefully.

Childhood is defined as a period of preparation, as a moratorium, as a period of "still-not-being-able-to, and of no participation". It means that children are not supposed to act autonomously but that their actions are to a large extent directed, because children are by definition seen as those, who still have to learn to become useful members of society. Power relations be-

tween children and adults are constantly being reproduced by trivializing and deeconomizing children's activities and work. In a further step these powerrelations effect the control of adults over children's time.¹ This also means the control that the next generation adapts to the existing economic system, which depends on human beings, whose energy can be adapted to the organization of working time units. The powerrelation between children and adults not only enables adults to take control over children but gives them the obligation to do so.

In this sense the child is not regarded as a full member of society but only has the status of a future member. It does not count for itself, but it needs investments to get a value. As such it appears to be something that has to be produced - a product. (In the following I will use the terms of "product" and "producing a child" in this sense. It means the upbringing according to social demands.)

The task of (socially) producing offspring is mainly the task of parents, who ought to care for the proper upbringing of their children and are made responsible for it. Although parents are supposed to act autonomously in their private sphere, they are limited in working out their own ideas about how to produce a child.² In the end they are under an obligation to society and in so far they are only carrying out following its demands without receiving much profit for themselves. The only benefit they can gain is an emotional one,³ but even that is exactly defined. Parents are controlled by experts and moralists, who, with the help of institutions as well as by permanent public discussion see to it that socialization happens mainly according to current societal demands. Psychology, medicine and pedagogy are the sciences which allow the experts to control children's bringing up.

According to the premise, that children are regarded as a socialisational product, I want to

throw in my research some light on this production process and here the social sphere where it mainly happens in early infancy: in the families, by parental investments. As I am mainly interested in the normative orders for the social production of children (and not so much in the individual coping with these norms), the empiric material of my research are advising books for parents. They contain expert advice for the production of children. I assume that they function as multipliers and are therefore relevant for the social reality of child production.

The main investment goods are the resources time and money. Since the establishment of the bourgeois family the division of labour has happened according to gender division. This is also true for the assignment of the investment of the resources. While the father was the main person to earn money for his family and by this supplied the material base for the child, the mother was mainly responsible for the investment of time which had to happen carefully and knowledgeably according to experts' advises.⁴ This is also true for the investment of money, but the difference in the investment of the two resources is the evaluation of how much it should be. The actual expenses are seen as relatively unimportant, it is

acceptable to reduce them to the minimum. Time, on the other hand seems to be absolutely necessary, it can never be enough or even too much. On the contrary, too little investment of this resource rather threatens to spoil the product child.

The ideas of how the "product child" should look like and how it should be produced depends and varies according to other social changes. Consequently cultural and historical variations of childhood can be found. Because of that my research focuses specifically on the variations, which can be found in parents' advisers published in German language from post-war times until now. After sorting out about 25 advisers, among which I selected and analysed 8 typical ones in detail, I could extract three models of parental time management that shape childhood in a certain period of time.

In the following I will concentrate on the pieces of advice for the first years of infancy. The instructions given for this time of life are formulated in a particularly differentiated or rather restrictive way. Moreover the influence of other socializational institutions is regarded as minor in this age, while the parents are seen as responsible for the education of their children.

Model 1: As one can already notice from the



Fig. 1. Poster "Mehr Zeit für kinder"

The picture shows an example of an actually awarded poster campaign of the association "More time for children". The sign across the child's mouth saying "Closed due to loneliness" or another one saying "Out of order for lack of love" show very clearly the intention to point out the productional character of time investments.

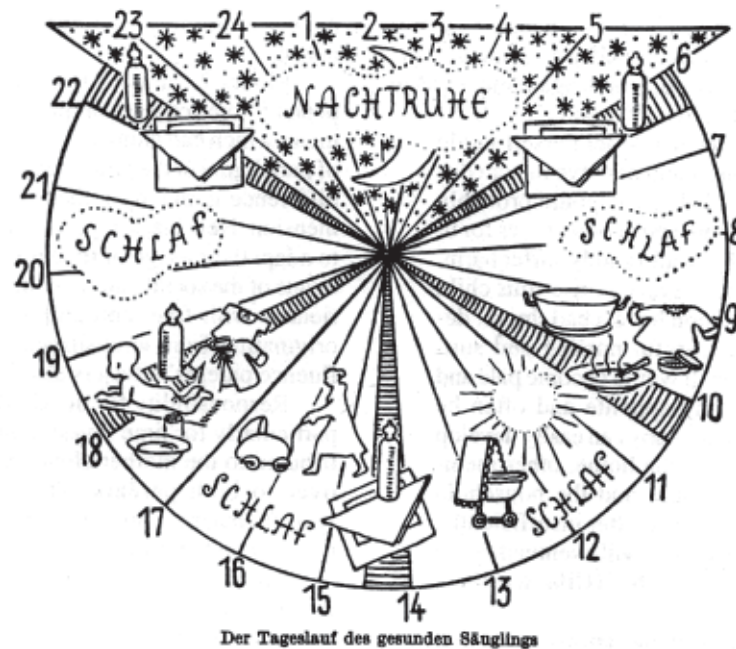


Fig. 2. Schedule for the day of the healthy baby (Uflacker p. 152)

Der Tageslauf des gesunden Säuglings

titles of these books,⁵ the typical adviser of the 50s and 60s mainly turns towards the mother, who is always supposed to be at home. It sets up quite a rigid curriculum for mother and child.

Time for care and education of children is conceptualized according to the logic of paid working time which corresponds to industry.⁷ Cleanliness and regularity are named as the main rules the mother has to observe.

"Only in case of illness or according to the doctor's advice you may take up your baby at night. (...) Get it used to cleanliness soon. As soon as the child is capable to sit, use a potty. Do exactly keep the times you raise him up in order to get him used to punctuality" (Marie France, 1955: 60).

The main nursing instructions a baby's mother has to follow refer to the benefit of the physical wellbeing of the child. A major part of the investment time is supposed to be used for feeding, cleaning and being outdoors which is important for the baby's physical endurance. Mental wellbeing is regarded as inferior. Regu-

larly is considered as the most important social necessity which already has to be internalized in earliest infancy. The child has to learn perception of time as it is an elementary matter of regulation. Apart from time mother and child should spend together, there are also times included in the schedule, when the child is supposed to be left to him/herself. It is not considered as optional but as absolutely necessary to let the child spend his/her times this way, as he/she ought to learn to occupy him/herself.

"The baby needs absolute rest apart from the time that is needed for nursing. (...) Everyday it learns something new. But it ought to acquire these knowledges by itself. Therefore it is objectionable, if the mother or other members of the family occupy themselves with the child, mainly if done so in an instructive manner" (Uflacker, 1963: 439-440).

To guarantee the parents' orientation towards the given arrangements of time management, the adviser predicts a pathological deviation from the

norms for the "product child" in case of disregard. The menace is a spoiled, a tyrannical, nervous, maladjusted child, which again threatens to disturb the given order of time.

"If the mother would let herself guide by her instincts and her love in her education of the baby, she would probably care much more and at other times for it. (...) The baby would surely suffer harm. For its mothers great worries this child would very soon have a bad thrive, despite all the careful nursing and suitable nutrition. It would become pale and be without any appetite and often be sick. (...) Such a baby can easily develop into a tyrant of the home, other members of the family and the household will only be looked after insufficiently, because the mother will eventually only have time for the baby" (Uflacker, 1963: 441).

The scheduling of the daily routine has a two-sided effect. On the one hand it disciplines the mother as well as the child according to explicit expert instructions. On the other hand it allows the mother to plan and calculate her time also for other works she needs to get done as a housewife, and probably a little time off for herself.

"The day demands all sorts of requirement for the young mother. By organizing her time skillfully she will be able to cope with every of them and occasionally to find an hour for her own relaxation..." (Uflacker, 1963: 153).

Fixed feeding hours, sleeping hours, and the prohibition to play with the baby beyond the set time or to look after it when it cries, give her the certainty to do the right thing to produce a proper child, if she only follows the plan.

For the child the practise of time arrangements means learning to orientate him/herself towards clear structures and limits, an early internalisation of discipline. Now he/she is well prepared for a just as disciplinary school which continues this principle. It prepares to the child fit into a hierarchy structure which is the basis of paid labour. The aspired product in this model is the easily adjustable human being, who is considerably compatible to industrial requirements, who has learned to subordinate him/herself and

his/her needs to society and to accept societal norms.

Model 2: In the 70s a drastic change happened in the requests on parental time management, which can almost be described as a change of paradigm in the production of childhood. The difference is mainly a matter of qualitative dimension. New ideas appear, of how parents ought to adapt their usage of time towards the requirements of the socialization of their children. Experiences with free, anti-authoritarian education originating from englishspeaking countries influence parents' advisers also in Germany.

Responsibility for the child's socialization, particularly for time investment is no longer attributed to the mother alone but is now handed over to both parents. The importance of a specific paternal time investment has been discovered and is now taken into account.⁸

Moreover children's needs of (parental) time are defined as being so extensive, that one adult alone can hardly fulfill them. Socialization towards regularity which was a "must" of a good education before, is now objected to as an unacceptable act of power over the child.

"Adults living with a baby will experience the disturbance of their plans again and again. Although things which happen out of plans might be nicer than the scheduled ones, adults are dissatisfied with them, because it is the keeping of the schedule which gives them satisfaction. Even if that, what they have to do for it, might be uncomfortable. We sacrifice day and night to the "idol schedule" (...) without realizing it. But we do not sacrifice less than our ability to realize the 'here and now' in a different way than a finished item in the agenda. In other words: we sacrifice the 'here and now'. But this is where the baby entirely lives. (Moral: in any case do without a schedule for the everyday life with your baby.)" (Sichtermann, 1983: 17-18)⁹.

That means, that the self organization of the child could be affected by rationalization and scheduling of time and must therefore be rejected. While disregard of time regulations was considered as leading to pathologization before, it now turns

into the opposite: a rigid usage of time does damage to the child, as it ignores the child's needs.

"A strongly suppressed baby will (...) need more sleep, as it is a light sleeper. Apart from that there is another reason why such a deplorable human being needs more rest in sleep than other children whose basic needs of life are satisfied, it's the waste of energy resulting from all the fights with a mother, who doggedly educates according to the clock and avoids anything that might cause 'bad manners'. A permanently frustrated child often gives up crying because it is ineffective, and becomes apathetic - one of countless alternatives for a human being to adjust and to survive" (Ritter and Ritter, 1972: 83).

According to these new requests the child has to be nursed, to sleep, to play and to use the potty whenever her/himself demands it. Otherwise parents would have to take responsibility for later mental damages.

Whereas the old model of parental time management was based on the idea of a child, that had to be adjusted to society, the new model implies a general autonomy of the child.¹⁰ The child him/herself ought to determine his/her parents' time usage according to his/her needs and requirements - which are defined by experts. Because of this parents now continuously have to provide offers for the child, by which the claim on parental time is much extended. The new motto is to be on standby as to the child's demands for 24 hours a day.

"When it (*the baby B.H.*) leaves mother's lap and starts to rob, crawl and walk beyond her body, it does it without interference ('care'). It is the mother's part then, to be at the baby's disposal when it comes to her or cries for her" (Liedloff, 1985: 202)¹¹.

"When Penny was two and a half, she wished to play for two to three hours after sleeping for about eight hours. Her playtime was between three and seven o'clock in the morning and all our attempts to get her back to sleep failed. (...) I took her downstairs then and let

her play, while I knitted or sewed, sometimes even ironed, baked a cake or wrote" (Ritter and Ritter, 1972: 88).

This new model follows a pedagogical use of time, which referring to Rousseau tells to spending time instead of gaining it. It institutionalises a specific logic of time in the private sphere which is incompatible with the demands of paid labour. The institutionalization of an specific time for children increases the separation between the outer world of labour and socialising work within the family. Childhood is in this sense even more conceptualized as a alternative draft to the accepted logic of social production, and its productional character which was visible before has now completely vanished.

Educational aim is no longer the well-adjusted member of society, but an individual that is able to find his/her very own place in a complex society. Even more, it is the individual, who is supposed to shape society in an active way, as he/she is capable to make his/her environment react on it from the very beginning of his/her life. It is the child that personifies the illusions, the hopes of a better world, of emancipation, of a renewed society of free individuals.

"The terrible confusion of society and its inability to differentiate indicate to us that it is impossible to rely on traditions. Our aim are adults who not only talk about charity, humanity or things like that but who possess the competence and capability to lead a rich and sensible life" (Ritter and Ritter, 1972: 10).

Model 3: It soon became visible, that this sophisticated aim was hard to reach. The production of the child still remained the responsibility of mothers, in spite of the claims towards shared parenthood. But the incompatibility of the two spheres of work forced the parents to take charge of one of them each. So the traditional arrangement of gender relations was hardly overcome, the shares of the time investments in the child were still divided up unequally. In the 90s the main responsibility for a succeeded "product child" still lies in the hands of its mother, who has to coordinate different demands on her time, though.

Due to women's increasing emancipation

which is connected with an increase of claim for an own life arrangement, the tendency of mothers to participate in the labour market has grown. This is last but not least because of the rising numbers of single mothers who do not want to commit themselves to a supplementary marriage.

Therefore the new pattern of time management is quite a pragmatic one. It makes it necessary to make use of the support of additional persons (or institutions): a babysitter, an au-pair-girl, a crib, a childminder. It allows mothers a certain amount of time for their own disposal, during which another person may take over the time investment, another woman in the most cases.¹²

However, parental time investment can only be taken over by another person or institution to a certain extend.

"If you work for your own pleasure (a few of us do that), spend as much money you can afford for a caring, brilliant childminder. (...) Physical motherhood must not in any case have magical elements. But responsibility cannot be shuffled off" (Purves, 1990: 130).

Parental time is still regarded as special. As it includes more than the simple keeping and caring of the child, parental time gets a special quality in comparison with other adults' time. The qualitative aspect of time spent together is now worked out explicitly, it refers to how parents spend time with their children, but not how much it is. This concept involves the intense and deliberate investment of time during a compact space of time, as it implies that it is more effective for the production of the child to spend time well-directed, than just providing the pure presence of parents.

"If you attend to the child at definite times of the day, in a few hours you will be nearer to him/her than full-time-mothers. For instance every morning we go and get the children, get them dressed and have breakfast together, even if a babysitter sleeps in the house. (...) And a sacrosanct half hour is planned before bedtime. At that time we completely concentrate on the offspring, do not watch TV, build castles of Duplo and rock babies on our knees. These moments in the mornings and in the eve-

nings count much more than the three-fold time absent-minded mothers spend with their children during the day" (Purves, 1990: 144).

The primary effect for the child is that he/she has to obey to the different orders of time of different caring persons or institutions. On the other hand there are always different scopes for his/her own time autonomy. The child is defined as being capable of adjusting to different surroundings and environments and to gain from them, if he/she only knows, where his/her main reference point is.

However, this concept of parental time management is only apparently a new one. It is the modern and worked out version of a pattern of time utilization, that was valid for fathers for a long time, when they spent a little while with the child after work.¹³ It is also common in British upper classes, where wealthy mothers traditionally employed their nannies.

The different models of parental time management base on different concepts of childhood and at the same time shape childhoods by their normative claims. Besides the above named variations I would like to point out the constant factors in the end which can be found in all worked out models of parental time management:

1. Childhood is characterized by feminization. The investment of the resource of time is still mainly the mother's business, and if not, it is to a great extend done by other women.

2. Children always need time. In the last 5 decades the general conviction, that children need time has only changed insofar, as it has increased.

3. Children's time depends on their parents' time. The progressive arrangement of the generational relation is being naturalized. Time investment into the producing of children can only be taken over to some extend by other adults, but it can never compensate parental time.

4. The production of childhoods is a complementary side of the productional and economic system as children are always produced according to current social productional modes. This concerns the actual everyday life of children, which has to subordinate to the societal arrangements of labour and work. Moreover it refers to the requirements of the productional system

which relies on human potential that was produced concerning its standards.

NOTES

1. Ennew, J.: Time for Children or Time for Adults? in Qvortrup, J. et al. (eds.): *Childhood matters* 1994 Vienna
2. see: Bühler-Niederberger, D., Hungerland, B.: *The Social Value of Children and the Sociology of its Assessment Process*. Paper read at the conference on Childhood and Children's Culture, 1997, Esbjerg, Denmark, will be published in 1998.
3. Zelizer, V.A.: *Pricing the Priceless Child. The Changing Social Value of Children*. New York 1991.
4. see: Schütz, Y. *Die gute Mutter. Zur Geschichte des normativen Musters "Mutterliebe"* Bielefeld 1991, Badinter, E.: *Die Mutterliebe Die Geschichte eines Gefühls vom 17. Jh. bis heute*, München Zürich 1980.
5. e.g. Uflacker, H.: *Mutter und Kind*. Gütersloh. 32. Auflage (1. Aufl., 1956) 1963, Marie France: *Mütter, nicht ermüden* Luzern 1955, Humana: *Das Mütterbuch* 1964, Haarer, J. *Die Mutter und ihr erstes Kind* München 1961.
6. In the following I will always refer to the mainstream, although there have always been other concepts of time usage or variations of the introduced model at the same period of time.
7. e.g. Marie France, 1955, Chapter 2: "Wie Frau Petunia das Taylorsystem entdeckte" ("How Mrs. Petunia discovered the Taylorsystem").
8. By that title the first special advisers for fathers are published, e.g. Dodson, F.: *Väter sind die besten Mütter - Der umfassende Ratgeber für werdende, wißbegierige und glückliche Väter*. (org.: How to father) Frankfurt a.M., Berlin, Wien: 1977.
9. Sichtermann, B.: *Leben mit einem Neugeborenen: ein Buch über das erste halbe Jahr*. Frankfurt a.M. 1983.
10. see Ritters P./Ritter J.: *Freie Kindererziehung in der Familie* (org. The free family), Reinbek bei Hamburg 1972
11. Liedloff, J.: *Auf der Suche nach dem verlorenen Glück* (org. The Continuum Concept), Munich 1985
12. see Purves, L.: *Die Kunst, (k)eine gute Mutter zu sein* (org.: How (Not) to be a Perfect Mother), Hamburg 1990
13. Fthenakis, W.E.: *Väter. Bd. 1 Zur Psychologie der Vater-Kind Beziehung*. München-Wien-Baltimore 1985, Dodson, F. 1977

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