

Governing Parents: Early Childhood, Intensive Mothering and Disciplinary Power in Switzerland

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For my parents – Anette and Holger

Abstract

Inspired by Michel Foucault and his work on power in modern states, which gave rise to the concept of ‘governmentality’, this thesis explores, first, how the Swiss state, through state-funded experts like the mothers’ and fathers’ advisors (MVBs), sets out to monitor and guide childrearing practices in early childhood, and second, how parents of small children govern themselves.

In recent years, early childhood has become an important focus of Swiss health and family policy and the subject of several parliamentary initiatives aimed at expanding early childhood programmes in order to protect children’s wellbeing and rights. Here, a child’s experiences during its first years of life are deemed ‘seminal’ for its future health, as well as academic and social success. The Swiss UNESCO Commission’s 2019 report on early childhood, for example, renders early childhood education and care an investment by the state in a nation’s future and claims that children benefiting from these programmes will be healthier, achieve a higher level of education and engage in fewer criminal activities.

The ‘outcomes’ of early childhood experiences are a concern for Swiss government institutions, whose policies are marked by taking a preventive approach to child welfare, in the sense that they centre on preventing ‘negative’ influences on children before they even arise, or addressing them before they can cause long-term damage to their health and development. Thus, young children, but also – and maybe more importantly – their parents, become the target of preventive expert monitoring and guidance.

In the case of Switzerland, the government provides expert guidance through the mothers’ and fathers’ counselling (the MVB) – a nationwide, state-funded early childhood service. Parents’ use of the MVB is intended to be health promoting and risk preventing, while advisors seek to build long-term, cooperative and trustful relationships with parents. I examine both the MVB’s mission as an institution and the counselling practices and concerns of individual advisors, as well as their (power) relationships with parents in detail, which also elucidates the limits of experts’ capacity to govern parents.

Additionally, parents’ accounts of raising their children are explored in the context of ‘maternal ambivalence’, a deeply gendered phenomenon produced by conflicting emotions, needs and demands. I argue that notions of ‘good’ mothering, which are highly influenced by the intensive mothering ideology, shape mothers’ experiences of ambivalence, such as an increased governing of conflicting emotions towards their children.

Parents' accounts of the experience of becoming parents and rearing their children shed light on parents' self-work intended to manage negative emotions, which is explored through Foucault's notion of technologies of self.

In this thesis, I connect prominent concepts in Parenting Culture Studies with Foucault's notion of disciplinary power in order to explore the practices which are seen by state-affiliated experts as being appropriate to govern parents, and to gain a deeper understanding of the concerns that guide parents' (self)governance. I investigate the (often gendered) links between intensive modes of childrearing and disciplinary power relations which have remained understudied by empirical research.

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¹ These are pseudonyms.

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Introduction

It happens that we are doing a home visit and we see that the fridge is full of mould. The food is all out of date, the woman cannot make sure that the food is healthy. The child is never outside, it is always in the dark, the mother does not play with the child, it also has no toys, or one overwhelms it too much. What we sometimes see is that the parents really do not know what their child can do or is allowed to do at their age. Here, it is of course our duty to make parents aware – especially those families who are not capable of this – we help them a little bit and say: ‘this is the moment to introduce a play mat’, or ‘no, now [the child] needs building blocks’. That way we try to give them [the parents] tools how to foster their children in their development. (MVB Valeria, recorded interview, 14.08.19)

In the quote above, a *Mütter- und Väterberaterin* (mothers’ and fathers’ advisor, MVB) describes her role as an advisor to families with young children. The *Mütter- und Väterberatung* (mothers’ and fathers’ counselling, the MVB) operates as a state-funded service in the field of parental education and preventive healthcare in Switzerland and provides counselling to parents free of charge. MVBs describe their work as ‘accompanying’ and ‘supporting families on their paths’, while being able to offer individualised expert guidance. ‘Getting into families’ before problems arise is a major concern for many MVBs.

Society cannot reproduce without investing in childcare – children obviously need dedicated caretakers who possess some knowledge of appropriate childrearing practices. However, over the last 100 years, through various technologies the state has increasingly assumed the responsibility to monitor, guide and instruct parents in this matter and intervene in families who are perceived to be unable to provide ideal conditions for their children’s development.

Policy makers attach major significance to children’s experiences in early childhood that calls for preventive measures which combine the monitoring of children’s health with parents’ education. Parents are encouraged to ‘prophylactically’ use early childhood services in order to ensure a prosperous future for their offspring. In recent years Swiss policy makers have expressed the aim to increase investment in early childhood programmes as well as improve the data on

children's health in early childhood (Bundesrat 2021; Gugger 2019; Stern, Dach and Calderon 2019). This is believed to be in the national interest, as – in the words of Samuel-Niklaus Gugger, National Council Member and initiator of a postulate that sought to improve early childhood programmes and counselling – “if the children are doing well, Switzerland is doing better” (Gugger 2019; my translation)

At the beginning of my ethnographic research in March 2019, I set out to explore where parents look for advice on childrearing, and who offers it. However, while examining this, my interest in broader questions grew and I came to the realisation that the issues I am interested in not only shed light on how childrearing is conceptualised today or illuminate notions of ‘good’ parenting. They also reveal how the modern state sets out to govern parents and how approaches to this have changed in recent decades. This book presents a contribution to literature inspired by Foucauldian discourses in the special setting of the intersections between parenting and the state, as it provides detailed ethnographic examples and a nuanced analysis of the (power) relations between state-affiliated experts and parents, parental ‘self-work’ and disciplinary practices aimed at ‘improving’ the population and the self.

Policy and Early Childhood

In *Governing the Soul*, Nikolas Rose characterised childhood as the “most intensively governed sector” of a person’s life (Rose 1990b: 121). Childrearing, as Rose points out, is linked to the “destiny of the nation and the responsibilities of the state” (ibid). This statement still holds true today. Schooling has been compulsory in Western states since the nineteenth century. On a more recent basis, certain paediatric check-ups have become obligatory in some European countries like Switzerland and Germany (Bollig and Kelle 2013), and a great abundance of public and private courses and counselling services promise to assist parents in safeguarding their children’s wellbeing. In Switzerland free, state-funded services such as the mothers’ and fathers’ advisors (MVBs) or

home visiting midwives providing postnatal care covered by health insurance offer parents regular support as soon as their baby is born.

Commonly defined as a phase of life that begins at birth and ends at the age of five (Dratva et al. 2019; Stern, Cammarano, et al. 2019), early childhood is deemed especially important for health and wellbeing in later life (BAG 2018b; Dratva et al. 2019: 1). Early childhood became a focal point of Swiss family policy documents in 2018 and 2019 and is the subject of several recent parliamentary initiatives and postulates aimed at expanding early childhood programmes in order to protect children's rights from the moment of birth (Aebischer, Parlamentarische Initiative, 2019; Gugger Postulate, 2019; Wasserfallen, Interpellation, 2019).

In 2019, the Swiss UNESCO Commission published a report on early childhood, which it defines as a time in which the “groundwork for the future of an individual is laid” (Stern, Cammarano, et al. 2019: 13; my translation). This kind of phrasing is ubiquitous in early childhood policy documents and writings on parental education (BAG 2018b; Tinguely and Berger 2009). Adequate early childhood education and care, argues the Commission, are an investment (by the state) in the future: children benefiting from early childhood programmes will achieve a higher level of education and will therefore not only be healthier, but also engage in fewer criminal activities. Thus, as adults they will be less of a burden on the health, social and penal systems, and will contribute a higher tax revenue. Another stated benefit of early childhood programmes is the boosting of ‘parental competences’, which is said will have a ‘long-term and positive influence on the emotional and cognitive development of children’ (ibid: 14; my translation).

The Swiss Federal Office of Public Health (*Bundesamt für Gesundheit*, BAG) writes in a policy document on health promotion and prevention of non-communicable diseases in early childhood that all professionals working with small children and their families, such as paediatricians, midwives as well as MVBs significantly contribute to detecting and reducing stress factors in early childhood. While a lot of the care they provide is focused on “children’s bodies”, the document states that it is beneficial when those professionals also extend their focus to the social aspects of

family life as well as to parents' potential psychological problems (BAG 2018b: 23; my translation). According to the BAG, early childhood experts² such as MVBs who, apart from medical professionals are most likely to come into contact with young families, are “predestined (...) to identify unfavourable influences on the child and to refer the affected families to services that can offer further support” (BAG 2018b: 23; my translation). The BAG asserts that health promotion and prevention of non-communicable diseases in early childhood is primarily “a setting-oriented approach, as the focus is not predominantly on the children themselves but the relevant social and spatial environment. First and foremost, this is the child's family with their primary attachment figures as well as their home environment” (BAG 2018b: 21; my translation). These policies focus on investing in children as human capital as well as ensuring children's positive development and protecting their rights. Thereby, they equally aim to regulate parents' practices (Hopman and Knijn 2015: 4). Thus, it is not only childhood that is ‘governed’ (Rose 1990b: 121)³, but also – and necessarily – ‘parenting’.

According to Faircloth et al. (2013a), ‘parenting’ is a relatively novel concept in public policy that not only challenges the variability in childrearing emphasised by some anthropologists (Gottlieb 2004; Small 1999), but also represents a form of childrearing that goes beyond the care work and informal kin relations involved in the upbringing of children. The term centres on parents' practices and their outcomes. As a modern mode of childrearing, it is no longer seen as a responsibility shared with the larger community, but one performed by mothers and fathers whose behaviour and practices are considered to directly ‘determine’ their children's future. “Compared to the past, it is a time-and-emotion-expensive enterprise, that parents should find personally fulfilling, yet also one that has increasingly (and ironically) been deemed far too important and difficult to be left up to parents” (Faircloth et al. 2013a: 2). Parents, according to policy makers,

² In this book, the term ‘childcare expert’ generally refers to trained professionals occupied in the fields of paediatrics, maternity or preventive health care or developmental psychology, such as paediatricians, paediatric nurses, midwives and MVBs, as well as authors of childrearing advice material. A definition of the term in the context of a Foucauldian approach is discussed in Chapter 2.

³ I am using the term ‘to govern’ in the Foucauldian sense.

ought to acquire a specific set of competences mediated by experts in order to ensure their offspring's wellbeing and 'success' in later life. "Parental authority embedded in existing lay knowledge and practices is thus actively delegitimised and substituted with expert or professionally shaped techniques" (Martin and Macvarish 2021: 438f). In Furedi's view, childrearing in countries such as the US or the UK has become an acquired skill "rather than an integral feature of an informal family relationship" (Furedi 2013: x).

The concept of 'intensive mothering' coined by Hays (1996) has probably been one of the most influential concepts in Parenting Culture Studies. In *Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* (1996), Hays describes the 'intensification' of mothering and suggests that maternal responsibilities are widening. Mothers are expected to invest a lot of time and money in their children and find their tasks personally rewarding (Hays 1996). Daily activities have moved into new dimensions and become goal oriented (Ramaekers and Suissa 2011). Playing with children as a (new) parental task, for example, is not only supposed to be a fun activity, but ought to be educational in order to stimulate the child's growing brain and ensure positive developmental outcomes (Faircloth et al. 2013a; Macvarish 2014). Emotional engagement with a newborn is not simply tending to, cuddling and soothing one's baby, but a way to activate its 'antistress-gene', so that it is more resilient in later life (BAG 2018a).

In *Paranoid Parenting* (2002), Furedi calls the idea that parents occupy an almost god-like status towards their children 'parental determinism' – because it sees childrearing practices as directly resulting in harm or benefit to children. Viewed from this perspective, parenting has consequences for society as a whole, as parents 'make or break' the next generation (Faircloth, Hoffman and Layne 2013b; Furedi 2014; Lee et al. 2014; Rose 1990b). The usage of the term 'parenting' in public policy, according to Faircloth et al. (2013b), is tied to the idea that parenting can cause, but also prevent, a range of social problems and therefore presents an important point for state interventions (Furedi 2014: ix). Thus, it is the task of policy makers and elaborate state bureaucracies to invest in and devise early childhood programmes that, with the help of childcare

experts, will monitor children's growth and parents' practices as well as the 'home environment' they provide, and intervene in families if a child's wellbeing is seen to be in danger.

While families do become the subject of government intervention when childrearing in the home fails, the "governing" of parents generally is not "imposed under threat by courts and social workers" (Rose 1990b: 208). Rose, inspired by Foucault's notions of 'governmentality' and 'technologies of the self', suggests that experts have not only gained access to the home via various media (or today's smartphone applications) but also by providing subjects with self-monitoring routines:

No longer do experts have to reach the family by way of law or the coercive intrusion of social work. They interpellate us through the radio call-in, through the weekly magazine column, through gentle advice of the health visitor, teacher or neighbour, and through the unceasing reflexive gaze of our own psychological educated self-scrutiny. (Rose 1990b: 208)

While the state and affiliated experts seek to shape childrearing practices through various channels such as state-funded counselling services, parents also engage in (self-)surveillance and introspection in order to govern themselves and their children "in the name of their own life or health, that of their family or some other collectivity, or indeed in the name of the life or health of the population as a whole" (Rabinow and Rose 2006: 197). Douglas and Michaels (2004), who coined the term 'new momism' in their work on the media's influence on mothering ideals, suggest that heightened (self)surveillance is intertwined with the 'intensification' of childrearing: "With intensive mothering, everyone watches us, we watch ourselves, and we watch ourselves watching ourselves. (...) Motherhood has become a psychological police state" (Douglas and Michaels 2004: 6). Authors such as Arsand (2014), Budds et al. (2017) and Henderson et al. (2010) have used Foucault's notions of 'discipline' and 'technologies of self' in order to explore the ways parents monitor, regulate and 'work' on themselves and their children in order to achieve a particular parenting ideal and produce a particular kind of child.

Parenting as a Site of (Self-) Governing

The conception of parenting as an intensive and expert-led mode of childrearing, and the fact that the modern state has assumed the responsibility to steer the outcomes of early childhood experiences implies that it is a site of ‘governing’, a central analytical term within Foucauldian perspectives.

What some literature in the field of Parenting Culture Studies as well as this book strongly convey is that the contemporary governing of families seeks to prevent ‘problems’ such as health or social issues before they even arise and potentially cause long-term damage. This comes as no surprise when viewed from the angle of human capital investment found in policy documents. The MVB’s mission, defined as such by the BAG (2018b), is to detect or prevent all sorts of ‘negative’ influences on children’s health and wellbeing, in order to forestall the need for child protection measures. In their critical analysis of the historical transformations of child welfare approaches in conjunction with social work practices, Vandebroek et al. (2011) describe how European states have moved away from coercive and repressive child protection measures that marked many welfare interventions up to the 1980s, and their social institutions have since taken up a ‘supportive’ and ‘empowering’ approach to governing families that centres on the prevention of risks (Bollig and Kelle 2013; Vandebroek et al. 2011: 71). And this is where the main focus of this book lies: the governing of parents through ‘soft power’ that is less tangible and of a ‘pastoral’ nature (Foucault 2009).

The line of investigation is two-fold: **I will explore first how childcare experts, particularly the state-funded MVB, set out to monitor and guide parenting, and second, how parents govern themselves.** In shedding light on the practices deemed appropriate by the state and affiliated experts to govern parents, the concerns that guide this (self)governance, as well as the ways ‘good’ parenting is conceptualised in the discourses of both experts and parents, this

ethnographic study seeks to contribute to the anthropology of childrearing as well as Parenting Culture Studies.

While I take recent policy documents regarding early childhood and childrearing advice material into account, I address these particular questions by focusing primarily on the institution of the MVB, a state-funded early childhood service whose advisors work face-to face with parents. Policy documents can give insights into the state's concerns and desires and set accounts of individual advisors into a broader context, but exploring the perceptions and motivations of professionals involved with parents is an important line of inquiry to figure out what informs childrearing expertise in practice. The views on parenthood imparted to parents in practice, what parental competences experts consider essential, how these competences are evaluated and, if found to be lacking, how they are encouraged, is a crucial part of this investigation. Further, the question of to what extent concepts influential in Parenting Culture Studies, such as 'intensive mothering' or 'parental determinism' are guiding the governing of parenting in the understudied context of Switzerland, and what effects this has on parents' experience of childrearing, is of special interest.

An additional objective of this book is to investigate how parents of small children navigate early childhood and new parenthood in Switzerland – how do they experience becoming parents and bringing up their children? Where do they look for information and advice regarding certain childrearing issues, such as the 'terrible twos' or 'temper tantrums', and what do they hope to gain from their chosen sources of advice?

This book draws from the Parenting Culture Studies literature (Edwards and Gillies 2013; Faircloth et al. 2013b; Furedi 2014; Hays 1996; Hoffman 2013; Lee et al. 2014; Macvarish 2014; Martin and Macvarish 2021) as well as literature that explores the professionalisation of childcare and the medicalisation of mothering (Apple 2006, 2012; Clarke 2006; Ehrenreich and English 2005; Fuchs 1997; Kanieski 2010; Rose 1990b; Stearns 2003). It builds on and extends this work empirically by

exploring both experiences of childrearing and the ways childrearing is governed as well as state-affiliated experts' (and parents') concerns when it comes to raising small children in Switzerland.

By shedding light on the relationships between parents and the state-sponsored MVBs and the 'techniques' (Foucault 1995) deemed appropriate to guide parents, this book aims to provide an ethnographic account of the ways parents are 'led' by experts, while at the same time paying careful attention to the limits of experts' power to guide. In the Swiss context, few studies investigate precisely what experts' 'leading' of parents looks like in practice and what kind of power relations this entails. An exception is Ballif (2019), who, in contrast to this study, however concentrates on the psychological governing of pregnant women by midwives in a perinatal unit in Switzerland.

Beyond Switzerland, there are several studies that draw on Foucauldian perspectives to explore specific parenting programmes or courses, such as Bae's (2017) study of *Incredible Years*, which was introduced by New Zealand's government in 2009. *Incredible Years* offers parent, child and teacher training courses. Yet educational studies researcher Bae does not explore the practices of individual course instructors or their relationship with parents but focuses on the underlying neoliberal assumptions of the *Incredible Years* programme itself. Similarly, psychologists Cottam and Espie (2014) examine subjectification in parenting training programmes and focus on the analysis of texts rather than on actual practices or social relations between experts and parents, when they study the discourses found in parenting training manuals.

Shepherd (2014) uses a Foucauldian framework to investigate interactions between low-income mothers and child and family health nurses in Australia. While her work presents an important point of comparison when discussing the Swiss MVB's practices, Shepherd's investigation is restricted to nurses' guidance in terms of care, such as children's diet or growth. In contrast, this book also focuses on experts' evaluation and ways of promoting 'proper attachment behaviour' and 'maternal sensitivity' and thus makes an important contribution to the question of how the emotional bond between mother and child is governed within the context of early

childhood programmes. In this context, MVBs' gendered discourses surrounding maternal 'instincts' or 'intuitions' also came to the foreground, which not only cast a light on the tensions between notions of mothers' 'innate' competences and the need for an expert-led childrearing, but also questions Lee et al.'s suggestion that experts have deemed instinctive parenting "mythical" or "problematic" (Lee et al. 2014: 53).

As a special contribution to the field of Parenting Culture Studies, this book closely examines the interconnections between intensive childrearing methods, the state and disciplinary power relations, which have not been appropriately addressed by research. Intensive mothering is inextricably linked with power relations, which is discussed by Hays (1996) in the context of gender and class inequalities, as well as by highlighting the state's interest in maintaining mothers' 'subordination'. While Hays references two of Foucault's works in the context of state centralisation (Hays 1996: 11, 198), she does not specifically explore how Foucault's notion of disciplinary power relates to intensive mothering in practice.

Foucault has been scrutinised for not taking aspects of gender into account when it comes to power relations (Allen Winter 2021 Edition; Oksala 2016), specifically in regards to the different effects of biopower on women and men (Bartky 1990) and women's central role in subjectification (Simons 1996): "Not only do women have a privileged relation to biopower due to their procreative roles as mothers, but also in other caretaking and typically feminine roles, such as nursing, teaching, family medicine, therapy, and social work" (Taylor 2012: 213). In the light of the feminist critique expressed against Foucault (Bartky 1990; Fraser 1989; Hartsock 1989), this book, by investigating the interconnections between disciplinary power and intensive mothering strives to illustrate the genderedness of the governing of parents. It is in this context, that this research adds novel perspectives to the body of literature exploring family relationships from Foucauldian perspectives (Duschinsky and Rocha 2012; Taylor 2012).

This book also presents an important contribution to the anthropology of mothering, as it attends to the experience of 'maternal ambivalence', a phenomenon that has mainly been studied

by psychologists and sociologists, but there is a lack of ethnographic research in this field. I critically examine the existing literature on maternal ambivalence in light of my own research findings and attempt to gain a more nuanced understanding of the conflicts that produce ambivalence in the daily lives of parents and how intensive mothering effects the experience and management of ‘negative’ emotions. In this regard, this book also pays a closer look at Hays’ suggestion that modern mothering is intensive in terms of the ‘emotional energy’ invested in children because of the strong focus placed on figuring out and addressing their needs ahead of their mothers’.

Researching the Governing of Parents in Switzerland

I addressed this study’s research questions through multimethod ethnographic fieldwork between March 2019 and April 2021 in the German- and French-speaking regions of Switzerland. The central methods consisted of different forms of interviews and participant observation complemented by the examination of ‘grey literature’ such as government policy documents, reports and meeting notes, flyers stemming from public or private institutions, as well as online posts in parenting fora. In order to trace the historic emergence of ‘intensive mothering’, I reviewed and analysed advice material from the 18th to the 21st centuries, focusing on Swiss publications, and also explored the history of the establishment of childcare services. Contemporary advice material, such as the *Elternbriefe* (parent letters) by Swiss youth foundation Pro Juventute, whose dissemination is funded by the state, was also used to embed certain themes that were prominent in my interlocuters’ accounts in widely-distributed advice literature.

Eighteen MVB participants from different cantons were interviewed in advice centres. I accompanied two MVBs throughout their working day for participant observation during consultations and a home visit. More participant observation was planned with other advisors. This, however, was foiled by the Covid-19 pandemic in spring 2020, during which I did fieldwork in the digital realm when possible. During the pandemic, the MVB in Zürich city developed online

services, like online baby massage courses, as well as online talks on specific topics, such as development or diet, which I attended in January and February 2021.

MVB reports, leaflets, webpages and job advertisements were collected, reviewed and analysed to gain a thorough understanding of the organisation's aims, approaches and services, as well as public policy documents that discuss the MVBs' work. This provided insights into the overall mission of the MVB as an institution as well as the state's views on the MVB's responsibilities in the context of early childhood policies, alongside the data collected from individual advisors.

I interviewed four midwives who worked at maternity centres. While this book does not focus on the work of midwives, who, in contrast to the MVBs, do not represent state-affiliated experts, the data collected during my conversations with them gave valuable insights into the topics and issues parents deal with during pregnancy, birth and the postpartum period, which complemented parents' accounts. Their views on certain topics were integrated at relevant points of this book.

I met with 24 mothers and two fathers (the partners of two of the 24 mothers) who had children under the age of five.⁴ The women and men were between 26 and 45 years old; the majority of parents were in their mid-thirties. While 15 parents had grown up in Switzerland, I also interviewed women who had moved to Switzerland from European countries such as Germany, France, Slovakia or the Netherlands, as well as women who had relocated there from South Africa, Kenya and New Zealand. Eighteen participants were married and one couple wanted to marry in the future; one participant was a single mother.

After finishing school, all the participants had either completed secondary education, such as vocational training in the form of apprenticeships, or tertiary education in universities or colleges (*Fachhochschule*). The great majority of the mothers worked part time while their partners either

⁴ There was one exception to this. One mother had children who were already over five, but I decided to carry out the interview anyway.

worked full time or in a higher percentage. Only three women were working full time when we met; one was a single mother, one had a husband who also worked full time in a business they owned together. The third woman presented an exception in terms of gendered divisions of labour when compared to the other participants. She had a PhD and worked full time in the education sector, while her husband worked one day a week and took care of their three sons.

Four mothers were not employed. Two of those mothers stated that they did not work because their salaries would be so low that they would not make up for the high daycare fees they would have to pay. The great majority of families used daycare facilities; a small number also used informal care arrangements, such as partners, grandmothers or friends.

Although I tried to diversify my recruitment channels, my calls for research participants primarily attracted middle class families – in terms of education, income and lifestyle. Three families provided exceptions to this, but mostly in terms of their income (not necessarily education or profession-wise), which seemed to be considerably lower than in other families. This of course raises some questions about the representativeness of my sample, but also whether the issues I wanted to talk about attracted certain parents who may contemplate their experience of being a mother/father and the ‘proper’ approach to childrearing more than others. Scholars exploring contemporary childrearing suggest that the aspiration – or pressure – to mother intensively takes hold of mothers from different social backgrounds. The ability to use intensive childrearing methods is, however, more feasible in middle-class families (Cappellini et al. 2019; Gillies 2007; Hays 1996; Lareau 2003; Pylypa 2011; Shepherd 2014).

There is also research suggesting that the self-regulation and self-discipline associated with intensive mothering (Cappellini et al. 2019; Caputo 2007; Pylypa 2011), can be less pronounced in certain groups, such as the young low-income Canadian mothers Romagnoli and Wall worked with (Romagnoli and Wall 2012). Especially in the context of expert guidance in conjunction with practices of self, there may be ample reason to focus on middle-class families. As Chapter 3 on the MVB will show, *some* parents – certainly those who belong to a middle-class background and adhere

to ‘intensive methods’, such as informing themselves about child development, were encouraged by advisors to use practices of the self, such as introspection, in order to find the ‘right’ approach to a certain issue. In contrast, other parents, often migrants with many children and little financial means, were believed to need more instructive and regular guidance. On a similar note, Aarsand (2014), who explores parenting through the lens of governmentality in Norway, suggests that experts see middle-class parents as being more able to govern themselves. Thus, studying how childrearing is approached in middle-class families can prove fruitful, especially when it comes to the effects of intensive methods on the experience of parenthood, but also ascertaining how the parental self is governed in the context of the intensive mothering ideology.

All but three interviews took place in the families’ homes and usually the children were present as well, so parent-child interactions could be observed in the context of the conversation. As Madden notes, “Ethnographers talk, participate and observe simultaneously” (Madden 2010: 77). While talking to interlocutors, I did my fair share of holding babies and playing with toddlers, assisting in food preparation, or listening to conversations between parents and children. My recordings were sometimes hard to listen to because of screams and playing noises in the background. Twice my recording device was flooded with orange juice.

Twelve follow-up interviews were carried out with eleven participants via Zoom, Skype or telephone call during the Covid-19 pandemic. While the follow-up interviews employed a more narrative approach, I also prepared open-ended questions to deepen certain themes that had emerged in the first interviews.

When I started my research, I also signed up to several mothers’ groups on Facebook which had many members, regular posts and responses. First, these online fora simply served as a ‘recruitment’ channel. In the course of my research, however, I became a daily reader of the questions and statements posted in the fora as well as the numerous responses that the posts yielded⁵. The

⁵ I did not engage in the discussions in online fora myself and have not used any direct quotes from posts for this research due to the ethical challenges of online research when it comes to, for example, obtaining informed consent. Further, I did not have any background information about the posts’ authors, so that

discussions that unfolded in the fora sometimes matched the issues parent interlocutors were dealing with, or reflected discourses found in advice literature or expert guidance. This added another dimension to my research findings – for example, when a post’s initiator wanted advice on how to deal with her child’s temper, it was interesting to see which books other mothers recommended to her or which approach most respondents suggested she should use when her child threw a tantrum. Sometimes arguments unfolded between advocates of different approaches.

Specifically, when it came to posts that described so-called ‘maternal ambivalence’ seeing how frequently mothers posted about it, especially after anonymous posting became possible, as well as reading other mothers’ views on it was illuminating, and highlighted that the experience of ambivalence towards mothering was not something only my interlocutors were dealing with. While this research is primarily based on face-to-face interactions with interlocutors as well as analysis of documents and grey literature, reading and ‘observing’ in the digital realm where mothers seek and give advice, discuss and argue provided an additional channel through which the experience of childrearing in Switzerland could be explored and contextualised.

Doing Anthropology at ‘Home’ and Being a Mother Myself

Field sites have transformed in in the last few decades. Ethnographic research is no longer exclusively undertaken in far-flung non-European contexts, but has moved to cities, institutions and organisations (Beer 2007; Madden 2010; Mughal 2015; van Ginkel 1994). Further, the idea of “one discrete singular field” has faded (Madden 2010: 54); fieldwork today is often ‘multi-sited’. The ethnographic field is created and defined by the research question (Madden 2010: 38). My field sites were parents’ homes, MVB advice centres, online parenting fora, or virtual baby massage

their questions, statements, etc. remained without much context. Neither did I search for certain topics that were discussed, but simply logged in every day and read through all the new posts that were created as well as the responses, and took notes if topics or debates relevant to my research came up.

courses. As I undertook research in Switzerland, the country in which I have been living – with longer and shorter interruptions here and there – for the last 21 years, one could say that I did my fieldwork at ‘home’. Moreover, I am the mother of a daughter who also was going through her early childhood years when I conducted my fieldwork, which made my research even closer to ‘home’. However, as several anthropologists have pointed out, what doing ethnographic fieldwork ‘at home’ actually means is hard to define (Madden 2010; Mughal 2015). ‘Doing anthropology at home’ is sometimes used in the sense of carrying out fieldwork in a nation state, a linguistic region or a city in which the ethnographer has resided for a length of time (Madden 2010: 45). It may also mean that the researcher is studying a segment or an aspect of society to which they belong themselves (van Ginkel 1994: 5). Madden notes that for him, however, ‘home’ does not refer to a nation state, but a smaller, more intimate environment – it is “familiar” (Madden 2010: 45): “My recipe for home is therefore a mixture of geographical, emotional, social, and cultural components, which are brought together under the rubric of familiarity” (Madden 2010: 46).

Some of my informants’ accounts, especially in terms of arranging childcare, as well as maternity and expert care during pregnancy and the postpartum period sounded very ‘familiar’ to what I had experienced as a new mother myself.⁶ However, even though my interlocutors and I were raising our children in the same country or even the same city, many experiences, practices, ideas or the approaches to childrearing conveyed in the context of interviews were anything but familiar to me. As van Ginkel asserts in his article ‘Writing Culture from Within. Reflection on Endogenous Ethnography’, while quoting an essay by Brunt from 1975:

Dutch anthropologist Lodewijk Brunt makes a point of stressing that it is fundamentally wrong to assume that ethnographers doing fieldwork in their own societies only have to deal with people who adhere to closely corresponding values: ‘Not only may there be a difference between the anthropologist and his informants, but it is very likely that there are differences between various groups of informants as well’. (van Ginkel 1994: 9; quoting Brunt, 1975, p.36)

⁶ However, in Germany, where I grew up, there is no equivalent institution to the MVB. Thus, I was not ‘familiar’ with the MVB and also very surprised when an MVB called me after I was discharged from the maternity centre, asking me to visit her centre.

A significant number of my interlocutors were not originally from Switzerland but described themselves as expats or said they had moved to Switzerland recently or many years ago from other countries in Europe, as well as non-European countries. I am not originally from Switzerland but moved here from Germany in 2001. The fact that I don't speak Swiss German immediately reveals that I am not from Switzerland. While I understand the different local dialects of Swiss German quite well, I still need to ask about the meaning of certain terms.

As the kind of research that I carried out did not allow me to be co-resident with my interlocutors, it could be described as what Madden calls a 'step-in-step-out' ethnography (Madden 2010: 79f). Madden importantly points out that "it's not always the choice of the ethnographers themselves as to how they wish to be in the field" (Madden 2010: 81). After meeting each mother, I went back home, transferred the recorded interview to my computer, and reviewed the notes I had made that day. Sometimes I would not have another meeting with a parent, an MVB or a midwife for another week. On the one hand, my research consisted of many different short-term encounters. On the other hand, however, I never really 'stepped out' of my field, because childrearing practices and the governing of parenting can be observed anywhere on a daily basis, and because I am a mother myself.

I spend time at playgrounds, the paediatrician, the school dentist. I received leaflets from Zürich city's health services about how to keep children's teeth healthy. I talk to befriended mothers about being a mother and rearing children. As I am myself fully immersed in raising a child, my observation of childrearing practices as well as how parents are governed by experts and how they seek to govern themselves never really stops. Often informal conversations with people who were not 'official' interlocutors resulted in me contemplating certain themes and discourses that I encountered when engaging with 'official' interlocutors. Conversations with 'official' interlocutors made me reflect on my own childrearing practices and values.

Even outside a research context, encounters with other people who are in a similar situation can cause reflections on one's own practices. Many mothers described how they observed and

evaluated other mothers' interactions with their children, which made them either critically question or consolidate their own practices. Ethnographic investigations, both 'at home' and 'far away', should always include critically reflecting on one's own practices and ideas to take a step back and create a distance from which fieldwork observations can be explored from different angles. In my case, however, this was of major importance, as "the process of distancing oneself from the research subject may prove difficult, since the situations studied can be almost identical to those confronting the ethnographers in daily life" (van Ginkel 1994: 12).

Continuously questioning and critically reflecting on terms or practices that at first glance seem obvious, self-evident, or commonsensical is essential when doing anthropology in a setting where one has lived for many years and especially when studying a topic that one is very close to (Beer 2007; Martin 1987; van Ginkel 1994). Further, paying close attention to my own positionality in terms of examining "my ethnographic baggage for presumption and prejudice" (Madden 2010: 22f), which can be connected to one's own upbringing, education, life story and many other factors, was essential. On the one hand, reflecting on positionality allows for more awareness regarding the ways these factors may shape the research as well the representation of participants. On the other hand, the positionality of the researcher as an "active participant in the ethnographic field" (Madden 2010: 23) also greatly influences their relationship with interlocutors. The fact that I am a mother myself may have allowed me to build a rapport with both parents and MVBs – who in most cases were mothers themselves – relatively quickly. Discussing sensitive issues such as infertility and conflicting emotions towards children, or intimate topics such as birth stories or postpartum issues may be easier with a 'comrade in suffering'. Many participants noted that only fellow parents could understand what childrearing really entails. While this may have given me the advantage that participants felt understood and taken seriously, it again posed a lot of challenges in terms of always having to stay alert in order to be able to move "beyond the self-evident" (van Ginkel 1994: 11).

The Field Site

In Switzerland (and to my knowledge in other German-speaking countries, too), there is no term that directly translates into ‘parenting’. The term that come closest to ‘parenting’ would be *elterliche Kindererziehung* (parental education/parental upbringing of children), which requires a specifying adjective stating who is carrying out the *Kindererziehung*, as it could also be carried out by other relatives, nannies or teachers. However, usually the parents and experts I spoke with just used the word ‘*Erziehung*’ without specifying who is being *erzogen* (educated) and who is doing it. Thus, as a term it does not specifically assign the task of educating children to parents. However, the term, which translated literally means something akin to ‘pulling’ out or ‘pulling something (or someone) in a certain direction’, also reveals a lot in terms of the task of the people who carry out the *Erziehung*: *Erziehung* refers both to the actions (or non-actions) that parents (or other caretakers) carry out in order to influence the development and the behaviour of children, but it can also mean the end result of those actions, and thus also pays attention to the (un)desirable outcomes of childrearing practices.

The lack of a German term for ‘parenting’ is one of many reasons why Switzerland, where childrearing practices as well as the governing of parenting from a Foucauldian perspective have been neglected by ethnographic research, is an intriguing site for fieldwork. In terms of both its family policy and early childhood services Switzerland is a special case. First of all, Switzerland distinguishes itself from neighbouring countries through its rather conservative family policies. The state assumes a hands-off approach to supporting new families after the birth of a child. The organisation and financing of childcare widely remains families’ personal responsibility, which, as I discuss later, also contributes to the consolidation of gendered divisions of labour⁷.

⁷ In line with other feminist authors such as Mills (2016) and Vogel (2013), I use the plural ‘divisions of labour’, as in many societies different gendered divisions of labour can be found depending on the kind of work, class, or age (Vogel 2013: 7, footnote 5). Further notions of what counts as ‘labour’ can vary, as well as expectations regarding what men and women should contribute to society or their household (Mills 2016: 285).

Secondly, with the MVB, Switzerland offers parents an extensive and elaborate expert ‘accompaniment’⁸ in early childhood, whose use policy makers highly encourage. In comparison with Germany and other neighbouring countries, the MVB is a unique institution, which has a 100-year history and is widely accepted and used by parents. So far, the institution of the MVB remains both historically and ethnographically unexplored.

In terms of parenthood, Switzerland joins two extreme poles: on the one hand, conservative family policies that render parenthood a ‘private’ risk, and on the other hand, policy makers’ endorsement of parents’ voluntary disciplining through state-affiliated experts. In light of this tension, Switzerland is an especially fruitful field site. It provides a special looking glass to explore the relationship between parenthood and the state and to investigate the ways childrearing is experienced and governed in a conservative and highly gendered European context.

Family Policies and Gendered Divisions of Labour

Gender roles in Switzerland have been legally consolidated for a long time. One of the milestones in attempting to achieve gender equality in Switzerland – after giving women the right to vote as late as 1971 (in the canton of Appenzell Innerrhoden in 1990) – was the introduction of a new marriage law in the late 1980s which replaced the ‘old’ marriage law from 1907. Until 1988, the husband was legally defined as the family’s head and provider, whereas the woman was assigned the role of the housewife (Fassung ZGB 1907. Art. 160, 161)⁹.

Another legal landmark in the context of gender equality specifically relating to parenthood was the revision of the parental custody law in 2014. Unmarried mothers used to have sole custody automatically, and after divorce custody was usually assigned to mothers. Thus, until recently, Swiss

⁸ The term ‘accompaniment’ (*Begleitung*) to describe professional guidance and assistance was often used by the experts working with parents I studied, such as the MVBs and midwives. It is also often used in policy documents. The meaning of the term is further explored in Chapter 4.

⁹ See https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/fga/1907/6_589_429_/de, accessed 12.05.2022.

law ensured that children whose parents got divorced (or were never married) lived with their mothers. Today, shared custody is the rule, unless decided otherwise by a court.

Although the role of fathers in families as well as the proportion of working mothers have changed drastically over the last 25 years, care work is still primarily done by women, which raises the issue of gendered divisions of labour in families living in Switzerland, which are – at least in part – enforced by government policies. Here, the employment situation of mothers and statistics reported by the BFS can assist in shedding light on how care work is organised and combined with employment in Switzerland.

Switzerland's female employment rate in general is the second highest in Europe, after Sweden (BFS, 2016: 1). While the employment rate of mothers with at least one child under the age of 6 in 2015 (70.2%) was lower than in some other EU countries, such as Denmark, Portugal and Austria, it was still higher than the European average (63.4%) (BFS, 2016: 10). In 2016, a publication about the employment situation of mothers in Switzerland by the BFS reported that four-fifths of all mothers work outside the home, while the same proportion of working mothers work part time. The birth of a first child usually involves a reduction in workdays for mothers or an exit from the labour market (BFS, 2016: 1). In 2020, only 14.5% of mothers with children under the age of 3 worked full time, while 61% worked part time. The employment situation of mothers with children aged between four and twelve looks very similar. In contrast, most fathers do not change their workload when their first child is born. In 2020, 78.5% of fathers with children under the age of 3 worked full time and 82.9% of fathers with children between four and twelve years of age worked full time. Only a very small percentage of fathers worked a pensum of less than 50% (3.3% of fathers with children under the age of 3) (BFS, 2021a).

Levy et al. speak of a “persistent core of traditionalism“ in Swiss family organisation (Levy, Widmer and Kellerhals 2002: 1). Mothers may have increasingly joined the workforce in recent decades, but their employment situation is still different from fathers. Albeit published in 2002, Levy et al.'s comment on the gendered divisions of labour in Swiss families is still valid:

(...) the male breadwinner model has much less disappeared than folk and media wisdom would have it and than statistical data on male and female employment seem to reveal (if not longitudinal and properly differentiated). It has, however, changed its appearance: men's employment careers are steady and tendentially ascending, women's careers are broken and static or descending. (Levy et al. 2002: 32)

Furthermore, the idea that mothers' professional aspirations may impact negatively on their children's wellbeing persists. Even though the great majority of mothers in Switzerland work, the BFS reports that a considerable percentage of men (36%) and women (27%) are sceptical about mothers' employment and believe that preschool children 'suffer' when their mothers pursue gainful employment (BFS, 2019: 28).

Dealing with family and domestic matters remains women's work. Many, however, have to combine care and domestic work with their professional jobs (Levy et al. 2002: 32), which puts a double burden on women. In 2019, the BFS recorded that in 69% of Swiss households with children it is women who carry out most of the domestic work (BFS, 2019: 13). Caring for children at home, according to the BFS, is mainly assigned to women – for example almost 74% of mothers with children under the age of 13 stay at home when the child is sick, while the fathers go out to work (BFS, 2019: 14).

This may be one reason why my research – although exploring 'parenting' – is largely about women and mothering; I mostly met with mothers, whose partners were usually at work during our conversation. Moreover, the early childhood experts I interviewed, such as midwives and MVBs, were all women. At the time of my research, MVBs were without exemption female¹⁰ and male midwives are very rare in Switzerland.

While the persistence of the 'male breadwinner model' can be explained by multi-layered sociocultural factors, mothers' widespread part-time employment (or leaving the workforce completely) may also have to do with the (unexplained) gender pay gap as well as expensive daycare

¹⁰ In July 2021, the MVB Zürich specifically searched for a male MVB, who would develop programmes and counselling sessions for fathers. Some MVBs reported that there was a male social worker in Bern who worked for the MVB. However, he was only ever referred to as a 'social worker' and not as a 'male MVB'.

fees. In 2014, women earned 18.1% less than men (Strub and Bannwart 2017: 2) – a reason why families may decide that the higher-earning male remains fully employed, while the lower-earning female stays at home with the children?¹¹

Daycare fees are extremely high, especially in the German-speaking region of Switzerland. In the Italian and French parts, fees are generally lower. In Zürich, a full day in a public daycare centre without any government subsidies costs 120 CHF or more. A couple who together makes 150,000 CHF net per year¹² (and have 100,000 CHF assets) are not eligible to apply for subsidies, and have to pay 2,400 CHF per month for a full-time daycare place for one child out of their own pockets.¹³

Fees in private daycare centres, which can determine their pricing independently, can be higher and subsidised daycare places can be hard to come by. In rural areas there may be no daycare centre at all. If not being taken care of at home, children attend daycare centres until they are four or five years old and then enter kindergarten.

While parents can apply for subsidies depending on their income¹⁴, it is still cheaper to take care of children at home, otherwise a large part of a family's income goes on daycare fees.¹⁵ While salaries are higher and taxes lower than in other European countries, living costs, especially in cities

¹¹ A large proportion of the gender pay gap remained unexplained in 2014 (42%), which meant that women earned 7.4 % less than men who worked in the same position and had the same qualifications (Strub and Bannwart 2017: 2).

¹² In 2016, the gross salary of a person working full time was 7,820 CHF per month in Zürich (where the average salary is higher than in other parts of Switzerland. https://www.stadt-zuerich.ch/prd/de/index/ueber_das_department/medien/medienmitteilungen/2018/november/18112_8a.html, accessed 31.08.21.

¹³ Zürich city has an online tool that calculates how much families have to pay for a public daycare place depending on their income and assets, at https://www.stadt-zuerich.ch/ssd/de/index/volksschule/betreuung_horte/beitragsrechner/beitragsrechner.html, accessed 31.08.21. In Zürich city, a couple who together 'only' makes 100,000 CHF net per year are eligible to apply for subsidies, but still have to pay 1,882 CHF for a full-time daycare place per month. Given the very high costs of living in Zürich city, an overall household income of 100,000 CHF does not go far.

¹⁴ The income limit determining when parents can apply for subsidies varies from region to region.

¹⁵ Of course, not working, or working less in order to save daycare fees has consequences in terms of financial security for women, as it means they are not paying, or only a small amount, into their so-called 'second pillar', an occupational pension. Also, they may not be able to develop their career to the same extent as an employee who works full time.

such as Zürich or Geneva, are often ranked as some of the highest in the world, and daycare fees put a major financial burden on families.

The costs of daycare in Switzerland stand in stark contrast to neighbouring countries such as Germany. While daycare costs strongly vary regionally, daycare fees are much lower. In Berlin public daycare is free and parents only pay for meals, which cost 23 Euros a month¹⁶. In Cologne, fees are dependent on parents' income. Parents with a high-end income of over 100,000 Euros per year pay less than 8,000 Euros annually for a full-time daycare place (45 hours per week)¹⁷.

High daycare fees may also be a reason for grandparents' intensive involvement in Switzerland when it comes to childcare; 40% of grandparents care for their grandchildren at least once a week (BFS, 2019: 23). Almost 70% of all children under the age of thirteen are being cared for by carers other than their parents, and 42% of parents use their family and social networks, such as grandparents, friends and neighbours, to organise free or low-priced informal care for their children. The exclusive use of daycare is only practiced by one-fifth of all households with children under thirteen (BFS, 2019: 19).

Another factor that may impact on gendered divisions of labour in Switzerland is conservative policies surrounding parental leave. Paternity leave was only introduced by law in January 2021. Fathers are now entitled to two weeks' paid leave within six months of their child's birth. While paternity leave had already been approved by Swiss Parliament in 2019, it was met with heavy opposition. Conservative critics of a nationwide paternity leave, such as the right-wing Swiss People's party (SVP), one of Switzerland's major parties, launched a national referendum to avert the policy, which was held in 2020. According to SVP politician and National Council member Verena Herzog, the ways families arrange for the arrival of a baby is a personal

¹⁶ See Senatsverwaltung für Bildung, Jugend und Familie Berlin, Kostenbeteiligung und Zuzahlungen <https://www.berlin.de/sen/jugend/familie-und-kinder/kindertagesbetreuung/kostenbeteiligung/>, accessed 31.08.2021.

¹⁷ See *Elternbeiträge der Kindertageseinrichtungen*, Stadt Köln, <https://www.stadt-koeln.de/service/produkte/00405/index.html>, accessed 31.08.2021).

responsibility and not a matter for the state.¹⁸ While 60% of voters were in favour, so paternity leave could finally be legally anchored, the backlash against its introduction shows that conservative views on gender roles are deeply engrained in Swiss society. Switzerland was one of the last countries in Europe that introduced leave for fathers. This meant that, from day one, the mother was made their child's primary carer as, until 2021, many fathers went straight back to work after their child was born if they could not take unpaid leave or did not have sufficient holiday leave to stay at home.

While Switzerland was the first country in Europe to settle the protection of women before and after birth with the *Fabrikgesetz* (factory law) in 1877, by banning them from working for a certain period of time, it was only in 2005 that the *Erwerbsersatzgesetz* was passed, introducing the so-called *Mutterschaftsentschädigung* (maternity compensation) (Studer 2016). For 14 weeks after their baby's delivery, mothers are on maternity leave and receive 80% of their salary (Degen 2006). While some government employers and large companies provided female employers with maternity compensation for a certain period before the law was introduced in 2005, it was not legally required and did not apply to all women, but depended on employers' goodwill.¹⁹ In contrast to Germany, Switzerland does not provide a so-called *Mutterschutz* (maternity protection), which bans pregnant women from working six weeks before their estimated delivery date. Although there is the possibility of receiving a doctor's certificate to require this, pregnant women in Switzerland are expected to work until their due date.

With only 14 weeks' maternity leave, Switzerland is not generous in comparison to other European countries. Great Britain offers up to 52 weeks, Norway 56 weeks and in Germany both mother and fathers can take *Elternzeit* (parent time). In total, *Elternzeit* can be taken for up to three years, during which parents can either reduce their workload or not work at all, while their employee

¹⁸ See Herzog's article in the SVP newspaper from 2019 <https://www.svp.ch/partei/publikationen/parteizeitung/2019-2/svp-klartext-oktober-2019/vaterschaftsurlaub-eigenverantwortung-statt-anspruchsmalitaet/>, accessed 24.02.2022.

¹⁹ Major employers like big banks often grant longer leave for both mothers and fathers.

position is kept on hold. Mother and father can take *Elternzeit* at the same time. The German state also provides families with so-called *Elterngeld* (parent money) for up to fourteen months for both parents, and twelve months for one parent if they work less than thirty-one hours a week in order to compensate parents who work less or not at all after the birth of a child. Even parents who had no income before their child was born can apply for *Elterngeld*. The amount granted is dependent on their income before the birth and can vary from between 150 and 1,800 Euros per month (BMFSFJ, 2020). Similar arrangements can be found in Austria, Sweden and Denmark. Switzerland's short maternity leave may be one reason why mothers decide to exit the workforce or 'only' work part-time. Leaving a three-month old baby in the full-time care of daycare staff or older relatives may not only feel too early for some families, who may still be adjusting to life with a baby, but may also complicate some mothers' wish to continue breast-feeding their child beyond the 14-week maternity leave.

In contrast to Germany and other European countries, "the condition of motherhood" is clearly "seen as a private matter borne by women and outside the jurisdiction of the state" (SIRC, 2012: 5) in Switzerland, where family policies hardly support parents financially or logistically when it comes to childcare. Short parental leaves and the expensive Swiss daycare system seems to be designed for one person to stay at home with the children, at least part time, and in most cases, as the numbers show, this person is the mother, who has fewer opportunities to develop her career or accumulate wealth. This is also connected to a deeply-entrenched conservatism in Swiss politics that supports 'traditional' gender roles as well as a long history of excluding women from political decision-making.

Meeting the Experts

In more tightly-knit communities with larger households and close contact between extended family members, infant and childcare skills can be acquired through daily observation and performing caretaking responsibilities from an early age (Gottlieb 2009; Hrdy 2009; Small 1999;

Verhoef 2005). In many post-industrialised societies, however, this is not usually a topic until adulthood, when the first baby is on the way. Where can parents look for information, advice and assistance in regard to childrearing, and who offers it?

While the numbers presented in the previous section showed that grandparents are highly involved in the care of their grandchildren, the majority of parents who participated in my research were not ‘instructed’ by their own parents or other relatives when it came to baby and childcare as well as *Erziehung*, but by professionals such as maternity nurses, midwives, lactation consultants, paediatricians and MVBs, as well as advice book authors, the internet or online parenting fora. This may also have a lot to do with the ways childcare is organised today. Specifically, the care of newborn babies is mostly invisible in many Euro-American countries. Confined to maternity wards in the first few days and after discharge from hospital to the parents’ home, the daily care routines are not easily observable by people who do not work professionally with young children or live with a baby in the same house. As a large part of infant care happens inside the home, sharing a household with a baby is the only way to witness what it entails.

While there is no statistical data available on how much experience Swiss women and men have with babies and toddlers through, for example, caring for younger siblings or babysitting their siblings’ or friends’ children before becoming parents themselves, several parents I met during my research noted that their own baby was the first infant they had ever cared for; some even stated that they had never changed a nappy in their life. The widespread ‘inexperience’ particularly when it comes to the care of newborns and babies was also confirmed by MVB and midwife interlocutors. A report by the Institute for Midwifery finds that primiparas and their partners usually have no previous experience of what life with a newborn looks like, as their own infant is usually the first baby that they “hold in their hands” (König and Pehlke-Milde 2010: 11; my translation). The institute claims that this paucity of experience and information combined with the little support of new mothers in Switzerland which lacks a *Wochenbettkultur* (child bed culture) can result in various

‘problems’, such as breastfeeding issues, mental overload, or the delayed healing of birth wounds (König and Pehlke-Milde 2010: 10; my translation).

Opportunities to observe how others care for a newborn on a regular basis or to handle a baby before becoming a parent oneself must be rare for many women and men today, whose daily lives (pre-baby) are often structured by full-time jobs. Mediating information on baby care and childrearing practices in Euro-American countries is thus not exclusively in the hands of kin groups, but – and perhaps more importantly – the domain of various experts. In Switzerland, it is (more or less) clearly defined which expert group is responsible for which ‘phase’ of early child and parenthood.

During pregnancy, antenatal care is provided either by a gynaecologist or a midwife, or a combination of the two, and is fully covered by health insurance. The Association of Freelance Midwives reports that most women in Switzerland opt for maternity care provided by a gynaecologist, as was reflected in my research participants’ accounts; none of the families opted for the exclusive care of a midwife during pregnancy and only very few chose a combination of gynaecologist and midwife. The number of pregnancy check-ups provided by midwives (as well as birthing assistance), however, is steadily increasing (Grylka-Bäschlin and Borner 2020).

There is no data on how many parents in Switzerland visit so-called birth preparation classes. The huge selection of antenatal classes that are on offer from hospitals, birthing centres and freelance midwives, however, suggests that they are very popular, and most of the mothers I met during my research attended one. The cost of these classes varies from between 200 to 500 CHF. Health insurance schemes pay 150 CHF for a course per pregnancy (BAG 2017: 6). The classes, which are sometimes also attended by the fathers-to-be, are usually led by a midwife and often begin in the second half of the pregnancy.

In Switzerland, the great majority of births take place in hospitals. In 2017, 98.3 % women gave birth in a hospital. Births in birthing centres have increased in recent years, but remain under 2% (BFS, 2017). In 2013, the BFS reported that 0.7% of all births were home births (BFS, 2013).

During labour, parents are assisted by midwives and gynaecologists. On average, the *Wöchnerin* (German term for a postpartum woman) stays at the maternity centres for three to five days after labour (König and Pehlke-Milde 2010), which is also fully covered by health insurance. Here, maternity nurses check the health of mother and child, assist women in (breast)feeding and instruct mothers and fathers in proper navel and skin care. Often, they ‘supervise’ or help the new parents to change the newborn’s nappy the first few times. During this stay on the maternity ward, many hospitals offer informational events for the parents that again bring up topics such as safe sleeping or (breast)feeding. Lactation consultants are present at maternity centres as well and assist new mothers when breastfeeding problems occur. New parents are also often provided with a leaflet about the MVB and fill out a contact form that is sent to the local MVB centre along with other information about the delivery and the baby’s weight. In some cantons, MVBs visit the local maternity ward in order to introduce themselves and their institution’s services to new parents.

In 2020, 85,914 children were born in Switzerland (BFS, 2021b). Postpartum care after discharge from hospital represents the main area of activity of freelance midwives, who in 2019 provided care for 86,343 women in Switzerland (Grylka-Bäschlin and Borner 2020: 6). Since 2015 midwives can make 16 home visits up to 56 days after the birth at the expense of health insurance if a woman has had her first baby, has given birth to twins or had a caesarean section (KLV Art. 16). In all other cases, ten home visits are covered by insurance (BAG 2017: 7). Postpartum care includes care for both mother and baby. The midwife checks any birth injuries or caesarean scars as well as the mothers’ breasts, which can sometimes suffer from breast engorgements or mastitis. Questions surrounding (breast)feeding, such as how often the newborn should be fed, whether it is getting enough milk, but also how to get a ‘good latch’ are central during the postpartum period. Mothers can also book appointments with a professional lactation consultant if they need special support.²⁰ Midwives assess the mother’s general condition, look out for signs of postpartum

²⁰ Health insurance covers three appointments with a lactation consultant per birth.

depression, and give some input regarding finding a routine as a new family (Grylka-Bäschlin and Borner 2020). Six weeks after the birth, the postpartum period is concluded with a final examination by the gynaecologist.

Another early childhood expert that many new parents consult, especially after the postpartum period comes to a close, is the MVB. The MVB is a nationwide service which is highly accepted by parents (Riedi 2003: 12), who can use the service free of charge. Most MVBs have trained as paediatric nurses and completed a MVB postgraduate diploma.

As well as midwives and MVBs, paediatricians are an important point of reference on matters of health, development and care. They not only carry out disease-related examinations and vaccinations, but are also consulted about behavioural issues such as excessive crying, or diet questions. While 11 preventive check-ups are planned in early childhood (SGP, 2011), only the check-up at four years of age prior to kindergarten entry is ‘obligatory’ in many cantons such as Zürich or Argovia²¹. If the parents have not taken their child for a check-up with a private paediatrician (who is required to send a report to the authorities confirming that the examination has taken place and noting any medical and social abnormalities), the kindergarten will arrange an appointment for the child with the school doctor.

The Swiss National Health Service sends out monthly brochures to parents, the *Elternbriefe*, ‘parent letters’ produced by Swiss youth foundation Pro Juventute. Pro Juventute was founded in 1912 and is dedicated to supporting children and their parents in their daily lives. The foundation further advocates for children’s rights and needs. Thus, parental education and counselling is an essential part of Pro Juventute’s work, which also runs an around-the-clock helpline. The *Elternbriefe*, which are more than just letters, rather little booklets of about 20 pages, are probably the most widely-distributed advice material in Switzerland. They inform about a broad range of childcare issues and give parents advice on how to act in certain situations. In the first year of life,

²¹ Preventive check-ups are also obligatory in the 5th and 8th grades and are carried out by the school doctor.

the letters arrive monthly and cover what Pro Juventute believes to be relevant for parents and children at a specific age.

As this discussion of the different groups of professionals working with expecting and new parents shows, the antenatal, perinatal, and postpartum period is very much ‘expert-led’. By international comparison, the free expert care for parents and their offspring in early childhood extends over a long period of time in Switzerland – up to five years if parents fully use the MVB service (Grylka-Bäschlin and Borner 2020: 8). Depending on the ‘stage’ of parent- and childhood, parental education and care for mother and baby shifts from gynaecologists and midwives during pregnancy and birth to maternity nurses in the first few days after the delivery, to midwives in the postpartum period. After the postpartum period, the MVB takes over until starting kindergarten. Preventive health check-ups by paediatricians complete the preventive health care services.

While using these expert services is not compulsory, parents are strongly encouraged to do so, and there are many different policies and avenues in place through which expert ‘accompaniment’ is ensured over an extended timeframe, especially during the first months of a child’s life. After the delivery, hospital staff ask mothers to note down the address of their midwife providing postpartum care, who also receives the maternity ward’s medical report. If families have decided against hiring a midwife, hospital staff may question this and urge them to rethink their decision, especially if there are (breast)feedings problems or the baby has a low birth weight. Mothers’ and fathers’ advisors are notified when mothers living in their district are released from hospital, who then contact the families by telephone or letter. The different professionals may also refer families to another service if they have the impression that regular expert guidance is still needed; for example, after concluding the postpartum period, a midwife may refer a mother to her local MVB if the baby is not putting on weight quickly enough or the mother is still struggling to get into a routine at home. Other issues in the ‘psychosocial’ realm may also attract the attention

of experts. A perceived lack of emotional commitment on the parents' side²², psychological problems or the lack of a social support network may also result in a professional who is 'losing access' to a family 'alerting' another professional who is about to 'gain access'. For instance, a maternity nurse may inform a local MVB advisor about such issues; the MVB may then attempt to arrange a consultation or a home visit more persistently (MVB Anna, recorded interview, 08.05.19).

Outline

Chapter 1 begins with anthropological perspectives on childrearing and investigates influential concepts of Parenting Culture Studies, such as 'parenting' and 'intensive mothering' in more detail, including how they intersect with class, gender and power relations. As this book is specifically examining parents' contemporary governing through 'soft' power, Foucault's conception of power – specifically his understanding of how modern states 'govern' populations and how individuals 'govern' themselves – is explored.

Chapter 2 traces the gradual emergence of intensive mothering in advice material from the 18th to the 21st centuries and thus provides a historical background to some of the key issues addressed in this book such as childcare experts' focus on mothers, the medicalisation of childrearing and the great influence of attachment and child development theory on notions of children's needs and 'good' mothering. Further, the history of establishing early childhood services in twentieth century Switzerland is investigated, which provides insights into how the contemporary MVB has developed and transformed over the decades.

The MVBs' guidance to parents is explored in detail in Chapter 3. By dissecting the MVBs' tasks and relationship to parents, this chapter investigates the 'techniques' (Foucault 1995) involved in the contemporary approach to governing childrearing. Here, Foucault's notion of pastoral power

²² See Chapter 3.

is especially relevant when trying to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between client and advisor.

Chapter 4 moves from experts' to parents' perspectives, discussing in depth the theme of 'maternal ambivalence', which emerged prominently when I explored interlocuters' experiences of rearing their children. Here, Hays' notion of 'intensive mothering' (1996) presents a basis for analysis, as interlocuters' experiences of ambivalence were in many ways 'tinged' by the intensive mothering ideology, gendered divisions of labour and power relations.

For some mothers, the experience of ambivalence resulted in the desire to govern 'negative' emotions and practice 'self-work' to achieve positive transformation, which is addressed in Chapter 5. This chapter combines both mothers' and experts' perspectives on the need to 'manage' emotions and, in connection to that, 'shaking off' practices that are seen as inappropriate or harmful for children and present a high risk of escalating into violence, both verbal and physical. On the parents' side, Chapter 5 introduces the case studies of four mothers, which describe practices of parental 'self-work' (Aarsand 2014) in order to illustrate how the self is governed and re-shaped in the context of childrearing. Moreover, the chapter provides insights into how expert guidance drawn from advice material, psychotherapy or coaching is applied by parents in practice.

1. *Key concepts and Terms*

In this chapter, I introduce the key concepts and terms that have inspired my research and framed the analysis of my data. The first part begins with anthropological perspectives on parenthood and childrearing and then turns to Parenting Culture Studies' take on how modern childrearing is organised and framed. The second part introduces Foucault's notion of power. Foucault aimed less to develop a "theory of power" (Foucault 1978: 82), but "rather, he is engaged in observing how it operates" – an approach that can "bring to light power operations that might otherwise be overlooked" (Mitcheson 2012: 60). As such, Foucault's approach to power is especially relevant for this research which investigates the ways parenting is governed in Switzerland.

Childrearing from an Anthropological Perspective

Some cultural and social anthropologists emphasise the great variability when it comes to childrearing practices and conceptions of children and parents. In *Our Babies, Ourselves*, Small describes childcare as one of the most variable human endeavours (Small 1999: 214). Gottlieb, who explores babyhood in her work with the Beng people of the Ivory Coast, argues that members of a particular ethnic group usually perceive childrearing as a commonsensical activity, "accepted as somehow having a natural foundation beyond the reaches of culture" (Gottlieb 2004: xvii). In *Local Knowledge* (1983) Clifford Geertz argues that the notion of 'common sense' as "what remains of reason when its more sophisticated achievements are all set aside" (Geertz 1975) is so deeply embedded in local culture that commonsensical knowledge or actions in specific situations are considered as natural, practical, accessible, transparent and seemingly without methods, as if unplanned (Geertz 1983). By applying Geertz's understanding of 'common sense' to the domain of childrearing, Gottlieb shows that the care practices of Beng mothers and other caretakers would appear anything but common to outsiders (Gottlieb 2004: xvii). According to this perspective, local childrearing practices are strongly shaped by cultural social, historical, legal, political, religious and

economic contexts. Mothers' and fathers' responsibilities are culturally and historically mutable. Who is thought to be responsible for the care of children, what 'good' care practices are and who holds the claim to mediating them is not only historically and culturally specific, but can also vary within a society depending on, for example, class or educational background (Kehily, Thomson and Hadfield 2009). Conceptions of children and what they need can change considerably within short periods of time – one only has to read childrearing manuals from the 1940s in which even small babies are portrayed as little tyrants with malevolent agendas and compare them to contemporary advice material or discourses of experts like the MVB that generally remind parents that their children do not have bad intentions when they are 'misbehaving' (ProJuventute 2018d; 2018g; ; MVB Anna, recorded interview, 08.05.19; MVB Rita, recorded interview, 10.05.19) – and they strongly impact on the ways parents are expected to behave and care for their children: "If children are considered to be inherently good, for example, society is assumed to need to change to enable this 'natural' purity to unfold; whereas if they are assumed to be inherently bad, it is children who must be shaped by society" (Faircloth 2014b: 38).

From Gottlieb's perspective, there is no such thing as an "Everybaby" existing outside of social and historical circumstances, as often proposed by Western childcare guides (Gottlieb 2004: xvi), but the development and behaviours of children are to a great extent shaped by local childrearing cultures. Babies living in Baganda society in Uganda usually sit up by the age of four months, while Euro-American babies typically sit up between seven and nine months. Sitting with and smiling at others is seen as very important by the Baganda, so it is practiced from an early age (Gottlieb 2004: 55).

Anthropological approaches to childrearing that strongly emphasise their cultural variability are largely omitted from this book, as the issues encountered during my research cannot be properly addressed by this discursive field. Rather, as mentioned, Parenting Culture Studies' take on childrearing as well as Foucault's writings on power are more apt to explain the ways parenting is governed in Switzerland as well as the concerns of the state and affiliated experts in this matter.

Furthermore, it is important to point out that raising children anywhere in the world, at any given time, requires dedicated caregivers who provide food and shelter on a long-term basis. Macdonald and Boulton view the engendering of adequate childrearing practices as a universally crucial task of human societies. They state that it is based on an “intergenerationally-transmitted body of environmentally-specific knowledge” and a cooperative workforce engaging in caregiving, food gathering, education and other activities, in order to successfully bring up children (Macdonald and Boulton 2011: 138). While human childrearing is special in many ways, there are three main aspects that differentiate human parents from other hominins: 1) in contrast to, for example, gorilla or orangutan mothers, human parents sometimes opt to neglect or abandon infants, 2) baby fat signals to human parents that the baby is likely to survive, leading to positive responses from caregiving adults, and 3) due to the long dependency of human children, primary caregivers such as mothers require support from others (ibid., 136f). From the perspective of evolutionary anthropology, humans can be described as ‘cooperative breeders’, whose infant survival rates and development are directly linked to the support of alloparents (Hrdy 2009). Hrdy is a prominent supporter of this theory and argues that rearing human children evolutionarily developed as a shared activity (ibid). This stands in contrast to certain psychologists, such as Bowlby (1966), who portrayed infant-rearing as a ‘naturally’ very exclusive affair between a mother and her child.

Parenting and Parental Determinism

The term ‘parenting’ specifically refers to the ways childcare is framed and organised in contemporary post-industrialised societies. Here, childrearing is not the responsibility of a larger community, but is assigned to parents, who are responsible for creating the ‘best’ environment for their children to thrive, a ‘job’ that – in the bigger picture – is intertwined with the future of society. This idea can already be found in *Dein Kind*, a Swiss child care manual from 1946 in which the authors declare that commitment to a child requires individual parents having the right sense of

responsibility towards the entire nation (Dietrich 1946: 13). As such, the term parenting emphasises the behaviour of parents or the activities they carry out (Faircloth 2013: 121). Parenting is seen as a “technical matter” (Smith 2010: 361) aimed at desired outcomes: “Touching, talking, feeding – even ‘loving’ – are no longer ends in themselves, but tools which parents are required to perfect to ensure proper development” (Faircloth et al. 2013a: 6). The techniques used to achieve positive developmental outcomes should ideally be based on scientific research, particularly in the realm of psychology (Ramaekers and Suissa 2011: 199). At this point, it is important to point out that wanting to achieve desirable outcomes through certain childrearing practices is not a specific aspect of modern parenting. The simple act of feeding a child is driven by a desired outcome. The fact that in the course of the twentieth century, the state has increasingly assumed the responsibility to steer the outcome of early childhood experiences is what is specific for modernity.

Family policies and early childhood programmes tend to make a causal relationship between parenting practices and social and health outcomes of children, a notion that Furedi (2002), calls ‘parental determinism’. The notion of parental determinism is what drives many contemporary early childhood programmes and interventions which aim to educate parents about child development and ‘strengthen’ their parenting skills. Furedi criticises the effects that such a one-dimensional ideology has on parents and children and suggests that “the transformation of childrearing into a constant focus of expert and political intervention tends to inflate the significance that society attaches to parenting” (Furedi 2013: x; 2014: xi). The state’s early childhood policies and interventions are based on outcomes conceived statistically. While parents do have effects on their children (and vice versa) they are rather probabilistic and may influence the chances of certain outcomes – along with many other factors that may be out of parents’ control. However, the question arises as to what extent parents (as well as experts who work with parents personally), who have internalised that everything they do or do not do will have an effect on their child in later life, think ‘statistically’, and what effect this has on their experience of childrearing and the parent-child relationship. While Furedi’s observation that there is a strong focus on the outcomes of

parents' practices in the context of health promotion in early childhood is right, government policy documents on early childhood are not necessarily making one-dimensional claims. The Swiss Federal Office of Public Health (BAG) concedes that there are other, more 'structural' factors that are also significant, such as parental leave, tax reductions or working conditions that need to be addressed when striving to promote health and wellbeing in early childhood. In the same document, the BAG also remarks that minimising 'risk factors' and boosting 'protective factors' is not a guarantee of certain outcomes though: "There are also always children who grow up in seemingly beneficial conditions and still do not develop as desired" (BAG 2018b: 21).

Nonetheless the BAG views 'the family' as the primary target when it comes to preventing, detecting and correcting 'risk factors' and, given the rather conservative family policies in Switzerland, policy makers may "find intervention in the sphere of parenting far more straightforward than engaging with wider social issues" (Furedi 2014: ix).²³

Intensive Mothering

In *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* (1996), Hays explores the emergence of a new motherhood ideal in the US in the late twentieth century, which she calls 'intensive mothering':

The ideology of intensive mothering is a gendered model that advises mothers to expend a tremendous amount of time, energy, and money in raising their children. In a society where over half of all mothers with young children are now working outside of the home, one might well wonder why our culture pressures women to dedicate so much of themselves to child rearing. And in a society where the logic of self-interest gain seems to guide behavior in so many spheres of life, one might further wonder why a logic of unselfish nurturing guides the behavior of mothers. These two puzzling phenomena make up what I call the cultural contradictions of contemporary motherhood. (Hays 1996: x)

²³ A recent example is a popular vote in the canton of Zürich in May 2022 on the introduction of an 18-week leave for both mothers and fathers after a child's birth. 64.8% of voters voted against the extension of parental leave, after Zürich's governing council had warned of the high costs of up to two billion yearly and the policy's negative effects on Zürich's economy, see <https://www.aargauerzeitung.ch/news-service/inland-schweiz/kinderbetreuung-klarere-nein-trend-zuercher-eltern-erhalten-nicht-mehr-zeit-ld.2290266>, or <https://www.nzz.ch/zuerich/abstimmung-in-zuerich-initiative-fuer-eine-elternzeit-im-ueberblick-ld.1679131?reduced=true>, accessed 20.05.2022.

As such, contemporary mothering is bristling with conflicts and contradictions. Central features of contemporary mothering, according to Hays, convey that good mothering means: 1) spending a lot of time, energy and resources on children, 2) taking a child-centred approach, and 3) paying attention to expert advice (Hays 1996: 122). Hays observes that contemporary motherhood entails many new tasks that go beyond sheltering and nurturing that were not an integral part of mothering before, such as taking children to all kinds of activities and specialists (Hays 1996: 5f).

While society puts the focus on having a career and the working world, Hays claims that childrearing as an unpaid domestic activity is itself devalued (1996: 18). At the same time becoming a mother is still deemed “an almost sacred endeavor” (Faircloth 2014b: 28; also compare Hays 1996, p. 125), which makes working mothers, who may not be able to spend a lot of time with their children, wonder how to juggle it all. The notion of the ‘sacredness’ of mothering as well as the ‘sacred status’ of children themselves, Hays asserts, calls for this “tremendous investment” (Hays 1996: 130)²⁴. Raising children intensively and selflessly is not only contrasted with “the self-interested pursuit of financial gain at work” (Hays 1996: 10), but the activity of childrearing is also perceived as requiring protection from the market rationale. This ‘sacredness’, according to Hays, is propagated by guidebook authors such as Benjamin Spock (1946) or Penelope Leach (1986), but was also expressed by the mothers she spoke to during her research. In this context, children’s innocence and purity is often invoked as a thing that must be guarded and preserved, as well as the unconditional love and joy that they give their parents in return (Hays 1996: 122-125):

They see the child as innocent, pure, and beyond market pricing, they put the child’s needs first (in word if not always in deed) and they invest much of their time, labor, emotion, intellect, and money in their children. Their answer to the question of why they make this tremendous investment is contained in the logic of intensive mothering itself. For them, the joy of sharing, the love they feel, and the love that children promise in return are sufficient reward. (Hays 1996: 130)²⁵

²⁴ Even without ‘intensive methods’ (Hays 1996: 108), children’s upbringing is a tremendous investment when measured in the calories needed to raise them to maturity (Hrdy 2009: 101f).

²⁵ In terms of the ‘sentimental’ value of children, Zelizer’s work *Pricing the Priceless Child* is relevant. Zelizer describes the historic processes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as the ban on child labour in the West, that resulted in pervasive changes of the social value of children: “The price of a useful wage-earning child was directly counterposed to the moral value of an economically useless but emotionally priceless child” (Zelizer, 1994, p. 57).

Hays claims that the emergence of intensive mothering went hand in hand with the rise of rationalised market economy (Hays 1996: 167). On the one side, she claims, deeming mothering and children 'sacred' represents an (unsatisfactory) opposition to the dog-eat-dog capitalist market society: "through this same emphasis on loving, caring, sharing (...) mothering can help to make the world a better place" (Hays 1996: 170). Motherhood and all the conflicts and tensions involved in it, such as the question of whether to be a stay-at-home mother or put children in daycare, according to Hays, is the central site that makes visible the "fundamental cultural ambivalence about a society based solely on the pursuit of self-interested gain" (Hays 1996: 172).

On the other side, however, intensive mothering in many ways serves the 'more powerful' (Hays 1996: 172). Hays' concept of intensive mothering pays (some) attention to power relationships, which is particularly relevant for this book. For example, mothers who feel pressured to spend more time with their children may exit the labour market, work part time, or strive less for the more lucrative, high-position jobs that also mean less time for family matters. This "serves men in that women's commitment to this socially devalued task helps to maintain their subordinate position in society as a whole" (Hays 1996: 163). Further, notions of proper childrearing practices give middle-class families who have the resources and time to parent 'properly' a claim to "superiority over the languishing, frivolous rich and the gaudy, untutored poor" (Hays 1996: 164). This is supported by Perrier who, in 'Middle-class Mothers' Moralities and "Concerted Cultivation", suggests that having the means to raise children the 'proper' way "forms part of the cultural capital of the middle classes" (Perrier 2012: 656). Moreover, Hays posits that the centralised state benefits from mothers' investment in their children:

A mother's ongoing dedication to educating the young in particular social norms helps to ensure the creation of law-abiding, tax-paying citizens, and the particularly time-consuming process of training children in self-discipline and individual responsibility makes a significant contribution towards sparing the state from future pressures to widen its welfare roles (...). (Hays 1996: 162)

Some scholars, such as Lee et al. (2014), have extended the concept of intensive mothering to parenting in general, for like mothering, fathering has been ‘intensified’ as well. Today, policy makers and experts also deem fathers to play a major role in their children’s development and expect them to acquire a special skill set just like mothers (Faircloth 2014a; Lee 2014b; Martin and Macvarish 2021). While the work of the MVB often focuses on the mother-child dyad, the service also aspires to be more father-oriented. However, other authors, such as Shirani et al (2012) have explored the intensification of fathering more closely and suggest that, although fathers are increasingly involved in care work, they are more likely to reject expert advice and seem to be less influenced by the demands of intensive parenting. Similarly, Dermott (Dermott 2008, 2009) observes that modern fathering in Britain is more ‘intimate’ rather than ‘intensive’, as fathers care less about spending as much time as possible with their children, but rather focus on the building of an emotional relationship.

Much of this book centres on women’s experiences of childrearing as well as experts’ views on mothers. While certain aspects of fathering may have become intensified, such as the increased involvement in care which experts assume to be essential for the child’s proper development, or the idea that fathers must provide well financially in order to ensure the ‘best’ start in life for their children (Shirani, Henwood and Coltart 2012: 27), mothers in general continue to assume most of the duties of care work, which, as discussed, is also the case in the Swiss context. According to Shirani et al. (2012) this is one reason why the “pressures” (ibid, p. 34) of intensive parenting are not experienced as acutely by fathers as by mothers. At some points in this book, the generic term ‘parenting’ will be used when, for example, including the experiences of the two fathers who took part in this research or when describing the perspectives of experts who sometimes address parents in general. However, this does not suggest that I assume that the intensification of fathering is on a par with the intensification of mothering. Martin and Macvarish point out in ‘Towards a “Parenting Regime”: Globalising Tendencies and Localised Variation’ that the term ‘parenting’ represents a “de-gendering” of divisions of labour that in practice are still very gendered and

“moves attention away from the question of who should care for children, to the question of how ‘parenting’ ought to be done“ (Martin and Macvarish 2021: 440).

While acknowledging class differences regarding how intensive mothering is practiced, Hays contends that the intensive mothering ideology takes hold of *all* mothers, regardless of their socioeconomic background (Hays 1996: 95). More recent research argues that intensive mothering has been normalised across different classes and social backgrounds, which has been ‘achieved’ through public parenting programmes that target poor working-class or minority parents. Nonetheless, scholarship in this field points out that intensive mothering is clearly based on values tightly connected to the middle classes, where raising children this way is also more feasible due to family organisation, financial security and access to experts (Cappellini et al. 2019; Gengler 2011; Gillies 2009; Henderson, Harmon and Newman 2016; Lareau 2003; Nelson 2010; Romagnoli and Wall 2012).

Gillies has worked thoroughly on the intersection of parenting and class by examining New Labour parenting policy initiatives as well as the everyday lives of middle and working-class parents in the UK. She contends that in the UK the mode of (intensive) middle-class childrearing is considered appropriate, while working-class parents are deemed in need of instruction in how to bring up their children so that they can have a ‘better’ future, through government interventions such as parenting classes (Gillies 2005, 2007). Perrier (2012) explores middle-class mothers’ moral conflicts regarding their aspiration to be a ‘good’ mother and evaluates the dichotomy suggested by the Parenting Culture Studies literature that views working-class mothering as “pathologized” and middle-class mothering as “legitimized” as too simple (Perrier 2012: 659). On the individual level, Perrier comments, it is more complex, as some middle-class mothers she studied opposed dominant modes of parenting and within middle-class mothering there were also discourses of what ‘good’ and ‘bad’ middle-class mothering was (Perrier 2012: 659). There was, for example, a “fine line” between a supportive mother and a “pushy”, “over-ambitious” mother that organises too many extra-curricular activities for her children (Perrier 2012: 665). Although middle-class

mothers enjoyed a “protected moral status” as policy makers, and experts deemed their mothering beneficial for bringing up ‘successful’ citizens, “ambivalent moral positions” (Perrier 2012: 657) in terms of, for example, being too child-focused or too heavily involved in their children’s education spawned self-regulation, in order to position themselves safely between the over-involved middle-class mother and the under-involved working-class mother (Perrier 2012: 667). Thus, the investigation of mechanisms of power in middle-class parenting – despite its “normative status” (Perrier 2012: 668) – should not be neglected: (...) “although middle-class parenting culture is legitimated in the symbolic order, this should not deter us from capturing the ways in which power is simultaneously enacted on the middle classes and formative of their subjectivities. Power is therefore not simply appropriated by a dominant class from a subordinate one” (Perrier 2012: 667). I will now turn to Foucault’s concept of power, which presents the second major analytical focus of this book.

Power

The definition of power is much debated in social and political theory (Allen Winter 2021 Edition). According to Allen, one central debate pertains to the discussion about whether power should be defined in terms of having ‘power-over others’ or in terms of having ‘power-to do something’. The proponents of the former definition, such as Max Weber (1978), or – however, from a different theoretical angle – Foucault (1982: 786) understand power as “getting someone else to do what you want them to do” (Allen Winter 2021 Edition: , para 2); the proponents of the latter, such as Thomas Hobbes (Hobbes 1985 (1641)) or Hannah Arendt (1970), conceptualise power “as an ability or a capacity to act” (Allen Winter 2021 Edition: , para 2). Other theorists emphasise that both aspects are important when it comes to the conceptualisation of power, but then focus on one aspect only (Connolly 1993; Morriss 2002) , while others reject the idea that both aspects can be included in one definition of power (Wartenberg 1990). Allen understands power broadly as the capacity to act, and suggests that, in order to have ‘power-over’, one needs to have ‘power-to’ first:

“(…) having power-over presupposes having power-to: in order to have power over another, one must have the capacity or ability to act in such a way as to attain some end” (Allen 1998: 37).

Other diverging approaches to power in the literature are action-theoretical conceptions on the one side and broader systemic or constitutive conceptions on the other. From the perspective of the former, power is understood in terms of the “actions or the dispositional abilities of individual actors”, while the latter centres around the relationships between actors and the ‘structures’ that make social action possible, highlighting “historical, political, economic, cultural, and social forces (that) enable some individuals to exercise power over others, or inculcate certain abilities and dispositions in some actors but not in others” (Allen Winter 2021 Edition: , para 4).

Foucault’s writings include both action-theoretical conceptions of power – “if we speak of the structures or the mechanisms of power, it is only insofar as we suppose that certain persons exercise power over others” (Foucault 1982: 786) – and constitutive conceptions of power that view power as a set of relationships (Foucault 1978; Vandenbroeck et al. 2011) that “emerge from every social interaction and thus pervade the social body” (Allen Winter 2021 Edition: , para 33). This way, power becomes “interwoven” in everyday practices (May 2006: 84). Rather than viewing power as a ‘possession’ or ‘resource’, as suggested by Marxist notions of power that are strongly linked to economic models, Foucault stresses that power needs to be exercised and thus is inherently relational (Oksala 2016: 79).

A conception of power that is multi-dimensional and includes ‘power-to’ – and in line with Allen – its derivative form ‘power-over’ (Allen 1998) *as well as* constitutive strands, can shed light on the positions of state-affiliated experts and parents, which will be explored in Chapter 3.

Governmentality

The notion of ‘governance’ allows for fruitful strands of investigation into the exercise of power in neoliberal states (Shin 2016: 304). Shin traces the use of the concept of ‘governance’ in politics back to Plato, who applied the verb *kubernào* (ancient Greek) ‘to steer’, to describe the primary task

of a political leader. The term, writes Shin, has always had a “normative cast”, and stood for ways of ruling which aimed to achieve “desired ends” (ibid).

Michel Foucault’s engagement with forms of power in modern states gave rise to his concept of ‘governmentality’, which provided novel perspectives on how states govern populations with certain aims in mind, such as the “welfare of the population, the improvement of its condition, the increase of its wealth, longevity, health, et cetera” (Foucault 1991: 100). In *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008), Foucault specifically turns to neoliberalism, which he understands as a form of governmentality that presents a re-organisation of the social realm. As such it goes beyond the introduction of economic policies, such as a de-regulating the market, and aims for the “eradication of the border between the social and the economic: market rationality – cost-benefit-calculation – must be extended and disseminated to all institutions and social practices” (Oksala 2016: 481)²⁶.

In *The History of Sexuality* Vol.1 (1978) Foucault argues that, in Western societies, ‘sovereign’ power relations, a form of power that gives the sovereign “power of life and death” (1978: 136), disintegrated (incompletely) in the classical era, and ‘disciplinary power’ emerged that seeks to invest in life²⁷ and effectively control, surveil, organise and optimise the population (Foucault 1978: 136-139). While Foucault acknowledges that disciplinary power can be repressive, he argues that disciplinary power is mainly productive, especially when it comes to the production of subjects: “the individual is not the vis-à-vis of power; it is, I believe, one of its prime effects” (Foucault 1980c: 98). In contrast to sovereign power relations, the rise of disciplinary instruments of power did not only to lead to more ‘subtle’, but also more ‘diffused’ power relations (Nadesan 2008;

²⁶ A brief note on the differences between the terms ‘government’, ‘governance’, and ‘governmentality’. ‘Government’ refers to the various public institutions of the state (Shin 2016: 304). The term ‘governance’ has been descriptively applied in political science and public administration since the 1970s to study the “changing role of government in an era of neoliberal globalization” (Shin 2016: 304). According to Amos, the term governance refers to “the different forms of purposeful acting of collective concerns” (Amos 2010: 83). While ‘governance’ and ‘governmentality’ share many characteristics – both are concerned with the state and the ‘steering’ of populations, the term ‘governmentality’ is a specifically Foucauldian term that developed in a different theoretical tradition and focus (Amos 2010: 85) and is critically applied to investigate forms of power in the modern state (Shin 2016: 304f).

²⁷ Here, ‘investing’ in life means, for example, investing in the health of the population.

Vandenbroeck et al. 2011: 70). ‘Power-over’ or ‘power-to’ does not only rest in official state institutions, but is dispersed and ‘handed out’ to different actors, such as an MVB, who is not a state official, but is paid by the state for her services, or a midwife whose postpartum visits are covered by mothers’ health insurance (Shin 2016: 305).

Disciplinary power relations are oriented towards regulating and managing citizens of modern, bureaucratic states more effectively. Here, the generation of knowledge through “hierarchical observation” (Foucault 1995: 170) of subjects as well as their “examination” (Foucault 1995: 20, 184) plays a crucial role. Normalising judgement (Foucault 1995: 177, 184) in the sense of creating norms is another instrument through which, Foucault asserts, discipline is exercised (Foucault 1995: 184), and through which normalisation is supposed to be achieved.

In the context of early childhood and norms, for example, WHO child growth standards or detailed milestones for child development²⁸ come to mind as having a disciplinary effect – not only on children’s bodies, but also on the practices of parents, who may be held responsible if a child is not thriving properly. When the MVB checks whether a child has achieved the developmental milestones prescribed for its age group, this represents a combination of hierarchical observation and normalising judgment. These kind of examinations are an example of Foucault’s idea of ‘power/knowledge’ (Gutting and Oksala Summer 2021 Edition), as it joins – as he describes in *Discipline and Punish* – “the deployment of force and the establishment of truth” (Foucault 1995: 184). It allows the examiner to gain certain information about the child, such as its developmental stage or weight gain, but potentially also something about the practices of the examined child’s parents. It may also enable the examiner to control the child’s future development. By inducing concerns in the mother (in the sense of having ‘power-to’) because certain milestones, such as the child not being able to roll over from its back onto its belly, have not been reached, and directing the mother to do certain exercises with the child (in the sense of power-over), so that

²⁸ See <https://www.who.int/tools/child-growth-standards/standards/motor-development-milestones>, accessed 28.02.22.

this milestone may be ‘ticked off’ in a future consultation, the ‘production’ of a ‘normal’ child can be advanced.

Power/Knowledge and (Psychological) Expertise

Foucault has emphasised the productive relationship between ‘truth’, ‘knowledge’ and power, which he termed, as mentioned above, ‘power/knowledge’ in his lectures (Foucault 1980c), books, such as *The History of Sexuality* Vol. 1 (Foucault 1978), and interviews (Foucault 1980b). Power exercised by individuals, institutions or states, according to Foucault, produces different kinds of knowledge, such as demographic information about the population, information derived from studies about criminals’ childhood experiences or, on an individual level, patient information derived from a medical examination or information derived from a confession in the context of the sacrament of penance. This knowledge in turn constitutes disciplinary power relations. Thus, “power and knowledge directly imply one another” (Foucault 1995: 27) and their relationship is “what ultimately determines the production of truth” (Basumatary 2020: 323).

In ‘Two Lectures’, Foucault stresses that power cannot be exercised without the production of truth in the form of accepted knowledge and that, through power, people are subjected to the production of truth: “power never ceases its interrogation, its inquisition, its registration of truth: it institutionalises, professionalises and rewards its pursuit” (Foucault 1980c: 93). Foucault was not so much concerned with what truth is, “his question was neither metaphysical nor normative” (Weir 2008: 370). Rather – as proclaimed in ‘Questions on Geography’ – he was more interested in how truth is practiced, what effects it has and how it is interwoven with power relations (Foucault 1980a: 66). In the ‘Truth and Power’ interview with Fontana and Pasquino (1980b), Foucault states that every society has a ‘regime of truth’, or ‘politics of truth’, which he defines as:

types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault 1980b: 131)

Foucault asserts that the regimes of truth in Western societies centre on scientific discourses and the institutions that produce them. The truth Foucault is talking about cannot be discovered and accepted as final, but represents an “ensemble of rules” that set out what is true and false, which are, however always contested (Foucault 1980b: 131f).

In the context of power/knowledge, it makes sense to briefly clarify what I mean by the term ‘expert’ – or ‘expertise’, which I use to label advice book authors as well as professionals working with families, such as paediatricians, midwives or MVBs. As Sharma and Gupta (2006) point out, experts and the special knowledge they possess are inextricably linked with governance: “In order to govern, one needs to know the object to be regulated, and trained experts are the bearers of this knowledge. The authority and social rank of experts rests on varied factors, including disciplinary training, claim to exclusive knowledge, special examinations, or even political sanction” (Sharma and Gupta 2006: 47). Expertise is thus directly intertwined with the exercise of power and the production of knowledge, as well as asserting a claim to truth. In line with Rose, who is very influenced by Foucault’s work on power, in this book expertise is defined as “a particular kind of social authority, characteristically deployed around problems, exercising a certain diagnostic gaze, grounded in a claim to truth, asserting technical efficacy, and avowing humane ethical virtues” (Rose 1991: 91). While Rose writes in the context of psychological expertise, his definition can be transferred to the experts I mentioned. The MVB, for example, works with psychological theories such as attachment theory (Bowlby 1952, 1958, 1969) and developmental psychology as well as psychological techniques, such as the strange situation test (Ainsworth 1967, 1969). The great significance of psychology when it comes to notions of ‘proper’ childrearing and children’s needs, individuality and wellbeing, as well as ‘governing’ the emotional world of mothers, is explored from a historical perspective in Chapter 2 and will again play a role when I discuss my fieldwork findings on the MVB in Chapter 3, as well as Chapter 5 about parental self-work.

Psychology as a field of knowledge is – in Rose’s words – a “generous discipline” as it can be applied by many different social actors, in various industries and institutions that are concerned

with human behaviour and pathology (Rose 1991: 92). It is especially promising for those who seek to influence or guide human conduct, as through psychological examination and tests, Rose argues, individuals become more “calculable” and thus more manageable (Rose 1991: 93f). Psychological expertise also plays a major role in the normalisation work of disciplinary power, when normality is deemed a “fragile outcome of the successful averting of risk” and “the production of normality can itself become an endeavour suffused with psychological calculation” (Rose 1991: 96).

Rose further argues that psychological expertise is especially useful for the governance of individuals as it allows experts to exercise authority in the form of, for example, diagnosing postnatal depression in a mother and prescribing a therapy in order to achieve ‘positive transformation’ in an ‘ethical’ way. Rose uses the term ‘ethics’ in the Foucauldian sense, which Foucault developed in the context of his engagement with sexuality in antiquity in Volumes 2 (Foucault 1990) and 3 (1986) of *The History of Sexuality*. Here, he investigates the ‘ethical’ concerns surrounding sexual conduct and devises a distinct definition of ethics. Foucault does not define ethics in the common sense way of ‘doing the right thing’, but as a “relation to self that enables an individual to fashion himself into a subject of ethical conduct” (Foucault 1990: 251). Foucault’s concept of ethics relates to his idea of the self-forming activities of the individual who intentionally works on herself or himself in order to conform to certain “moral recommendations” (Robinson n.d.: , para 1) set by, for instance, the church, the school, or the childcare expert.

Rose asserts that the exercise of authority in the context of psychological expertise is ethical, because it is not solely based on an external truth, “but on a truth internal to the person over whom it is exercised” (Rose 1991: 95), which is achieved by the technology of confession. In *The History of Sexuality* Vol. 1, Foucault argues that Western societies are “confessing societies” – and that the act of confession has become a central technique for producing truth:

One confesses in public and in private, to one’s parents, one’s educators, one’s doctor, to those one loves; one admits to oneself, in pleasure and in pain, things it would be impossible to tell to anyone else, the things people write books about. One confesses – or is forced to confess. When it is not spontaneous or dictated by some internal imperative, the confession

is wrung from a person by violence or threat; it is driven from its hiding place in the soul, or extracted from the body. (Foucault 1978: 59)

Rose notes that confession is part of most forms of psychotherapy and counselling, during which an individual tells truthfully “who one is and what one does” (Rose 1991: 97), which positions that individual in a certain set of power relations with the person who is listening to or ‘extracting’ that truth. The aspiration to guide in line with psychological ethics that are based on the truth of the self, according to Rose, is connected to the liberal ideal of achieving individual autonomy through a code of conduct whose:

norms answer not to an arbitrary moral or political code but only to the demands of our nature and our truth as human beings. It does not try to impose a new moral self upon us, but to free the self we truly are, to make it possible for us each to make a project of our lives, to fulfil ourselves and shape our existence according to an ethics of autonomy. (Rose 1991: 97)

This leads us to Foucault’s concept of technologies of self, which builds upon the subject’s ‘self-transforming’ capabilities (Rose 1990a: 3-4).

Technologies of Self and the Limits of Governmentality

Governmentality entails providing subjects with the means to govern themselves – so-called technologies of self – as it is hardly possible for the state to directly act upon the actions of every single individual. Persuading subjects with strategies to make the ‘right’ choices through education or ‘awareness campaigns’ out of self-interest is an integral part of governing in the Foucauldian sense. Governmentality is the contact point of technologies of power – “which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject” and technologies of self – “which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (Foucault 1988: , para 9). Technologies of self are employed by a self who also has a certain aim in mind when employing practices of self, such as the transformation of its “mode of being” (Foucault 1990: 28). I will discuss what kind of practices

technologies of self entail, as well as Foucault's notion of how these practices emerged in Graeco-Roman philosophy and how they were transformed by early Christianity more closely in Chapter 5.

In a lecture titled 'Technologies of Self' from 1982, two years before his death, Foucault remarks that he may have "insisted too much on the technology of domination and power" and that he had become "more and more interested in the interaction between oneself and others and in the technologies of individual domination, the history of how an individual acts upon himself, in the technology of self" (Foucault 1988: , para 12). In Volumes 2 (Foucault 1990) and 3 (1986) of *The History of Sexuality*, in which he explores Roman and Greek sexuality, Foucault develops a more nuanced understanding of subjects, who he alleges (although always constituted by power relations) engage in their "construction and modify themselves through practices of the self. (...) One way of contesting normalizing power is by shaping oneself and one's lifestyle creatively" (Gutting and Oksala Summer 2021 Edition: para 55).

At this point it is important to mention that the notion of technologies of self alludes to the important point that the 'governing' of populations does not necessarily achieve the 'desired ends'. Even if the state, policy makers or social workers have certain aims in mind when implementing particular policies or interventions whose effects they may perceive as calculable, these ends may never actually 'materialise'. Not only is resisting power inseparably intertwined with its exercise, according to Foucault, but governmentality also relies on subjects to perform 'work' on themselves to reach a certain state, which gives room for "refusing forms of subjectivity" (Oksala 2016: 484).

Because government refers to strategic, regulated and rationalized modes of power that have to be legitimized through forms of knowledge, the idea of critique as a form of resistance now becomes crucial. To govern is not to physically determine the conduct of passive objects. Government involves offering reasons why those governed should do what they are told, and this implies that they can also question these reasons. Foucault claims that this is why governmentality has historically developed in tandem with the practice of political critique. (Gutting and Oksala Summer 2021 Edition: para 61)

In 'Governmentality' Murray Li also draws attention to the 'limits' of power in the form of governmentality, asserting that the fact that governmental interventions may not go as planned alludes to Foucault's notion of governmentality as form of power, and not as a "force" (Murray Li 2007: 276). As Murray Li points out, the limits of governmentality make it especially apt for ethnographic investigations, as they pay attention to the "informal practices of compromise and accommodation, everyday resistance or outright refusal" (Murray Li 2007: 279) in and around governmental interventions and explore what happens when plans go wrong or when data needed to carry out an intervention is not accumulated.

2. *The History of Childrearing Guides and the Establishment of Early Childhood Services*



Image 1: Cover of Dein Kind (Dietrich, 1946), a Swiss childrearing guide for new mothers.

The emergence of childcare experts can be observed from the nineteenth century onwards (Furedi 2013), which manifested itself in the publication of a multitude of childrearing guides (Fuchs 1997: 14). Paediatricians, theologians and pedagogues were dedicated to this field. Psychologists interested in children's development played a crucial role from the 20th century onwards as well. Expert advice on childcare was not only mediated through the publication of manuals, but also through the establishment of private and public institutions in the twentieth century that were devoted to educating mothers and sought to protect children's health and wellbeing.

This chapter is important for the rest of the book in many regards, as it provides a historical background to the issues addressed in the following chapters. While Hays, whose notion of 'intensive mothering' represents a focus of analysis in this study, traces the emergence of intensive

mothering mostly in the American context in *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* (1996), this chapter explores the changing demands placed on mothers propagated in childrearing advice literature with a focus on Switzerland (or other German-speaking nations), an area of research that remains understudied. This historical review tracks the formation of today's 'parenting culture' in advice material while also considering the social processes in which the drafting and publication of these manuals are embedded.

In light of the selected guidebooks from the eighteenth century until today, this chapter argues that mothering has gradually been intensified. The chapter also provides a historical background to the establishment and development of early childhood services in Switzerland, specifically the mothers' and fathers' advisors (the MVB), whose work and mission will be explored in detail in the following chapter. Further, the chapter historically contextualises certain terms and themes that are central for one or several chapters, such as 'attachment', the psychologisation of childhood, and the discourse surrounding children's needs.

Further important parallels to the Anglo-American context, which has been much better researched, will be drawn. Influential literature in the Anglo-American context was translated into German and published in Switzerland, such as Benjamin Spock's famous *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* (1946, 1952). Certain practices travelled from the United States to Switzerland, for example the *Elternbriefe* (parent letters) from Pro Juventute, which were modelled on the *Peter Pelican Letters* distributed to parents in Louisiana in the middle of the twentieth century (AB 1969, 32(21): 33 quoted in Kopp 1974: 127).

The status of advice literature as a primary source remains debated in the social sciences (Heimdinger 2006). What can guidebooks really tell us about predominant norms, ideas and everyday culture during a certain period? To what extent are norms and lived practices shaped by this literature? In his essay on the so-called *Anstandsbücher* (books instructing on social etiquette), Trümpy comments that, as a source in ethnological research they invoke two questions: "To what extent do these books reflect and record prevailing norms and to what extent do they influence

these norms” (Trümpy 1983: 154; my translation). Certainly, guidebooks presenting novel (or not so novel) ideas, discoveries or knowledge and giving instructions and guidance to enhance daily routines, childrearing or social relationships claim a behaviour and thought-modifying effect on readers. However, the ways they shape practices and thought in real life is difficult to determine (Heimdinger 2006: 60). Historians and other researchers often attempt to pinpoint the influence of a book by stating how many copies were sold or how many editions were printed, which Heimdinger views critically, as sales numbers do not prove that the advice given in a book had any real effects on people’s daily lives (Heimdinger 2006: 60). In ‘Alltagsanleitungen? Ratgeberliteratur als Quelle für die volkscundliche Forschung’, Heimdinger attempts to position advice literature as a source, and stresses the importance of asking what processes led to advice material being written in the first place and what conditions made certain books or manuals popular. Heimdinger asserts that guidebooks do not just *have* an effect, but that they themselves *are* already an effect. He views guidebooks as products of cultural discourses, conflicts and insecurities regarding certain topics that are present in society and that are addressed by this form of literature (Heimdinger 2006: 61).

Thus, I do not intend to suggest that the advice literature discussed in this review was seminal in bringing about transformation in parents’ practices, but that they are ‘witnesses’ to sociopolitical processes and scientific discourses as well as social conflicts and concerns that facilitated the drafting of advice material and the popularity of certain books. This chapter is about the dissemination of advice by experts and the transformation in terms of childrearing approaches visible in these materials, rather than about the lived practices of parents.

The Beginnings of Childrearing Guides in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

Texts on childrearing have been produced for a long time. They can be found in ancient Graeco-Roman writings, the Bible, or medieval sermon texts. Humanistic writers such as Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466/69-1536) and Johann Amos Comenius (1592-1670) brought forth a series of

pedagogical essays. The ‘great pedagogues’ of the eighteenth century Enlightenment period, such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) or Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827) published books with concrete advice on childrearing (Fuchs 1997: 14f). In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the *Erziehungsratgeber* (childrearing advice literature) as the distinct genre we know it as today gained a foothold (Höffer-Mehlmer 2003: 246f; 2008: 137). The increased publication of manuals during this time as well as the themes discussed in them, for example, the importance of a good education for children, can be seen in the context of the social and political situation of the Enlightenment era. Power relations such as the *Ständeordnung* were criticised, the process of secularisation set in, and the *Erziehung* of children was another entry point through which society was supposed to find to ‘reason’ (Schmid 2008: 21; Volk 2018: 12).

Fuchs observes the emergence of two different types of publications: on the one hand, a wealth of popular literature in the form of handbooks and guides that gave practical advice embedded in contemporary medical discourses and were often bound up with normative and denominational doctrines, and on the other, academic publications in the field of pedagogy. Both in the Anglo-Saxon and in the German context, mostly men felt obliged to publish written advice. Fuchs only found one female German author, Wilhelmine von Gersdorf, who edited and translated a French manual by Madame Campan, head of a girl’s boarding school (Fuchs 1997: 16, 18). Authors gave advice in regard to a diverse range of topics, such as diet, hygiene and ‘maternal duties’ before birth, as well as physical and intellectual education (Fuchs 1997: 61).

A central theme of nineteenth century manuals was that childrearing was the sole responsibility of the parents and ought not to be left to strangers (Fuchs 1997: 61). Initially, both mothers and fathers were addressed in advice literature (Mühlestein 2009; Schütze 1988), however, during the first half of the nineteenth century, advice started shifting to mothers belonging to the educated middle class (Ehrenreich and English 2005; Fuchs 1997; Wolpert 1950: 700). This is indicated by the titles of many manuals that specifically address mothers. In Switzerland, Johann

Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827) designated childrearing as mothers' divine providence in his *Buch der Mütter* (Book of Mothers).

Ideas about *Geschlechtscharaktere* (gendered characteristics) whereby men and women were born with specific traits and personalities which 'naturally' assigned them to their tasks in life heavily influenced expert advice on childrearing. This view posited that inherently passive and emotional women were made for domestic work and childcare, active and rational men for the working world (Fuchs 1997: 134). Women's 'meednees, 'gentleness' and 'fragility' of their body and soul tied them to the home, according to an article in the *Schweizerisches Familien-Wochenblatt* (Swiss Family Weekly Paper, SFW)²⁹ in 1884.

Fuchs argues that medical doctors, philosophers and theologians propagated a new image of middle-class motherhood in the nineteenth century that understood women's main function to be raising 'reasonable' humans. While this supposedly high valuation of mothering as a 'natural' and 'sacred' task earned mothers "a certain extent of recognition" (Fuchs 1997: 45; my translation), it also excluded them from other tasks, as Budde ascertains in her work about childhood and childrearing in England and Germany from 1840 to 1914. Processes that assigned women to childrearing (exclusively) ran parallel to the professionalisation of paid male employment (Budde 1994: 171f), as well as industrialisation in Europe which began in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and resulted in stricter compartmentalisations of reproduction and production (Fuchs 1997: 52; Hrdy 1999: 109).

²⁹ In *Erziehung im Wandel*, Kopp analyses the childrearing advice given in the SFW from 1881 until 1896, which was mostly read by members of the middle class (Kopp 1974: 21,31). The SFW bore the subtitle 'Für Familie, Haushalt und Küche. Organ für die Interessen des Frauenberufes und der Familie. Ein Leitfaden und Rathgeber für unsere Frauen und Töchter' (For the Family, Household and Kitchen. Body for the Interests of Female Occupation and the Family. Guide and Companion for Our Wives and Daughters). The SFW was first published in 1881 in Zürich, represented one of the first weekly papers in Switzerland, and was read transregionally. The editors of the paper were male, while the authors included "practical housewives and notable writers" (Messerli and Mathieu 1992: 192; my translation). In the first years of the paper's publication it specifically addressed female readers, but later the editors changed the title to *Schweizerisches Familien-Wochenblatt für Unterhaltung und Belehrung* (Weekly Swiss Family Paper for Entertainment and Instructions) and thereby addressed the family in general (Messerli and Mathieu 1992: 187).

In the context of assigning child raising specifically and exclusively to mothers, breast feeding was an often-discussed topic. In the nineteenth century, authors of childrearing guides started preaching that it was every good mother's duty to breastfeed her children herself. According to Austrian teacher Julius Boss, who published *Erziehungskunst* in 1882, healthy mothers who failed to do so were depriving their children, and the harm done could never be compensated for:

Every mother, who without compelling reason, bodily sickness or absolute incapability refuses her child this natural nourishment, is depriving her child and committing a wrongdoing that she can never make up for again. (Boss 1882 quoted in Fuchs 1997: 49; my translation)

Boss's comment must be seen in light of the condemnation of the *Ammenwesen* (wet nursing business) of his time (Fuchs 1997: 50), which at least in France had been established on a large scale. Badinter explores wet nursing in France, where until the seventeenth century only women belonging to the aristocracy handed their children over to wet nurses, as it was considered unhealthy and inappropriate for them to nurse a child themselves (Badinter 1981: 46f, 70f). In the seventeenth century, the 'bourgeoisie' also started hiring wet nurses, and in the eighteenth century women from all classes living in urban areas as well as small towns followed suit, even members of the working classes (Badinter 1981: 48f). The widespread use of wet nurses by all classes was documented in numbers in eighteenth century Paris by lieutenant-general LeNoir. According to his report, of the 21,000 babies born in Paris in 1780, less than 1,000 were nursed by their own mothers and about 1,000 were breastfed by a live-in wet nurse, which was only affordable for the upper classes. 19,000 babies were taken care of by live-out wet nurses – the great majority in the countryside far away from the parental home (Badinter 1981: 47f). In his article on the breastfeeding debate in early German enlightenment, Fues comments on the widespread use of wet nurses by city dwelling women who handed their nurslings over to caretakers living in rural regions: "Only the peasant child can expect its mother's milk. However, it can also often expect to share it with a foster child" (Fues 1991: 80; my translation).

In Switzerland, the *Ammenwesen* started to take root over the course of the eighteenth century, but according to Zürcher, the use of wet nurses by mothers was “modest” (Zürcher 1998: 141; my translation). Still, the SFW complained about the widespread use of wet nurses and encouraged mothers to assume this “sweet and sacred duty” themselves in an article from 1885 (SWF 1885, 5, p.57 quoted in Kopp 1974: 50; my translation). Warnings against hiring wet nurses ranged from reports of neglect to children’s murders by wet nurses (SWF 1888, 7, p.300, SFW, 1895, 14a, p.144 quoted in Kopp 1974: 46f).

However, wet nurses continued to be hired. Fuchs cites several authors, such as Hermann Klencke, who addressed selection criteria for wet nurses, whose virtuousness and decency were perceived as especially important in his guide for German women (Klencke 1870: 78). Wilhelmine von Gersdorf worried that bad character traits could be transferred to the child via breastmilk (Gersdorf 1824 quoted in Fuchs 1997: 50). This seemed to be a widespread idea in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe. German Physician Friedrich August Meyer (who declared himself a non-believer of this theory) issued a small screed in Hamburg in 1781 titled: ‘Are the proclivities and passions of a breastfeeding woman shared with the child through the milk?’ (Meyer 1781 quoted in Fues 1991: 105; my translation). In Switzerland, writings that may hint at the idea that character traits could be transferred via breastmilk can be found as well. Swiss gynaecologist Rudolf Abraham Schiferli (1775-1837), for example, listed several requirements for wet nurses in his manual of midwifery. Here, he not only emphasised that wet nurses should be in good health, but that they should also be well-mannered as well as free from any ferocious ‘passions’ (Schiferli 1806 quoted in Zürcher 1998: 141; my translation).

According to Fuchs, the demand that wet nurses had to be carefully selected was a new development (Fuchs 1997: 52), which she sees in the context of the increasing emotionalisation of the parent-child relationship that took hold over the course of the late eighteenth century in Europe and was intertwined with a new conception of marriage and ‘family’ based on love and intimacy (Fuchs 1997: 40f). According to this novel idea of ‘family’, the love that a married couple feels for

each other, writes Badinter, is reified in the offspring resulting from their union (Badinter 1981: 141). However, it must also be seen in conjunction with the ‘discovery’ of childhood as a unique phase during the eighteenth century in which a child was deemed innocent, should not have to work and should be prepared for later tasks in life (Fuchs 1997: 40f, 42f). In France, philosopher and pedagogue Jean-Jacques Rousseau, for instance, propagated the idea of ‘the innocent child’ that challenged the Christian concept of ‘original sin’ that affects small children as much as adults, in his *Émile, ou De l'éducation* (Rousseau 2010, 1762)³⁰. Romantic poets and artists of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries began portraying children as pure and innocent beings, distinct from adults (Heywood 2001: 24-27). Zürich-born Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1801, 1803), who was highly influenced by Rousseau’s writings, emphasised the importance of a good education during childhood and the crucial role of mothers in this regard. The *Kinderbild* (conception of the child) forming in the eighteenth century is often contrasted with the *Kinderbild* of the middle ages when – according to authors such as Ariès (1970), who pinpointed the emergence of a concept of childhood in the early modern period – no idea of childhood being a special stage of life separate from adulthood previously existed. This assertion is challenged by other historians (cf. Heywood 2001: 11-15). As Heywood points out, there were several ‘discoveries’ of childhood before the early modern period and the ‘nature’ of childhood varied accordingly: “the whole notions of a definitive discovery of the particular nature of childhood is open to question (...) It would surely now be more illuminating to think in terms of an ebbing and flowing of interest in the young over the long term, and of competing conceptions of childhood in any given society” (Heywood 2001: 20). Perhaps then, the ideas emerging in the eighteenth century should rather be understood as a ‘re-discovery’ of childhood or simply a conception of childhood that was closer to the contemporary one.

³⁰ The book was condemned by Church authorities and burned in Paris and Geneva. It still became very popular among European scholars (Blundell 2012: 28).

The idea of childhood as a work-free time, dedicated to play and education (Fuchs 1997: 42) seeped into the families of the urban middle classes, which historians have documented for different European countries, such as France and Germany, but also in the US (Badinter 1981: 171f; Ehrenreich and English 2005; Fuchs 1997; Heywood 2001: 27f). It also took shape in the form of laws in the nineteenth century. In Switzerland, measures were introduced to protect children and ensure their education, such as compulsory schooling in some cantons as early as 1848 as well as the banning of under 14 year-olds from factory work in 1877. Historian Heidi Witzig understands these state measures as a ‘trimming’ of parents’ authority over their children, who – in theory – could no longer freely decide whether they wanted to send their children to work (Witzig 2008). Economic change and technological innovations further contributed to children’s exit from the labour market, as child labour became less and less important. As Heywood notes, however:

The Romantic view of childhood was far from sweeping all before it. For a start, the older tradition of tainting children with original sin died hard. (...) the emphasis on childhood innocence had little relevance to the lives of the majority of young people, still being immersed in the world of adults at an early age. The new ideas resonated most powerfully in middle-class circles, where the interest in domesticity and education was particularly developed. They also served as a powerful antidote to the strains and stresses of the French and the industrial revolutions. (Heywood 2001: 27)

In Switzerland, for example, the advancements described above did not apply to all children. Children living in rural areas, where their help was important to support the agricultural sector, often did not attend school. It also did not apply to foster children and *Verdingkinder* (indentured children working on farms), as investing in their human capital was seen as pointless. Especially in Catholic cantons, schooling was reserved for boys only (Furrer et al. 2014: 8f).

Childrearing and ‘Science’ in the Twentieth Century

The process of marking childhood as a special period in life, in which one needs special protection (*Schutzbedürftigkeit*) developed further in the twentieth century, which Ellen Key proclaimed as the

‘century of the child’. In her publication with the same title (Key 1909), Key appeals for the public protection of children’s needs. Key’s ideas indeed took shape on an international level, with the League of Nation’s Declaration of Children’s Rights in 1924 and the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1959. The passing of children’s rights went hand in hand with the idea of the child as a citizen of the state (Rose 1990b) . In *For Her Own Good*, Ehrenreich and English study the history of expert advice for women from a feminist standpoint and argue that, with the ‘discovery of childhood’ also came the:

“discovery” of the *power* of women. In the official ideology of the time, woman was already sequestered in the realm of private life, which was, after all, “her sphere.” Here, because of the triviality of domestic concerns, she was even allowed to “reign,” just as the man supposedly did outside. But now it is as if the masculinist imagination takes a glance over its shoulder and discovers it has left something important behind in “woman’s sphere”—the child. This child—the new child conceived as a kind of evolutionary protoplasm, a means of *control* over society’s not-so-distant future. This child cannot be left to women. It follows that if children must be left with their mothers, they must not be left *alone* with them. A new figure will enter the family tableau—a man equipped to manage both children and mothers *and* to direct the interaction between them—the scientific expert in child raising. (Ehrenreich and English 2005: 210)

Over the course of the twentieth century, childrearing was made into a “scientific enterprise” (Hays, 1996, p. 39) as experts called into question whether women’s ‘gender characteristics’ alone could warrant good mothering practices. Progress in medicine, research in psychology and child development, as well as social activism significantly fostered this development. According to Stearns, post-nineteenth century manuals written by medical doctors and psychologists increasingly framed the topics covered in their guides as “problems” (Stearns 2003: 19). Experts sought to replace ‘traditional’ childrearing practices with ‘rational’ practices (Schütze 1991: 10).

The notable success of the physical sciences in the nineteenth century, the elation that followed on the Darwinian revolution, and the culture’s high hopes for a technological Utopia joined at the end of the nineteenth century to define child psychology as scientific and rational. The vagaries of casual stories about children, the eccentricities of folk knowledge, and the superstitions of grandmothers were all to be cleansed by the mighty brush of scientific method. (Kessen 1979: 817)

The importance ascribed to ‘science’ in childrearing can be found in the articles published in SWF as early as the late nineteenth century. In his book on childrearing advice in the SWF, Kopp mentions that the paper showed marked efforts to give women advice informed by ‘scientific findings’. For instance, the SWF cautioned “reasonable modern mothers” against rocking fussy infants, alleging that this could have negative effects on the child’s brain (SWF, 1882, 2 p. 5, quoted in Kopp 1974: 38; my translation). The idea that rocking is bad for babies’ brains can also be found in a Catholic magazine for popular education from 1841 published in Baden-Wuerttemberg in Germany. According to Karl Rösch, a medical doctor from Southern Germany, rocking indeed put babies to sleep, but it only worked so well because it filled their brains with blood, leading to dizziness and daze. In the worst case, rocking could cause cerebral inflammation, so letting infants cry was healthier for them (Rösch 1841: 31)³¹. SWF often recommended books on childrearing by medical doctors and warned mothers against asking relatives for advice on health questions (SWF 1885, 5, p. 57 quoted in Kopp 1974: 39). Kopp finds that mothers’ alleged ignorance regarding childrearing was often addressed in the SWF. In a volume from 1885, the magazine suggested that adolescent girls should attend courses, in which caregiving and pedagogics would be taught by experts (SWF 1885, 4, p. 280, quoted in Kopp 1974: 39).

In *Perfect Motherhood. Science and childrearing in America*, Apple documents the medicalisation of childrearing in the US, where trusting the experiential knowledge of laywomen when it came to health-related questions was seen as problematic by paediatricians (Apple 2006: 15). Apple describes the emergence of the ‘educated mother’, who follows expert advice and bases her childcare, even the most basic practices such as bathing and dressing, on modern science (Apple 2006: 2). Apple notes that the increased attention regarding childcare and hygiene comes as no surprise, as it went hand in hand with social activism and reforms in the US during the Progressive Era, when high infant mortality rates “spurred physicians, reformers, and mothers to action” in the

³¹ Today gently rocking infants to sleep is not considered to have negative effects on the brain, and many contemporary Euro-American advice texts and also the MVBs I talked to usually emphasised that letting babies cry for a longer period of time could lead to ‘insecure children’.

early twentieth century (Apple 2012: 698). The same can be observed in Switzerland, when the first cantonal child welfare offices were founded (Businger and Ramsauer 2019: 50) and, in the face of high infant mortality rates, private initiatives established childcare services for working-class mothers. Early twentieth-century guides in Switzerland also focused on mediating the latest findings about care and hygiene and urged mothers to reject any advice given by laywomen in favour of professional aid. An example of this is the manual *Dein Kind. Die moderne Säuglingspflege in Wort und Bild* (Your Child. Modern Infant Care in Words and Images) from 1946. The guide is typical for the mid-twentieth century in the ways it introduces mothers to ‘modern’ infant care based on rigid schedules and routines. Good mothering is understood as providing proper care based on medical expertise. The book displays many photos that instruct mothers in great detail about how to position themselves and their baby during bath time, how to dress the baby, how to change nappies, how to clean ears and cut fingernails.

Still, the guidebook shows that instruction on infant care and childrearing was not only given by ‘the male expert’. In *Dein Kind*, a female nurse called Sister Margrit spoke to the reader. While her medical background certainly gave her authority to write about infant care, her long-term ‘experience’ was emphasised. The guidebook provided information given to expectant mothers in a four-week long baby care course taught at a mothers’ school in Zürich and was intended for women who could not attend the course. The book alludes to the mothers’ schools, whose establishment in the twentieth century will be further discussed in the following section. Sister Margrit made the acquisition of “solid knowledge” in childcare matters the first duty of expectant mothers (Dietrich 1946: 10; my translation)³² and admonished the reader that: “The advice of all the aunts and cousins or unbidden neighbours – no matter how well-meaning – must make way for professional guidance” (Dietrich 1946: 74; my translation).

³² The imprint of the manual states that it was designed by H. Dietrich. No last name for ‘Sister Margrit’ is given and it remains unclear if she was a real person and actually worked at the mothers’ school. The identity of H. Dietrich and his role in the writing of the manual remain unknown as well.

The attempt to educate women about childcare matters did not only transpire through the publication of manuals, but also through other media. In the twentieth century, exhibitions on newborn care took place in various parts of Switzerland. In an article in the Swiss women's magazine *Frauenbestrebungen* (Women's Aspirations) from 1920, an exhibition in Zürich was highly recommended for young girls and women interested in the health of "our" children. The author also mentioned that it was part of a touring exhibition about newborn care (Unknown 1920: 31).

The demand that mothers should follow expert advice conflicted with the idea that women are 'naturally' equipped with traits that make them especially good at childrearing, in the sense that 'nature' ensured mothers' devotedness to their offspring, as suggested for example by Darwin (1871) or later by Bowlby (Bowlby 1958, 1966, 1969). Authors of mid-twentieth-century manuals propagated this idea, such as Paula Bascho-Schultz, a paediatrician who practiced in Berne. In her manual *Mutter und Kind. Des Kindes Pflege und Ernährung* (Mother and Child. The Child's Care and Diet), Bascho-Schultz argued that 'nature' had endowed women with physical and mental gifts such as self-sacrifice and self-renunciation, so that they could fulfil their most beautiful task in the most perfect manner (Bascho-Schultz 1949 in: Mühlestein 2009: 61).

This contradiction was sometimes addressed in advice material by authors, who suggested for example that human instincts were not as reliable as animal instincts and needed intellectual support (Mühlestein 2011: 61). Others suggested that 'maternal instincts' were just not as trustworthy as they used to be and that mothers had become "*instinktlos*" (without instinct) (Kopp 1974: 125). In an article published in *Anna Belle* (AB)³³ in 1967, the senior nurse at Zürich's mothers' school reported that many of her students had never held a newborn and that the 'mother instinct' that is supposed to set in with birth could no longer be relied upon (AB, 1967, 30 (15), S.25 quoted in Kopp 1974: 124).

³³ *Anna Belle* is one of Switzerland's most read women's magazines.

While the previous section largely focused on written advice on childrearing, the following section will discuss the establishment of mothers' schools and advice centres, which resulted in female professionals working face-to-face with parents until today. Here, I will mostly focus on institutions that continue to be relevant for this research– the MVB and Pro Juventute.

Mothers' Schools and Milk Kitchens

Many authors reviewing the history of associations and institutions providing childcare services and maternal education in Switzerland see the reasons for their establishment in the early twentieth century in the background of the high newborn mortality rates at that time (Desiderato, Lengwiler and Rothenbühler 2008: 29; Müller 2013: 11; Naegele 2004: 24; OVK 2010: 5).³⁴ In their 100 year jubilee report, the *Ostschweizerischer Verein für das Kind* (OVK, Eastern Switzerland Association for the Child) describes the founding of their association as “the story of brave, determined St. Gallen women, who did not want to stand idly by while children were dying and suffering” (OVK 2010: 5; my translation). An article from 1947 in the *Schweizerische Lehrerinnenzeitung* (a magazine for female Swiss teachers) reported that young mothers’ distress and insecurity regarding feeding and caring for their firstborns was becoming more and more evident in public and that schools for mothers being established in various regions of Switzerland sought to prevent resulting health damages in children in the future. The unknown author mentioned that the schools were founded by private initiatives, such as the Red Cross in Geneva, a women’s association in Basel and a school board in Winterthur. Zürich’s mothers’ school had been especially popular with “brides” and “expectant mothers”, so the city soon provided a bigger location for the school, where paediatric nurses, a paediatrician, a female gynaecologist³⁵ as well as a kindergarten teacher taught women about care and pedagogics (Unknown 1947: 144) . It is highly likely that she is referring to the mothers’ school opened by the *Frauenzentrale* in 1942, a women’s association founded in Zürich in 1914 (Frauenzentrale n.d.).

As well as schools, advice centres for mothers were set up, out of which the contemporary MVB developed. While in the early twentieth century it was mostly female volunteers, *Fürsorgerinnen* (female social workers) and doctors who advised mothers, the *Mütterberatung* (mothers’ counselling)

³⁴ The infant mortality rate was at 15% around 1900 in the canton of Zürich (Desiderato et al. 2008: 45).

³⁵ Swiss universities were pioneers in the German-speaking region, opening universities for women in the middle of the 19th century. Thus, female doctors were already available in Switzerland at this time.

was gradually professionalised in the 1930s. The female profession of the *Säuglingsfürsorgerin* (infant welfare worker) was created, the predecessor of the contemporary MVB.³⁶ (Desiderato et al. 2008: 48). Pro Juventute provided the training until the 1970s, when it was taken over by Zürich's *Spitexschule* (home health care training school). The conceptualisation of training programmes as well as the school providing it changed several times after the 1980s (Müller 2013: 11f).

In contrast to the nineteenth-century advice literature written for middle-class mothers, Desiderato et al. argue that advice centres initially targeted working-class mothers, as the mortality rates of infants growing up in poor families living in 'unhygienic' conditions were especially high. While, according to Desiderato et al. (2008), doctors knew that economic and social factors played a major role in driving up mortality rates, measures taken to curb them focused on systematic educational work. In some communes, *Säuglingsfürsorgerinnen* began making regular home visits, which seemed to be mandatory for families seen as needing professional guidance. According to Hedwig Blöchliger, a central office member of Pro Juventute, through home visits the infant welfare workers could reach women who did not attend centres due to "shyness, lack of time, a presumed know-it-all attitude, prejudice and often a lack of responsibility" (Blöchliger 1932, quoted in Desiderato et al. 2008: 48; my translation).

In the canton of Zürich, Pro Juventute promoted the establishment of mothers' advice centres by organising a touring exhibition on infant care, which often inspired the opening of new centres (Desiderato et al. 2008; Müller 2013: 11). This proved to be highly successful, as they multiplied rapidly over the twentieth century. In 1913, Zürich City opened its first three advice centres, and in 1930, 27 centres had opened across the whole canton. Desiderato et al. (2008) report that by this time, 50% of all newborns in Zürich were brought to the centres. By 1968 almost all

³⁶ In the cities, advice centres were still often headed by doctors, while in the rural areas *Säuglingsfürsorgerinnen* were in charge (Desiderato et al. 2008: 48). During an interview, a MVB who had been working as an advisor for 30 years, noted that in some rural regions of Switzerland the MVB had long been the only place parents could turn to when needing medical advice, as there were no paediatricians nearby.

communal districts within the canton had one or more centres, adding up to 117 centres in total (Desiderato et al. 2008: 48).

Hygiene measures also gave rise to milk kitchens, where mothers could obtain artificially produced milk (Desiderato et al. 2008: 44). Müller reports that the milk offered in the public kitchens was made of cow's milk, water, lemon juice and rice gruel (Müller 2013: 11). However, feeding babies with artificially-produced milk raised a lot of criticism, as the promotion of breastfeeding was a central part of the fight against high infant mortality rates (Desiderato et al. 2008: 46). In St. Gallen, the OVK headed by Frieda Kaiser (born in 1877), the third woman in Switzerland to gain a doctoral degree, established a mothers' advice centre³⁷. The services in the centre did not differ much from the services provided in MVB centres today: consultations take place on a weekly basis during which infants are weighed and mothers receive advice on various topics (OVK 2010: 8f).

While at first the initiation as well as the funding of professional childcare services was in the hands of private institutions like Pro Juventute or women's associations, public institutions such as cantonal youth aid departments³⁸ became more and more involved by subsidising centres and providing locations free of charge. In Zürich, the youth aid department played a role in standardising the services on offer by organising conferences and training programmes for the professionals working in the centres. In 1957, a new youth aid law was passed in Zürich which made the *Säuglingsfürsorge*³⁹ an integral part of the cantonal child welfare policy. Since 1962, all Swiss communes have been required by law to provide professional guidance to pregnant women and parents, while the provision of those services can be delegated to private institutions (Desiderato et al. 2008: 50). Since the 1980s the contemporary MVB, which developed out of the diverse local

³⁷ The association also founded a care home for the babies of working mothers as well as a mothers' school (OVK 2010).

³⁸ Zürich city founded one of the first child welfare offices in Switzerland in 1908 (Businger and Ramsauer 2019: 50).

³⁹ The *Säuglingsfürsorge* is not specific to Switzerland. In many other European countries, such as Germany, the UK, and the United States, similar associations were active in this field (Davies 1988; Ehrenreich and English 2005; Rittershaus 2013).

services for mothers and infants, has been coordinated and sponsored by the cantons, who co-finance them jointly with the communes (Desiderato et al. 2008: 51; Frey 2020). In some cantons, such as Lucerne, Aargau, Schwyz and Basel, the MVB has even been anchored in the cantonal health law, which means that the communes must provide the service.

As well as transformations regarding the sponsorship, organisation and name of the consultants – from *Säuglingsfürsorgerin* (infant welfare worker) to *Gesundheitschwester* (health nurse), to *Mütterberaterin* (mothers' advisor) to *Mütter- und Väterberaterin* (mothers' and fathers' advisor) (Müller 2013), the topics addressed in advice centres changed over time. With the decline of infant mortality rates in the 1930s, the focus on hygiene shifted to mediating the latest findings on infant feeding, care and upbringing (Desiderato et al. 2008: 49). In the 1970s, topics such as female employment and other changes in family organisation became part of consultations. According to Desiderato et al. “the psychologisation as well as the pedagogisation of childhood required new forms of support and advice” (2008: 51; my translation). In the 1980s counselling in advice centres, which had focused on newborns and babies, was extended to toddlers up to five years of age. In the 1990s, the prevention of violence and abuse began to play a role and, as Desiderato et al. put it, counselling toddlers' parents contributed significantly to improving the protection of children's rights (Desiderato et al. 2008: 52).

The following sections will return to considering the advice literature. In the context of transformations regarding the MVB's counselling work in the 1970s, I briefly mentioned the ‘psychologisation’ of childhood above, which I will now explore in more detail.

From Strict Schedules to Spock's Baby Bible and Attachment Theory

Over the decades, advice manuals have promoted various ‘parenting styles’, specific practices used by parents to socialise children (Spera 2005). The different approaches to children's socialisation are often labelled as ‘authoritarian’, ‘authoritative’ or ‘permissive’ by scholars exploring advice

literature (Ehrenreich and English 2005; Eschner 2017). Baumrind's (Baumrind 1967, 1971) classification of parenting styles has been very influential in psychological research revolving around parenting styles and their outcomes and is used by many scholars attempting to classify a guide book author's approach⁴⁰.

The propagation of 'authoritarian parenting', marked by a parent-centred approach and associated with imposing strict rules and control (Eschner 2017: 23), is found in many of the nineteenth-century German texts that Fuchs has evaluated. Some authors also advised the use of corporal punishment which, according to Fuchs, was specifically recommended for small children under four or five in order to foster obedience and break infantile stubbornness (Fuchs 1997: 59-61).

In connection with the promotion of authoritarian parenting, one also finds a specific *Kinderbild*, conception of the child, in advice literature. Small children, even newborns, were viewed as domineering, calculating tyrants whose wills must be broken by their caretaker (Dietrich 1946: 85ff; Kopp 1974: 53f; Kunz 2015: 48). Too much affection on the mother's side was considered uncondusive by advice givers (Kunz 2015: 49; Mühlestein 2009: 106). In the SWF, mothers were admonished to be uncompromising and to install "deference and fear" in their children in the late nineteenth century (SFW, 1895, 15, p.96 quoted in Kopp 1974: 81f; my translation). According to the mid-twentieth century *Dein Kind* by H. Dietrich and Sister Margrit, even small infants put their mothers' *erzieherische* capabilities to the test, when they torment them with relentless crying. Letting babies 'cry it out' was seen as crucial to let them know that their efforts were pointless:

There are children, who simply don't want to stick to the feeding schedule and demand more than the prescribed portion. They torment the mother and of course also the father every night by screaming for hours (...). If she [the mother] gives in to the child's every stir of discomfort or bad mood, she will soon be her child's slave and will have to suffer bitter misery. Early on, one has to break the child's bad habits, later on it is much harder. It is completely wrong to take the nursling out of his bed and carry him out around, when he screams at night or in between meals. It is even more wrong to feed a badly behaved nursling or even take him into the parental bed, if one is convinced that he is not lacking

⁴⁰ For a detailed discussion of the defining characteristics of the different styles, see Eschner (2017: 23-25). Classifying a guidebook author's approach to childrearing is not an easy task, as the advice may include elements of different styles. Furthermore, attempting to classify a parent's childrearing style is even more questionable, as parents' practices may be anything but consistent, depending on mood or other factors, like their co-parent's approach.

in anything. If everything is in order, one should let the child scream, until it realises that it is to no avail. It is unobjectionable to bring the squaller in a remote room, where he cannot disturb anyone. (Dietrich 1946: 85ff)

Dein Kind (1946) recommended instilling a strict regimen of feeding and daily routines aimed to regulate children and rid them of ‘flaws’, which was supposed to make life easier for parents. This is exemplary for manuals published in the first half of the twentieth century in Europe, when advice authors endorsed sticking to feeding timetables and hygiene routines or starting toilet training in infancy and discouraged cuddling or soothing children (Dietrich 1946; Heywood 2001: 199). In the German context, the promotion of authoritarian, detached parenting practices in the 1940s was also bound up with national socialist ideologies, such as Johanna Haarer’s (1934) famous guidebook *Die Deutsche Mutter und Ihr Erstes Kind* (The German Mother and Her First Child), first published in 1934. The book’s publication was initiated by an editor who was directly connected to the national socialist movement. It served as a basis for teachers working for the *Bund Deutscher Mädel* (League of German Girls) as well as the National Political Institute of Education (NAPOLA). Surprisingly, the last edition of her book was published in the 1980s. To what extent national socialist ideologies influenced advice literature in Switzerland and how Haarer’s book was received in the country remains unstudied. Still, *Dein Kind* and Haarer’s guide have parallels in terms of their focus on cleanliness, routines and a detached handling of the infant, who, they assert, must be shaped according to the mother’s wishes and learn to obey from a very young age.

This kind of handling of children, who may be ‘spoiled’ if picked up and soothed too quickly is still “within our historical memory” (Hays 1996: 39). In 1996, Hays noted that “many of us had mothers or grandmothers who were admonished to refrain from picking up their infants when they cried” (ibid). However, 26 years later this is still the case, as I personally experienced, but also learnt during my work with the MVBs, who reported that they regularly counselled mothers who were unsettled by older relatives’ remarks that they were ‘spoiling’ their babies.

Medicine had long been the main discipline when it came to advising on childcare. Since the Second World War, however, psychology, invigorated by Freud's theories, became another key discipline, especially in regard to parent-child interactions (Eschner 2017; Kunz 2015: 57; Lee 2017; Rose 1999): "Since World War II, psychology has increasingly provided the language in which these concerns with the rearing of children have been phrased, the means of identifying problems and the types of expertise capable of putting them right" (Rose 1990b: xi). Advice on raising children began to focus on their psychological wellbeing (Desiderato et al. 2008: 29) and became more empathetic towards the child (Ehrenreich and English 2005; Hays 1996; Hendrick 2016). Hays describes this period as "the permissive era" that began in the early 1930s, when "detached handling, strict scheduling, and behaviour modification had lost favor" (Hays 1996: 45). According to Ehrenreich and English, permissiveness resulted in the transformation of mothers' position. They were no longer seen as representing the experts in the home by imposing experts' instructions, but were urged to follow their children's lead: "But now it is the child who acts as junior field representative of the expert, instructing the mother in the daily routines of life" (Ehrenreich and English 2005: 240). In contrast to the behaviourist approaches of, for example, American psychologist John B. Watson (1878-1958), which suggested that children needed to be 'moulded' into shape (Watson 1928), mothers were now encouraged to understand and support children's impulses and 'natural development' and focus less on regulating them.

In the context of a transformation from authoritarian to more child-centred (or 'permissive') parenting, the work of American paediatrician Benjamin Spock and his extremely popular 'baby bible'⁴¹, *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* (1946) (published in the same year as *Dein Kind*) is often cited. Spock's book was translated into German and published in Switzerland in 1952 with the title *Dein Kind – Dein Glück* (Your Child – Your Bliss) (1952). While it is unclear how Spock's book was received in Switzerland, Eschner (2017), who has analysed childrearing guides

⁴¹ Spock's book is rated as one of the bestselling books of all times – since its publication in 1946 over 50 million copies have been sold (McCrum 2016).

between 1945 and 2015, comments that it was not as successful in Germany, where it was published in the '50s, as it was in the US.⁴²

Spock, who had psychoanalytical training (Lee 2017: 133), focused on building a stable relationship between parent and child and emphasised the importance of experiencing parental love for child development and wellbeing (Spock 1952: 19). In contrast to Sister Margrit (Dietrich 1946), who made acquiring 'solid knowledge' of childcare the most important task for expectant mothers, Spock began his book with a section titled 'Trust yourself – you know more than you think you do'⁴³. Although Spock still recommended mothers to follow doctors' instructions (and he mediated information on all sorts of childcare topics in his book himself), he deemed listening to 'instinct' and 'natural loving care' more important for rearing children than following expert advice:

Don't take too seriously all that the neighbors say. Don't be overawed by what the experts say. Don't be afraid to trust your own common sense. Bringing up your child won't be a complicated job if you take it easy, trust your own instincts, and follow directions that your doctor gives you. We know for a fact that the natural loving care that kindly parents give to their children is a hundred times more valuable than their knowing how to pin a diaper on just right, or making a formula expertly. (Spock 1946: 3)

In contrast to many other guides of the time, Spock addressed both mother and father at the beginning of *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*. While he stressed the importance of a good father-child relationship for a child's wellbeing, he situates the father's role in care work as an occasional helper for the mother:

Some fathers have been brought up to think that the care of babies and children is the mother's job entirely. This is the wrong idea. You can be a warm father and a real man at the same time. (...) Of course, I don't mean that the father has to give just as many bottles or change as many diapers as the mother. But it's fine for him to do these things occasionally. He might make the formula on Sunday. (Spock 1946: 15)

⁴² During my research, I realised that the first German editions of Spock's book had been severely abridged and primarily included the chapters that focused on infant feeding and care, while the original version in English covers childrearing until puberty and includes topics that go beyond feeding and care, such as child psychology, discipline, play and jealousy between siblings. The reasons why the German edition was shortened remain unknown. Perhaps publishers felt that Spock's ideas regarding childrearing were too progressive, or the book was perceived as being too long to attract a large readership?

⁴³ The German edition begins with the same section. For practical reasons, I have quoted from the English version.

Spock also took a stance against imposing strict schedules on children as propagated in other manuals of the time and discounted rigid feeding routines (Spock 1952: 25-27). In contrast to Sister Margrit, he spoke out in favour of a nursing schedule adapted to the child's individual needs which had to be carefully assessed by its mother, a central theme in his overall work in regard to other topics, such as weaning or toilet training as well. This can be seen as the beginning of a movement that highly valued children's individual characteristics. Further, transformations concerning the idea that proper socialisation can be achieved by instilling fear and obedience in children can be observed in Spock's work, who viewed punishment critically and recommended parents to take advantage of children's 'natural' desire to be loved and respected: "In general, remember that what makes your child behave well is not threats or punishment but loving you for your agreeableness and respecting you for knowing your rights and his. Stay in control as a friendly leader rather than battle with him at his level" (Spock 1946: 272).

Conservative politicians of the '60s, such as US Vice President Spiro T. Agnew, blamed Spock's book for causing the defiance and unruliness of young adults (who he believed were raised according to Spock's book that allegedly propagated 'permissiveness') and providing fertile ground for the student protest movement (Lee 2017: 6). It is very interesting that Agnew did not blame parents for not raising their children properly, but the expert providing guidance to the parents. In her thesis on the contradictory elements of Spock's childrearing ideas, N. Lee challenges the notion that Spock propagated a generally permissive approach:

His advice transformed the meaning of discipline by implementing subtler control over children, which seemed effective and practical from his perspective. Dismissing the authoritative⁴⁴ types of discipline such as punishment and nagging, Spock embraced a more lenient way of interacting with children, which appeared permissive to the critics. However, this seeming leniency of Spock's advice on parenting, wittingly and unwittingly, stem from an attempt to promote tighter—effective and practical—control. (Lee 2017: 28)

⁴⁴ I wonder whether Lee actually means authoritarian here.

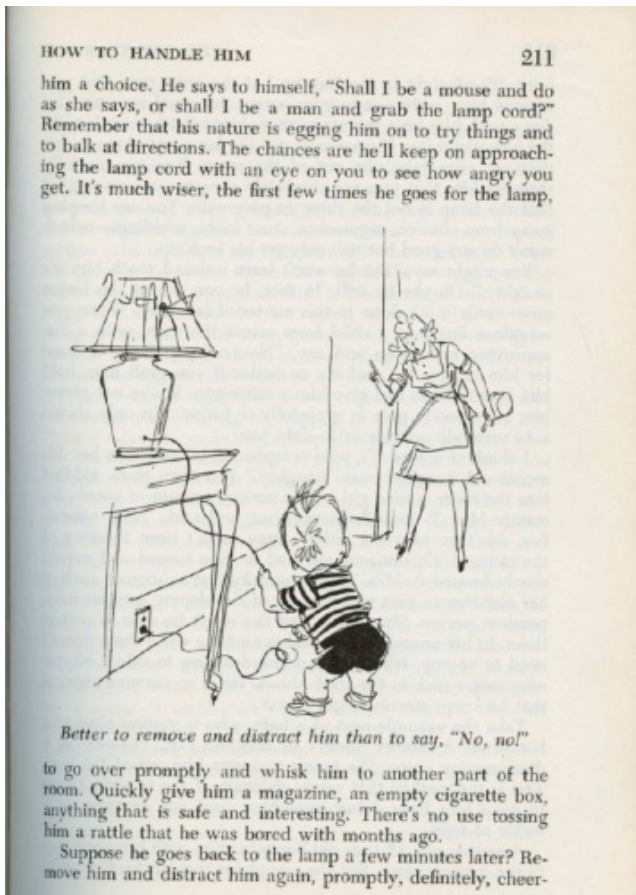


Image 2: Spock (1946: 211) deems distracting children more effective than saying 'no'.

Spock recommended a different concept of discipline based on the observance of children and assessing *their* needs (not parents' or societies' 'wants'). The aim of this form of discipline, according to N. Lee, is to create an "environment for children's spontaneous and voluntary attitude", which is supposed to make it easier for parents to handle their children. N. Lee's reading of Spock is highly significant in the context of changing concepts of (power) relationships between parents and children and ideas of 'proper discipline' in advice literature – discipline as installing obedience in children through punishment and strict routines versus discipline as "managing and leading a child

successfully" (Spock 1955 quoted in: Lee 2017: 67) (which almost sounds like Foucault's definition of disciplinary power). Furthermore, N. Lee highlights the theme of parents' emotion regulation and self-control as a central element of Spock's advice: "Spock emphasized the importance of parents' maintaining of emotional control as they interacted with their babies and children because their reactions and mutual interactions could make a significant impact on babies' and children's development" (Lee 2017: 154). The governing of emotions continues to play an important role in childcare advice as well as in making children more 'cooperative' (and less defiant) – one of the ultimate aims of Spock's approach to childrearing according to N. Lee. This will also play a role in Chapter 5, which explores the governing of parents' emotions.

In 'The Unstable World of Benjamin Spock: Social Engineering in a Democratic Culture, 1917-1950', Graebner explores the political circumstances during which Spock wrote his

guidebook. Spock's conception of children and his ideas regarding their proper socialisation are a product of the interwar period⁴⁵:

Baby and Child Care, (...) must be read as an analysis of American civilization in the interwar years (...) Spock had no small feeling of discomfort with the world in which he lived. He found economic institutions too competitive, social institutions insufficiently grounded in history and tradition. The Great Depression, the threat of totalitarianism, and the actual experience of war were basic ingredients in his world view. At the center of this unstable world was an unstable infant and child – fearful, frustrated, insecure, and potentially destructive in his aggressive tendencies. Through control over the childrearing process, Spock sought to create a society that was more cooperative, more consensus-oriented, more group-conscious, and a society that was more knowable, more consistent, and more comforting. He wrote to prevent chaos and to achieve discipline rather than license. His search for a methodology, necessarily a troubled one at a time when all forms of control were viewed as potentially dangerous, led him to a “democratic” model of child rearing which featured the family as a small group, the parent as a group leader, and the child as occasional participant in a group decision-making process. This model of child rearing would later be labelled “permissive,” but its content belies the word's laissez-faire connotation. Spock was nothing less than a social engineer, and an important one at that, for his democratic methods could be found in many areas of American life. (Graebner 1980: 612f)

In light of Spock's ideas regarding discipline, some authors, such as Eschner (2017: 85) and N. Lee (Lee 2017: 4) are more inclined to label Spock's approach ‘authoritative’ – a style often described as being characterised by “a high level of supportive control, as well as affection, warmth, sensitivity, and empathy. Consistent rules, rituals, and consequences provide security (...). In contrast to the authoritarian style, authenticity (autonomy and wilfulness) is permitted and questioning parental demands is possible. Conversely, discipline, adjustment and abiding by factually justified restrictions are expected” (Eschner 2017: 23-24; my translation).

Swiss paediatrician Christoph Wolfensberger struck a very similar tone in 1958 when he deemed figuring out the individual needs of a child and adjusting to those as paramount – if not the most important task of a mother. In his manual *Liebe Junge Mutter* (Dear Young Mother) (1958:

⁴⁵ Ehrenreich and English interpret the trend towards ‘permissiveness’ in childcare experts’ writings, such as Spock, in the context of economic changes during this time when they argue that it went hand in hand with the American economy becoming increasingly dependent on individual consumption: “The experts who had been concerned with discipline and self-control now discovered that self-indulgence was healthy for the individual personality just as it was good for the entire economy” (Ehrenreich and English 2005: 232).

14ff) adhering to schedules becomes of secondary importance and is even considered wrong if they do not coincide with a child's individual requirements. Breaking a child's will was not recommended (Wolfensberger 1958: 18f), but building a relationship of trust and security was. The expression of genuine motherly love towards a child was deemed crucial for a healthy development.

According to Mühlestein, changes in advice literature towards a more loving approach also coincided with the then-widely debated study by Austrian-American psychoanalyst René Spitz (1945), who explored the effects of maternal deprivation of hospitalised children on their physical and mental development in the 1940s. A small booklet with the title *The Employment of Mothers. A Burning Socio-Political Problem* (Frei 1957; my translation) published by the Swiss Social democrats in 1957 discusses a study on maternal deprivation in a US clinic in order to portray the grave dangers that working mothers pose to society (Frei 1957: 7f). The pamphlet renders maternal employment responsible for juvenile crimes committed by children who did not receive enough love from their absent mothers (Frei 1957: 10f). Motherly presence and love became considered crucial for the healthy development of children and their futures as law-abiding citizens. Discussing the effects of child development research on childrearing, Rose notes: "Love was no longer a merely moral duty or a romantic ideal, it was the element in which were produced normal and abnormal children" (Rose 1990b: 156).

In terms of the importance of addressing children's needs as well as maternal presence, psychologist and psychoanalyst John Bowlby (Bowlby 1952, 1958, 1969) spread similar ideas in England with his prominent attachment theory and ideas about instinctive bonding between mother and child⁴⁶. According to Bowlby, so-called 'social releasers', such as crying and smiling by an infant, produce 'instinctual responses' on the mother's side that ensure her attendance to the child's needs. Bowlby described mothers as 'enslaved' by their babies' smiles:

⁴⁶ Bowlby did not write a guide for parents, but advice literature draws from attachment theory to this day, which is why I am discussing it in more detail at this point.

In addition to the baby's cry, maternal behaviour in the human mother is subjected to another social releaser: this is the *baby's smile*. As with other instinctual responses, maturation of smiling varies considerably from infant to infant; in most it is present by six weeks. At this time and for two or three months longer, smiling is sensitive to patterns much simpler than the whole human face: it is in fact activated at first by a sign stimulus comprising no more than a pair of dots. Nevertheless, however activated, as a social releaser of maternal behaviour it is powerful. Can we doubt that the more and better an infant smiles the better is he loved and cared for? It is fortunate for their survival that babies are so designed by Nature that they beguile and enslave mothers. (Bowlby 1958: 367)

Bowlby stressed the absolute importance of a child's secure attachment to its mother as the basis for their healthy development⁴⁷. He claimed that mothers, due to hormones set off by the birthing process and evolutionary processes, are 'naturally' inclined to nurture their children, and if this nurturance is missing, so-called 'maternal deprivation' can lead to mental disorders in children.

Newcome et al. (1982) review the historical setting of the interwar period when Bowlby's early research took place. The authors argue that the consequences of World War I in terms of bereavement, mourning and loss, which also left many children orphaned, had a great influence on psychoanalytic thought and psychiatry in Britain and stirred Bowlby's interest in the effects of maternal deprivation on child development:

His attention was originally drawn to separation in the 1920s and 1930s, largely because of the extensive experience of both lay people and professionals with adult mourning reactions in postwar Britain. This concern with problems linked to mourning may have combined with a deep commitment to tracing the early roots of adult disorders and an assumption of a strong form of developmental continuity. (Newcombe and Lerner 1982: 11)

Marshall Klaus and John H. Kennel (Klaus and Kennel 1976) further developed attachment theory and designated the first moments after birth as a 'critical period', when a so-called 'imprinting' of the *mother* on the baby takes place: "Whereas Bowlby focused on how infants become attached to their mothers in the months after birth, bonding posited a rapid process whereby mothers form an emotional attachment to infants in the hours right after birth" (Hrdy 1999: 487). In the late 1970s the idea of the 'critical period' transformed maternity centre policies in the US (and later other

⁴⁷ Bowlby based his findings on a study of children who were already living in difficult conditions, as they were placed in foster families, orphanages, hospitals or refugee centres, which is why his research is deemed questionable by authors such as Kunz (2015: 60).

countries), which abandoned centralised nurseries and left newborns with their mothers to ‘room in’ (ibid, p. 486).⁴⁸

Attachment theory remains highly influential in contemporary advice literature. The importance of a ‘good’ attachment between parent and child is stressed, for example, in the Pro Juventute *Elternbriefe* and Remo Largo’s *Baby Jahre* (2018), which I will discuss later. ‘Promoting’ a secure attachment between parents and children is a major concern of many contemporary childcare professionals, such as the MVB, which will be discussed in the following chapter. Midwives and infant nurses emphasise the importance of immediate skin contact between mother and child after delivery – nowadays fathers are not exempted here either. Both MVBs who used to work as paediatric nurses and midwives working at maternity centres who I talked to during my fieldwork noted that they observed the mothers’ behaviour towards their infants after labour and in the first few days afterwards in hospital. Mothers who were deemed uninterested in their baby who, for instance, preferred to focus on their mobile phone instead of engaging with their newborn, were seen as being at risk of not forming an emotional bond to their baby. One MVB noted that paediatric nurses who observed this at the maternity centre might inform the local MVB about this who may then try to strongly motivate the mother to attend the advice centre after her discharge from the hospital. ‘Baby wearing’, as encouraged by attachment-parenting advocate William Sears (2008), has been trending in Euro-American countries for the last few years. In Switzerland, a multitude of so-called *Trageberatungen* (baby wearing advice) can be found online, where parents can book a session with a counsellor who advises them on how to best carry their baby in a sling. The

⁴⁸ Hrdy notes that Bowlby was briefly intrigued by the idea that human mothers imprint on their babies as it occurs in animals such as sheep, but was quickly convinced that such a mechanism was unlikely to evolve in primates. Hrdy herself is highly critical of Klaus and Kennel’s concept of ‘bonding’ in humans. For a mother *already* at risk of abandoning her baby (for example due to gender preference, a newborn’s health condition, extreme poverty and famine, stigmatisation of single motherhood or other factors), contact with the baby directly after the birth can make a difference in terms of secure attachment many months later. However, according to Hrdy, there is no evidence that failing to make contact with a newborn in the first hours or days after the birth has any ill effects in terms of attachment if a mother is *not* at risk of abandoning her baby (Hrdy 1999: 315-317, 486-488)

websites usually allude to the ‘naturalness’ of baby wearing and stress that this way of carrying a baby supports bonding between baby and parent.⁴⁹

At this point, I want to stress that, in line with Hrdy, I do not intend to suggest that Bowlby was wrong when he argued that infants seek the secure attachment to a dedicated caretaker who pays attention to their needs. Their survival simply depends on it and it is needed for healthy emotional development (Hrdy 1999: 495). The mother is also the perfect candidate to act as the primary attachment figure and address those needs because if she, for example, breastfeeds the baby, she is already close to it and, as Hrdy argues, around the world mothers usually fulfil this role, although this is by no means cast in stone (ibid: 501). However, the notion that the mother is the *only* person who can foster a secure attachment and provide a sense of security, and in turn is the only person responsible for the healthy development of offspring is problematic, especially when many mothers work outside the home and delegate care tasks to other relatives, daycare staff or nannies. Ideas regarding what ‘proper’ attachment behaviour and responses to children’s ‘signals’ look like can result in the pathologising and increased surveillance and disciplining of mothers. These issues will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

The recommendation to use an authoritarian parenting style and corporal punishment found in nineteenth-century advice literature declined over time (Doepke and Zilibotti 2014; Kopp 1974: 277ff) and eventually experts condemned ‘physical’, ‘emotional’ and ‘verbal’ violence. The ideal of a ‘nonviolent’ *Erziehung* – and here violence is understood as a very broad concept – is predominant today and has its origins in the 1960s and ’70s. ‘Good communication’ with children became considered key for a harmonious parent-child relationship (Eschner 2017). American psychologist Thomas Gordon’s (1918-2002) famous *P.E.T., Parent Effectiveness Training: The Tested New Way to Raise Responsible Children* (1970) was published for the first time in 1972 in German and promoted a ‘non-coercive’, ‘non-manipulative’ handling of children, without the use of

⁴⁹ See <https://www.tragelfen.ch/ueber-uns/>, <https://steinzeitbaby.ch> or <https://www.herzanherz.ch/trageberatung/>. Many MVB centres also offer baby wearing courses.

punishments or rewards. Gordon also offered one of the first parenting courses in the 1960s in which parents could learn how to communicate appropriately with their children⁵⁰. Another important advocate of ‘proper communication’ is the American psychologist Marshall Rosenberg (1934-2015), whose concept of ‘nonviolent communication’ has inspired many contemporary advice books authors and is still used in parenting courses today.

Advice Material from the 1980s to Today

Since the 1980s books written by Anglo-Saxon authors, such as British psychologist Penelope Leach (1986) and American paediatrician Terry Brazelton (1998) (Eschner 2017: 227), have become increasingly influential in the German-speaking region of Europe. Hays reviews Leach’s, Brazelton’s and Spock’s approaches to childrearing in *The Cultural Contradiction of Motherhood* and concludes that they propagate what she calls the ‘intensive mothering ideology’, such as placing a strong emphasis on mothers’ responsibility for fostering child development and child-centredness. While there are differences in the ways the three authors approach advising parents, they all agree that: “a good parent is (...) guided by the child’s desires” (Hays 1996: 54). In the late 1980s, for example, Leach announced in the introduction to *Your Baby and Child* that it “is written from your baby or child’s point of view because, however fashion in childrearing may shift and alter, that viewpoint is both the most important and the most neglected” (Leach 1986: 8)⁵¹.

Mediating information on child development in order to help parents understand their children’s needs better, as done by Spock, continues to be a central element of contemporary advice literature. In the Swiss context, Remo Largo (1943-2020) must be mentioned. Largo was a paediatrician who carried out a major long-term study on child development at the children’s hospital in Zürich. His book *Baby Jahre. Entwicklung und Erziehung in den ersten vier Jahren* (Baby Years.

⁵⁰ Today courses inspired by Gordon can be taken worldwide, while the overall aim of the parent training is to ‘improve’ parent-child relationships, see <https://gordonparenting.com>.

⁵¹ Leach has toned down this statement in newer editions.

Development and *Erziehung* in the first four years) (2018) was first published in 1993 and is omnipresent in Switzerland and other German-speaking countries. It is also one of the first hits when searching for ‘*Elternratgeber*’ or ‘*Erziehungsratgeber*’ on Amazon.de⁵². Like many modern guidebook authors, Largo addressed parents in general. Largo began his book by ensuring parents that they possess an innate ability to ‘read’ their child’s needs and that without it, they were not capable of raising their child, thereby silently referring to Bowlby and his attachment theory (Largo 2018: 17). In the book, which is a big tome of over 500 pages that is conceptualised as a kind of encyclopaedia, Largo explains to parents how children develop and takes this as the basis for his advice on how parents can address their child’s individuality and their social and emotional needs. A multitude of charts on sleeping behaviour, growth and diet, as well as images depicting information about attachment behaviour, motor skills and development inform the book. Largo deems it very important that parents know about the sequences of child development and acknowledge that child development is very diverse – children reach certain developmental stages at different ages, and some stages may be more pronounced in some children than in others. As Eschner (2017: 268) observes, Largo places high demands on parents when propagating *Erziehung* that is ideally informed by child development research: from this perspective ‘good’ parents should educate themselves about the latest findings on child development and pay close attention to their child’s individuality.

Largo asserted that this knowledge, and the readiness to “adapt to the child’s behaviour and to always take the child seriously”, would assist parents in freeing themselves from ‘traditional’ norms and ideas which would prevent them from being guided by their child’s developmental stage and individual needs (Largo 2018: 18; my translation). During my conversations with some mothers, the notion that they needed to ‘shake off’ outdated conceptions of children and the harmful childrearing practices of their own parents and grandparents loomed large and was

⁵² Seven mothers that I talked to mentioned in a self-evident manner that they had Largo’s *Baby Jahre* at home. Several MVBs also referred to Largo’s book when discussing their sources of information on child development.

perceived as a very difficult task with a lot of potential for relapses. Older generations, according to some of my interlocuters, had no knowledge about the latest findings regarding child development, which made them less sensitive to children's needs. This was also described by MVB Tina, who, when I asked her whether her clients asked their own relatives for advice and whether this played a role in her counselling, commented on the tremendous change in views on proper childrearing and also talked about her own experiences with her parents:

I also know how it is myself as a mother with [asking advice from] my own mother. I've noticed the change in a generation (...) the change in the last 100 years... the child was taken away from their parents, it must fall asleep on its own, when the baby screams it is good for their lungs, it will be spoiled if you keep carrying it around (...). Breastfeeding for six months is great, if you do it any longer the child be spoiled. In the last few years, a lot has changed: attachment parenting, return to a need-oriented *Erziehung*, children are allowed to sleep in the parental bed, baby wearing and not pushing babies in a pram, not letting them cry it out. I also had to tell my father-in-law – back in the olden days, the baby would have been eaten by a sabre-tooth cat if you always let it cry (...). I think in the last five to ten years there's been an extreme change, so the views of our mothers are deemed outdated. (MVB Tina, recorded interview, 05.11.2019)

The great majority of my parent interlocuters noted that they did not ask their older relatives for advice or did not consider them 'good' advice-givers. For example, Amelie, a mother of a toddler son, pointed out that the older generations' experiences as caretakers of small children had been too long ago for them to be able to give helpful advice:

The generation of my mother and mother-in-law – they only annoyed me with their stupid advice. It always comes unsolicited and if I *do* have questions then they don't know the answer, because it [the time when they were the caretaker of a baby or toddler] was five million years ago. (...). It is too far removed from them. When the child is about one year old they are good babysitters, but you have to give them a lot of instructions. (Recorded interview, Amelie, 04.12.2019)

As well as developmental psychology, 'neuroscience' and 'brain research' have increasingly informed parenting advice. Since the 1990s 'brain claims' (Macvarish 2014, 2016) have emphasised parents' pivotal role in their children's neurological development. Macvarish (2014, 2016) explores the rise of 'neuroparenting' in UK policy, especially in regard to early childhood and the

concomitant attempt to normalise parental education through government action. Macvarish defines neuroparenting as a:

way of thinking which claims that ‘we now know’ (by implication, once and for all) how children ought to be raised. The basis for this final achievement of certainty regarding childrearing, which we know has changed dramatically from one historical period to the next and which we are aware still varies greatly across diverse human societies, is said to be discoveries made through neuroscience about the development of the human brain, in particular, during infancy. (Macvarish 2016: 2)

Children’s brain development remains a central element of contemporary parenting books, such as the *Das gewünschtete Wunschkind treibt mich in den Wahnsinn. Der entspannte Weg durch Trotzphasen* by Seide and Graf (2019)⁵³. The authors⁵⁴ explain how brain development shapes children’s ‘autonomy phase’ (see Chapter 4, footnote 115 for a discussion of the term) and how parents should react appropriately to children during temper tantrums, based on the latest insights from neuroscience.

Today the number of parenting guides, which according to Eschner, has seen a ‘boom’ since the 1990s (Eschner 2017: 329), is hardly comprehensible. The search for *Elternratgeber* yields over 4,000 hits on Amazon.de, while *Erziehungsratgeber* yields over 30,000 hits. Since the 2000s the field of *Erziehungsratgeber* has expanded even more through the internet. In the context of the twenty-first century, online parenting fora play a major role when it comes to advice giving. Parents can google any question regarding childcare and are provided with information 24 hours a day. While there are some fora where childcare experts such as paediatricians or midwives can be contacted by parents, who then answer those questions publicly or privately, there is also a multitude of fora where parents give each other advice⁵⁵. In this context, parents’ desire to receive

⁵³ A Wunschkind is a child that was ‘planned’ and wished for by its parents. The title translates as *The Most Desired Wunschkind Is Driving Me Insane. A Relaxed Way Through Defiance Phases*. Like Largo’s *Baby Jahre*, *Das gewünschtete Wunschkind treibt mich in den Wahnsinn* is also one of the first hits on Amazon.de when searching for *Elternratgeber*.

⁵⁴ Seide and Graf do not have a background in neuroscience. While Seide is a pedagogue, Graf has a background in law and economics.

⁵⁵ The literature suggests that online parenting fora are highly gendered and mostly used by women. There has been little research on fathers’ use of online parenting fora and discussion boards, however (Lupton, Pedersen and Thomas 2016).

experienced-based advice or first-hand accounts from peers who are in a similar situation has been highlighted by scholars studying parents' advice-seeking online (Plantin and Daneback 2009). At the same time, parents also strive to share their own experiences and provide information to other parents searching for advice, as shown by Lawton et. al. for example in their study on parents of children with skin diseases, who wish to share the 'expertise' they have built up over time (Lawton, Roberts and Gibb 2005).⁵⁶ The emergence of the 'self-styled parenting expert' is significant and nowadays inextricably linked to social and digital media (Hardyment 2007; Lee 2014a). In *You're doing it wrong. Mothering, media, and medical expertise*, Johnson and Quinlan find that social media both "continue and interrupt the dissemination of expertise" (2019: 8) and complicate the classification of 'expert' and 'lay knowledge' for the users:

(...) in chapter 3, on pregnancy behaviour, we recount the claim of an FB [Facebook] poster that caffeine consumption caused chromosomal abnormalities. This claim, delivered as incontrovertible fact without supporting evidence and presented as if all of medical science agreed, illustrated a lay expert who referenced medical research (technical expertise) without citing a single source. Perhaps the most unfortunate impact of social media is the false confidence these platforms provide – a unique combination of some level of anonymity and limitations on post length allows individuals to make confident claims devoid of context and lacking sufficient explanation. These increasingly common posts can add to the stress and anxiety of parenting, as claims are hard to assess and expertise is increasingly challenging to define and ultimately to trust. (Johnson and Quinlan 2019: 15f)

Eschner remarks that, due to the proliferation of sources of advice, choosing from the wide array of material has not only become more difficult and time-consuming, but also 'riskier', because parents may select the 'wrong' sources (Eschner 2017: 302).

This leads onto the next section of this chapter, which explores advice material specific to Switzerland: the *Elternbriefe*, parent letters, by youth foundation Pro Juventute. The letters' distribution is funded by the state and they are sent to parents on a regular basis⁵⁷, aiming to combat

⁵⁶ I was surprised how many responses for advice or information-seeking questions were yielded in the Facebook mothers' fora that I joined for my research. Some responders clearly rejoiced in sharing their own experiences or providing the post's initiators with information, guidance or, if they did not have an answer to their question, simply expressing their compassion.

⁵⁷ In the first year, they are sent on a monthly basis; in the second and third years they are sent every two months.

the ‘flood of information’ and setting parents on a path guided by information validated by the ‘right’ experts.

Parent Letters against the Flood of Information

Pro Juventute was founded as a private foundation in 1912 (Kunz 2015: 86). The fact that, since its beginnings, important government officials were Pro Juventute board members, however, gave it a public ‘vener’ (Kunz 2015: 87). According to Kunz, Pro Juventute declared in its founding-year statutes that they wanted to raise the Swiss population’s sense of responsibility regarding children’s wellbeing as well as protect children from ‘evil’ (Kunz 2015: 91). While the foundation financed itself through the sale of charity stamps and postcards, it also received funds from the government until 1967 (ibid: 85).

While Pro Juventute is widely known today as the author of the parent letters, the foundation is also noteworthy in another regard. Between 1926 and 1973, supported by government institutions, Pro Juventute carried out the now widely-condemned *Kinder der Landstrasse* (Children of the Country Road) project. This entailed forcibly removing approximately 900 children from Yenish families and placing them in foster homes, reform schools or psychiatric institutions, with the aim of assimilating them into a sedentary lifestyle (Furrer et al. 2014: 15). The Yenish ‘traditionally’ led a travelling lifestyle in various parts of Western Europe. They speak their own language, Yenish, that is based on German, but also includes elements of other languages such as Yiddish or Romani. 30,000 Yenish live in Switzerland today, where they are a recognised cultural minority. About 2,000-3,000 Yenish people maintain a travelling lifestyle, which the government had attempted to eradicate until the 1970s (BAK, 2019). Despite Pro Juventute’s involvement in the persecution of the Yenish, the foundation has not lost its claim to advise parents.

In 1969, Pro Juventute launched their parent letters. The parent letters were modelled on the *Peter Pelican Letters* which were distributed to parents for the first time in the US state of Louisiana in the 1940s (Lüscher, Koebbel and Fisch 1982). Anna Belle magazine praised the letters

for always arriving at the “right moment” and “providing advice in good amounts” (AB 1969, 32(21): 33, quoted in Kopp 1974: 127; my translation). The letters were originally developed by the Pro Juventute *Mother and Child* department, which was one of the many task forces committed to fighting infant mortality rates in the early twentieth century and one of the main initiators of advice centres (Kunz 2015: 95).

Today 1,300 Swiss communes ‘gift’ the letters to first-time parents, while the first three letters are usually sent automatically to parents (ProJuventute 2015: 8). If the parents wish to receive the letters on a monthly basis, they can sign up to a free subscription⁵⁸. In Zürich City, the letters are provided to parents free of charge until the third year of their child’s life. According to Zürich City council, two-third of the parents provided with the sample letters sign up to receive the first (first year of life) and second (second year of life) set of letters. 70% percent of parents order the third set (third year of life) for which a new subscription has to be made (Stadtrat ZH 2015: 1). This probably makes the letters the most widely distributed advice material in Switzerland. Pro Juventute reports that in 2015, 60,000 first-time parents received their *Elternbriefe* (ProJuventute 2015: 5). The letters “accompany” parents during the first six years of their child’s life⁵⁹, so there are three additional sets (ProJuventute), which however, are usually not provided to parents for free. The fact that the letters are financed by the communes shows an enduring connection between Pro Juventute and the Swiss state that was already present during the *Kinder der Landstrasse* project. Kunz (2015) argues that the concepts and values concerning children, families and parenting found in the letters coincide with those of the state and thus they can be conceived of as part of the national family policy.

The idea behind the letters, according to Alfred Ledermann, central office member of Pro Juventute in the 1970s, was to reach ‘insecure’ parents who were not making use of the MVB or other parental education programmes, but were being confronted with ‘problems’ daily:

⁵⁸ The letters are only provided for free for the first-born child.

⁵⁹ The MVBs’ work with parents is also termed an ‘accompaniment’ of parents (see Chapter 4)

Many parents neither use the mothers' advisors nor parental education courses. But they encounter problems on a daily basis when it comes to the care and *Erziehung* of their children. I have long been searching for a method through which simple answers to daily questions about *Erziehung* can be given. I wanted to provide ways for parents to conquer their insecurity. (Ledermann 1979 quoted in Kunz 2015: 100; my translation)

Today, policy makers still envisage the *Elternbriefe* as an *Instanze* (entity) that assists 'insecure' parents in figuring out what is 'best' for their child:

Children should receive the best possible care and support. There is a multitude of advice literature on the market. This enormous flood of information increases parents' insecurity. The parent letters by Pro Juventute strengthen mothers and fathers in being parents, promote parents' understanding of their children's needs, and provide security when it comes to *Erziehung* as well as orientation for living together. (...) The mothers' and fathers' advisors confirm from their practical experience and based on feedback [from parents?] that there is great insecurity among parents when it comes to determining what is best for their child. While there is a lot of information on *Erziehung* and child development on the internet, the quality of the sources is not verifiable, and information is partly contradictory. Thus, the extended provision of professionally-qualified information is a good and effective support for both parents and advisors. (Soldati and Peduzzi 2019; my translation)

The quote above stems from a statement by Lucerne city council, which decided to finance the letters until a child's third year. Similar descriptions of the letters can be found on the homepages of Swiss communities. Part of the description originally derives from Pro Juventute itself, which used it on their homepage to define the aims of the letters until at least May 2019. However, Pro Juventute has since removed this description. According to the statement, figuring out what is 'best' is not complicated by parents' unwillingness to educate themselves, but by the flood of inconsistent information online and a profusion of advice literature that results in insecurity on the side of parents who are unsure how to determine the credibility of sources and what is 'right' for their child. In this context, the letters which provide 'professionally-qualified information' are presented as an 'antidote'. Parents confused by the multitude of sources of advice as well as the difficulty of verifying the information they find are set back on track by a 'standardised' childcare manual sanctioned and gifted to them by the state.

The great majority of research participants living in the German-speaking region of Switzerland had received these letters, while my interlocutors from the French-speaking region,

who were all expats, had not heard of them. One reason for this may be their expatriate background, but some also lived in communes which do not fund the free distribution of the letters to first-time parents.

The letters, which have been edited several times since their first publication, are available in German, French and Italian and address a wide range of topics, such as nutrition, care, sleeping and toilet training, but also topics in the area of gender, motherhood, fatherhood, single parenthood, working parents, non-parental supervision, violence, children's rights and parental love. The editorial team cooperates closely with experts from the fields of medicine, psychology, pedagogy and nutritional sciences as well as MVBs.⁶⁰

The letters are each about 30 pages long, so they are more like small handbooks than letters. The 2018 edition is richly illustrated with humorous drawings mediating important information, such as never leaving a baby alone on the changing table, or showing daily situations in parents' lives. The use of drawings to educate parents makes the letters seem less formal and patronising. Advertisements for products such as Vitamin D supplements, toothpaste and health insurance schemes make parents aware of all the things that could be important for safe, healthy childrearing – and raise the question of to what extent advertisers finance the letter. They also include many pictures of babies and toddlers, mothers, fathers and sometimes other caretakers, attempting to draw a 'raw' picture of parenthood and childhood. In contrast to the photography found in much of the mid-twentieth-century manuals which convey clean, almost sterile settings, the parent letters show children with snotty noses, dirty faces or scratches, and stressed, tired parents.

In 1989, Pro Juventute began publishing parent letters specifically for migrants, under the name *Unser Kind* (Our Child). They are available in the "migration languages", namely Albanian,

⁶⁰ There are also a number of so-called *Extrabriefe* (additional letters) that solely focus on a specific topic, such as the how to prepare children for kindergarten or the 'body and feelings' as well as the '*Trotzalter*' (defiance age). There is also a letter for grandparents, that discusses how they can "deepen their contact with their children and grandchildren and evade areas of tension" (ProJuventute n.d.-a).

Arabic, Bosnian-Serbian-Croatian, English, Portuguese, Spanish, Tamil, Tigrinya and Turkish. According to Pro Juventute's website, the "successful integration of migrant children begins in the first years of life and incorporates the whole family"(ProJuventute n.d.-b: ; my translation). *Unser Kind* reflects the growing importance of reaching migrant parents in early childhood policy, which I also encountered in my work with the MVBs.

In the first year of life, the letters arrive monthly and cover what is thought to be relevant at a certain developmental stage: "By subscription they arrive in time before the next developmental step" (Stadtrat ZH 2015: 1; my translation). In the letter *Your Child at Five Months Old*, for example, the introduction of solids is addressed, which is recommended at around this age. Similar to Spock, the parent letters encourage parents to evaluate their child's developmental stage in order to find out whether it is ready for the introduction of solids: "Is your child ready for the next step? Can it hold up its head and does it put things in its mouth? Does your child watch with interest when you are eating? Some children are ready to eat solids at this age, some are not" (ProJuventute 2018d: 14; my translation). The letters strive to provide this information at the right moment, so that parents adapt their parenting practices to their child's developmental stage. The letter *Your Child Is One Year Old* prepares parents for their child's future developments, such as talking or discovering their own free will, and describes parents' role in this as a constant evaluator of needs:

You as parents are allowed to accompany your child in its growing independency. An exciting and yet challenging task, because accompanying means giving security and letting go at the right moment. Try to keep up with what is happening and attempt to always figure out anew what your child needs from you. It will be dependent on your protection, your security and your encouragement for a long time, but it also needs a lot of space, so that it can make its own experiences through observing, imitating and trying out things by itself (ProJuventute 2018f: 4; my translation).

Summary

Nineteenth-century expert advice was mostly written by men and targeted middle-class mothers. As the wet nursing example shows, authors advocated the exclusion of third parties when it came to nurturing children and deemed childrearing a 'natural' and 'sacred' task for mothers exclusively.

While mothering children was more ‘distributed’, through the use of wet nurses for example, experts propagated a reduction in ‘personnel’. Care work was narrowed down to one woman who received a lot of moral pressure to assume tasks like breastfeeding herself.

In the early twentieth century, ‘science’ increasingly informed manuals and resulted in the medicalisation and psychologisation of childcare. Acquiring information and skills in childrearing based on medical expertise was recommended, and following advice from laywomen strongly discouraged. This represents the increasing importance of an expert-led way of childrearing, a central element of modern (responsible) parenting.

At the same time, the establishment of mothers’ schools and advice centres can be observed, which initially targeted mothers from the poorer classes, where child mortality rates were high. In the context of the professionalisation of early childhood services and maternal education, a new kind of professional emerged, the infant welfare worker (*Säuglingsfürsorgerin*) who instructed expectant women and mothers in hygiene and care. While many scholars reviewing the history of childrearing manuals and expert advice stress that this field was dominated by males, the Swiss example shows that ‘on the ground’ mothers were also advised by females. Many schools and advice centres were started by women.

In the middle of the twentieth century psychology, in particular psychoanalysis and developmental psychology, transformed expert advice in the US. Children’s wellbeing, and the fulfilling of their emotional and physical needs – which were defined by experts – took centre stage. Spock’s ‘baby bible’ stressed the importance of parental love, sought to re-install trust in mothers’ instincts that had been called into question by experts insisting on rigid schedules, and sensitised mothers to their children’s development, individuality, desires and impulses. Attachment theory further stressed a mother’s essential role in her child’s healthy development as well as her instinctive responses to her child’s needs. Advice became more and more child centred. From the 1970s onwards any form of violence became taboo in advice literature, while more ‘subtle discipline’ (Lee 2017) and proper communication was supposed to solve conflicts between parents and children.

In light of contemporary advice material, such as *Baby Jahre, Das Gewünschteste Wunschkind* or the parent letters, developmental psychology's authority on how childrearing is done 'right' remains strong until today.

While advice literature cannot tell us much about parents' lived practices, they do provide insights into the discourses, tensions and concerns prevalent at the time they were written and published (Heimdinger 2006; Zeller 2018). This review of the guides and exploration of the history of mothers' schools and advice centres indicates that the groundwork for what Hays (1996) labels 'intensive mothering' was laid as early as the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the context of advice literature, the 'intensification' of mothering was a gradual process that started with deeming mothers to be children's exclusive caretakers in the nineteenth century, which was triggered by many different factors, such as a stricter separation of production and reproduction (Hrdy 1999).

With the growing influence of medicine and psychology in childcare advice in the twentieth century, the image of the 'educated' and 'child-centred' mother emerged. Mothers' responsibilities widened, according to advice literature, as authors suggested that 'good' child raising means informing oneself about the latest insights on child development and brain research. Meanwhile, older relatives' role of providing new parents with advice and guidance has been diminished. Outdated ideas on childrearing promoted by older generations are brushed away by a scientific approach as suggested by Largo, who notes that parents can rid themselves of attitudes passed on from one generation to the next by acquiring knowledge about child development.

Ehrenreich and English claim that the "great romance" between women and experts ended in the late twentieth century, as advice proliferated and none of the parenting styles, such as 'permissive', 'authoritative' or 'authoritarian', triumphed as generally accepted (Ehrenreich and English 2005: 345). I am not convinced by this, however, as at least in the context of childrearing there is no evidence that mothers reject expert advice or that experts have ceased giving advice to mothers. While advice material indeed proliferated and self-styled parenting experts also emerged,

who may compete with trained professionals such as psychologists or paediatricians, policy makers still deem child raising, especially in early childhood, a task that is best expert-led.

As discussed, policy makers ensure that mothers have access to professionals such as midwives and gynaecologists during pregnancy as well as after the birth of their baby until at least the end of the postpartum period. By means of the tradition-steeped institution of the MVB, the communes provide parents with trained childcare experts, who they can consult face-to-face on a regular basis free of charge until their child is five years old. Statistics show that it is mostly women who consult MVBs (Frey 2020; FVMVB 2018). The state further finances the distribution of advice material to parents. While Pro Juventute claims that 98% of their readers read the letters from beginning to end (ProJuventute 2018i)⁶¹, it is difficult to determine if and how the letters affect parents' actual practices. Still, the fact that most parents sign up for a subscription indicates that free access to information and expert advice on childrearing sanctioned by the state is at least not unwelcome.

While modern advice material usually addresses both parents and stresses that a mother's *and* father's care is equally important for the development and wellbeing of the child, there are studies that indicate that guide books on parenting are mostly bought and read by women (Keller 2000; Zeller 2018). Further, Sunderland's review of contemporary parentcraft texts in the British context shows that mothers are still widely constructed as children's main caretakers, whereas fathers are defined as fulfilling more supportive or helping functions: "‘Father as baby entertainer’, ‘Father as mother’s bumbling assistant’, ‘Father as line manager’, ‘Mother as manager of the father’s role in childcare’" (Sunderland 2000: 268).

While the mother-expert relationship may not be described as a ‘romance’, experts still advise on childcare and are even supported by the state to offer their services, and it is women who seem to engage with experts during early childhood and parenthood more often. The great majority

⁶¹ This number was given in an information brochure for companies interested in advertising in the letters.

of parents I interviewed read ‘analogue’ advice material in the form of books, the parent letters or articles in parenting magazines (20 out of 26 parents); those who did not read analogue advice material googled questions online or visited parenting fora to ask for advice or information. While a minority of mothers stated that they shared advice material they deemed ‘interesting’ or ‘good’ with their partner who would then read it as well, most of them told me they would rather share the information they got out from the advice material with their partner verbally, as their partner would not read it.

Another important point highlighted in this chapter is that the aspiration to ‘educate’ mothers was initiated not by the state, but mostly by private associations. The state, however, gradually became involved by providing facilities and eventually making advice centres as well as the distribution of advice material part of its national family and health policy, by funding the services and anchoring them in its laws. Certainly, the state recognised the potential of these services to govern families with certain aims in mind, such as providing children with ‘good’ parents who will ensure their children’s health and wellbeing so that they can become healthy, productive, law-abiding, tax-paying citizens. This chapter, therefore, not only reveals the gradual intensification of demands placed on mothers in advice literature, but also shows how experts, private institutions, social activists, and later on the state forged the disciplining of the family in the twentieth century.

As noted, one motivation for establishing institutions such as milk kitchens, advice centres and mothers’ schools was to curb the high infant death rate in working-class families in the early twentieth century. Their establishment thus presents the aspiration to “invest in” and “develop” life (Foucault 1978: 136-139) and surveil, assist and ‘reform’ those whose childrearing practices are deemed (potentially) inappropriate.

The family, children’s bodies and development, as well as parents’ childrearing practices are a special concern of policy makers and their ‘biopolitical’ and ‘anatomo-political’ endeavours. The power wielded by the modern state, according to Foucault that brought forth both anatomo-politics and biopolitics, is both individualising and centralising.

Centralisation is achieved by developing highly-elaborate administrations and bureaucracies that organise, monitor and control the population as a whole. Foucault dubbed the state's individualising power 'pastoral power' (Foucault 2009), which allows the state to influence individuals' daily lives for the 'better' through the means of, for example, 'pastoral power officials' (Nadesan 2008: 24), such as probationers, social workers or childcare experts, who provide guidance to parents face-to-face.

The construction of a widespread network of advice centres to coordinate medical care for children and to instruct mothers in hygiene and care according to the latest findings from medicine and psychology represented a 'biopolitical measure' (Foucault 1978: 139). It allowed for knowledge production about families' health status, which in turn permitted the state to tailor health and family policies and justify interventions. The appointment of 'pastoral power officials' (Foucault 2007; Nadesan 2008), such as the infant welfare workers and later on the MVBs who exercise a "normalizing gaze" (Foucault 1995: 177, 184) based on their position as experts, is an 'anatomopolitical' endeavour, which centres on the individual's disciplining and enhancement during home visits or consultations at advice centres (Foucault 1978: 139). Childrearing guides and childcare experts use psychological theories to construct 'truths' about the correct, ethical way of raising children that is adapted to their 'natural' mode of development as well as their individuality.

What the governing of parenting by state-affiliated experts looks like in practice today is explored in the next chapter, which discusses the pastoral work of the mothers' and fathers' advisors.

3. The Pastoral Work of Mothers' and Fathers' Advisors

I am not exactly a friend, but I am friendly, nice, just like we should treat children. It does not mean that we don't set boundaries, we do set boundaries, but more in a nice tone, just being friendly. Kind of like: 'Did you notice that you feel better now?' Just saying in a reassuring manner that she [the mother] is doing it well, and what she could do on top of that, so that things will get even better. (MVB Nina, recorded interview, 28.05.19)

In the quote above, a mothers' and fathers' advisor (MVB) describes the way she converses with clients. She stresses her gentle, encouraging way of speaking to parents, which she compares to the ideal handling of children by adults. Her counsel, she claims, aims to improve the childrearing skills of a mother, who she asks – at least in her example – to reflect on whether she is feeling better now that she has implemented her advice.

This chapter⁶² explores expert guidance on parenting in Switzerland in early childhood and discusses the work of the MVB, whose publicly-stated mission is to counsel parents in various childrearing-related issues, while providing them with “security” as well as skills in handling children (Brugg n.d.; MVB Leimental n.d.). Early childhood policy, which the MVB is an integral part of, aims to safeguard and promote the health and development of preschool children. Together with pregnancy, early childhood is seen as a seminal phase that directly influences an individual's physical and mental condition in adulthood and during which the prevention of illnesses and development disorders is regarded as essential (Ballif 2019; Dratva et al. 2019; Stern, Cammarano, et al. 2019).

By describing the range of tasks that MVBs engage in as well as their perceptions of their role as advisors and interactions with parents, this chapter will provide insights into the technologies of power at work in the landscape of early childhood programmes.

⁶² A shortened version of this chapter has been published as an article in 2022 in *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics*, Vol. 8 No. 3, Special Issue: Parenting and the State, pp. 66-82.

Before delving deeper into this Chapter, I want to make it clear that my primary aim is not to criticise public early childhood services, neither do I aim to undermine their importance or denigrate their significance: the MVBs' support can prove invaluable both to parents in need of information or assistance and to children's wellbeing. I have benefited from the MVB's service myself. For example, when I was upset about an issue at my daughter's daycare and wanted to hear a perspective on the issue from a 'neutral' party, I used the MVB's telephone counselling service. I perceived the advisor's recommendations as helpful, and simply talking to her helped to calm my feelings about the issue.

Services providing professional advice such as the MVB also have the important function to prevent or disclose cases of child neglect or abuse. The home can be a dangerous place and statistically a child's own parents are the most likely to cause it harm. According to the Swiss Society of Paediatrics' national child protection statistics from 2020, most cases of child abuse and neglect happen within the family, where young infants are an especially high-risk group. The report states that the use of physical violence is still widespread in *Erziehung* and that three children had died that year as the result of abuse (Wopmann 2020).

Nonetheless, critique is an important dimension of the social sciences, and social research and critique of policies and public services should matter to policy makers, who ideally want to ensure that their policies do not have unintended consequences or even bring about outcomes they are intended to prevent. Against this background, a quote from Foucault himself is especially apt to describe why critique of policies, public programmes, or the practices of individual counsellors funded by the state is so crucial: "People know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does" (Foucault in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983: 187)⁶³.

⁶³ I am thankful to Donald Gardner who drew my attention to this quote.

From Coercing to Empowering?

Up to the 1980s governing families through child welfare institutions was often marked by coercive and repressive measures (Vandenbroeck et al. 2011). In the context of Switzerland, the project ‘Children of the Country Road’ comes to mind. Between 1926 and 1973, Pro Juventute forcibly removed Yenish children from their families because they did not agree with their parents’ travelling lifestyle. The children were placed in orphanages, foster homes, reform schools or psychiatric institutions in order to assimilate them to a sedentary lifestyle and turn them into ‘industrious’ citizens (Furrer et al. 2014: 15; Galle 2014: 385). From 1929 onwards, the federal government funded Pro Juventute’s ‘project’ (Hüttenmoser and Zatti 2010) and, as mentioned in the last chapter, senior government officials acted as Pro Juventute board members (Kunz 2015: 87). The measures taken are reminiscent of what happened to the Stolen Generations in Australia, where state institutions took aboriginal children away from their parents and placed them in white foster families. Similar actions were taken in the United States of America, where Indian Residential Schools were established in the seventeenth century which aimed to assimilate Native American children into a Euro-American culture and lifestyle.

In addition to the Yenish, children from poor working-class families or unmarried mothers were also forcibly removed and placed in institutions or ‘foster’ families. Up to the 1960s, they could also be employed as *Verdingkinder* – indentured children – who had to carry out hard work on farms for their board and lodging. Poverty was one of the key reasons why children were removed from their families in the twentieth century (Businger and Ramsauer 2019), as it hindered families from living up to certain standards that social workers and policy makers believed were necessary for ‘good’ child raising conditions. Societal norms of familial organisation and cleanliness made the working class the target of child protection interventions, as their children were seen as needing to be saved from neglect (Furrer et al. 2014: 17). Parents’ state of mind – “intellectual

inferiority” or “imbecility” – could be invoked in order to remove custody rights as well (Gallati and Hauss 2014: 91).

The state’s power to intervene in families and remove children from their parents was anchored in the Swiss Civil Code (ZGB) from 1907. In 1912, three child protection statutes were added to the ZGB (Arts. 283, 284 and 285). According to Articles 283 and 284, the Guardianship Office could impose the so-called *Fürsorgeaufsicht*⁶⁴ as well as the *Fremdplatzierung*⁶⁵ (placement) of children. The withdrawal of parental authority (Art. 285) had to be requested from the district counsellor. According to Businger and Ramsauer, the district counsellor was both the decision-making body and appellate jurisdiction, and was also responsible for supervising the Guardianship Office which they claim did not represent a sufficient separation of power (Businger and Ramsauer 2019: 49).

Another example of coercive measures against parents was the severe stigmatisation and discrimination of single mothers (Naegele 2004: 25) as well as pregnant women showing signs of mental illness, right up until the 1980s. In the twentieth century, the high rate of non-marital births became the starting point for the development of mothers’ homes. While providing shelter and medical attention to marginalised women and their children, mothers’ homes also employed coercive and repressive ‘child protection’ measures that marked many welfare organisations during this time. One example of an institution founded to support – and discipline – so-called ‘fallen women’ or ‘illegitimate mothers’ was the *Städtischer Verein für Mutter und Säuglingschutz* (Association for the Protection of Zürich City’s Mothers and Infants, SVMS), founded by “initiative and educated women” (Naegele 2004: 9; my translation) in Zürich City. The association launched a home for single mothers which gradually evolved into a modern maternity hospital called Inselhof.

⁶⁴*Fürsorgeaufsicht* can be translated as ‘care supervision’. If the Guardianship Office imposed the *Fürsorgeaufsicht*, a *Fürsorgerin* – an old term for a social worker – visited families on a regular basis in order to instruct parents on proper care and to examine conditions in the home (Businger and Ramsauer 2019).

⁶⁵*Fremdplatzierung* is a term used in Switzerland to describe the forced placement of children with *Fremde*, ‘strangers’. These strangers were various institutions or ‘foster’ families (Huonker 2014: 399).

While the SVMS could be seen as a progressive institution attempting to improve the situation of disadvantaged women, certain goings-on inside the affiliated home and maternity clinic overshadow their philanthropy. The eugenic movement in Switzerland influenced medicine and law, but also social work practices (Huonker 2003: 9). Forced sterilisations were performed on thousands of people evaluated as being “*erblich minderwertige*” (people with ‘inferior hereditary properties’) or “*eheunfähig*” (banned from marriage due to ‘defects’) in many Swiss hospitals and psychiatric wards as late as the 1980s (Huonker 2015: 7). In the context of Switzerland, it must be emphasised that women were affected to a much greater extent than men (Furrer et al. 2014; Iso 2006; Wecker 2012). Naegele writes that in Zürich’s Burghölzli psychiatric hospital, spotting vague mental disorders in a pregnant woman was ample reason to perform an abortion or sterilisation. Sometimes a perceived “lack of morality and stability” was enough to lead to a sterilisation (Naegele 2004: 96; my translation) and becoming pregnant outside a marital union could lead to the diagnosis of “moral idiocy” (Iso 2006: 44f). Often (single) women asking for abortions were only treated if they consented to a subsequent sterilisation, which was not only supposed to prevent other unwanted pregnancies, but also the transmission of ‘inheritable defects’ in the future.

In a lecture given at a conference that took place at Inselhof in 2015, historian Thomas Huonker, who has worked extensively on this topic, claims that it was particularly single pregnant women placed in mothers’ homes who fell victim to coerced sterilisations and abortions, and that children born at Inselhof (and other mothers’ homes) were often given up for adoption or ended up as *Verdingkinder* on farms (Huonker 2015: 3, 7). In an article from 1989, the then-president of SVMS notes that children born to single mothers in their home often remained in the affiliated children’s home (Meyer-Fröhlich 1989-1990: 4). The article does not discuss why this was the case, but it probably alludes to the fact that single mothers were still very disadvantaged in the late ’80s and could not care for their children themselves.

Forced abortions, sterilisations and the removal of children from poor families or single mothers can all be understood as state-sponsored eugenics in the form of reproductive

interventions aimed at ‘improving’ the population and ‘solving’ social problems. They also present a repressive and coercive approach to governing families and child ‘protection’ by providing children with ‘proper’ caretakers (Vandenbroeck et al. 2011). However, these interventions can also be viewed as an extreme example of ‘stratified reproduction’, a concept coined by Colen (1986) in her study of West Indian childminders in New York working for wealthy white parents, and further developed by Ginsburg and Rapp (1995). This posits that certain groups of people are empowered to reproduce and can decide how they want to care for their children, while others are discouraged or disempowered from reproducing, or their reproductive and nurturing possibilities are restricted (Ginsburg and Rapp 1995). Even if victims reported positive experiences in regard to their *Fremdplatzierung*, negative experiences prevail –removing a child usually led to their isolation from parents and siblings (Furrer et al. 2014), as ongoing contact with them was prohibited (ProJuventute). There is a lack of research into the experiences of parents who were supervised by a social worker or whose children were removed, as most research focuses on the children’s experiences.

Whether the predecessors of the MVBs played a role in the removal of children belonging to marginalised groups remains historically unexplored, and I have not found any indication that they did. However, as the jubilee report of the Association for the Child of Eastern Switzerland shows, MVBs from older generations experience the involvement of public authorities in families as being less easy since the late 1970s. In the report, Eveline Niederer talks about her work as an advisor in the 1960s, when hygiene, as she put it, was sometimes handled “catastrophically” in families. She remarks that when children were not cared for appropriately, as seen by advisors, they had to engage authorities such as the family welfare department, who then removed children from their families and put them in orphanages until the situation at home was fixed. With the introduction of a new children’s law in 1978, the intervention of authorities became more difficult:

During this time, mostly questions of diet and development were discussed. When the child was not cared for as one saw fit, the infant nurse had to get the Department of Family Welfare or the Orphan Office involved. Then it can happen that the child is placed in an orphanage, until the

situation at home is resolved. Since the new children's law from 1978, however, governmental access [to families] is not so easy anymore. (OVK 2010: 16).

Niederer claims that back in the '60s, at least MVBs' observations in homes could lead to the swift removal of a child whose parents did not meet hygiene standards. Today, as some MVBs emphasised during my research, placing children with strangers is supposed to be the last resort, partly because this is an expensive measure. Similarly, the former general manager of the MVB trade association, Rita Bieri, notes in an interview in parenting magazine *WirEltern*, that "back in the olden days, [health] nurses, had a position of control", and this idea had stuck in some people's minds. In the meantime, Bieri explains in the interview, "the task of the mothers' advisor has moved away from control and developed towards counselling, accompanying and supporting mothers and fathers" (Frei n.d., interview with Rita Bieri; my translation).

Studies of social work services argue that, since the 1980s, policy makers in European states have abandoned the "controlling" and "repressive" child protection discourse and moved towards a child welfare discourse. This approach is framed as taking a "supportive" and "empowering" approach towards parents, in which well-meaning social workers play a major role. In contrast to the coercive measures associated with the child protection discourse, social workers are viewed as cooperating with parents in a partnership to ensure children's rights and wellbeing (Vandenbroeck et al. 2011: 69). Vandenbroeck et al. note that "the idea that friendly social work is better than repressive social work" had already gained a foothold by the beginning of the twentieth century, when "friendly visits" by case workers were introduced into welfare work (Vandenbroeck et al. 2011: 71). Primary prevention, to forestall later child protection measures and state involvement, are a central concern of the welfare discourse (ibid).

The focus on prevention is tightly connected to the idea that children are generally an 'at risk population' (Rose 1990b), which has a long history, starting with the '(re)discovery' of childhood as a special phase in the late 19th to early 20th centuries, and considers children to be 'innocent' and especially vulnerable, not only to disease, but also to emotional turmoil and

corruption (Cunningham 2006; Fuchs 1997; Stearns 2009). Parents, as primary carers, belong to the group of people who put children at risk when they, for example do not provide proper food or a safe environment at home. Today, the concept of “risky parents”, according to Faircloth (2014b: 44), does not apply to obviously ‘bad’ parents who, hit or neglect their children for instance, but is extended to all parents by policy makers, experts (or parents themselves), who may potentially be unaware of certain dangers they may subject their children to, or just have not yet encountered situations in which they may be a ‘threat’ to their child. A ‘prophylactic’ use of the MVB by all parents is highly encouraged by policy makers and the institution itself. Prevention endeavours go hand in hand with increased surveillance (Rabinow 2005: 187).

Vandenbroeck et al. suggest that taking the ‘empowering’ approach to child protection does not mean that government institutions dealing with families have become less powerful or less controlling, but that the techniques deemed appropriate to shape and police parenting practices and ensure children’s wellbeing have changed (Vandenbroeck et al. 2011). This is not entirely true, however, as few state administrations have the power to terminate a woman’s pregnancy against her will, for example. Swiftly removing a child from a single mother on the sole basis that she conceived outside a marital union or placing children in foster care simply because their parents are poor is also no longer possible. So it is fair to say that government institutions have lost some power. However, I agree with Vandenbroeck et al.’s (2011) suggestion that the practices deemed appropriate for surveilling and guiding parenting today are a clear example of what Michel Foucault ‘pastoral power’, which is marked by a more subtle approach to governing families that favours ‘benign coercion’ (Shepherd 2014). I will explore this idea in more detail and with practical examples in the following sections.

Pastoral Power

A significant concept introduced by Foucault that is particularly relevant when thinking about how early childhood programmes aim to monitor and shape parenting practices is that of pastoral power, or pastoral care, to use the original church term. The Hebraic/Christian idea of the pastor as a shepherd who guides his flock towards salvation constitutes the cornerstone of pastoral power. It is both totalising and individualising, as the pastor not only looks after the flock as a whole, but also possesses specific knowledge about every single sheep (Foucault 2009: 126f). This is achieved by observation of “behavior and conduct”, as well as the instruments of confession and self-examination. The Christian pastor acquires “knowledge of conscience” and has the “ability to direct it” (Foucault 1982: 783). In this context, pastoral power links up to technologies of self, as the confessant, after a close self-examination of conscience, must tell a truth that can only be found within him/herself (Foucault 1985: 60). The relationship between pastor and sheep is one of “complex reciprocity”, as “the merits and demerits of each individual sheep are imputed to the pastor” (Golder 2007: 166).

While the Christian pastorate may have lost its influence, Foucault asserts that the ‘power of the pastorate’ has “spread and multiplied outside the ecclesiastical institutions” (Foucault 1982: 783). Since around the eighteenth century, modern Western states have “integrated” a form of pastoral power into their ways of governing populations (Foucault 1982: 782ff; Nadesan 2008: 23f). Pastoral power has been transformed and secularised in order to fit various purposes, such as assuring economic security, health and wellbeing. In contrast to the Christian pastorate, salvation is sought after in this life, rather than after death (Foucault, 1982, p. 784). Today techniques of pastoral power can be found in public institutions like police, schools and social welfare departments, but are also increasingly being transferred to privatised experts. Social workers and health visitors can be understood as ‘officials’ of pastoral power when they interact with clients in the context of home visits or counselling services (Nadesan 2008: 24). Like Rose, who rejects a

“state-centred approach” (Rose 1999: xxi) to political power, I understand officials of pastoral power not as “merely servants of power”, but as agents who “actively shape and transform objects, techniques and ends of power” (ibid).

The power of pastoral officials is not founded in repressive measures and coercion, but in their devotedness to do individual clients (and society as a whole) good by guiding them to a state of wellbeing. In the context of the MVB, governing parents includes gathering and archiving information and hierarchical observation, as well as ‘empowering’ parents by providing them with the means to govern themselves. Shepherd stresses the significance of the notion of ‘empowerment’ in the context of modern expert guidance, specifically in nursing care (Shepherd 2014: 48-50). The empowerment approach to advising clients prescribes a collaborative relationship between parent and counsellor, enabling the client “to develop personal capacity and authority to take charge of everyday family life” (Zerwekh 1992: 102). While this approach focuses on the involvement of clients and their agency to take their or their children’s health and wellbeing into their own hands, these “ideals and approaches can obscure strategies of persuasion or ‘benign coercion’ that are inherent in nurse-client conversations and the presentation of health care information and options. These strategies are central to the exercise of pastoral power” (Shepherd 2014: 50f).

While Nadesan argues that “individuals failing to take responsibility for self-governance are subject to management from experts (Nadesan, 2008, p. 34)”, the MVB’s mission is to reach every family. Being counselled and supported by an MVB on a regular basis is not generally designed for “unruly participants” (Peters 2012: 418), but extends to all parents. As MVB Rena explained to me:

It would be nice (if all parents worked with the MVB), but it is just difficult, because we are a voluntary service. It is not obligatory to go to the MVB, but the desire of course is there to reach every family one way or the other, so that the MVB has a ‘leg’ in every family (...). (MVB Rena, recorded interview, 26.08.19)

While not every parent uses the MVB, it is not conceptualised as a place for ‘problem families’ to go, but a normal part of early childhood activities. Nevertheless, the ‘intensity’ of MVB guidance

as well as the style of advice-giving can vary. Special programmes have been set up for families that are believed to require closer MVB support, such as migrant families. The normalisation and stimulation of a voluntary use of the MVB aims to avoid coercive child protection interventions, such as mandatory home visits by MVBs or – as a last resort – removing children from families. Thus, it represents an example of a ‘preventative’ approach to child protection (Vandenbroeck et al. 2011: 69), through the development of the MVB service, whose advisors offer long-term support to families with young children and which assumes that the wellbeing of children is an aim shared by the state and parents.

The following sections discuss my fieldwork findings in more detail. Before exploring the position of the advisors (MVBs) and their relationship to parents, I will give some general information about the MVB as an organisation.

General Information about the MVB

The MVB has a long tradition in the Swiss landscape of parental education and preventative healthcare. It evolved out of private associations that aimed to curb high infant mortality rates in the early twentieth century. Today, the MVB is a nationwide service and widely used by parents – the MVB’s trade association estimated that 58% of parents used the MVB at least once in 2017. Use varies according to region, for example some providers – mostly in rural regions – counsel almost 100% of all families with children under one at least once (FVMVB 2017b: 1)⁶⁶.

There are different regional MVB providers who are independent of each other. Even within a canton, the local MVB may have various private or public operators. Although there are

⁶⁶ No clear answer can be given as to why the MVB service is used more in rural areas. The ‘pressure’ to visit the MVB in small villages may be higher, because clients may already know their local MVB. Perhaps in this setting mothers feel that their ‘absence’ would be more notable? However, during interviews, I also learnt that some advisors in rural areas are ‘pushier’ when it comes to arranging a consultation with new parents. Two MVBs told me that they would go to a family’s house unannounced if they could not reach them by phone to introduce themselves and arrange a meeting. MVBs working in cities may not have time for this.

efforts underway to change this, the different regional centres use separate IT systems to document client information and hand out different informational brochures or flyers to parents.

In 2016 there were 74 regional MVB providers in Switzerland, each of which operated a network of advice centres, numbering from one to 270 centres. According to a report, there are an average of 2.5 advice centres per every 100 newborn babies (FVMVB 2017a). The MVB is financed almost exclusively by the public sector, as donations or contributions from parents or others only make up 0.5% of its budget (Frey 2020: 10).

The advisors are female, and the great majority of clients are mothers (Frey 2020; FVMVB 2018)⁶⁷. However, some MVBs told me about a male social worker who was employed by the MVB in Berne and offered courses for fathers. In the case of the MVB, women guide (mostly) other women because both ‘professional’ care work as well as care work at home is highly gendered. Traditionally, to become an MVB, one needed a professional background as a maternity/paediatric nurse (this has changed very recently), which is a profession mostly taken up by women. Childrearing in Switzerland primarily remains women’s work. The MVB, however, is trying to become more father-oriented. In 2021, the Zürich MVB posted a job advertisement for a male MVB who will be responsible for developing courses for fathers and will specifically provide counselling to fathers. A small number of MVB providers already offer courses specifically for fathers (Frey 2020: 10). Another reason for the organisation’s female orientation is the MVB’s strong focus on the mother-child relationship and maternal ‘skills’ such as breastfeeding. In her study on the *Sure Start Programme* in the UK, Clarke discusses similar findings and comments that, “despite the language of ‘parenting’ and the acknowledgement of the role of fathers or other family members, the infant is seen primarily in the context of the mother-infant dyad (...)” (Clarke 2006: 718).

⁶⁷ According to the statistics of the MVB trade association, in 86% of the cases the mother of a child consults with the MVB; in 3% of the cases, it is the father who receives counselling, and in 8% of the cases both parents are present during consultations. These numbers apply to the German speaking region of Switzerland (FVMVB 2018).

Most MVBs I interviewed had trained as paediatric nurses and completed the MVB postgraduate diploma⁶⁸, which is offered by Careum in Argovia, an educational centre exclusively for jobs in health care⁶⁹. MVBs can only start the degree after having worked in the job for a certain amount of time. The training consists of various modules, like paediatrics, counselling, pedagogic education and child protection. During the course, MVBs are encouraged to reflect on their own norms regarding childrearing and on the norms of the institution as well as on current political and societal transformations that may be relevant for their counselling work (Careum, MVB_030_191029, n.d.-a). Most MVBs I interviewed are either currently doing the course or have completed it. A small number of MVBs had decided not to do the MVB diploma and instead undertook various further training in areas such as lactation or developmental psychological counselling.

My diverse MVB interlocutors shared certain professional principles and those who had completed their MVB diploma recently used very similar phrasings during our conversations, especially when describing how they advised parents. Still, every MVB had her own individual approach to her work with families which, in some cases, resulted from the further training she had completed. For example, MVBs who had acquired a diploma in developmental psychological counselling seemed to focus specifically on observing attachment behaviour during consultations, which was a core theme of their training.

First contact between parents and an MVB is made after a child is born: advisors contact parents via telephone or letter in order to arrange a first home visit or they suggest that the parents

⁶⁸ Acquiring the diploma as MVB has recently been opened to midwives, preschool teachers, social workers, and psychologists. This may mean that the institution is in the process of re-orienting itself. Midwives' home visits during postpartum time are covered for a longer period by health insurances now and MVBs are consulted less during the newborn days, when care, breastfeeding and sleeping are major topics for parents. I was told by two MVBs that because of the competition with midwives, they were trying to focus more on their expertise in pedagogics and *Erziehung*, which may be reflected in the opening of the MVB training course to social workers.

⁶⁹ No college offers MVB courses in the French or Italian part of Switzerland.

should visit their centre⁷⁰. The MVB learns about the birth of a child in their local commune via two channels: both the hospital in which the child was born as well as the commune in which the child's parents reside transmit a birth registration and, in the case of the hospital, contact details of the parents to the local MVB centre. Parents can, however, note on their contact details that they do not wish to be contacted. The local MVBs I interviewed dealt with this in different ways. Most accepted the parents' wish not to be contacted, while others decided to send information about their services via post anyway because, as MVB Lisa framed it:

Usually, they [parents] are overrun [with information] at the birth clinic and do not know what this [the MVB] is and say 'No, no, I do not need this, I have the midwife'. We do it so that we are still present, and they see that this is also available. (MVB Lisa, recorded interview, 03.05.20)

Any parent with a child under five years of age can consult the MVB via telephone or email, or visit the advice centres, but can also request home visits. Advice centres can be found in almost all communes and offer regular consultation hours, and parents can visit many of the centres without making an appointment. Some centres offer group counselling, during which clients who have similar-aged children meet with the MVB and can ask questions in the group, exchange thoughts with their peers and socialise (Frey 2020: ; MVB Nina, recorded interview, 28.05.19).⁷¹ The centres I visited were situated in very different locations, such as within a retirement home, community and social welfare centres, a kindergarten and a police station. Often the buildings in which the MVB was located housed other public counselling services, such as drug, marriage or financial counselling. Some MVBs noted that this was very convenient, because if a client had a problem that was outside their competence, they could just send the client a floor up or down to seek help. The MVB centres were usually equipped with a waiting area as well as a room in which the

⁷⁰ I have learnt that when and how parents are contacted varies, depending on the commune. Some MVBs call parents soon after the delivery, some two weeks after the child is born, others first send brochures by post and then call parents when the child has turned 4 months old. At this age, most parents in Switzerland start introducing solids into their infant's diet. Some MVBs noted that this was a good moment to get in contact, because many parents had questions about this topic.

⁷¹ The MVB support is not only provided for first-time parents, but also after the birth of all subsequent children.

counselling took place. The counselling rooms were furnished in a very similar fashion and always had a changing table as well as a scale, a desk with a computer containing client data, as well as toys for babies and toddlers.

Services comparable to the MVB do not exist in Germany today. In the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), however, there used to be an institution called *Mütterberatung*. In some Eastern German communes there are some *Überbleibsel* (traces) of this institution, as they advertise their mothers' advisors' services on their websites. I have found several articles and blog entries reporting the re-establishment of mothers' advice centres in Thuringia, so there seems to be some sort of revival of the institution in Eastern Germany (Schulze 2019; udz 2010). Some scattered cities in Western Germany, such as Hamburg (Kossel 2011), also have centres where mothers' advisors can be consulted, but there is no nationwide institution that is present in every commune and used by a large majority of parents, and there is no college offering special training courses for mothers' advisors, as is the case in Switzerland.

The UK, Hungary and Australia (Paton, Grant and Tsourtos 2013) have services comparable to the MVB; however, they differ from the MVB in the ways they are set up. In the UK, 'health visitors', registered nurses funded by the National Health Service (NHS), visit pregnant women during their pregnancy at home, as well as after the birth, but can be sought for counselling until the child is five years old⁷². In Australia child and family health nurses (cfh nurses) provide free child health and development assessments for children under five in so-called Child Health Centres⁷³. In her thesis *Power, Care and Knowledge: The Co-construction of 'Good Mothering' in Interactions Between Low-Income Mothers and Child and Family Health Nurses* (2014), Shepherd examines the nurses' relationships with low-income mothers in Tasmania from a Foucauldian perspective. Her work is an important point of comparison, as she makes similar observations to me in terms of advisor-client relations as well as techniques applied by nurses to encourage 'good' mothering practices. In

⁷² See <https://ihv.org.uk/families/what-is-a-hv/>.

⁷³ See https://www.health.tas.gov.au/service_information/services_files/child_health_centres.

Hungary, specially-trained health visitors provide counselling to pregnant women and new mothers and monitor children's health on a regular basis. They also carry out planned paediatric check-ups (Szöllösi et al. 2020) .

Taking Care of Health from Birth

A slogan that can be found in many MVB flyers is: *Von Geburt an zur Gesundheit Sorge tragen* – “taking care of health from birth”. ‘Keeping children healthy’ or enhancing their health represented the main focus of the MVBs I met, who used to be called *Gesundheitschwestern* (health nurses). MVB interlocutor Fiona, for example, saw her work as an MVB in contrast to that of a nurse, who treats illnesses. She wanted to “look at the health” and always tried to pose the question of “how does a child stay healthy?” (interview notes, 15.04.19). Ensuring health, according to the description of a learning module on the MVB training course, is achieved by strengthening parents’ competences (Careum, MVB_030_191029, n.d.-a). Tinguely and Berger, two MVBs from the Bernese Oberland, call this “coaching parents” or building up parents’ “resources” during a time in which “the course is set for the future development of a child” in an article about the tasks of an MVB. They describe parenting as a “demanding task” and the MVB as a *Begleitung*, an ‘accompaniment’ during an “often difficult time” (Tinguely and Berger 2009).

the importance of parents receiving instructions in childrearing from experts is stressed and the concept of parental determinism looms large. A child's future is thought to be a direct outcome of parenting practices, which is why professional guidance is deemed crucial. The OVK jubilee report from 2010 conceptualises the MVB as “extra-occupational training in being a parent” that becomes especially important in a time when parents have very little time to acquire ‘solid schooling’ in childrearing. The report notes that, whilst expectant mothers in the mid-twentieth century could spend four weeks learning at a mothers’ school, women today work during their pregnancies so have no time for such courses. Time in the maternity ward would allow for a bit of training (“*Anlebre*”), but stays in a maternity ward after delivery have become shorter and shorter.

After three to five days the parents came home and are confronted with a wealth of questions, decisions and a new life situation (OVK 2010: 21).

Consultations are also seen as imperative for detecting developmental disorders, diseases and other issues in children that may be invisible to parents themselves (Tinguely and Berger 2009). One ‘classic’ thing that was mentioned by MVB Katharina and MVB Isabella, who worked at a rural MVB centre, were cranial deformations, which were becoming more common due to the safe sleeping information parents received at maternity wards prescribing that newborns should always sleep on their backs. Often mothers did not notice the deformity – “they take their child as it is” - and paediatricians sometimes had the opinion that such things “disappear in time” – “but we know if we don’t do something now (...)” (MVB Katharina, recorded interview, 12.04.19). Katharina, who had been an MVB for the last 30 years, stressed the advantage of early detection during MVB consultations. During her work as a nurse in a children’s hospital she had realised that, for many children, hospital stays or medical interventions in general could have been prevented if someone had intervened earlier, especially regarding diet and development.

MVBs triage (Careum, MVB_050_200106, n.d.-b) – they evaluate whether a child needs to see a doctor or another professional, or they can help them by themselves. In an article in the *Wir Eltern* magazine, the former general manager of the MVB trade association, Rita Bieri, points out that the MVB helps to reduce public expense, because when issues are detected in kindergarten it is “often too late” – by which she probably means that such cases require more expensive medical intervention or have irreversible effects (Frei n.d., interview with Rita Bieri).

MVBs interconnect with private organisations such as Caritas and public services like the Office for Social Work. Furthermore, they try to connect with other childcare professionals, for example, they send representatives to midwife meetings, they attend gatherings at maternity clinics, and organise meetings with local paediatricians.

What Happens During a Consultation?

During consultations breastfeeding, diet, nutrition, sleep and child development were the main topics addressed by far. MVB Katharina said that new questions also arise with new ‘trends’, such as in the context of veganism – “can I feed my child a vegan diet, or can I breastfeed while eating vegan?” (recorded interview, 12.04.19). The nature of the questions posed by parents also depends on the age of their child and whether someone is a first-time mother. According to MVB Katharina, first-time mothers of newborns consulted her more often and posed a lot of general questions about ‘growing’. Later on, mothers consulted her again when they had two or three children. Then their questions revolved more around *Erziehung*. MVB Isabella, Katharina’s younger colleague, added that, in the early days of motherhood, women asked her a lot whether they were doing things ‘right’ and were concerned about questions regarding normalcy: “It is normal that my baby cries to much? Is it normal that it still does not sleep through the night?” (recorded interview, 12.04.19).

Many MVBs reported that new mothers often needed reassurance and that there was great insecurity when it came to childrearing. This is something I also heard in an informal conversation with a freelance midwife from Zürich, who told me that her main job was to stand “behind the mothers and pat their backs” and tell them “you’ re doing it right” (Midwife Leandra, notes, 06.02.2019).

When I visited my local mothers’ advice centre in Zürich City in 2015 and 2016 when my daughter was a baby, consultations took place in the large but cosy room of a community centre with many chairs, a changing table, and a play area for children. Several parents, mostly mothers, were waiting in the room with babies and toddlers to see the MVB. There was an assistant, who first measured and weighed incoming children and entered the measurements in their client file. On a small table in an elevated part of the room sat the MVB. Parents who wished to consult the MVB had to sign up to a waiting list and, when it was their turn, they would sit at the table with the MVB. The conversations with the MVB could be overheard if one sat close enough to the

table. I was surprised that sometimes very personal topics, such as a mother's mental exhaustion, were discussed in the presence of others, but assumed that this was normal procedure.

During my research, however, I learnt that today MVBs have a separate room where they talk to parents privately. Most of my MVB interlocuters stated that counselling in a common room with other parents present was an outdated practice and did not guarantee data protection or confidentiality. Moreover, according to Lisa, who at some point in her career as an MVB requested a separate room for consultations, conversations took a very different turn when they were held in a private setting: “the women open up (...), they dare to cry” (recorded interview, 03.05.19). Having clients ‘open up’ during consultations is crucial for the MVBs’ accompaniment, which will be addressed in more detail later on. Moreover, MVBs no longer have an assistant for weighing and measuring children, but do everything themselves, as they like to observe how mothers interact with their children during this process – another point that will be addressed later in this chapter.

Early Intervention

Some MVB centres operate early intervention programmes (*Frühförderung*). The early intervention programme offered by Lucerne City, for example, is called MVBplus and is offered to families who show a “high degree of stress factors” (Luzern 2018: 6; my translation). However, MVB Lisa from Lucerne City told me that it was mostly “socially deprived” migrants involved in this programme, who were believed to be in need of “closer accompaniment”⁷⁴ (recorded interview, 03.05.19).

In 2019, one of Lucerne's countryside MVB centres had recently introduced its own version of MVBplus. It was still in the early phases of development when I discussed it with MVB Fiona, who told me that it was mostly migrants who were included in it. In order to evaluate whether a family ‘qualified’ for the early intervention, the MVB worked with a ‘points system’. If families

⁷⁴ The idea that migrant parents need more assistance to provide their children with the ‘ideal’ environment to thrive and develop is also indicated in a study carried out on behalf of the MVB on the *Erreichbarkeit* of socially deprived families (‘reachability’ – the MVB’s ability to ‘reach’ different families by informing them about the service and attracting them to use it) (Rabhi-Sidler and Magistretti 2019: 7).

fulfilled a certain number of points, they were believed to be in need of early intervention in the form of a monthly home visit by an MVB that lasted for about an hour. Fiona and her colleagues seemed to have set certain criteria, such as a migrant background, having many children and being financially disadvantaged, that indicated an enrolment in the programme. Other criteria, such as being able to draw on a local family network “would make up for a lot” and could therefore ‘neutralise’ some of the criteria that would suggest an enrolment. Fiona noted that the families who were enrolled in the programme had many problems. I asked Fiona how she ‘broke’ it to parents that the MVB believed they were in need of early intervention. I was wondering how families reacted when they were told that they needed ‘closer *Begleitung*’ because they did not score very well in the MVB’s point system. I then learnt that parents did not get to see how many points they were given – I suspect that they did not even know about the points system. Fiona told me that she had thought for a very long time about how to ‘sell’ early intervention to parents and that she took this matter very seriously. She decided to “turn this matter around”. She explained that she described enrolment in the FF as something positive and told parents that they deserved more time from the MVB because they had so much to discuss. According to Fiona, the parents usually accepted this and were pleased that more time was being committed to them (field notes, 16.07.19).

Commission-Based Work

MVBs are charged with preventing or disclosing child abuse (FVMVB n.d.: 2). Like doctors, MVBs have an obligation to maintain confidentiality, but also the duty to report parents to the *Kindes- und Erwachsenenschutzbehörde* (children and adult protection services, KESB) when a child’s physical or psychological wellbeing is seen to be at risk, because of for example abuse, neglect or parental drug addiction, and they cannot provide relief themselves (KOKES 2019).

The KESB can commission MVBs to visit a family’s home or require the family to visit an advice centre regularly if there is a suspicion that the wellbeing of a child under the age of five is endangered. If parents fail to show up to commission-based consultations, the MVB must report

this and the KESB may implement further measures. Depending on why parents have been ordered to consult with an MVB, specific issues may be addressed during a consultation, such as scanning a child's body for signs of abuse: "They have to show their children from top to bottom" (MVB Katharina, recorded interview, 12.04.19). Other parents are required to consult with the MVB on a regular basis because they are believed to need support due to a lack of 'intelligence': "Some parents have a low IQ so we really need to keep at it and check how they are doing... it is also about very trivial things, such as cooking baby food. They need someone who comes to their house and shows them how it is done" (MVB Gisela, recorded interview, 31.07.19).

In the context of commission-based work, it is the MVB's task to evaluate whether the physical and mental growth of a child brought to the KESB's attention is in the normal range, and whether the parental home can ensure their healthy development. MVBs will write a report for the KESB in which they present their evaluation. The MVBs have no decision-making power; rather their report can be seen as a recommendation on which KESB bases its interventions in families.

The following sections explore the work of the MVB from a Foucauldian perspective, which will shed light on the technologies of power at work when it comes to governing parents.

Accompanying Parents

The MVB's service is framed in terms of *Begleitung*, an 'accompaniment' to families' efforts to raise a child. The accompaniment of parents is supposed to begin when the baby is a few weeks old. Taking advantage of cost-free expert support as new parents is highly endorsed by early childhood policy makers. Parents receive the first leaflet informing them about the MVB's services during their stay in a maternity ward after their child has been born. Many leaflets and regional MVB providers' websites frame early parenthood as a time when expert guidance is needed. They explain that, while it is "lovely" and "exciting", it can also be an "exhausting" and "challenging" time prompting feelings of "insecurity" and "overload" as well as triggering many questions, which the local MVB was ready to answer. The MVB's monitoring of paediatric development is advertised as

preventative and health promoting (Spitex Höfe n.d.). Several MVBs I talked to shared the idea that becoming parents was a kind of ‘cut’ (*Einschnitt*) in life and that expert support was very helpful for finding your way into the new role. ‘Having the guts to consult experts’ for advice and ‘knowing one’s boundaries and asking for help’ were rated as ‘good’ parenting by some MVBs. During my conversations with MVBs they often stressed that cooperation from the midwives who provide postpartum care was essential for ‘getting into families’. MVBs expected midwives to recommend their service and hand families over into their care. That way, according to MVB Rebecca, a “seamless transition” (recorded interview, 21.08.19) in terms of parents’ accompaniment by an expert could take place⁷⁵.

This connects to another aspect inherent in the accompaniment of families. The MVB’s *Begleitung* is supposed to be preventive. The idea is that parents visit their local MVB with their children before any ‘deep-seated problems’ arise, such as parental exhaustion, breastfeeding issues or developmental disorders. In this context, some MVBs remarked that they were not *Feuerlöscher*, “fire extinguishers”, meaning that they did not appreciate being consulted in emergency cases that required considerable intervention when, in their view, they could have been avoided by the ‘prophylactic’ use of the service.

While some MVBs stated that the issues discussed during consultations were determined by parents, other MVBs addressed certain topics unsolicited in order to comply with their prevention mandate. A field notes excerpt describes a consultation ‘scene’ during which MVB Beatrix gives a mother hints about her child’s future developmental steps and stresses which things she needs to consider:

Beatrix asks the mother whether she can have a look at the baby, which is then placed on the changing table. After examining whether the baby can follow her head movements with its eyes, Beatrix tells the mother that her infant son will soon start to grab his feet with his hands and then begin to roll to the side, onto his belly. She then turns the baby from its back on its stomach in order to demonstrate the movement. The baby starts protesting. Beatrix warns the mother that she must not leave him lying on the sofa on his own anymore.

⁷⁵ Not all MVBs opined that expert accompaniment of new parents was essential. Three MVBs remarked that there were mothers who did not need the MVB.

The mother affirms this. (Field notes, 24.07.19)

Many MVBs said they sought and enjoyed having a close relationship with clients. MVB Fiona strongly emphasised her devotion to clients. She stressed that parents could “count on her” for five years and that that she was doing the work with a lot of *Herzblut*, “heart blood” (interview notes, 15.04.19). Many MVBs stressed that parents could come to them with ‘anything’, pose ‘any question’, and that they took all issues parents brought up very seriously: “This is the beautiful thing [in this work] (...) when they [the clients] have trust, when they know that they are being accompanied, are taken seriously, and can ask whatever they want, that [for the MBVs] there are no stupid questions” (MVB Isabella, recorded interview, 12.04.19). Accordingly, gaining clients’ trust played a major role in MVB-parent relationships, especially when it came to the question of how the accompaniment might be made long-term: “Those mothers who have used the MVB and have experienced that they are taken seriously and have trust in their MVB, they come [to the MVB], they come on a regular basis” (MVB Valeria, recorded interview, 14.08.20).

In terms of the positions of MVBs and parents, most MVBs believed that there was a clear divide between expert and client in their practice and that parents saw them in the role of an expert (*Fachperson*) in the development, care and *Erziehung* of small children. When I asked MVB Fiona how she dealt with parents who did not take her seriously, when she told them, for example, that she thought their child had a developmental delay or behavioural issues, Fiona noted that telling parents was enough: for she had “thrown a stone in a well that was continuously drawing circles”. The parents would not be able to forget what she had said and would constantly take notice of the issue she had pointed out (field notes, 16.07.19)⁷⁶. Fiona seemed to count on her capacity to have an impact on parents, who would not be able to ignore her judgement. This revealed her perception of her position of authority and claim to ‘truth’ (Rose 1991: 91) as an expert, as well as her “ability to direct” her clients’ conscience in the position of the ‘shepherd’ (Foucault 1982: 783).

⁷⁶ Fiona also remarked that sometimes parents were even relieved when she addressed a “deficit”, for she finally voiced what they had suspected all along.

When I asked MVBs about their relationship to clients, some noted that there were parents who saw them as a kind of grandmother in the way that they fulfilled the role of an older relative with a lot of experience with children who was willing to give advice and support. A young MVB in her early thirties spoke of the “grandmother bonus” enjoyed by her predecessor, who she believed was able to build good relationships with parents due to her advanced age (MVB Anna, recorded interview, 08.05.19). Similarly, MVB Valeria described her work as “giving parents security in things that used to be mediated by their own parents or grandparents” (recorded interview, 14.08.19). Yet clients who treated their MVB like a grandmother were not always viewed positively by MVBs, who stated that they needed to set boundaries for some parents who would trouble them with topics beyond their expertise, such as debts or their love life. Very few MVBs, such as Beatrix and Nina, noted that they were *per Du* (called each other by their first name in the sense of addressing someone informally) with their clients (field notes, 24.07.19; recorded interview, 28.05.19). According to Nina, being *‘per Du’* was less patronising and allowed for a familial atmosphere during the consultation, which made it easier for women to talk about their problems (recorded interview, 28.05.19).

A large majority of MVBs told me that they had chosen the profession not only because they had a special fondness and fascination for advising, but also because it allowed them to have a close and durable relationship with their clients, in contrast to the brief contact made with patients when they worked as paediatric nurses on maternity, neonatal or paediatric wards. This way, they could ‘work on’ issues with parents and ‘really keep at it’. MVB Isabella described the benefits of accompanying families in the following words:

Usually, one is in a relationship over a longer period, and I think that this has a lot of advantages, in order to work on something (...) when they come with many different topics and one can accompany the process, the developments, and strengthen and encourage parents in all their questions. Recorded interview, 12.04.19

Accompanying allows MVBs to ‘work’ on issues over a long period of time, in the way that they can follow up how, for example, sleep disorders develop over time, whether advice given could be

implemented, whether it helped or whether new ways to tackle the issue must be found. Shepherd emphasises the centrality of building trust for the expert's position of power when she describes relationships between low-income mothers and CFH nurses in Tasmania. She observes that:

developing relationships of trust increases nurses' pastoral power. Pastoral power comes from a deep knowledge of the person which is built on confession and knowing. Through respectful and trusting relationships mothers feel able to confide in nurses and CFH nurses come to know the mothers at a deeper level. (Shepherd 2014: 203f)

From a public health stance, Paton et al. explore mothers' perspectives of an intensive home visiting programme in South Australia. The general aim of home visiting programmes, according to the authors, is to "modify preventable risk factors for the health of mothers and children by raising the mothers' awareness of strategies to improve their own and their family's health (...)" (Paton et al. 2013: 191). Bringing about this 'modification', Paton et al. stress, was dependent on the *relationship* between the mother and the home visiting nurse, which "must be strong enough to reassure and empower the mother to act on the information provided through the program (...)" (ibid.). Paton et. al highlight the importance of 'trust' for the mothers' readiness to discuss their problems or disclose their "real self" to the home visitor (Paton et al. 2013: 195).

MVB Fiona talked about the 'beauty' of seeing change in those who had "worked on themselves". During an informal lunch, Fiona mentioned a mother who used to wear gothic clothes and had a lot of piercings. Fiona felt that this client initially had a critical attitude towards her, but after two years of accompaniment, her attitude had become more positive. The client had recently told Fiona that she was expecting a second child, confessing that she was terrified of life with two children. Fiona told the client that she did not need to be scared at all, because she had "worked on herself so much". The client's eyes filled with tears. Fiona made it clear that she valued such moments a great deal and remarked that the woman's transformation was also visible in her style of clothing, which had become less gothic (field notes, 16.07.19). Fiona's anecdote further illustrates the transformations that relationships between advisor and client can undergo in the context of long-term accompaniment: Fiona gained the trust of a formerly sceptical client, who

opened up to her when faced with anxiety over the arrival of her second child. Fiona, who had got to know the client well, could reassure her that she had ‘improved’ herself and thus did not need to worry about how to manage life as a mother of two.

Long-term accompanying was framed not only as safeguarding and promoting children’s health by keeping track of their growth and developmental milestones, but also as a way to enable parents to reach a satisfactory state of autonomy. Here, the idea of the ‘guiding pastor’ is reflected in the MVB’s position, providing ‘salvation’ by assisting parents to gain skills and confidence in childrearing. Like her colleagues, MVB Fiona considered it her job to ensure that parents achieved ‘self-dependence’ by mastering the issues that triggered a lot of conversations during consultations themselves (interview notes, 15.04.19). After what MVB Olivia called a “transition phase”, during which parents could contact her, she believed they would reach a sufficient level of competency where “they can do it on their own” (recorded interview, 05.12.19)⁷⁷. Thus, accompanying families is supposed to come to an end when parents are able to manage childrearing themselves. In this context, the MVB’s approach to advising – which is intended to be individualised and facilitate technologies of self – plays a role.

Individualised Advice

Individualised advice-giving is a major concern of mine. This means that I do not have the same answers for different women. I have different answers. It is very important for me that the person can implement it herself so that it is doable for her (...) different ways are possible. Often it is my aim to give the women several answers and then they can decide what they want to do. (MVB Valeria, recorded interview, 14.08.19)

The MVBs interviewed described their approach to counselling as being individualised – they did not give the same answers to all parents seeking advice regarding, for example, how to deal with

⁷⁷ A small number of MVBs noted that, even after the youngest child in a family turned five, the relationship with certain mothers did not necessarily end. Some mothers kept asking them for advice regarding older children or called them even if they had moved to another country. MVBs did not turn those parents away, but still provided counselling.

temper tantrums, but ‘tailored’ their counselling to the characters, wishes, needs and resources of the parents. “Directive counselling” (recorded interview, 23.12.19), as MVB Zoe termed it – in the sense of specifically instructing parents what to do – was rarely applied⁷⁸.

Some MVBs contrasted their service with the various internet fora in which parents give advice to other parents. According to MVB Tina, the problem with online platforms was that the advice was solely based on experiential knowledge and did not take people’s individual backgrounds into account: “Just because something worked for one mother, it does not mean that it will be right for another mother” (recorded interview, 05.11.19). In contrast to “lay people”, Tina accentuated, the MVB was independent and could cater to parents’ individual needs. Even when it came to ‘medical’ topics such as vaccination, some MVBs stuck with individually advising parents:

Vaccinations is a good topic, [parents ask] ‘what is your recommendation?’ (...). Vaccinating... this is a personal approach. One needs to deliver facts. I must tell parents this and this and of course it is also about individually assessing [parents]. I have parents here, I see them, and I tell them honestly, ‘vaccinate your child, I don’t think you could stomach it if your child got this childhood disease’. There are anti-vaccinationists who have engaged with this topic, and it is their world view (...) they are very aware that if the child gets the disease it will be bad, but it is part of life (...). But when I see a mummy who has already been scared just because her child fell over once – which is also normal – then I can, then I must – ‘then *my* recommendation in *your context* is, vaccinate against this’, even if I admit that I myself did not vaccinate against it, but ‘I would recommend this to *you*’. (Recorded interview, 10.05.19)

In the quote, MVB Rita⁷⁹ mentions that counselling entailed individually assessing parents. MVBs commonly remarked that counselling work involved evaluating what kind of family was sitting in front of them. To successfully accompany them, MVB Hannah stated, “you must find out where do the parents stand? What background do they have? And based on that, what [do] they need and what they themselves say they want from me” (recorded interview, 17.05.19). Thus, ‘opening up’ to an MVB is prerequisite for receiving proper guidance.

⁷⁸ In the context of some questions, such as what to do to treat a rash or constipation, it is very likely that their counselling takes a directive approach, however.

⁷⁹ Rita had not given her own child all the available vaccinations. Nevertheless, she was not the only advisor who catered to individual needs when it came to vaccinations. Other MVBs reported referring parents who did not want their children to be vaccinated to doctors who were themselves critical of immunisation.

MVB Tina noted that the wide range of approaches towards childrearing today made counselling especially challenging as it meant always needing to figure out which approach the parents took in order to provide suitable advice. For example, she could not advise a mother to let her child sleep in her bed if the mother believed this was unacceptable. Not getting a feeling for clients' particular approaches could result in "snubbing" women who had a different view on a topic (recorded interview, 05.11.19). Several MVBs commented that they preferred doing face-to-face counselling, as finding out a parent's approach and needs was difficult via email or telephone. Also, in terms of advising, they needed to know what resources parents could draw on: "It is of no use for me to say that the child needs *Papi-Zeit* (daddy time) when the father is never around" (MVB Zoe, recorded interview, 23.12.19).

When counselling parents in order to solve a specific issue, such as helping parents who did not know how to calm a crying baby, many MVBs described asking parents what felt right for them, what they had already tried to address the issue, and what thoughts or feelings the applied practices had triggered in them. Often MVBs were consulted by parents who had been unsettled by conversations with older relatives who had different views on how to properly care for a baby. Intergenerational discussions often revolved around older relatives' idea that babies would be spoiled if they were picked up too quickly when crying, for example. MVB Anna noted:

I usually ask them what they feel is right for them and it is usually not the way that the [parents'] grandmother or mother wanted it to be. And usually it is sufficient that they come here and talk about it and the MVB says that the way they want to do it is right. And usually then they go home and say, 'the expert said I can do it this way'. I think this is usually enough, that they are a little bit strengthened, that they can do it the way they feel is right. (Recorded interview, 17.05.19)

Similarly, MVB Isabella's example of advising parents who were worried that they may be 'spoiling' their baby involved asking parents to self-reflect:

'Who says that it must be this way? Do you have this feeling or [has] someone else [said]... that it must be done different [in order not to spoil the baby]? What feeling do you have in terms of how long you can wait until you pick up the child when it is crying? Where is this demand coming from that you need to let it cry?' This is usually not from the mothers

themselves. Trying to find out – ‘what do you want as parents? You can decide yourself’. (Recorded interview, 12.04.19)

Against this background, MVB Zoe’s statement that she was convinced that “the solution and the approach to a solution is within the client” (recorded interview, 23.12.19) may boil down some MVBs’ descriptions of their approach to advising parents when it came to solving a specific issue. Finding out what resources the client could draw on – for example, whether a parent who was exhausted could fall back on the support of relatives – was only possible through the clients themselves. Only the client, through self-searching facilitated by the MVB’s questions, could say what felt right.

Self-reflection and, even more so, “trust in oneself” also played a role when it came to notions of parental “intuition”, “instinct” or “gut feeling”⁸⁰. Many MVBs believed that most parents know “instinctively” or “intuitively” what to do or that many parents would instinctively “do the right thing”, and that this was an “innate’ ability”⁸¹. While some did not further specify what they meant by these terms, others referred to *Feinfühligkeit*, literally a “fine-tuned sensitivity” that allowed a mother to ‘read’ and respond to her child’s needs.

A recurring theme was that this ‘innate ability’ was at risk of being lost because parents were attempting to become too well-informed, and so were confronted with contradictory information which could lead to feelings of insecurity. The idea that maternal instincts are fading is not a new worry. As discussed in the previous chapter, the senior nurse at Zürich’s mothers’ school had worried that the maternal instinct was becoming unreliable in an article in *Anna Belle* from the 1960s (AB, 1967, 30 (15), p. 25 quoted in Kopp 1974: 124).

Similar to Pro Juventute, many MVBs considered that the flood of information available on childrearing could make parents insecure. On top of that, parents received ‘input’ by third parties such as relatives and friends which would further unsettle them. MVBs described how some

⁸⁰ Many MVBs used these terms interchangeably.

⁸¹ This notion is in line with Remo Largo, whose book *Baby Jahre* was considered a “bible” by several MVBs.

parents coming to the centres had already read up on a certain topic that concerned them online or in advice material and, by doing this, had been confronted with contradictory information which could lead to feelings of doubt and hesitancy: “The parents of today need to learn to decide according to their gut feeling ‘what is right for me’... there is a great insecurity when it comes to *Erziehung*” (MVB Lisa, recorded interview, 03.05.19). MVBs such as Isabella and Rena described the contemporary approach to childrearing as being overly intellectual and defined the restoration of parents’ trust in their own ‘instinct’ or ‘gut feeling’ as an important part of their work:

Sometimes one needs to lead the parents back to this instinct, because the way is so cognitive, the parents are so busy with thinking and do not trust in their gut feeling any more, and so sometimes the connection must be re-made and one can ensure them – no, they do not have to plug in a device so that they will hear the child in the next room in the night, they will hear it, they may even be awake before [the child wakes up]. (MVB Isabella, recorded interview, 12.0.19)

I tell many [parents], ‘just listen to your gut feeling, because you actually know what is good for your child’ but yeah... that is really what is most important... because this gut feeling is also really being lost, because many read up in advice books, then the parents-in-law also come and the friends, who butt in. They then feel just insecure, so much information is around, they want the best for their child, but actually... that is why I tell many of them... ‘listen to what you feel is good, because this is really good’. (MVB Rena, recorded interview, 26.08.20)

In order to be able to, as MVB Hannah phrased it, “draw from one’s intuition” (recorded interview, 17.05.19), clients needed to introspect about what felt good, what felt right. The ‘solution’ again was conceived to be inherent within the clients themselves, while the MVBs’ essential task was to assist in self-searching and subsequently provide ‘reassurance’ that the parents’ realisations were ‘right’. In this constellation, “‘the expert’ refuses to say what is ‘good’, but facilitates the self-examination” (Vandenbroeck et al. 2011: 72). Ostensibly, this practice accentuates the cooperation between parent and advisor and installs the parent as an expert in his or her own right. Nonetheless, the process of self-reflection is initiated and guided by the expert who subsequently gives her ‘blessing’ (or not) to the client’s realisations. Inviting the parent to self-reflect also assists in knowledge production about families, as it entails facilitating her (or him) to speak a kind of inner truth (Foucault 1985: 60) and thereby puts the client “in a submissive position within power

relations” (Hennum 2011: 539).

Although the counselling approach described above was depicted by many MVBs as common practice, it seemed that not all parents were able to come to the MVB with the ‘right’ concerns and did not reach the ‘right’ conclusions through self-reflection. Some MVBs described making clients aware of ‘problems’ such as a baby’s poor weight gain, developmental delays, or using breastfeeding to make children fall asleep more easily⁸². MVB Rebecca regarded it as her task to get a feeling of:

(...) what counselling the different individuals need. What do they want, what is our mission and how precisely is it formulated? (...) One can significantly serve one client if she knows ‘OK, I have enough milk, I can breastfeed my child, this is enough – in regard to all other things, I feel secure’. And with other clients, who come and say ‘there is no problem’, I see a *lot of problems* and a lot of difficulties. (Recorded interview, 21.08.19)

In her view, there were some mothers who only needed her confirmation that things were going well and there were other mothers who were mistaken about their capabilities. Rebecca remarked that she did not try to be a *liebe Oma*, “a nice grandma”, in her role as an advisor, but tried to give feedback on problems that had caught her eye. MVB Katharina described adjusting her style of counselling depending on the requirements of the particular mother, in terms of either providing them with instructive counselling or reassurance, or commenting on issues that she perceived as problematic but had not been recognised by clients themselves:

There are of course different mothers. Some need more security and want rules, structures, ‘what is right’, and others have a more relaxed view. This is partly the challenge...being able to cater to the individual mothers. What does she need? Giving the necessary freedom, supporting, empowering, reassuring, ‘you are doing this right, you have good intuition, you can rely on it’. When it is going well, just doing this [kind of counselling]. When we notice, however, that someone is a bit too casual or does not take something seriously, we should really address the problem or say, ‘you must keep an eye on this a little bit’. (Recorded interview, 12.04.19)

⁸² Some MVBs believed that using breastfeeding to make infants fall asleep more easily was problematic, because that way the children did not have to ‘self-regulate’ and would not learn to fall asleep on their own.

Both MVBs emphasised that they assessed mothers' individual 'needs' in terms of expert guidance which ranged from simple reassurance that they were doing well to instructive advice-giving and making them aware of 'problems'. Similar to the needs discourse in advice material discussed in the previous chapter, which highlights the importance of parents assessing and fulfilling their children's individual needs, the MVBs evaluated and addressed the needs of their individual clients to provide personalised guidance and encourage desirable behaviour. Katharina's description of her varying advising styles also points to the notion of 'empowerment' in MVB counselling which, however, seemed to be reserved for mothers where everything was 'going well'. While mothers who showed appropriate childrearing practices and presented a healthy child might be 'collaborated' with and 'enabled', mothers who failed to do so required a more controlling or dominating approach.

More instructive advice-giving was also observed during my field work with MVB Fiona, especially in the context of consultations involving families who were enrolled in an early intervention programme, the *Frühförderung* (FF). As discussed, the families enrolled in FF were believed to be in need of 'closer accompaniment' and consultations took place more regularly. Several MVBs stated that it was mostly migrants who were included in FF, whose parenting practices some advisors seemed to view more critically. In the context of FF, MVB Lisa, for example, noted that some migrant families from African countries needed to be instructed in how to 'sit down and play with their children' (recorded interview, 03.05.19). Further, she thought that their ways of handling babies needed improvement:

An African woman pulls her child up by one arm and I can hardly watch. And then I think, 'OK, you have learnt to do it this way', and then they quickly throw it on their back and tie it up. Or they can hardly put the baby on the floor because the floor is dirty. And then you can also just say 'it must learn to roll over' – that it is better to put it on the floor than leaving the baby on the sofa.' (ibid.)

From Lisa's point of view the mother's way of picking her child up was too 'rough', but she did not interfere because the practice did not present a great danger to the child. On the other hand,

African women's alleged reservations about leaving babies on the floor had to be addressed by Lisa, in order to prevent babies falling from sofas. This shows that there was also an assessment of which practices are tolerable, and which practices could cause harm and thus needed to be corrected by the MVB. What felt 'right' to some parents was not necessarily sanctioned by the MVB.

In the context of cultural differences and childrearing, Riedi, who carried out a small-scale study of the MVB in Winterthur, speaks of 'normalisation work'. This term refers to professional standards which are, for example, mediated in MVB training courses, or childrearing practices specific to Switzerland which the MVBs may impose on parents from different ethnic backgrounds (Riedi 2003: 89). For example, when informing parents about diet and nutrition, MVBs stick to their trade association's guidelines. However, these standards can come into conflict with other cultural or individual practices that MVBs encounter during their work. For instance, the guidelines instruct parents to start with carrots and potatoes when introducing solids, but parents from a different cultural background may want to start with rice.

During my fieldwork, it was notable that several MVBs referred to mothers from 'African countries' when they wanted to exemplify culturally different approaches to childrearing. About five MVBs stated that (in contrast to European parents) mothers with origins in African countries "just do something somehow" (MVB Anna, recorded interview, 08.05.19; MVB Lisa, recorded interview, 03.05.19), meaning that they did not read up or consult with experts, but tried out things without thinking too much. This was not necessarily seen as a negative approach, but contrasted with overly anxious and insecure Swiss parents, who "hardly dare to even touch" their infants (MVB Lisa, recorded interview, 03.05.19). This alluded to some tensions and contradictions surrounding migrants, 'intuitions' and childrearing. On the one hand, some MVBs believed migrants to be more intuitive with their children. As discussed, many MVBs spoke in favour of an intuitive approach to child raising and saw leading parents back to their 'intuition' as an important part of their work. On the other hand, however, migrants were more likely to be enrolled in the

FF programme where they received closer accompaniment. Here, ‘normalisation work’, which also aimed to integrate migrant children into Swiss society by, for example, teaching parents to go to the playground or the library with their children (MVB Lisa, recorded interview, 03.05.19) plays an essential role. As Pro Juventute points out in the context of their *Elternbriefe* for migrants (see Chapter 3), integrating children into Swiss society is ideally done during early childhood and involves the entire family. From a Foucauldian perspective, normalisation work can be understood as ‘normalising judgement’. MVB guidance shifts from ‘cooperation’ to a pattern in which the advisor clearly states what is ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ and attempts to correct practices perceived as harmful, exposing the MVB’s position of authority.

Encouraging parents to self-search could also be deployed in a different context, for example, in making parents admit to wrongdoing. MVB Fiona saw the prevention of violence in childrearing as one of her most important tasks. In July 2019 I spent a day with her at an advice centre in a rural region in the canton of Lucerne. Fiona counselled a couple with a 17 month-old son. After answering the questions that the parents had, Fiona started asking them some questions, such as how their son was sleeping and whether he had already reached the *Trotzphase*⁸³. A discussion started about how to be consistent with a child and how to formulate saying ‘no’. The parents noted that their son sometimes got very angry when they did not allow something. Fiona seemed to have reached a point in the discussion that she had been heading for. She suddenly narrowed her eyes and asked: “Can you stomach it when he screams like that? (*Magsch es verlide, wänn er so schreit?*) What do you do when he gets angry?” The mother replied that she tried to stay calm and controlled, which was not always easy. Fiona seemed to be happy with this answer and nodded eagerly in agreement.

After the consultation, I asked Fiona why she had brought up this topic, which had not been raised by the parents themselves, for, at our first meeting in April 2019, she had claimed that

⁸³*Trotzphase*, translated as ‘defiance phase’ or ‘the terrible twos’ is understood as a developmental phase of toddlerhood during which children develop a sense of self-awareness and, in relation to that, their own will. When faced with resistance, toddlers can react with so-called ‘temper tantrums’.

the topics discussed during consultations were usually determined by the parents. She replied that she was “fishing” for certain topics, such as sleeping or *trotzen* (defying) that may cause stressful situations in families, as she wanted to discuss how they were dealt with at home. She wanted to prevent parents resorting to any kind of violent reaction in dealing with their children: she said that slapping children on the hand was still widespread, and the child presented during the consultation was in a particularly at-risk age group. Fiona emphasised that a parent could come to her with “anything”, for she could stomach (*verliden*) a lot, and then they could “work it out” (field notes, 16.07.19, interview notes 15.04.19).

Inducing confessions from parents by encouraging them to introspect and think about potential wrongdoing towards their child also took place on other occasions. Fiona told me that she informed parents during their first consultation that she was legally required to report abuse, just as they had the right to inform authorities when they “see something in the neighbourhood they don’t like”⁸⁴. In this way, she tried to “disempower control that was somewhere there above us” and made clients understand that there would be consequences for her if she failed to report signs of abuse. I am not exactly sure what Fiona meant by ‘disempower[ing] control that was somewhere there above’. Maybe she believed that, by letting parents know that she had the duty to report whenever a child’s wellbeing was endangered, she was being transparent and thereby less controlling? Perhaps this remark must also be seen in the context of her next statement. Providing parents with this information, Fiona asserted, provoked conversations about violent occurrences in families’ homes, such as yelling at children or locking them in their rooms⁸⁵. Just by letting parents know about her reporting duty, parents would begin self-reflecting about whether they had resorted to violence at home. When parents had started to address issues concerning violence or aggression, one could start “correcting” them. By triggering conversations about violent

⁸⁴ Here, Fiona alludes to the fact that anyone, professional or not, can inform child protection services about child endangerment (Art. 314c ZGB Melderechte).

⁸⁵ Generally, MVBs used a wide definition of violence that included not just physical violence, but also verbal violence.

occurrences, Fiona could start “working with the parent” on this issue. While being able to provide ‘relief’ themselves, MVBs do not have to report families to authorities, who Fiona might have conceived as being “somewhere there above” her.

Fiona stressed that she would not judge a mother who told her that she was yelling at her child, but would tell her that they would look into it and find out exactly what made her so angry. This way, she said, they were already transitioning to the prevention of violence. She claimed that it was often completely incomprehensible for parents as to why they treated this “little human” that they loved so much this way. It was necessary to find out the exact reason that made the parents so angry and provide them with “tactics” to deal with this, Fiona asserted. Those tactics again entailed self-reflecting: parents had to be very self-aware and think about their needs. Parents should not lose themselves. She noted that she worked a lot with language, saying that parents needed to think about how they talked to their children and clearly communicate their emotions or state of mind. They could, for example, tell children that they could not play with them because they were tired. This way, children could also learn to communicate their own feelings (interview notes, 15.04.19).

The MVB’s approach to advising families is concerned with the individual, whose personal capabilities, needs, and wishes are assessed. It also involves assisting (some) parents in finding out what feels right for them by guiding self-reflection. Encouraging parents to self-reflect entails clients speaking a kind of ‘inner truth’, providing the MVB with important knowledge about every single ‘sheep’ she is held accountable for, when she, for example, fails to recognise or report child abuse or neglect:

The pastor (i.e. the social worker) is accountable for each sheep, as is obvious in the increasing number of cases where social workers are brought to justice in cases that they have for instance failed to detect child maltreatment. The ‘sins’ of the sheep are considered to be also the pastors’ sins. This concept of pastoral power requires a specific knowledge by the shepherd of the soul of each member of the flock. (Vandenbroeck et al. 2011: 72)

The following sections will explore another aspect of pastoral care: observing ‘behaviour and conduct’. MVBs’ counselling sessions involved the observation (and examination) of children in

order to collect and archive information, especially in terms of physical growth and development, but also the observation and classification of mother-child interactions.

Gathering Information and Making Observations

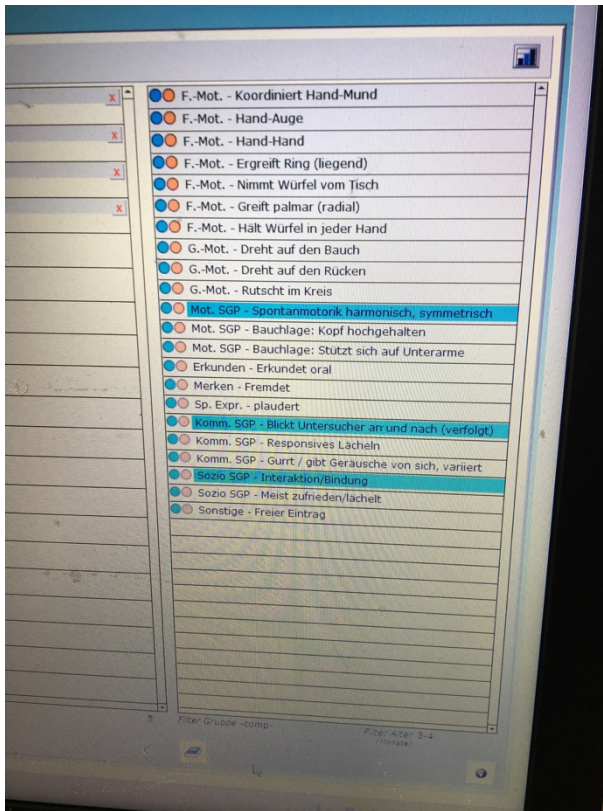


Image 3: A grid in which the MVB checks off developmental milestones, authors' photo.

MVBs, like doctors, had a file on every client family and documented each consultation. The infant's weight, length and head circumference⁸⁶ were entered into a growth curve chart, and questions put by parents, information given, and observations made by the MVB were noted down. Even if MVBs left what was discussed during consultations up to the parents, they still observed and documented children's behaviour as well as parent-child interactions unrequested. When I asked MVB Beatrix why she had checked whether a baby could follow her head movements with its eyes she told me that this was an important developmental step for the child's age group and that she was checking whether he was already capable of it. She then showed me a grid (Image 3)

⁸⁶At least in non-commissioned consultations it is not mandatory to keep track of physical growth. In the consultations I took part in parents always made use of this offer. During the interviews, MVBs mentioned that parents with infants usually wanted the MVB to track their growth.

in her IT program which she fed with client data⁸⁷. In this grid, she and her colleagues ticked off developmental steps according to age, such as gross and fine motor skills, communication, behaviours, such as stranger anxiety or wanting to explore things orally, the general condition of the child – evaluated as “mostly content and smiley” in the example above – as well as the interactions and attachment behaviour between parent and child. The grid is extended with new developmental steps in line with a child’s increasing age (field notes, 24.07.19).

Monitoring the development of children was usually done incidentally by MVBs. In the consultations I witnessed, it was often not clearly communicated to the parents that it was taking place and what exactly the MVB was looking for and why. MVB Valeria described how she examined children’s development in the following way:

I control the development – I do not necessarily position the child in front of me and make it do this and this and this. I usually do it while the child is playing. And then I may mention to the mother, ‘oh, your child is already doing this, and this... but it is not doing this yet. You could promote this in this way’. (Recorded interview, 14.08.19)

MVB Fiona prepared her consultation room before each family arrived by arranging toys on the floor which she believed were appropriate for the age of that particular child. This way, she explained, she could observe whether the child was “playing properly”. She especially liked observing children in her play kitchen, because that way she could check whether they engaged in role play, which she deemed very important for a specific age group. Similar to MVB Valeria, Fiona commented on children’s play and pointed out what their child was already capable of doing to the parents. Sometimes she asked parents whether their child was already capable of doing something. For example, she asked a mother whether her nine-month-old son was already crawling. When the mother affirmed this, Fiona expressed delight and remarked: “I am a big fan of crawling, because it fosters the connection between the left and the right brain hemisphere, which is important for spatial orientation and neural networking” (field notes, 16.07.19).

⁸⁷ MVB Beatrix encouraged me to take a photo of the grid, in which the client’s name was not visible.

Both Beatrix and Fiona asked clients whether they wanted their child to be measured and weighed after their questions (or the MVBs' questions) had been answered, which all clients affirmed. The children were placed on the changing table, undressed by their mothers, and then placed on the scale. MVBs used a measuring tape to measure the head circumference. Body length was measured with a measuring stick. Taking these measurements – especially head circumference and body length – did not seem to be an easy task, as during both Fiona's and Beatrix's consultations sometimes the measurements did not make sense. For example, one baby's head circumference seemed to have shrunk one centimetre since the last consultation and one baby had got heavier, but its length had not changed at all.

Before measuring MVB Fiona always said: "Now Mummy will get a nice number". After entering the measurements in her computer to feed the growth chart with new data Fiona informed the mothers about the result and located their child on the different percentile curves in the growth chart, commenting on whether it was a "larger" or "smaller" child. The mother of a nine month-old son, who Fiona assessed to be a larger child, was told that he was "developing magnificently" (*er entwickelt sich prächtig*). Compared to the other children that had been brought to the advice centre that day, this baby was particularly big for his age. He was well nourished with chubby cheeks and chunky legs. He seemed to arouse the most delight in Fiona, who sighed, "is he not the dearest?" (*ist er nicht herzallerliebst?*) and waved joyously at him on his departure (field notes, 16.07.10).

The supervision of biological processes by gathering and storing data about children's physical and mental development allow bio- and anatomo-politic interventions "to invest life through and through" (Foucault 1978: 139). Biopolitics are concerned with control and intervention in human populations that require the collection of data. The MVBs engage in generating knowledge about populations when gathering and storing information on families by producing growth charts and recording age-specific developmental milestones, as well as documenting parents' questions and concerns, and the attachment between mother and child. Anatomo-politic interventions are individualising and concerned with the human body as a

machine whose “usefulness” and “docility” (Foucault 1978: 139) must be preserved or increased to fit the demands of modern economic production. The MVB monitors and evaluates the individual child’s body according to standardised growth charts. If a child is putting on too little or too much weight, the MVB can suggest that the client should put their child on a different diet and return a few weeks later to check up on their weight again. If the child is ‘lagging behind’ in terms of development – for example, if it is not able to crawl or walk at a certain age – the MVB can suggest certain exercises to support the child’s development in this regard or instruct the mother to take the child to a paediatrician for further examination. The client takes on responsibility to implement expert advice at home. By observing and examining the child, analysing its growth curve as well as ticking off developmental milestones, the MVB exercises a “normalising gaze” (Foucault 1995: 1984) that supports the parents’ (and the state’s) efforts to produce a ‘normal’ child. Receiving a ‘nice number’ when having the child weighed and measured by the MVB indicates that the child is growing properly, which is supposed to feel rewarding for the client who is indirectly praised for providing proper care and nourishment and encouraged to continue doing so. The child’s body can be “a sign of the parent’s devotion – or neglect” (Strathern 2005: 5) and, especially in terms of growth and development, is assumed to reflect the parents’ practices (ibid).

Shepherd alludes to the “persuasive power of numbers” when it comes to the affirmation of ‘good’ mothering in child health centres in Australia: “Weighing babies provides numbers that are interpreted, by both mother and CFH nurse, as an indicator of both the baby’s health and the mothers’ conformity to normative expectations” (Shepherd 2014: 165). While Henderson et al. use the example of the paediatrician, they suggest that children’s ‘ranking’ in terms of physical growth and development in a formal setting can also instil a feeling of constant surveillance in parents by an “external authoritative figure” (Henderson et al. 2010: 235).

In *Discipline and Punish* (1995), Foucault refers to Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon (1748-1832), an architectural model for institutional buildings that are designed, as for example in the case of prisons, in a way that inmates are permanently visible to the guard, but the guard is not

visible to the inmates. This way, the inmates never know when they are being observed, which has the effect that they feel constantly monitored. Subsequently, the prisoners start to observe and manage their own behaviour as though someone might always be watching them. Foucault termed the kind of monitoring of subjects that is made possible in the Panopticon “hierarchical observation” (Foucault 1995: 170). Observation, exercised by someone with a higher status, becomes invisible and aims at subjects’ self-modification of their behaviour, as constant surveillance becomes internalised.

During a conversation with MVB Beatrix, we talked about commission-based home visits. Beatrix stated that she enjoyed working with KESB. While other MVBs had a passion for diet, she liked to take care of the “social situation” of families and “problem cases”. When I asked MVB Beatrix what she paid attention to during a commission-based home visit, her first answer was that she checked how the child was doing, but then shifted to the parents. She went on to explain that she did not believe everything parents told her, only about 50%, because parents could feign a lot to her. Beatrix claimed that she let parents know – at least those she worked with based on a commission – that she can tell whether they always clean their house or only before an arranged home visit takes place. Also, in terms of attachment behaviour, Beatrix alleged that she could spot whether a mother only played with her child when she was around, or if this also took place unobserved. If the latter was the case, she said she could detect a defence reaction in the child, as no bond could grow between mother and child if the mother sat on the sofa watching TV while the child played alone in its room. By asserting that she could see through the scene that was set for her during visits, Beatrix wanted to motivate her clients to adhere to ‘positive’ parenting practices even when they were not being observed. Here, the notion of instilling a sense of constant observation in ‘difficult’ clients might also play a role: the idea that Beatrix’s observation skills could even track what they had been doing unobserved may result in clients constantly thinking about the MVB’s next home visit and subsequently modifying their behaviour in order to conform to her expectations.

In the context of non-commissioned consultations, MVBs also hierarchically observed parent-child interactions, especially when it came to attachment behaviour, which was also visible in the grid that Beatrix showed me on her computer. MVB Sophia remarked that promoting attachment in early childhood was increasingly being addressed in their prevention work. Clearly, attachment theory, which stresses the utmost importance of a child's secure attachment to its mother (or another caretaker) as the basis of healthy development, as well as the concept of 'maternal sensitivity', were very prominent in the MVBs' work, with 'making' sensitive mothers being a major concern, but it was probably one of the tasks that clients were least aware of.

Promoting Maternal Sensitivity and Secure Attachment

Bowlby suggested that all primate infants "are born preprogrammed to form a powerful emotional attachment to their mother or other primary attachment figure to whom the infant strove to stay close at all times" (Hrdy 1999, p. 387). Based on the degree to which "their own early feelings are reciprocated" by this primary caretaker, infants configure an idea of what to "seek and expect from relationships" (ibid.), which also shapes their attachment behaviour. Bowlby was aware that not all mothers acted in ways that promote 'ideal' attachment, which was also found by Mary Ainsworth (Ainsworth 1967; Ainsworth and Bell 1970), who built on Bowlby's theory and devised the 'Strange Situation Test' to classify a child's attachment to their mother:

According to a prearranged plan, mother and infant arrive together in the lab; shortly thereafter the mother slips out, leaving her infant alone in an unfamiliar setting with a kindly disposed stranger. Then the mother returns. This process is repeated. Exactly what the infant does (or does not do) to reestablish physical and psychological contact with her mother after these absences is carefully observed, coded, and classified (...). (Hrdy 1999: 402)

According to Ainsworth's classification, securely attached infants may be distressed when the mother leaves, but are easily comforted when reunited with their mother or may not even need comforting, but are simply happy and express joy that the mother has returned (Faircloth 2014c;

Hrdy 1999: 402-403). Insecurely attached infants are divided into two categories: insecure/ambivalent and insecure/avoidant children. The first category describes children who are very distressed when the mother leaves them and are *not* easily comforted by her when she returns. The latter category describes children who don't display any distress when separated from the mother and even avoid contact to her when she returns (Hrdy 1999: 403).

MVBs' notions of attachment were directly connected to those of 'instincts' described in the previous sections. Some MVBs explained that intuitive competences enabled mothers to promote their child's secure attachment, such as being *verlässlich* (reliable) as well as being able to recognise and cater to the child's needs. Paying attention, interpreting, and reacting appropriately and consistently to needs, was sometimes described as 'reading a child' or 'identifying the *Feinzeichen*' (subtle signals or signs) given by the child. None of my MVB interlocutors specifically referred to the psychological concept of 'maternal sensitivity'⁸⁸ (also translated as *Feinfühligkeit* in German), coined by Mary Ainsworth to define what they meant by *Feinfühligkeit*. MVBs' elaborations on *Feingefühligkeit*, however, came very close to Ainsworth's ideas about mothers' 'sensitivity' and how it shapes the mother-child relationship. Ainsworth, who studied mother-child interactions in Uganda and North America, defined maternal sensitivity as a central determinant of the 'quality' of attachment. She asserted that sensitive mothers' capability to accurately interpret and respond to their children's 'signals' – both obvious and subtle – results in the child's secure attachment to its mother (Ainsworth 1969)⁸⁹.

⁸⁸ Dawson notes that in 1981, the more gender-inclusive term 'parental sensitivity' emerged, that began to undermine the "initial construct" that suggested that the mother is the primary caregiver and as such solely responsible for her child's attachment style (Dawson 2019). However, several recent publications still use the term 'maternal sensitivity' (Aarestrup et al. 2020; King, Priddis and Kane 2015).

⁸⁹ In contrast, insensitive mothers "are not aware of much of their infant's behavior, either because they ignore the baby or they fail to perceive in his activity the more subtle and hard-to-detect communications. (...). A mother may have somewhat accurate perceptions of her infant's activity and moods but may be unable to empathize with him" (Ainsworth 1969: 4). Insensitive mothering results in insecurely attached children.

Ainsworth's concept is still very influential today and early childhood programmes aspiring to promote maternal sensitivity can be found worldwide (Dawson 2019), as well as psychologists and health sciences researchers studying the outcomes of these programmes (Aarestrup et al. 2020; King et al. 2015; Neuhauser 2017). Aarestrup et al. (2020) stress the positive effects of secure attachment as well as the detrimental outcomes of a lack of sensitivity which results in insecure attachment:

Sensitive parents are aware and capable of understanding their child's expression of emotions and respond to the child's need in a timely and appropriate manner. Conversely, lack of or inconsistent accessibility/presence or misunderstanding the child's emotional expression and behavior can lead to an insecure or disorganized attachment relationship when frightening the child. Secure attachment has been shown to be significantly associated with several positive outcomes for the child in terms of emotional, social, and behavioral development and adjustment, as well as school performance. Likewise, insecure and disorganized attachment is associated with an increased risk for the development of externalizing and internalizing behavior and later psychopathology. (Aarestrup et al. 2020: 2)

From the point of view of the state as well as affiliated early childhood experts, a lack of sensitivity resulting in insecure attachment presents a "risk factor" (Kanieski 2010) for children's undesirable social development and poor academic performance, while secure attachment is "constructed as a protective factor" (Kanieski 2010: 341). Thus, monitoring mothers in terms of (risk factors for or) a lack of sensitivity or signs of insecure attachment behaviour in their offspring is deemed highly important to ensure children's ideal development and their 'success' in later life. Kanieski observes that deeming insecure attachment a risk factor has resulted "in the use of the techniques of surveillance medicine to monitor families not only to prevent disorders of attachment but also to promote and optimise the psychological health of children" (Kanieski 2010: 336). This was clearly apparent in the work of MVBs, who classified attachment behaviour and strived to enhance sensitivity in those who showed a lack of it.

According to MVB Rebecca, assessing how a child was doing and whether its needs were being identified and satisfied was a demanding but crucial task of an advisor. Observing and evaluating attachment behaviour was one way of gaining an insight into how sensitive a mother

was. Rebecca classified children's and mothers' behaviours during consultations and described a child's secure attachment behaviour in the following words:

It [the child] needs time until it feels comfortable. It searches for the closeness to its mother, but when it notices that 'the MVB is OK, she just talks to Mummy, she does not want to give me an injection', then the exploration phase must begin. We have a lot of toys in the consultation rooms... that the child shows that it feels secure enough and shows explorative behaviour. You can observe this in every session... also does a mother let her child explore? (Recorded interview, 21.08.20)

Rebecca was the only MVB who referred to Mary Ainsworth when discussing attachment behaviour. She understood the MVB consultation as a kind of Strange Situation Test, although the mothers do not leave the room during the visit and, especially when clients come to the centre regularly, the MVB may not be a stranger to the child at all. Rebecca expected securely attached children to first show 'heightened attachment behaviour' (Ainsworth and Bell 1970) such as clinging to the mother, triggered by the 'threat' of the strange MVB. After a while, however, Rebecca expected them to feel secure enough to leave the mother's immediate proximity in order to explore the consultation room. A sensitive mother, according to Rebecca (as well as Ainsworth) permits and supports their child's desire to explore its surroundings (Dawson 2019: 6).

During a consultation with a mother and her nine month-old son, MVB Fiona assessed mother-child interactions in terms of attachment, which was also communicated to the client. My field notes read:

Fiona puts a blanket on the floor and positions several toys on it. The mother, who sits on a chair opposite Fiona, places her son on the blanket. The infant panics, flails its arms and starts crying. Fiona comments on his behaviour by calmly saying 'oh, he is not ready to separate from you yet. He still needs your closeness'. The mother picks up the child and places it on her lap again. (...) During the conversation, which revolves around a patch of rough skin that the mother wants Fiona to look at, the boy cheers up. He stands up on his mother's legs and starts jumping up and down. The mother holds him under his arms. Fiona interprets this as good attachment ("*gute Bindung*") between the mother and the child. She tells the mother that it is a good sign that her son dared to jump and climb on her, as this meant that he trusts her to hold him while he is jumping and that he knows that she will catch him when he falls. (Field notes, 16.07.19)

Fiona kept an eye on the boy's behaviour and shared her observations with the mother. When the infant started crying after being positioned on the floor, Fiona interpreted this as a sign that he was

not yet ready for the 'explorative phase' and relayed to the mother that her son still wanted to be close to her. Fiona was 'reading' the child and 'translating' the child's needs to the mother. The mother reacted appropriately by picking her anxious son up again. Later, Fiona commented on the infant's active movements on his mother's legs and remarked that she saw this as an indication of a trustful relationship between her and her son. Thereby, she not only let the client know that she rated her child's behaviour as a positive sign of her mothering, but also that she was able to gain an impression of the quality of their emotional bond by simply observing her child's behaviour.

The Strange Situation Test sheds a light on the 'power of psychology', as it provides the MVB with a tool to observe and classify clients' behaviour hierarchically and normatively. In 'Experts of the Soul' (1991), Rose alludes to the usefulness of psychological tests in terms of making people "calculable", which allows for more efficient governing:

The psychological "test", in all its forms, is the paradigmatic technique of the calculable person, for visualising and inscribing individual difference in a calculable form. The test is a tiny but all pervasive diagram of a certain combination of power, truth and subjectification: tests and examinations render individuals into knowledge as objects of a hierarchical and normative gaze, making it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish. The invisible, subjective world of the individual can now be visualised and represented in classifications, in figures and quotients. The psychological test thus plays a crucial role within the calculative attitude that has become central to all those 'disciplinary' institutions that are the other 'normalising' side of liberal democracy, institutions where individuals are to be governed in terms of their individuality, in such a way to maximise their organizational utility and utilise their powers in a calculated form. (Rose 1991: 93f)

MVB Rena explained that assessing interactions between mother and child in terms of attachment was an 'automatism' one developed as an MVB. Interactions at the changing table were a good opportunity "to look at what is going on between mother and child". However, she would not immediately tell parents if she felt there was a deficiency in terms of attachment, but "continue to observe it" (recorded interview, 26.08.19). Similarly, MVB Rebecca noted that she checked how mothers reacted to their babies' behaviour during counselling and would share her observations with the mother after a few weeks if she found her interactions with the child to be problematic. Rebecca also pointed out that, in order to be able to address such a 'sensitive' topic, trust between client and advisor first needed to be established:

When I am in a conversation [with a client], I look there and again... when a child makes a sound, cries, or expresses joy. I can see how a mother reacts to this. Does she react or not? If she does not react, this is very conspicuous. One must find out why this is. But depending on... [how long she has been in contact with a client], I cannot intervene as an advisor yet, because the trust is just not there yet. But I can detect it, observe it, and also make a note. Keeping it in the back of my mind that when I see the woman after two or three weeks I will remember that I must keep an eye on it. If the trust is there, after a few weeks – a month would be too long – I can address it. (...) [I say] ‘It has caught my eye that...’. (Recorded interview, 21.08.19)

A critical discussion of the concept of ‘maternal sensitivity’ and how it has been adjusted and extended as a theory in recent decades would go beyond the scope of this chapter. Still, it is important to note that the question of whether the concept of maternal sensitivity can be universally applied cross-culturally has been raised even by psychologists (Dawson 2019) who contrast the assumptions of the concept with anthropological literature on childrearing. Keller, for example, points out that researchers need to take local ideas about family relationships as well as culturally-specific socialisation goals regarding children into account when studying attachment. While it may be desirable in one cultural context to follow the baby’s lead, it may be more desirable to shape and control children’s behaviour in another context (Keller 2013: 181f). However, mothers’ reactions to their children’s signals may not be solely dependent on ‘local caregiving standards’ (Dawson 2019: 4), but may also just vary on an individual basis and depend on the mother’s personal preferences and desires regarding her child’s socialisation, ideas concerning the position of children and parents, her social and economic background, her own upbringing, religious affiliation, and other factors.

Dawson asserts that certain aspects of the contemporary theoretical conceptualisation of maternal sensitivity (that to some extent depart from Ainsworth’s original notion of sensitivity) are culturally specific, such as the “centrality of parent-infant play, verbal responsiveness, the inclusion of learning in parent-infant interactions and the shift towards a more proactive (rather than reactive) role for the parent in parent-infant interactions” (Dawson 2019: 1). While Ainsworth’s sensitive mother was primarily reactive, Dawson states that contemporary theorists expect mothers

to be proactive. Thus, expectations regarding the sensitive mother have also been ‘intensified’. Dawson goes on to say that supposedly universal features of sensitivity such as verbal interaction is not a given in all local contexts:

There is also extensive evidence that suggests that different cultural groups make use of different modalities to respond to infants’ signals. While Western parents tend towards more overt, verbal forms of interaction, non-Western parents’ interactions appear to be more subtle and non-verbal. Active social and extroverted behaviours such as face-to-face positioning, eye contact and vocalisation are also more commonly found in North American and Western European cultures. In contrast, parents in African, Asian or South American cultures are commonly found in continuous close physical proximity to their infant and appear to primarily make use of physical facilitation, focus-following, tempo adjustment, movement and positioning in response to infant signals. Such parents are unlikely to engage in normal speech or motherese (baby talk), eye contact or face-to-face interaction. Given these cultural variations, many groups are likely to be misrepresented by current conceptualisations or measures of maternal sensitivity, which consider vocal interactions to be central. (Dawson 2019: 6)

In line with Bowlby, many MVBs understood *Feinfühligkeit* to be ‘innate’ and usually referred to mothers when describing what they meant by it. While to some extent this may be connected to gendered ideas regarding childrearing, in the sense that they perceived mothers as primary caretakers who are ‘naturally’ programmed to ‘read’ their children and respond to them, it was probably also because the MVBs mostly dealt with women. Mothers who were perceived as being unable to display *Feinfühligkeit* were believed to be suffering from a psychological illness, such as postnatal depression or trauma. In this case, as Rebecca’s phrased it, the *Feingefühl* that allowed mothers to promote attachment was *verschüttet*, “submerged” (recorded interview, 21.08.19). MVB Sophia explained that mental disorders, but also a high level of stress, could prevent mothers from being “present” and reacting to their children (recorded interview, 22.05.19). MVB Lisa noted that there were some parents who “were just not capable of it, had never learnt it” (recorded interview, 03.05.19) thereby alluding to the idea that some parents had never experienced their own parents displaying *Feingefühl* and therefore had had no opportunity to acquire it themselves. These perceptions of the determinants of a missing *Feingefühl* do not morally condemn mothers for not being sensitive and potentially engendering an attachment disorder in their child, but understand

insensitive mothers as “victims of their circumstances” (Kanieski 2010: 342)⁹⁰. As Kanieski points out, the medicalisation of mothering “has extended to the emotional realm”, as experts assess “the ability to form emotional bonds with others” in the context of maternal sensitivity and attachment behaviour (Kanieski 2010: 335). Although discussing these issues in terms of ‘love’, Martin and Macvarish allude to experts’ and policy makers’ increasing focus on parents’ “psychological or emotional barriers to loving their children”, which are assumed to impact negatively on secure attachment between parent and child (Martin and Macvarish 2021: 439).⁹¹

While mothers may not be morally condemned for not being sensitive (Kanieski 2010), there is a moral incentive to improve *Feinfühligkeit*, as reading and subsequently addressing children’s needs appropriately and reliably is considered crucial for the child’s future wellbeing, development and success. Some MVBs described trying to motivate mothers who, in their view, were lacking *Feingefühl*, to react appropriately to their children’s cues. By making parents aware of their child’s behaviour, they hoped to trigger a reaction: “I show them the child’s perspective, I say ‘Aha, look, he is looking at you, he likes your face so much’. Telling parents what their child likes, what does their child good” (MVB Sophia, recorded interview, 22.05.19). The idea that babies signal their needs through *Feinzeichen* made some MVBs encourage the parent to engage in close observation of their child’s disposition. MVB Olivia advised parents to consciously observe their babies in order to become more aware of their abilities and learn how to interpret their behaviour:

Just taking time, very deliberately... to sit for half an hour in front of the baby and just to experience what it does. It is astounding that actually many... even if one is 24 hours with the baby, one never focuses on what it actually does, what movements it can do, how is its gaze? Can it already make eye contact for a longer time, does one hear first sounds (...)? Does it want to suckle? How is this expressed? Is it already hungry? Just to observe... just taking time to observe. (Recorded interview, 05.12.19)

⁹⁰ However, Lisa also noted that there were some parents who had the feeling that “this is just a baby anyway” (recorded interview, 03.05.19) and thus reflected the view that missing *Feingefühl* could also have other reasons than a mental disorder, such as just having a wrong attitude towards infants.

⁹¹ The evaluation of mothers’ psychological state and the governing of maternal emotions already starts during pregnancy. In ‘Policing the Maternal Mind: Maternal Health, Psychological Government, and Swiss Pregnancy Politics’ (2019), Ballif explores the psychological government of pregnancy in a perinatal unit in Switzerland and describes how midwives providing counselling to pregnant women encouraged them to manage their emotions for their child’s sake.

Olivia viewed baby massage as a means through which parents “could get in touch” (*in Kontakt treten*) with their newborns, who otherwise had difficulties to do so⁹²:

In Zürich City, we also have other things on offer, such as baby massage. It is also free; some courses are on a drop-in basis, others without. Mothers can attend after [their baby has turned] six weeks. The main aim here is to reach especially families where one notes a little bit that *Feinfühligkeit* is a topic – lack of *Feinfühligkeit* – or that they express themselves in a very insecure manner or present themselves in an insecure manner... that we try to accompany their attachment to the child, their relationship to the child, positively. (Recorded interview, 05.12.19)

Here, Olivia addressed how the expression of ‘insecurity’ in childrearing-related matters could indicate that the MVB’s *Begleitung* aimed at promoting attachment was needed – probably because parents expressing insecurity regarding handling their baby were perceived as having issues with properly reading their baby’s signals and accessing their intuitive competences. Zürich City MVB’s website promotes the benefits of baby massage for both children and parents. On the child’s side, these relate to babies’ physical wellbeing as well as their future development: massaging boosts babies’ growth and enhances learning and language abilities, as “touch and pleasant, respectful contact” was just as important for the baby as eating or sleeping. Further, the child’s emotional wellbeing is supposed to be fostered in this way, as massaging the baby allows for the “mediation of important feelings” such as love and respect. “High-quality moments” (*qualitativ hochwertige Momente*) shared during the massage are believed to strengthen the connection and support an “intimate contact” between parent and child. While it is unclear exactly what is meant by ‘high-quality moments’, I assume that the MVB is alluding to the time and focus that is invested in the baby during a massage. On the parents’ side, the massage promises increased wellbeing, such as better sleep and gaining self-confidence in the parental role. As conveyed in MVB Olivia’s quote above, the MVB’s website claims that the massage will also “intensify parental sensitivity”: “You

⁹² Experts seem to view baby massage courses as means to connect parents with their babies in other European countries as well. According to Underdown and Barlow, baby massage programmes are routinely offered by various early childhood programmes in the UK (Underdown and Barlow 2011).

learn to recognise your child's signals of content and discomfort – this increases your understanding of your child” (MVB ZH n.d.; my translation).

During the second nationwide Covid-19 lockdown in January and February 2021, I had the opportunity to witness how *Feingefühl* and in conjunction secure attachment was sought to be promoted during three MVB baby massage sessions offered by Zürich City's MVB⁹³. The three sessions were conducted by two different MVBs, who did not differ much in how they taught the course. Massage sessions used to take place in the advice centres but had to be cancelled due to the ban on group activities which aimed to curb the spread of Covid-19. The sessions took place online via Microsoft Teams and were attended by about 15 participants, mostly mothers, but sometimes a camera also showed a mother and father waiting for the session to start. The MVB giving the course seemed to be in the advice centre. On my laptop screen I recognised the usual consultation room set-up, with a changing table, scale and wet wipes. The camera was directed close-up at the MVB who sat cross-legged on a yoga mat. A doll wrapped in a blanket was positioned in front of the MVB. The doll was bald, had brown eyes and a somehow enraptured smile on its face. It was fully dressed in baby clothes. The MVB instructed the participants to turn off their videos and microphones⁹⁴, while one camera showed a mother hectically changing her baby's nappies in a bathroom and another one provided a glimpse into a bedroom, where a woman sat on a bed covered in laundry waiting to be folded. Although conducting baby massage courses online prevented face-to-face contact with clients, the camera provided MVBs (as well as participants) with glimpses into parents' 'private' lives at home.

The MVB started the session by instructing participants to undress their babies, while she also began removing the clothes from the doll, which even had a nappy on. She then looked into the doll's face and asked: 'Hey, is it OK if I give you a baby massage?' (MVB Charlotte, field notes,

⁹³ Before signing up for the course, I informed the MVB about my research project and asked whether I could take part in the online session as a researcher, which the organisation granted.

⁹⁴ The MVB's concern here was about data protection – in the second session, MVB Hilda noted that the camera should not be directed at the babies' naked bodies.

26.01.2021)⁹⁵ – which was probably supposed to encourage parents to ask for their infant’s approval before starting the massage. The MVB then directed the parents to coat their hands with massage oil and showed the first massage techniques by massaging the doll and describing the movements she was doing with her hands. When describing massage techniques that focused on different body parts, the MVB spoke in a calming, soothing voice. While kneading the doll’s limbs, she encouraged parents to observe their baby’s behaviour and reactions and thereby interpret its emotional state: “Does my child like it? How much pressure does it like? Is it relaxed? Does it need a break?” This way, the MVB asserted, the baby massage would allow the parents to get to know their baby (ibid.). From time to time, the MVB looked into the camera to address the participants, but most of the time she focused on the doll’s face. She smiled at the doll and talked to her while massaging, saying things like: “that’s right... this is relaxing” (MVB Hilda, field notes, 29.01.21). Sometimes the MVB spoke from the doll’s point of view. For example, when the massage began to focus on the torso, she suggested that the participants should first just rest their hands on the baby’s belly and then noted what the baby was thinking at that moment: “Ah, now the hands are positioned on my belly” (ibid.). Further, the MVB recited nursery rhymes during the massage or ‘greeted’ the different body parts that were about to be kneaded or stretched. At the end of the massage, the MVB carefully picked the doll up in her arms and said: “Thank you Baby for letting me massage you” (MVB Charlotte, field notes, 26.01.21)⁹⁶. After the massage, the participants had the opportunity to ask questions.

From the MVB’s point of view, baby massage assists in training an ‘insensitive’ parent to develop a *Feingefühl* for the child. The massage facilitates physical contact and communication between parent and child, which many MVBs deemed essential for good attachment. Further, it entails monitoring the baby’s reactions to their parents’ touch. The MVB continuously encouraged

⁹⁵ MVB Hilda, who conducted the second session, did not ask the doll whether it was OK about having a massage, but suggested that parents should inform their baby that they were now taking its clothes off and were giving it a nice massage (field notes, 29.01.2021).

⁹⁶ MVB Hilda did not thank the doll for allowing her to give it a massage.

parents to ‘read’ their child during the massage in order to find out whether it was causing relaxation or discomfort in the baby. Taking part in the session ‘forces’ parents to dedicate an hour exclusively to observing and actively engaging with their baby. MVB Hilda remarked during the massage that “we have time, we have no stress”, designating the massage as a period when parents could focus solely on their baby without being distracted by other things (MVB Hilda, field notes, 29.01.21)⁹⁷. As course instructor, the MVB herself served as an ‘object of imitation’ for parents. By keeping her gaze on the doll’s face, smiling, and talking to the doll, reciting nursery rhymes or commenting on the doll’s reaction to the massage, she sought to display ‘proper’ communication with babies, which was probably intended to stimulate parents to do the same with their own child⁹⁸.

Foucault notes that the “pastor must really take charge of and observe daily life in order to form a never-ending knowledge of the behaviour and conduct of the members of the flock he supervises” (Foucault 2009: 181). Only by gathering individual knowledge of his sheep is the pastor able to properly provide guidance and ensure salvation. In the context of the MVB and the issue of attachment, this means that only through observing mother-child interactions can MVBs tell if mothers and their children are displaying appropriate attachment behaviour or whether further interventions such as a baby massage course or psychological counselling are required.

Clients are not necessarily aware that they are being observed in this way but, as the example of MVB Fiona showed, MVBs may indicate that they are evaluating the quality of the mother-child bond and praise mothers for having securely attached children. Still, the MVBs’ mission in regard to attachment and maternal sensitivity was not presented in a transparent manner, and thus these observations transpired in a highly hierarchical way. Furthermore, the question arises as to what extent advisors are really capable of assessing the relationship between a mother and child within a 20 or 30-minute consultation.

⁹⁷ MVB Hilda noted that older children also enjoyed massages, because they knew that during this time parents would focus solely on them.

⁹⁸ The effects of baby massage as a ‘dyadic therapy’ on sensitivity and mothers’ capacity to reflect on their babies’ mental states and behaviour has been investigated by public health researchers such as Underdown and Barlow (2011).

Lee et al. suggest that childcare advice today problematises instinctive parenting⁹⁹:

(...) perhaps the single most distinctive feature of expert commentaries and statements about today's parents is the tendency to reposition 'instinct' as either mythical or problematic. The transformation in expert discourse of the relationship between parents and a child into a set of skills that has to be learned and acquired, and for which instinct provides no satisfactory guide, stands out as a defining feature of today. (Lee et al. 2014: 53)

Lee et al.'s observations do not hold in Switzerland, where notions of 'instincts' played a prevalent role in the MVBs' counselling work. Many MVBs were in favour of mothers listening to their instincts when handling children, which may be connected to the fact that they seemed to be highly influenced by Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory, which argues that attachment behaviour was instinctive. The idea that mothers can rely on their 'instincts', but still require the MVB for guidance, seemingly presents a paradox. Nevertheless, the MVB's focus to reinstall trust in 'instincts', to assist those who struggle to 'access' them as well as enhance 'intuitive' competences by promoting sensitivity was stressed by several advisors. While offering (some) mothers reassurance that they 'intuitively' know what is 'good' for their children may be experienced as 'empowering' by (some) women, notions of 'innate maternal instincts' may present an even "harsher task master for women than discipline and study had ever been" (Ehrenreich and English 2005: 242) – especially if women who are deemed 'insensitive' or whose children do not fit into the scheme of proper attachment behaviour are pathologised. Ideas about 'innate competences' promote highly essentialist views about women, as well as normative thinking about childrearing.

In *Mother Nature* (1999), Hrdy uses a Darwinian understanding of natural selection to understand mothers' commitment to their children, whose gestating and raising is extremely costly in terms of physical 'hardship' for the mother during pregnancy and birth, but also in terms of the attention, time and material resources children require until their maturity. Like nurturing, Hrdy contends, neglecting children can equally be an adaptive behaviour resulting from environmental

⁹⁹ I am sceptical of this claim. Attachment theory, which assumes that parents instinctively respond to their children's signals, is extremely influential in contemporary advice material as well as childcare experts' discourses.

pressures. Hrdy argues that humans are so-called cooperative breeders, as the 13 million calories needed to rear a child to maturity cannot be provided by one caretaker alone (Hrdy 2009: 101f). Thus, Hrdy posits, human mothers are not automatically dedicated to fulfilling needs and being always responsive. A lack of maternal sensitivity is not necessarily caused by mental illness, as suggested by some MVBs. The fact that infants are “connoisseurs of mothering” (Hrdy 1999: 387), according to Hrdy, proves that mothers’ commitment to children and attendance to their needs is not self-evident:

Embryos evaluate a mother’s chemistry and have already begun to register her utterances. Infants memorize her scent and assess her glances, her warmth, her tone of voice. Above all, infants are exquisitely sensitive to signals of maternal commitment. Will she stay close or (most dreaded prospect!) disappear? If human mothers were automatically nurturing, their infants would not need to be so attuned and keenly discriminating.(...) For in the course of human evolution their increasingly slippery and hairless mother had become more fertile than any ape ever before, with consequences for how unconditionally loving a human mother could afford to be. (Hrdy 1999: 388)

While a mother’s emotional commitment to her child, which in the case of humans is also referred to as ‘mother love’, is “neither a myth nor a cultural construct” according to Hrdy, it is very dependent on the ecological and historical circumstances in which a mother gives birth to and raises this child. A young, poor mother without a support network may opt to abandon her first-born child, give it up for adoption, or – from the standpoint of maternal sensitivity – invest very little in building a strong emotional bond to the child, and may choose to focus on building a career in order to improve her economic position. The same mother, who now has a well-paid job as well as a supportive partner, may be a ‘loving’, highly committed and responsive mother to her second-born years later.

Discussions surrounding maternal ‘instinct’ or ‘love’ often lead to the omnipresent nature/nurture debate that I want to broach briefly. Kawash notes that one cannot claim that biology has nothing to do with mothering, as long as “reproduction cannot be dissociated from the female body” (Kawash 2011: 990). But what exactly is ‘biological’ about mothering? Are certain aspects of mothering learnt and others instinctive? The idea that nature and nurture can be grasped

as separate entities responsible for specific behaviours that are either innate or acquired is at the basis of dichotomous discourses (Hrdy 1999: 47). The nature/nurture dichotomy in the context of mothering is, on the one side, represented by essentialist approaches proposing innate maternal devotion from the early nineteenth century onwards (Hrdy 2001: 62f). On the other side, social constructionists such as Scheper Hughes (1992) have argued since the late twentieth century that maternal emotions are socially constructed (Hrdy 2001: 62f). While dichotomous ideas persist, Hrdy suggests that the dynamics of interwoven social and biological processes that contribute to maternal devotion cannot be divided into either natural or social (ibid: 65): “Complex behaviors like nurturing, especially when tied to even more complex emotions like “love”, are never either genetically predetermined or environmentally produced” (Hrdy 1999: 174).

Resisting Pastoral Power

Foucault’s conception of power has been criticised by feminist theorists such as Nancy Fraser (1989) and Nancy Hartsock (1989), who argue that his concept of power does not allow for positive social transformation. McKee observes that Foucault’s concept of power is sceptical of emancipatory projects, as it conceives power “less as an entity that can be overthrown, destroyed or abandoned” (McKee 2009: 10). In ‘Microphysics of Power’, Oksala asserts that the idea that Foucault’s view on resistance to power is ‘profoundly pessimistic’ (Hartsock 1989: 167) is based on his relational concept of power that affects *every* social relationship: “Since all social relations appear to be power relations, there seems to be no possibility of progress in the sense that social relations would become less oppressive” (Oksala 2016: 482).

However, in *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault notes that “where there is power, there is resistance”; and resistances, Foucault asserts “are inscribed” in power relations “as an irreducible opposite” (Foucault 1978: 95f). On the level of parent-expert interactions, parents can resist the MVB by ceasing to consult their local advisor, not implementing the advice given or not disclosing certain issues. Power is not unidirectional, and individuals embedded in power relations resist by

trying to undermine or shape disciplinary practices. As Mitcheson notes regarding Foucault's conception of power, individuals can dominate and be dominated at the same time: "(...) even when we are dominated by others this is not a purely passive relationship. Rather, being dominated still involves our active engagement in power relations" (Mitcheson 2012: 60). This, according to Oksala, is especially contested in feminist debates surrounding Foucault's notion of power, as he stresses that resisting against power is embedded in the very same relationships of power (Oksala 2016: 482): (...) "resistance is never in a position of exteriority of power" (Foucault 1978: 95). Social change in the form of a 'revolution' is still possible, however, according to Foucault (Foucault 1978: 96). In *Security, Territory, Population* (2009), Foucault gives examples of the ways that resistance or 'counter conducts' took place in the context of the Christian pastorate, such as in the form of practices like Asceticism, Gnosticism, Mysticism and, of course, the reformation movement that defied the authority of the church (Foucault 2009: 204-214).

MVBs were very aware of the fact that their accompaniment, although conceptualised in beneficial and constructive terms, was not welcomed by every family, and that resistance from clients shaped or transformed disciplinary practices. This was reflected in MVBs' dealings with families who they felt may want to resist their accompaniment. The example of MVB Beatrix's discussion of commission-based home visits showed that MVBs pondered about whether clients may want to resist their guidance by drawing a false picture of the situation in their homes – and that MVBs developed ways to counter such attempts. In Beatrix's case this meant referring to her (hierarchical) observational skills and claiming that she could spot whether clients had kept up with 'desirable' parenting practices unobserved or not.

In the context of involuntary consultations that were commissioned by KESB, advisors were more wary of clients resisting their accompaniment. Some MVBs indicated that they believed parents lied to them or acted in certain ways in order to get a good report. MVB Nina claimed that the "problem families" in her community, who had already attracted the attention of authorities, had all moved, and thereby managed to slip away (recorded interview, 28.05.19). Often 'gaining the

families' trust" or 'building a good relationship' was seen as an effective way to make clients, who were ordered by child protection services to work with them, more cooperative. Relationships with such clients were described as very variable by MVBs. The MVBs explained that some families were open to, or even grateful for, their support, while others met them with resistance or saw them as 'intruders'. Normalising regular contact with the MVB, in the sense that a large number of parents consult with advisors on a voluntary basis, was cited as a way to make commission-based clients feel more comfortable about their situation:

It is much harder if one is forced by someone, and one must do it [consult with the MVB], but we try to relativise it a bit and say, 'many parents also just come with questions [voluntarily] when they have their first child'. But sometimes you face resistance, when the parents don't want to come. (MVB Gisela, recorded interview, 31.07.19)

Another context in which MVBs thought about resistance to their guidance was in situations where advisors felt they needed to report clients to child protection services. Some MVBs recounted that they had informed parents before reporting them to the authorities: "I tell the mother, 'I have noticed this, I have observed this and I will report this'" (MVB Lisa, recorded interview, 03.05.19). However, MVB Tina told me that she and her colleagues sometimes made a report via a "different channel" or did it in such a way that it was not clear where it had come from. Her concern was that, if a family was already under the MVB's care and then found out that the report had come from an MVB advisor, they would stop attending consultations and "slip away". Then the family would be "lost". This was not in the interest of anyone, because the MVB "wanted the best for the family and to continue the accompaniment" (recorded interview, 05.11.19). Similarly, MVB Valeria told me that if a report to child protection services was required, they always discussed who should file it: "If I, as an MVB report [the family] I am out, she [the mother] won't come to me anymore. But if the paediatrician does it, there's a better chance that she will still visit a doctor [with the

child]” (recorded interview, 14.08.19)¹⁰⁰. Thus, some MVBs chose to be non-transparent in regard to reporting, as they worried that otherwise their accompaniment would come to end, which in turn could worsen the situation of a family who would then be left without the guidance of an early childhood expert. As discussed, the accompaniment of families – as well as the MVB’s power to govern them – is based on developing a trustful, positive relationship. Reporting parents would destroy the trustful relationship between advisor and client, so insights into ‘conscience and conduct’ would be obstructed.

The notion that parents may have a ‘defensive attitude’ towards the MVB was prevalent in the context of voluntary use of the service as well. Here, contemplating why parents did not use the MVB in the first place played a role, but also concerns that clients may terminate their use of the service. For example, several MVBs lamented the fact that some parents had the wrong idea about the MVB’s purpose. Instead of seeing the MVB as a paragon of prevention that primarily sought to ‘enable’ parents, there were those who perceived the MVB as an organ of control and therefore avoided contact with advisors. While, for instance, MVB Rena admitted that the MVB *did* have a monitoring function, she added that they only had clients’ best interests in mind by helping them to be “good parents” (recorded interview, 26.08.19).

Some MVBs felt that home visits were a practice that even parents who used the MVB voluntarily perceived as intrusive. MVB Fiona, who had been an advisor for 23 years, remarked that she had noticed a change in parents’ attitudes towards home visits, during which she could “see much more and help better” (field notes, 16.07.19). It was no longer guaranteed that families would let her into their homes anymore, however. Some MVBs thought a lot about parents’ perception of the MVB and stressed that they needed to exercise some caution in terms of contacting and advising families who may be put off by ‘too pushy’ MVBs. MVB Rita felt that some of her colleagues took an almost intrusive approach in the way they tried to ‘get into families’

¹⁰⁰ Families who are reported to child protection services have the right to read the report and therefore may find out who had written it.

and suggested that this would drive parents away from the MVB:

I am new in the MVB, and sometimes I think during these discussions... I find it a bit excessive how some MVBs speak – ‘*unbedingt rein, unbedingt rein und unbedingt rein*’ (get in, and get in by any means). Here I think... this will be countered with resistance. If I want to get in so badly, I will be faced with resistance. (Recorded interview, 10.05.19)

Surprisingly, MVB Sophia talked about her own experience of being contacted by an advisor as a new mother and noted that back then (before she was an MVB herself) the MVB conveyed the feeling to her that she must use their services: “I did not use the offer, because it wasn’t right for me, because it came too early and it gave me the impression that one had to do it. I found that annoying” (recorded interview, 22.05.19). Especially younger MVBs, who had not yet been working as advisors for long, noted that they did not want to ‘butt in’ too much, as this may be perceived as overpowering by clients, who would then terminate the service.

MVB Tina, who worked in a coordinating position for a regional MVB provider, indicated that the success of the MVB in terms of how many parents used the service was dependent on the individual advisors. This could make the attraction to parents on a long-term basis challenging, because if a parent did not find an advisor likeable or did not have a positive experience during the consultation, he or she may not return to the MVB. This was especially problematic in small communities, where parents may be ‘stuck’ with one advisor and could not easily change to another one who they got along with better. Clients also talked about experiences with the MVB among themselves, according to MVB Tina, and one bad counselling experience could do a lot of damage to the MVB’s overall reputation:

One then notices, ‘OK, they [parents] are not coming [to the MVB]’, because someone misunderstood something or was told something [by an MVB] that did not go down well and this has consequences (*zieht Kreise*)... one bad counselling session (Tina sighs deeply) results in many [parents] not coming. It needs a lot of good counselling sessions to make up for one bad one. (Recorded interview, 05.11.19)

MVB Valeria seemed especially concerned about how mothers felt after consulting her: “One of my main aims of counselling is that the woman goes home with at least one good thing. I do not

send her home feeling that everything is bad. Always. Something is always good, and I look for this” (recorded interview, 14.08.19). Letting a client go home with an overall ‘bad feeling’ about her child’s health or her own parenting capabilities may have undesirable effects on Valeria’s relationship with a client, which she strived to frame as positive – perhaps also to motivate mothers to return to her. When I asked MVB Nina to describe how she counselled parents who, as noted before, was *per Du* with her clients, she told me that she tried not to be “patronising” and sought to build a positive relationship:

I try to have a good relationship. I rarely use threats. No! I don’t use threats... I rather... they tell me how they would like it to be, and I help them to achieve the solution that they envision. As I don’t have such difficult cases I can do this. I’d rather stay in contact with the women than [risk] them not calling me any more. I am not like: ‘Now you must, now you should’. (Recorded interview, 28.05.19)

Nina remarked that this style of advising was possible because she did not have ‘difficult’ cases. Here, she was probably referring to parents whose practices needed to be urgently ‘reformed’ and who were not able to envision a ‘solution’ that seemed acceptable to Nina. Further, she made clear that this approach was more sustainable in terms of the duration of her relationship with the clients. Being too authoritarian by prescribing certain practices or dictating the solution to a problem to a mother might result in not only losing insights into her conscience and ability to direct it, but also the sheer access to a client.

At least in the context of voluntary use of the MVB, the position of the pastor and her ability to acquire knowledge of conscience in order to guide is highly dependent on her relationship with the client. In certain contexts, however, the question arises as to how voluntary even non-commissioned accompaniments really are. Consultants can use their position to motivate parents to visit again by purposely *not* invoking voluntariness. MVB Lisa told me that if MVBs believed it was necessary for certain parents to bring their children in again, they “do not rub it in their faces” that the MVB is voluntary: “We can use our influence to say that it is important that they come back in a month to weigh the child” (recorded interview, 03.05.19). Another remark by two MVBs

from a rural region in the canton of Lucerne also made me question whether non-commissioned accompaniment is always voluntary. They told me that if they cannot reach parents by phone after receiving details of a birth registration, they will go to their address to try to speak to them in person. While the MVBs did not request entry into the house, showing up at the doorstep without prior notice could lead to an (unexpected) home visit, as the parents then sometimes invited the MVBs in.

Still, if parents do not like a MVB or do not agree with her counselling, they may start 'following' another advisor's guidance or cease using the service altogether. Thus, the pastor's stand is somewhat volatile and 'getting into families' and accompanying them must be exercised with deliberation and a readiness to assimilate into a client's perceptions and requirements. The MVB's approach to counselling that generally renounces too directive advice-giving and too much 'butting in' must also be seen against this background. Parents, to a large extent, give the pastor the power to guide by allowing the pastor insights into their 'conscience and conduct', while the pastor's practices are transformed by clients' wishes, requirements and reactions to her counselling.

In her study on the experiences of parents who were ordered to attend parenting programmes or visited them voluntarily in England, Peters highlights the possibility of resistance against expert guidance by both groups of parents. Peters also alludes to 'parenting workers' resistance against certain interventions, such as reporting parents who were ordered to participate in the programme but had failed to attend a session: "Some workers felt that instigating breach procedures against parents contradicted the ethos of the voluntary organisation and affected their ability to build up trusting relationships with parents" (Peters 2012: 418). In a similar fashion, several MVBs stated that they were critical of or uncomfortable with commission-based work when families were ordered by the child protection services to consult with them on a regular basis, as it did not comply with the MVB's claim that using the service was generally voluntary.

The MVB was not unrivalled when it came to early childhood experts. There seemed to be some competition between midwives and MVBs as to who got to care for and advise families. This

had been fuelled further by a new law (KLV Art. 16) passed in 2015, that allows midwives to make 16 home visits up to 56 days after the birth at the expense of their health insurance. Before this law, postpartum care by midwives was only paid for by health insurance for the first 14 days, so MVBs took over earlier. Almost every MVB I talked to complained that midwives were taking families away from them. In a report on the postpartum care of women in Switzerland, König and Pehlke-Milde note that MVBs and midwives complained that it was not clearly defined who was responsible for new mothers. The authors further allude to the daily conflicts emerging in cooperation between the two groups of professionals (König and Pehlke-Milde 2010: 16). Having access to parents determines whether both MVBs and freelance midwives have a job, so this competition is not surprising. However, some of my MVB informants bemoaned that midwives often did not do their job properly when it came to, for example, teaching new mothers how to breastfeed. Then families would consult them with deep-seated problems that could have been prevented if they had been able to intervene earlier. Thus, there also seemed to be a quarrel about who does the job of advising and instructing parents better. There may be competition between the MVBs themselves about which advisors had the most ‘followers’. One MVB boasted that she was particularly successful at attracting large numbers of parents, while another MVB remarked that some parents wanted to be counselled *only* by her, not by other MVBs who were part of her local team of advisors.

At this point, I will give some examples of parents resisting the MVB’s guidance. Nicole, for example, a toddler’s mother who I met during the course of my fieldwork, had ceased consulting the MVB after gaining the impression that her local advisor was incompetent. Nicole had consulted the MVB when her son was four months old because it took her a long time to get him to sleep at night. After learning that Nicole always breastfed her son to make him fall asleep more easily, the MVB advised Nicole to stop this, saying that it would prevent her son from ever learning to fall asleep by himself. Nicole then thought about this at home and came to the

conclusion that breastfeeding her son to sleep was “beautiful and nourishing for everyone”, so she continued to do so until he was 18 months old (recorded interview, 24.06.19).

I also observed other examples of parents resisting guidance when I accompanied MVB Fiona throughout her working day, when she counselled two families who were part of the early intervention programme. The first family – mother Mandy with two (of her three) children – came to the centre to discuss several questions about her newborn baby and her three year-old son (who was not present). Before her client arrived, Fiona told me that she used to do home visits with this family – according to the early intervention programme’s usual practice – but Mandy’s partner did not want her in the house. He accepted Fiona supporting Mandy, but he did not personally want anything to do with the MVB. When Fiona had visited the family’s home for the first time, the father had reacted negatively to Fiona’s counselling. Whenever commenting on a child’s behaviour or giving advice on a specific topic the father had countered it by saying, “ah, now you are referring to this theory”, and began to elaborate on it. His behaviour, which Fiona interpreted as being unable to accept advice, had stumped her. It also made her feel sorry for him, as his knowledge of developmental theories and pedagogics led her to believe that the father had had a difficult past in which he had been “over-treated” by psychologists and social workers.

While Mandy was still under Fiona’s care and consulting her on a weekly basis, at least during the time when I did my research, it did transform the way the early intervention accompaniment was handled, as Fiona ceased to visit the family’s home where, she said, she “can see much more”. Mandy’s partner and the father of her children had rejected Fiona’s support and denigrated her observations and advice by letting her know that he already knew about all the theories she worked with and therefore had no use for her support.

Later in the afternoon, Fiona and I drove to the home of a Kurdish family with six children that was also part of the early intervention programme. My field notes read:

We are sitting in the living room and chat with mother Amal. The atmosphere is casual, and one can tell that Fiona and Amal have known each other for several years. Fiona asks how Amal’s children are doing and when the conversation shifts to Amal’s youngest child,

a baby boy, she complains that he cries a lot because he always wants company. She goes on to say that she often had to interrupt her cooking which sometimes resulted in her food being overly salty, because she would forget that she already had seasoned it after attending to her son. Amal jumps up, remarking that she had not offered us anything to drink, and heads to the kitchen. Fiona takes this as an opportunity to ask me what I would do if a baby constantly cried because it wanted attention. I tell Fiona that I had sometimes struggled with the same problem when my daughter was a baby and that I had carried her in a sling while doing housework, which had kept her content. Fiona seems to like my suggestion. Amal returns with three cans of Coca-Cola and three glasses on a tray. When Fiona catches sight of the Coca Cola cans, she asks whether she could just have a glass of water, as she wanted to avoid drinking sugary drinks. Amal replies that the Coca-Cola cans are the only cool drinks she has in the house and that she thought that a cool drink would be nice for us in this summer heat. Fiona insists that she only drinks water and Amal brings her a glass of water. As soon as Amal sits down on the sofa, Fiona takes up the conversation about her baby son's crying again. She asks Amal whether she still has the baby sling and suggests that she could carry the baby while doing housework. Amal replies that she has already put the sling in storage, but she could get it out again at some point. Fiona then says in a bit of a pressing tone 'we have to get the sling out again' and asks Amal whether she would like to know how to carry her baby son on her back. Amal does not seem to understand what Fiona means and has a confused look on her face. Fiona then tries to explain to Amal what she means by pantomimically tying a child on her back and declaring: 'you could carry him on your back like an African woman'. Amal does not seem to be very keen on this idea and replies in an appeasing way: 'Maybe next time you visit you can show me'. Fiona seems to get the hint and then suggests to Amal to tell the baby that he just has to wait, for he was already able to understand this.

Suddenly a loud howling resounds from the boys' rooms, who have been playing peacefully together until now. Not long after, son Alan runs to Amal, his face awash with tears. According to the boy, his older brother had Jiro kicked him in the nose. Amal hugs him and tells Fiona and I that Jiro was always hitting Alan. Unsettled by this information, Fiona starts giving Amal clear instructions how to handle the situation. Fiona advises Amal to ask Jiro to come out of his room and to tell him explicitly that she does not want him to hit others and that he must apologise to his brother. Amal smiles calmly. She goes on to explain that she does not see the point in this as the boys will just start blaming each other. However, Fiona argues that Amal should counter that by saying that she is not interested to hear that, for she was not a judge. Taking this approach, asserted Fiona, would mean less stress for Amal, as she would not have to take sides. Fiona asks Amal to call Jiro again. Amal calls Jiro's name, but the son does not appear. Amal keeps calling him from the sofa, but not very loudly. She grins while she is calling him and does not seem to take the situation as seriously as Fiona, who seems to be upset. At this point the father comes home from work and shakes Fiona's and my hands. He then enters the boys' room. Fiona asks Amal whether he would now find out what happened and rebuke Jiro for hitting his brother. Fiona is not happy about that and says that this was not the point, because the whole thing also had to do with having respect for women. I guess that Fiona is unhappy about Jiro not reacting to his mother's calls. Fiona says that it would make a deep impression on Jiro if he was scolded in front of us. This would make him feel especially ashamed, which was good. After a while, Jiro comes out of his room. Amal's husband does not return to the living room. Jiro has a sneering look on his face. Amal says something in Kurdish and the boy starts to defend himself. Fiona reminds Amal to say that she is not a judge. Jiro apologises to Alan in a mocking way. Fiona asks him to repeat the apology, which he does. Jiro returns to his room and Alan starts playing games on his mother's mobile phone. Fiona and Amal continue talking about the situation. Fiona appeals to Amal to try taking the approach she

had described to her. Amal replies that she is ranting a lot because of the hitting. Fiona stays adamant and says: 'Try it'. Amal laughs and says in a surrendering manner 'yes, I am trying everything', slapping her hands on her knees. (Field notes, 16.07.19)¹⁰¹

One thing that was striking about the counselling of Amal, especially when contrasted to parents who were not enrolled in FF, was Fiona's style of advice giving, which I experienced as directive and problematising and did not invite any self-reflection from Amal. Rather she asked me how I would solve the crying issue of Amal's baby. Fiona even took over Amal's position at one point and requested a second, more sincere apology from Jiro herself. Amal remained rather inactive and did not put much effort into implementing Fiona's instructions. While Fiona rendered Jiro's behaviour as something that needed to be managed urgently and appropriately, Amal visibly did not share Fiona's concerns, which represented a resistance to Fiona's guidance in this matter. While being instructed by Fiona, Amal smiled. I am not sure if she thought that the whole situation was a bit silly and not as bad as Fiona thought it was, or whether she was smiling because she felt embarrassed or awkward. Moreover, when she followed some of Fiona's instructions, such as calling Jiro, she did so in a reluctant and non-serious manner. The same could be said about the crying issue and Fiona's suggestion to carry the baby in a sling while doing housework. Amal remarked that she did no longer had the sling to hand and did not seem eager to comply with Fiona's demand to get it out of storage. She postponed Fiona's offer to show her how to carry her son on her back, which Fiona then countered by advising her to teach her baby that he had to wait.

These examples reflect how setting families on the 'road to salvation' is not always successful, as in the end it is Amal who decides whether she wants to deal with the next hitting incident in the way Fiona suggested. Parents may tolerate the MVB's accompaniment, which is clearly the case with Amal who had been accompanied by Fiona for several years, but clients may

¹⁰¹ There are many significant aspects of this excerpt, such as Fiona rejecting the sugary Coca-Cola and suggesting that respect for women was an issue in a Kurdish household. However, due to space, I have only focused on the theme of resistance.

not necessarily strive to implement their advice, either because they do not find the advice helpful or do not share their advisor's concerns.

Investing in the Future

The practices deemed appropriate for the surveillance and guidance of parenting today are characterised by pastoral forms of power aimed at families' 'salvation' that have both individualising and totalising effects. When an MVB tracks a child's weight gain she – as childcare expert – has the 'power-to' induce concerns in the mother if she finds that the child is not gaining weight properly. She also has 'power-over' the mother when she can get her to present the child for regular check-ups or change the child's diet (Allen 1998, Winter 2021 Edition; Foucault 1982). This power is anchored in her position as an 'expert' who claims superior knowledge about childcare and development, but also rests in her ability to report those parents to child protection services who neglect to follow her instructions and jeopardise their child's wellbeing. The power 'wielded' by the MVB is vested in her as an individual and defined in action-theoretical terms. The MVB's 'power-over' and 'power-to' is embedded in the relationship between mother and expert and thus highlights the relational aspects of power, which are especially prominent in Foucault's notions of pastoral power that foreground the reciprocal relationship between the 'pastor' and his 'sheep' (Foucault 1982: 783; Golder 2007: 166).

The MVBs' pastoral work is future-oriented in the way that the promotion of health and positive parent-child relationships are believed to have beneficial effects reaching into adult life. While the MVBs themselves usually only talk about caring for the wellbeing of individual families, the reports by the MVB trade association emphasise the significance of their work for a prosperous future of the entire nation (FVMVB n.d.). Thereby, the MVB asserts that it shares the state's (whose financing the MVB also wants to secure for the future of its own institution) concerns and responsibilities regarding the rights and wellbeing of small children as well as the ambition to provide 'good parents' for them.

Framed as accompaniment, the MVB offers (usually) voluntary guidance from a trained and committed advisor that is intended to be preventive, long-term and health promoting. The relations between client and MVB are ideally characterised by proximity – in order to receive guidance, clients provide their advisor with insights into their ‘private’ lives and access to their conscience by expressing their ‘internal truths’ verbally. Provided that the MVB does not consider it necessary to report a family, a client’s ‘confession’ is confidential and stays with the advisor. Parents share their questions, challenges and successes with their MVB. The MVB’s beneficial gaze monitors the child’s development on a regular basis, and she intervenes if something catches her eye.

This chapter especially illustrated the ‘enmeshment’ of psychology in governing families in early childhood (Rose 1991). The MVBs’ guidance of families was greatly influenced by psychological theories and tests, such as developmental and attachment theory as well as maternal sensitivity, which served as templates for how mothers and children should behave. Furthermore, the technique of ‘confession’ in the sense of extracting a “truth internal” to the client, allows the MVB to exercise authority according to ‘psychological ethics’ (Rose 1991: 95).

The MVBs’ advice is intended to be tailored to the specific needs and requirements of each individual family, which are carefully assessed by the MVB. Counselling can entail giving parents different, (but safe) options of how a specific issue can be addressed and then letting parents choose for themselves which option they consider most suitable. The MVB’s counselling facilitates technologies of self, such as self-reflection and self-searching, in order to find out which way of, for example, calming a crying baby, feels right to them. This approach aims to equip parents with techniques that will allow them to eventually guide themselves. Through introspection, self-observation and observation of their offspring, parents are expected to reach a state of autonomy in which they are confident about childrearing.

This style of advising reflects the contemporary trend of ‘soft’ advice giving that, according to Zeller, can also be detected in modern advice literature for parents (Zeller 2018). This grants

(some) parents autonomous handling of the advice they received. Many MVBs emphasised that they can show parents different ways to solve an issue and explain why tackling an issue in a certain manner is beneficial, but in the end, it was the parents who had to make up their minds and decide what they wanted to do with this information. According to Zeller, authors of advice literature published in the 1970s still explicitly defined ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ approaches to childrearing, but today the interrelation between advice and its implementation was granted more leeway (Zeller 2018: 152). In this regard, advice givers relativise their status as experts, and advice is constituted as “co-production between lay person and expert” (Zeller 2018: 156; my translation). Zeller asserts that the “rehabilitation of parents’ intuition” (Zeller 2018: 155; my translation) is also connected to this approach to advice giving.

Even if (some) parents are encouraged to say what is ‘right’ themselves, the divide between client and expert remains clear-cut, as otherwise the expert’s authority to provide guidance, collect information, make observations, and carry out examinations would dwindle. Observing children’s and parents’ behaviours in order to recognise issues such as developmental delays, or a lack of attachment that clients might have no knowledge of, supplements the promotion of technologies of self, or may reveal things that clients do not want to disclose.

The MVB’s (pastoral) care is not necessarily perceived as well-intentioned or redemptive, which makes its exercise challenging. MVBs’ reports of parents’ mistrust about the MVB’s purpose reflect the fact that some parents do perceive advisors’ work as controlling. Clients assess advisors’ abilities to guide and counter instructions by simply not implementing them or by rejecting accompaniment altogether. MVBs are very aware of this, and the examples above showed that expert guidance may be transformed and adjusted when faced with ‘counter-conduct’. As some MVBs revealed, the client’s power to resist in the form of, for example, ceasing to consult with the MVB, impacted on the counselling style of some MVBs, who explained that they tried to be less patronising or prescriptive. The ways clients resist pastoral care supports Foucault’s argument that

power relationships are “inherently unstable, as always accompanied by, even generating, resistance” (Allen Winter 2021 Edition: para 39).

The chapter has also shed light on early childhood experts’ views of what ‘good’ mothering practices entail. The MVBs clearly had a notion of how raising children was done ‘right’, which coincided with some of the elements that Hays asserts make up the mode of intensive mothering (Hays 1996: 122), specifically when it came to expert-led, child-centred, emotionally committed and highly responsive childrearing ‘methods’. As the discussion of MVB informants’ views and the analysis of MVB reports, leaflets and websites, as well as articles written by MVBs has indicated, expert guidance and monitoring in early childhood was considered important for children’s health and wellbeing. Some MVBs strived to install a seamless expert accompaniment of families – in the sense that there was no period in early childhood during which no expert had access to the family – by encouraging postpartum midwives to ‘hand over’ women directly into their care, which they believed was essential to prevent deep-seated ‘problems’ emerging in families.

Further, the mothering ‘style’ endorsed by the MVBs was distinctly child-centred. This became especially apparent in the context of the discourses around attachment and maternal sensitivity, which demand that mothers intuitively read and respond to their children’s needs in a timely, consistent and reliable manner. A mother’s capacity to be child-centred was intertwined with her readiness to form a strong emotional bond with her child and promote secure attachment by being a sensitive mother who recognises even the most subtle cues given by her child. The MVBs had devised several strategies to observe, evaluate and enhance maternal sensitivity and thereby a secure attachment of a child to its mother.

The great majority of MVBs did not express the view that mothers should spend as much time as possible with their children – an idea that, according to the concept of intensive mothering, takes a hold over mothers, who at least in Switzerland usually *are* employed part-time, however. Nonetheless, MVB Nina was sceptical about whether daycare staff could address the special needs

of small babies, who are sometimes taken there as soon as their mother's official maternity leave ends after 14 weeks:

Babies show very well what they need, and one needs a lot of time. And I... this is the reason why I think sometimes... daycare... I don't know how much time they really have for a baby. The toddlers who can talk, they say what they need. The baby... it may smile and then when there is no one around, it looks away. There are children who then just shut down. They may sleep more than is good for them. (...) They want to be in contact with someone... and when there is no one around at that moment(...) until a baby is six months old, it is a 24-hour care job. I know the baby has a main attachment figure in the daycare too, but this person does not only have one baby to look after. It is rare that a mother has twins or triplets, normally she just has one and she also has a lot of other things to do, like cooking and cleaning. It is important that one says: 'It is important that the child is with you, you must watch it, you must massage it'. (Recorded interview, 28.05.19)

It is notable that before Nina stressed that she did not use prescriptive language during counselling, such as 'you must'. In the context of addressing babies' needs, however, Nina seemed to consider it essential to remind mothers about the importance of always keeping their infants close and investing a lot of time in them, so that their needs can be met, and she used – at least in this example – exactly the kind of prescriptive counselling that she deemed patronising before. Nina opined that taking a baby to daycare too early may harm its development. The aspect of gender in terms of assigning responsibility to address these needs and therefore ensure a secure attachment, and in turn, proper development to the mother – who, according to Nina's example also assumes domestic tasks like cooking and cleaning – is highly prominent in Nina's account. Here, attachment theory is applied to confine babies' mothers to the home.

Evolutionary anthropologist Hrdy rates Bowlby's attachment theory as "among the greatest contributions made by evolutionary-minded psychologists to human wellbeing". At the same time she regrets that it represents real "dilemmas for mothers who want to rear emotionally healthy, self-confident children, but who also want lives and careers of their own" (Hrdy 1999: xiii). This may be one reason for the backlash against Bowlby which is manifested in books deeming bonding a fantasy, such as Eyer's *Mother-Infant bonding: A scientific Fiction* (Eyer 1992). Still, it is important to point out that this dilemma does not "invalidate the central premise of his model: infants seek

secure attachment and need a secure base for healthy emotional development” (Hrdy 1999: 504). Thus, Hrdy’s take on Bowlby is that he is not wrong at all in suggesting that children benefit from a dedicated caretaker who provides them with a sense of security. Nonetheless, raising a “well developed” child does not have to be framed as being dependent on a single (female) caretaker alone (Hrdy 1999: 504) and, as Hrdy notes, human mothers have always shared childcare tasks with others. Acknowledging that babies have these needs does not have to result in the ‘enslavement’ of mothers (Hrdy 1999: 494). A child can equally prosper when it has several dedicated attachment figures or, in Hrdy’s words, ‘allomothers’ – which, however – as Nina also pointed too – can be hard to find (Hrdy 1999: 504-506)¹⁰².

The MVBs’ work entails guiding parents in practical matters: how to breastfeed, introduce solids, sleep or potty train, as well as keeping a close watch on how children’s bodies develop, such as tracking their weight or making sure that parents know how to maintain healthy teeth. However, this chapter has highlighted that state-affiliated experts are also very concerned with governing the emotional bond between mothers and children, increasing maternal sensitivity, and maximizing maternal investment. While the individual advisors may view this mission as part of their prevention work that aims to ensure children’s healthy development as well as simply ‘doing the right thing’ – providing a child with a committed mother – from the state’s point of view, promoting secure attachment and maternal investment is seen as a way to reduce welfare measures and public spending in the future when those children have grown up into productive adults. Considering Hrdy’s work on the historical and economic contingency of maternal investment, however, the question arises as to whether the MVBs’ approaches to promoting maternal sensitivity through measures such as baby massage or psychotherapy are always suitable.

¹⁰²Hrdy takes into account the fact that Bowlby revised his theory that it is the mother “that mattered most”, but also stresses that he was convinced of this for a major part of his career, which in turn influenced how most studies exploring attachment were done, as they largely focused on the mother-child relationship (Interview with Hrdy, Johnson 2012).

This chapter has focused on early childhood experts' concerns regarding mothering, relationships between clients and experts, and disciplinary practices through which families are governed by the state, which have transformed from 'repressive' and 'coercive' to more subtle 'techniques' such as persuading and providing information to make the 'right' choice as well as providing 'subjects' with technologies of self to reach a state of autonomy to handle childrearing confidently at home. The following chapters will largely focus on my fieldwork with parents – however, where relevant, MVBs' views on certain topics are discussed. The discourses on children's needs, mothers' emotions and the enhancement of mother-child relationships which revealed important elements of the MVBs' work remain significant when exploring parents' experiences of childrearing, parental self-work and the governing of emotions.

The next chapter turns to 'maternal ambivalence' and analyses my findings in light of Hay's concept of intensive mothering. Nonetheless, maternal ambivalence connects to MVBs' demands in terms of attachment and maternal sensitivity, which prescribe intensive, child-centred mothering practices such as the close observance of *Feinzeichen* and timely response to needs. Children's needs, however, as well as the challenges that can arise when combining motherhood with paid work, produce ambivalent emotions in mothers and conflict with their own desires and needs.

4. *Narratives of Ambivalence*

After the first weeks of living with a baby girl who mostly slept or quietly nursed through seminars, it became increasingly apparent that in the world I lived in, caring for a baby was incompatible with concentrated work. A new baby's terrifying vulnerability, the magnitude of the responsibility, and the insatiable demands that kept me on-call twenty-four hours a day, came as a shock. Yet, as a primatologist in the post-Bowlby era, what could I do but turn my life over to her?

I was overwhelmed by contradictory impulses, trapped if I did, damned if I didn't. Not the least of the emotions that bubbled up was a whirring resentment – the kind I identify with the most primitive portions of my brain – toward my daughter's father, by then a medical doctor and infectious-disease researcher who could go off and spend long hours in the lab while I tried to eke out of the daily interruptions enough time to write. I wanted him to invest more, so that I could be free. Yet if I delegated care to others, wouldn't this mean reverting to the ways of my mother's generation, before we understood the attachment of infants?

I desperately wanted to succeed in my chosen profession; yet I didn't want to deprive my daughter of the emotional security I had become convinced she needed. Personal ambition seemed to be on a collision course with my baby's needs. (Hrdy 1999: xi)

Anthropologist and primatologist Sarah Hrdy describes the conflicts that arose when trying to combine motherhood with her academic career. Hrdy highlights that the socio-economic conditions we live in today seem to make it impossible for working mothers to address their baby's needs properly, who Bowlby asserts need the undivided attention of an attachment figure around the clock. The "ambivalence" Hrdy experienced made her wonder whether she was a "bad mother" (Hrdy 1999: xv) and resulted in her famous book *Mother Nature: Maternal Instincts and How They Shape the Human Species*.

The theme of 'ambivalence' prominently emerged during the course of my fieldwork, which I therefore decided to pursue more thoroughly. While the empiric data presented in this chapter is largely based on the narratives of women, I will use the generic term 'parents' at some points in this chapter, as I also include Hannes' account, one of the two fathers who took part in this research. Nonetheless, the focus of the research on ambivalence as well as the experience of it in the context of childrearing is deeply gendered.

A large part of my conversations with parents revolved around what parenthood was all about. What does it mean for you to be a parent? How are you experiencing raising your daughter(s)/son(s)? Here, I got very similar answers. For example, for many of them being the mother/father of their child/children meant (maybe unsurprisingly) taking on great responsibility, passing on values and giving and receiving 'unconditional love'. However, accounts of ambivalence were part of almost every conversation. I often heard sentences like: "Being a parent is the most beautiful, but also the hardest job you will ever do". 'Hard' referred not only to the worries and fears that having children triggers in parents, such as children becoming ill or failing to thrive, but also the challenge of what Adams describes in her book on the ethics of ambivalence as "competing desires to nurture and to be independent" (Adams 2014: 6). While this is probably not confined to parents, but could occur in any caregiver-dependent situation, this seemed to be a dilemma marking the day-to-day lives of many mothers.

On the one hand, this concerned difficulties in combining childrearing and paid work. Mothers described opposing desires in the sense that they were torn between wanting to advance their careers and wanting to be present for their children. These tensions point to the ideology of intensive mothering that Hays (1996) described as utterly conflicting. Under particular socio-historical conditions, mothers want to work and have a career, but at the same time feel like they should spend as much time as possible with their children or may harm their children by not being present enough. On the other hand, parents' accounts of the experience of rearing their children included conflicting emotions about their children or the constraints parenthood brings about, and for some the 'governing' of those emotions, a theme that will be addressed separately in Chapter 5.

The term 'ambivalence' was not used by parents themselves to describe their experiences of childrearing but is applied as an etic umbrella term for conflicting emotions and desires described by parents towards their children or the experience of childrearing. The term ambivalence describes a "conflicted mental state" (Almond 2011: 8), in which one has conflicted feelings for the same

phenomenon (Jovanović 2016; Palmberger 2019; Pedersen 2019)¹⁰³. In psychology and the social sciences, ambivalence can refer to intrapersonal, subjective experiences, but at the same time it is also often framed as a social phenomenon engendered by social structures, power relations, and intimate relationships (Hrdy 1999; Merton 1976; Parker 2005). I chose the concept of ambivalence to analyse parents' experiences, because it allows me to highlight the interplay of psychological, cultural, and social factors that engender conflicting emotions and opposing desires in parents. At this point, it is important to stress, that I do not understand ambivalence as an addition to the inventory of emotions, but as a secondary phenomenon engendered by conflicting emotions, demands, or seemingly opposing desires.

Ambivalence must be a “core human experience” and an “expression of the complexity of social life” (Palmberger 2019: 75). Ambivalence is not exclusively directed towards people, but towards objects, experiences, decisions, or the future (Jovanović 2016; Palmberger 2019; Pedersen 2019). The fact that the arrival of a child (and the hard work involved in the upbringing of this child) which many parents evaluate as a life-changing event, results in conflicting emotions and desires in parents comes as no surprise.

However, particularly when it comes to mothers, the idea that they could harbour conflicted feelings towards their offspring is considered especially abhorrent or pathological, as powerful cultural ideologies in Western traditions construe motherly love as unconditional and selfless, and motherhood as an essential part of women's identity that should feel emotionally rewarding (Almond 2011; Heffernan and Stone 2021; Lacy 2015; Matley 2020; Parker 2005; Takseva 2016). In this context, for example, the Christian idealisation of the Virgin Mary as self-sacrificing mother comes to mind, who duly accepts an unanticipated immaculate pregnancy as well as the gruesome death of her son¹⁰⁴. Because of this, ambivalence can trigger the experience of guilt or shame in

¹⁰³ Psychoanalyst Bleger refers to ambivalence that is directed at people as ‘affective ambivalence’ (Bleger 2013). It is commonly rated as a negative state, prone to inducing distress (Sincoff 1990).

¹⁰⁴ The theme of motherhood and self-sacrifice in Christian traditions is explored in Gallagher Elkins' monograph *Mary, Mother of Martyrs: How Motherhood Became Self-Sacrifice in Early Christianity* (2020).

mothers (Parker 2005: 8) that may be at a greater level than in other caregiver-dependent situations.

In this chapter, I will provide a more nuanced understanding of the conflicts that produce ambivalence. While parents' experiences are complex and diverse, I argue that many parents' narratives are 'tinged' by the intensive mothering ideology (or the 'not-just-being-a-mother ideology'), that prescribes a needs-oriented, time and emotion-intensive and expert-led mode of childrearing. Before going into the findings of my fieldwork, I will review the current state of research on ambivalence in anthropology in general and on maternal ambivalence in particular, which has mainly been explored from psychoanalytical and sociological standpoints. Given that ambivalence is usually defined in emotional terms (in the sense that it is produced by conflicting emotions towards a phenomenon), and the governing of emotions will play a significant role in Chapter 5, I will briefly address how emotion has been conceptualised in anthropology.

Before delving deeper into ambivalence as a concept, I want to point out that there were a small number of conversations with mothers during which accounts of ambivalence hardly sprang up at all. However, these interviews were usually shorter than those in which parents addressed ambivalence, and the interlocutors gave brief answers and narrated less freely. While I don't know whether this is an indication that these research participants were either less reflective or less forthcoming about their childrearing experience, my relationship with them felt more distanced. One example was Melanie, a 29-year-old mother of one toddler who was expecting her second child when we met. She noted that she simply enjoyed motherhood and that she was "a Mummy with all her blood and her heart" (Melanie, 29, recorded interview, 10.05.19). While she had had a "difficult start" to new motherhood because she struggled with breastfeeding and her newborn son was a *Schreibaby*, she was very "relaxed" being a mother and she could not "complain at all". Melanie, the oldest of three sisters, explained that she had always looked after her younger siblings and starting her own family had always been her dream since she was a teenager. Melanie, who was employed 20% at the time we met, stressed that she did not work because she felt cooped up at home with her son. This stood in stark contrast with other mothers, who highlighted that they

needed their employment in order to “feel balanced”, “intellectually stimulated”, or to “be more than just a mother”. During our interview, I often had the feeling that Melanie considered that the answers to my questions should be obvious. The conversation with Melanie, who mostly gave short answers differed from conversations with other parents who were usually in a ‘chatty’ mood, sharing private details of their lives and giving many practical examples of their daily interactions with their children as well as childcare experts.

Emotions: A Brief Digression

Ambivalence is usually defined in emotional terms, such as a being in a ‘conflicted mental state’, experiencing ‘contradictory emotions and impulses’ or ‘mixed feelings’ (Almond 2011; Brown 2011; Hrdy 1999: xvi; Parker 2005: 7). Thus, emotion as a concept needs to be further addressed. While anthropologists have always shown an interest in emotion, especially in terms of cross-cultural comparison, emotion as a concept has not been thoroughly theorised: “Its integrity as a concept has been assumed, its cross-cultural identity taken for granted, its empirical role in social processes either scorned or obscurely acknowledged as fundamental” (Beatty 2014: 546). The proper methodology to use to investigate emotion ethnographically, but also the definition and scope of emotion, remains much debated (Beatty 2014; Liljeström 2016; Lindholm 2005; Lutz and White 1986). Given the great diversity in terms of theoretical approaches to emotion, a detailed discussion of how emotion has been conceptualised by different scholars in different fields would go beyond the constraints of this chapter. Still, it is important to note that the concept of emotion invokes dichotomies, such as body/mind or biology/culture in the anthropological, philosophical, and psychological literature (Leavitt 1996; Röttger-Rössler 2002). Emotions are seen to be located either primarily in the body or primarily in the cognitive, psychological realm (body/mind). Biologically or psychologically-oriented anthropologists, such as Melford Spiro (1984) deem emotions to be a universal, bodily phenomenon. On the other side, interpretive or cognitive anthropology is largely concerned with the social construction of emotion. A representative of this

position is Owen Lynch (1990), who published an edited volume on the social construction of emotion in India. Here, emotion is understood as an “aspect of cultural meaning” (Lutz and White 1986: 406f) that can greatly vary across cultures (biology/culture). As Leavitt points out, however, emotions include both bodily feelings and cultural meanings:

(...) emotions are especially interesting precisely because they do not fit easily into these dichotomies. On the contrary, it is precisely emotion terms and concepts that we use to refer to experiences that cannot be categorized in this way and that inherently involve both meaning and feeling, mind and body, both culture and biology. To give a simple example: what we describe as a fluttery feeling in the stomach may be anxiety about a public presentation or the result of an unfortunate lunch, or it may be some horrible combination of the two. But we will not call that feeling the emotion of anxiety if we are convinced that the lunch is the only factor involved: to call an experience anxiety, or anger, or happy excitement, it must be associated with a series of culturally defined meanings that go well beyond the digestive. At the same time, neither a definition of anxiety nor an appraisal of an anxiety-provoking situation is the same thing as being anxious: to be anxious is to have a feeling associated with a meaning. (Leavitt 1996: 515)

Additionally, emotion as ‘internal’ bodily feeling can be hidden from others, or it can be visibly expressed and displayed through the body, such as by crying when feeling sad or slamming a door when angry. Röttger-Rössler comments that by understanding emotions as complex phenomena based on a variety of interacting factors, such as biology, biography, psyche, and culture when felt in a specific situation by a specific person, anthropology can escape false dichotomies when engaging in the debate about their conceptualisation (Röttger-Rössler 2002: 158). Röttger-Rössler further asserts that emotions are highly relational processes. The aspect of relationality, in the sense that ambivalence is engendered by, for example, conflicting emotions, intimate relationships and the conflicts they bring about is also a central element in the anthropological literature on ambivalence, which will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

A Lack of Ambivalence in Anthropology?

There is a surprising lack of empirical research on maternal ambivalence in social and cultural anthropology. Anthropological literature that does address ambivalence often draws from psychoanalytic and/or sociological literature to frame it as an analytic concept (Berliner et al. 2016; Hrdy 1999; Kierans and Bell 2017; Palmberger 2019). Thus, the concept of ambivalence remains undertheorised in anthropology (Palmberger 2019; Peletz 2001)¹⁰⁵. However, there are a number of anthropological articles that raise relevant points for the discussion of how ambivalence is produced.

While Jovanović does not provide a specific definition for ambivalence in ‘Ambivalence and the Study of Contradictions’ (2016), she examines her interlocutors’ opposing dispositions in relation to the future in a copper processing town in East Serbia. Jovanović argues that exploring ambivalence provides a fruitful lens for gaining a deeper understanding of power relations, which can entrap people in insurmountable dilemmas:

My research shows that ambivalence was precisely an effect and a coping mechanism in a social environment where people were dependent on what they wanted to eliminate and escape: on pollution from the smelting factory, on restricted possibilities for employment in a mono-structural economic environment, on approval of the head director, and on an inefficient and nearly bankrupt state that was supposed to “save” the company. (...) the specific focus on dispositions with reference to future entails a privileged domain for the anthropological study of contradiction precisely because contradictions consist of encounters with the social, political, and economic conditions on which people are reliant on, and which more than often “work against” them. Hence, I believe that the focus on ambivalence in the study of contradictions, which frequently appears as *both* an effect *and* a coping mechanism, has a potential to repoliticize power relations and to embed contradictions in actual contexts, where the simple choice of “either”/“or” is a very rare instance for people. (Jovanović 2016: 5)

¹⁰⁵Another article that has something to add to an anthropological understanding of ambivalence is a debate in HAU with the title ‘Anthropology and the Study of Contradictions’ (2016). As the debate mostly focuses on inconsistencies in religions and what to make of them as an anthropological researcher, it will not be further discussed here.

In her paper on Turkish migrants living in Austria, Palmberger introduces the term ‘relational ambivalence’ to shed light on the social and discursive dimensions as well as emotional aspects of ambivalence in migrants’ narratives pertaining to past choices, feelings of belonging and the prospect of returning to their country of origin (Palmberger 2019). Palmberger understands ambivalence as a relational experience tied to intimate relationships and “relationally driven” (Palmberger 2019: 75) emotions that, if communicated to others, move beyond being simply subjective experiences to become a “part of social life” (Palmberger 2019: 75). In light of her interlocutors’ elaborations, Palmberger observes:

Spouses and children and their specific needs and desires influence the decision-making process significantly. When my interlocutors weighed pros and cons, it seemed that this was not done to convince me, the interviewer, but rather in conversation with several voices (particularly of family members) and arguments were brought up in response to different addressees. The narratives I encountered always represented several (often seemingly opposing) views and standpoints and they often resembled an inner dialogue that seemed ongoing from long before the actual conversation took place. (Palmberger 2019: 87)

In the context of maternal ambivalence, it is important to note that Palmberger sees relational ambivalence as a “particularly gendered form of ambivalence” (Palmberger 2019: 85) connected to, for example, the divisions of labour between men and women. Women carry out more unpaid care work than men and are expected to find it personally rewarding. In addition, many women strive to combine this work with paid employment, which creates a double burden that men are not expected to carry. This deeply gendered conflict can trigger more ambivalence in women about care work (Connidis and McMullin 2002: 561; Palmberger 2019: 85). This again links up to Hays’ (1996) ideas about intensive mothering and the various existential demands that conflict with it, as well as the relationships of power that are intertwined with this mode of mothering. Palmberger’s understanding of relational ambivalence as a gendered form of ambivalence invites the question of whether she makes a distinction between different forms of ambivalence and whether there is also ‘non-relational ambivalence’. This, however, is not

addressed by Palmberger, who argues that ambivalence is “intrinsically social” and embedded in social relationships and the social environment.

The aspect of gender features prominently in Connidis’ and McMullin’s (2002) paper on sociological ambivalence and family ties. Palmberger was clearly inspired by their conceptualisation of ambivalence that underlines the interplay of “structured social relations” and “individual agency” mirroring power imbalances and the ‘rehashing’ of social actors’ roles: “(...) employed mothers may place higher priority on either work or motherhood or attempt to balance the two by renegotiating the traditional demands associated with each one” (Connidis and McMullin 2002: 562f). Seen from this angle, Connidis and McMullin assert, ambivalence can act as a “catalyst for social action” (Connidis and McMullin 2002: 559). In the context of parenthood, for example, ambivalence can trigger a negotiation between partners about a more equal distribution of care work. However, what Connidis and Mc Mullin fail to comment on is the point that ambivalence can also be a ‘catalyst for social inaction’ – in a situation of conflict or opposing desires, a decision can be put off, because one cannot decide to go for one side or the other.

The ambivalence literature published by social and cultural anthropologists is rather scarce and is informed by psychology and sociology. Many authors in the fields of psychoanalysis, sociology, but also evolutionary anthropology share the goal to normalise maternal ambivalence. The issue of maternal ambivalence has been picked up by feminist theorists such as Adrienne Rich (2007a) who, similarly to psychoanalysts, call for the “depathologizing” (Takseva 2016: 153) of mothers’ conflicted emotions towards their children. In this context, the acknowledgement of maternal ambivalence as a ‘normal’ part of the mother-child-relationship is usually seen as essential for the empowerment of mothers, whose experiences are conceived as being strongly shaped by oppressive patriarchal structures that interact with the psychological, cultural, social and political factors that engender ambivalence (Rich 2007b; Takseva 2016). In contrast to maternal ambivalence, there are only a few publications on ‘paternal ambivalence’ or ‘parental ambivalence’ in general, which points to the deeply gendered nature of the ambivalence literature.

Maternal Ambivalence in Psychoanalytic Theory

One noteworthy author in the field of maternal ambivalence who is also often referred to by social scientists, such as Donath (2015), is psychotherapist Rozsika Parker, who calls for a sociocultural situating of maternal ambivalence, as she argues that cultural representations of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ mothers as well as dominant cultural conceptions of how mothers should feel about the relationship with their child and the care involved in its upbringing, interact with the mothering experiences of individual mothers. In *Torn in Two: The Experience of Maternal Ambivalence* (2005), Parker describes the complex and conflicted feelings that mothers have when it comes to their children: on the one side, Parker argues, mothers want their children close, but on the other side, they desperately want space; they love them like nobody else, but at the same time they hate them:

None of us find it easy to truly accept that we both love and hate our children. For maternal ambivalence constitutes not an anodyne condition of mixed feelings, but a complex and contradictory state of mind, shared variously by all mothers, in which loving and hating feelings for children exist side by side. (Parker 1997: 17)

In line with Parker, Almond, a psychoanalyst and psychiatrist who published *The Monster Within: The Hidden Side of Motherhood* (2011), defines maternal ambivalence as “that mixture of loving and hating feelings that all mothers experience towards their children, and the anxiety, shame and guilt that the negative feelings engender in them” (ibid: 2).

Parker contends that, while psychoanalytic theory heralded ambivalent feelings of the child towards its mother as a positive and important developmental step, it was often rendered pathological for mothers to feel this way about their children (Parker 1997: 17). The reason for viewing maternal ambivalence as a problem was psychoanalysts’ complete immersion in children’s development, that had concealed the fact that mothers go through developmental sequences too: “having a baby is a step in an unending series of transformation for women (Parker 1997, p. 19)”. On the one side, writes Parker, adult development runs parallel to infantile development, “a mother experiences processes of separation, union and reciprocity just as the child” (Parker 1997: 18) –

but, on the other side, the meaning of these processes and how a woman reacts to them are specific to the experiences of the individual mother. Parker notes, for example, that a mother's own mother has a formative influence on how she herself experiences childrearing. If one's own mother was perceived as extremely strict or cold, it may serve as a 'deterrent' one must be careful not to duplicate. A loving mother may serve as a role model who one does not want to disappoint by *not* duplicating her commitment, patience, or warmth (Parker 2005: 93f).

Although mothers have been subjected to attentive observation by developmental psychologists, their emotions and behaviours have usually been evaluated from the point of view of the child (Parker 1997: 18). Parker refers to psychoanalyst Melanie Klein (1935) and her ideas regarding children who, at the age of six months, begin to experience their mother as whole a person that they both love and hate, while before that children split the mother into two entities, one they love for her pleasing and nurturing qualities, and another they hate for "frustrating" them (Parker 1997: 19). Becoming aware of this ambivalence causes anxiety and grief in the child, who fears that the beloved mother may be driven away by its own hatefulness. Thus, Parker argues that infantile ambivalence goes hand in hand with a sense of self as well as a sense of responsibility (Parker 1997: 20). Parker then reverses Klein's conception to mothers and notes that experiencing conflicting feelings towards the baby is a crucial step in maternal development, because it:

can promote a sense of concern and responsibility towards, and differentiation of self from the baby. Accordingly, both idealization and denigration of her baby diminish. Acknowledging that she hates where she loves is acutely painful for a mother and feels terribly dangerous, for her baby is dependent upon her. Hence the sense of loss and sorrow that accompanies maternal ambivalence cannot be avoided. The parallel is with the loss Klein's baby undergoes when it gives up the image of the all-perfect, all-loving mother. (Parker 1997: 20)

While mothers are frustrated and infuriated by their children's behaviour, they are at the same time worried that they may harm their baby through their resenting impulses, leading to feelings of guilt (Parker 1997: 22). Parker distinguishes between "manageable" and "unmanageable" ambivalence. Manageable ambivalence serves as a "source of creative insight", as it encourages a woman to

“struggle to understand her own feelings” as well as her child’s behaviour. Unmanageable ambivalence “arouses intolerable levels of guilt” in mothers, where their negative feelings towards the child overshadow the love or, as Parker puts it, are not “safely ‘mitigated’ by love” (Parker 1997: 21). Almond, who stresses that maternal ambivalence comes in many different forms, from occasional bouts of impatience and loss of temper to actual feelings of hate that, if not diffused by love, “can extend to the depths of the dark side” – meaning psychological and physical abuse, even murder (Almond 2011: 9f). Here, the concern that emotions like anger and frustration may result in mothers becoming violent towards their children becomes apparent. Still, Parker not only argues that ambivalence is a normal aspect of all intimate relationships, but also that acknowledging and ‘owning’ these feeling is extremely important for a mother in order to understand herself, her relationship with her child – and her child’s needs:

Unless she can begin to acknowledge her internal reality – which means facing the part of her that wants to shut the baby up at any cost, as well as the part that passionately wants to make things better – her capacity to help is limited. She needs to ‘reverie’ about herself if she is to understand her baby. (Parker 1997: 26).

Hence, Parker asserts that suffering through ‘contradictory feelings’ boosts a mother’s thinking about and engagement with her child, which Parker considers is one of the most essential elements of mothering. Thus, Parker claims, maternal ambivalence in itself is not problematic, but society’s tabooing and disdain of it is, as this not only increases fear, shame, and guilt in mothers, but also overlooks the creative forces of this state of mind that can actually lead to more attuned mothering (Parker 1997: 34f; 2005: 8f): “The painful conflict of love and hate itself provokes the desire to know and answer the baby’s needs” (Parker 2005: 73). Parker alludes to an important point here, as pondering about conflicting emotions or opposing desires can result in the formation of ‘meta-desires’ or ‘desires about desires’ that can indeed have transformative effects.

To conclude this section, I will draw attention to the ambivalence literature’s somewhat unnuanced characterisation of mothers’ feelings as ‘loving’ and ‘hating’. Mothers can use a more differentiated vocabulary to describe their resentments, as was the case during my conversations

with mothers. A mother may feel ‘annoyed’, ‘angry’ or ‘overwhelmed’ by her child and may not necessarily use the word ‘hate’ to describe her state of mind. Further, Parker defines ambivalence in terms of ‘contradiction’, such as the co-existence of ‘contradictory emotions’ (Parker 2005: 7)¹⁰⁶. The idea that feelings of annoyance, aggression or even in some moments violent impulses towards a child *contradict* the love for this child or the joy it generally brings is questionable, especially when considering philosophical debates about the nature of ‘love’. While many theorists define love as an emotion, Naar (2013) argues that love is a dispositional state which is “essentially tied to a pattern of emotions, without necessarily involving them” (Naar Penultimate Draft: 26). Naar importantly draws attention to love’s different relation to time. While emotions like anger or annoyance are often only temporary: “love typically permeates one’s life in such a way that it cannot be said to just “come and go”” (Naar Penultimate Draft: 7). Rather than conceptualising mothers’ emotions towards their children as ‘contradictory’, I understand these emotions in terms of ‘conflict’. Defining them in terms of ‘contradiction’ would also suggest that ‘maternal love’ is a ‘pure’ or ‘unconditional’ form of love, which is something that the ambivalence literature in general seems to want to avoid. Further, this definition would contradict my discussion of Hrdy’s (1999) work on maternal commitment that indicates that even a mother’s love is calculated and contingent.

Ambivalence and Regret

When Orna Donath, a sociologist and feminist activist, published her study on Israeli women who regret having become mothers (Donath 2015, 2017), it received wide attention in the international press and unleashed fiery debates online under the hashtag #regrettingmotherhood (Heffernan and Stone 2021). Donath objects to the idea that “womanhood and motherhood are (...) synonymous” (Donath 2015: 343) and argues that, for some women, mothering their children

¹⁰⁶ The idea that parental feelings towards the child, towards becoming a parent or care work, that include joy, happiness, but also sadness, anxiety, and anger are ‘contradictory’ can also be found in the parent letters by Pro Juventute (ProJuventute 2018a: 10-11).

entails so much hardship that they regret they ever had them. Although the ambivalent tensions involved in mothering had been acknowledged by scholarship, “this stance of regretting the transition from being a nonmother, and the wish to undo motherhood, tends to be seen as an abject maternal experience and an object of disbelief” (Donath 2015: 344) – not only in the media and mainstream discourses, but also, writes Donath, in feminist and sociological literature. The experience of regretting motherhood remains uncharted by research and, according to Donath, represents a “distinct stance from other conflictual and ambivalent maternal emotions” (ibid.)

Moore and Abetz explore the voicing of parental regret on the online platform *Reddit*. In contrast to Donath, they argue that the ‘emotion of regret’ is distinct from ambivalence “in that one can be experienced without the other” (Moore and Abetz 2019: 407). At the same time, the paper proposes that ambivalence and regret are connected, as many parents’ experiences of regret are described in a highly ambivalent fashion, and both can be a source of shame and guilt¹⁰⁷. Both being ‘objects of disbelief’ (Donath 2015: 344; Parker 1997: 17), parental ambivalence and regret “clearly interweave to create constellations of emotions that constitute pronatalist ideals imbued in mothers’ and fathers’ roles” (Moore and Abetz 2019: 407). Moore and Abetz understand ambivalence as part of the inventory of emotions, a point of view, which, as discussed above, is not shared by this book¹⁰⁸.

In 2016, YouGov, an international data and analytics group, published a quantitative study on regretting parenthood in Germany¹⁰⁹. The study seems to be a response to Donath’s work, as YouGov refers to the media outcry in Germany succeeding her publication, while commenting based on their own findings that regretting motherhood was widespread among German mothers

¹⁰⁷The authors included both comments from women (107) and men (95), as well as posts whose users’ gender was unclear (84).

¹⁰⁸The authors assert, for example: “However regret is not the only taboo emotion of parenthood. Whereas ambivalence has been identified as a common emotion associated with childbearing desire (...) ambivalence was rarely cited by Reddit parents as a precursor to regret (Moore and Abetz 2019: 406).

¹⁰⁹YouGov’s survey included 2,045 people, see <https://yougov.de/news/2016/07/28/regretting-parenthood-wenn-eltern-ihre-kinder-lieb/> accessed 14.01.2022.

as well¹¹⁰. In contrast to Donath, YouGov, however, included fathers in their study. Generally, YouGov found that 20% of the parents would not have children again if they could make that decision a second time. Here women (20%) and men (19%) gave almost the same response. While most parents who regretted having had their children stated that it did not affect their love for their children, 3% of all parents questioned stated that they did *not* love their children. When comparing women and men, YouGov found that men tended to find being a parent more rewarding (80%) than women (74%). However, mothers (96%) scored higher than fathers (93%) when asked if they loved their children. Women felt more restricted in their personal and professional development due to having children than men. Constraints in professional development was one of the most cited reasons for regretting parenthood (33%), with a stark gender difference – 60% of the women and only 27% of the men gave this as a reason for their regret (YouGov 2016).

Donath's work on the regret of motherhood is highly relevant in the context of maternal ambivalence. However, the notion of 'regret' did not play a role in my research, as none of the mothers or fathers I talked to stated that they regretted having become parents. Still, it may also be the case that regretting motherhood or fatherhood may be such a great taboo that none of my interlocutors addressed it during our conversations.

Maternal Ambivalence in Sociology

In a social work Master's thesis, Lacy explores narratives of maternal ambivalence on an anonymous online platform. Lacy calls for a departure from the 'traditional' psychoanalytical definitions suggested by Parker or Almond, as she found that in none of over 300 posts had mothers enunciated hate or violent feelings towards their children. Rather, they declared great love for their children, but stated that they "hated being a mother, and all that motherhood brings with

¹¹⁰See <https://yougov.de/news/2016/07/28/regretting-parenthood-wenn-eltern-ihre-kinder-lieb/>, accessed 24.06.21.

it” (Lacy 2015: 61f). Lacy points out that this notion of maternal ambivalence comes closer to Brown’s (2011) conceptualisation of the term. Brown investigates maternal ambivalence from a sociological perspective and indicates that the hatred mothers experience is in fact directed towards the ‘institution’ of motherhood. Regarding the ‘target’ of ambivalence, Donath finds that the ‘regret’ at becoming a mother, which, as mentioned earlier, she evaluates as a special form of ambivalence, is not connected to the children as individuals, but is directed at the ‘maternal experience’:

The interviews gave rise to a categorical distinction that the majority of the participants explicitly insisted on and emphasized, sometimes over and over again, namely the distinction between object (the children) and experience (maternity). Most of the mothers stressed that they love their children but hate the maternal experience and that they regret becoming mothers but that this regret has nothing to do with the children themselves. (Donath 2015: 335)

The sociological literature criticises the suggestion of psychoanalytic authors such as Parker that mothers’ hate is fixated on the child as a person and argues that the negative feelings are instead directed at the ‘institution’ or ‘experience’ of motherhood, alluding to the social factors, power structures and relations that engender ambivalence, which was discussed in the context of Palmberger’s as well as Connidis’ and McMullin’s work above. While it may be hard to distinguish ambivalence towards ‘the children’ and ‘the experience of motherhood’, the different approaches to ambivalence may, however, also be owed to the different theoretical as well as methodological frameworks of the two disciplines. Parker, for example, based much of her findings on her therapeutic practice and patients’ statements. Donath, from her sociological and feminist standpoint, criticises Parker’s idea that (manageable) maternal ambivalence is generally a creative force. Parker’s claim, Donath opines, supports the notion of a “female figure who is unavoidably bound to motherhood or who gradually adapts to the maternal experience” (Donath 2015: 362). Moreover, her own study on regretting motherhood indicated that ambivalence was not necessarily ‘fruitful’ (ibid.). In my view, Parker’s ideas do not contradict Donath’s findings, however. While ambivalence could still lead to ‘more attuned mothering’ of the particular child, as Parker suggested,

a woman may still regret having become a mother, as, according to Donath, the regret is not directed toward the child, but rather the maternal ‘experience’.

Moore’s and Abetz’s (2019) paper on how parents communicate regret regarding having had children on the online discussion forum *Reddit* differentiate between two main categories of regret. The first form of regret, which was more common, was related to regretting “certain circumstances associated with having children” (Moore and Abetz 2019: 390), such as the timing and number of children, the sacrifices respondents make for their children, or the partner they had the children with. This form of regret was not related to the decision of having children *per se*. The other category of parental regret originated from having ‘difficult’ children, being a ‘bad’ parent to one’s children, or the desire to live a childfree life (Moore and Abetz 2019: 402). The people that express this kind of regret, according to Moore and Abetz, voiced that they would not have children again if they were given a second choice (Moore and Abetz 2019: 404). Moore’s and Abetz’s paper raises a very important point in the discussion surrounding the true ‘targets’ (Donath 2015) of ambivalence (or regret): What are the conflicts that produce ambivalence? The conflicting emotions regarding either the individual children or having had them, or the care work and constraints that parenthood brings about? The ‘targets’ of ambivalence can be diverse, situational, and may not even be easily distinguished. Additionally, gender and other factors can have an effect in relation to the conflicts that engender ambivalence. Brown compares maternal ambivalence in terms of class and ethnic differences. She finds that it manifests in various ways among different social groups:

(...) the most significant and consistent class and race differences occur along identity ambivalence, with white middle-class mothers experiencing the highest ambivalence. Mothers belonging to other social groups experience more maternal ambivalence along attachment and combining work and family ambivalence, when, respectively, black mothers and lower income mothers feel more ambivalent about their motherhood experiences than white and higher income mothers. I find no class and race differences among mothers in their ambivalence about being good at mothering. Other covariates of class and race, such as maternal employment, social support, quality of intimate relationships, and motherhood experience, are also significant predictors of maternal ambivalence. (Brown 2011: iii)

This alludes to another important point that has been raised in some studies, namely that the degree of maternal ambivalence and the conflicts that produce it depends on external factors, such as access to support, economic situation, and perceived quality of the intimate relationship with one's partner (Brown 2011; Hrdy 2009; Lacy 2015; Parker 1997; Westbrook 1978). YouGov found that those parents who said they regretted having had children had a lower income, worked part-time or had given up their paid employment, did not co-reside with the mother/father of the child and had little support from family members or friends when it came to child care (YouGov 2016). This again links up to the notion that the occurrence of ambivalence is tightly connected to 'structured' social relations and processes.

Anthropologist and primatologist Sarah Hrdy, who I quoted at the beginning of this chapter, draws attention to the fact that external factors are decisive for the experience of mothering as well as the 'commitment' of a mother towards her child. In her Preface to *Mother Nature: Maternal Instincts and How They Shape the Human Species*, Hrdy describes her state of mind as a new mother. While she did not want to deprive her daughter of "emotional security" (Hrdy 1999: xi), something she believed was extremely important for small children, she still strived to advance her professional career, which made her feel ambivalent about motherhood. In an interview with the *Scientific American*, Hrdy commented on her 'reactions' to new motherhood:

I adored my baby. Yet as a woman turning my life over to this little gene vehicle, I was surprised by how ambivalent I felt. I have always felt that my gestations were the average length and my sexual responses seemed to be average, so I had no reason to think that my reactions to motherhood were abnormal. I just figured I needed to understand maternal ambivalence a lot better than I did and I made that a research priority. The resulting book *Mother Nature* is really about maternal love and ambivalence. Human maternal ambivalence I came to realize is completely natural. (Hrdy in: Johnson 2012)

In the book, Hrdy sets out to understand maternal ambivalence from the perspective of evolutionary biology and concludes that emotions in human parents can be highly "flexible" (Hrdy 1999: xvi). As 'cooperative breeders' (see Chapter 1), human mothers' emotional and material investment in a child is dependent on the social support and material resources that she can acquire:

The mother's commitment to her infant is the single most important determiner of survival prospects. But a long evolutionary history of cooperative breeding has meant that both a mother's commitment to her newborn and the level of support she is able to provide are linked to how much social support she herself has. More than in any other ape, a mother's love is contingent on her circumstances. (Hrdy 2001: 97)

In other words, mothers are not 'naturally' hard-wired to love and nurture their children no matter what but are also compelled, due to the great 'expense' that caring for children requires, to look out for themselves. The balancing act to reconcile one's own needs with one's children's needs is what inevitably creates ambivalence in human mothers, which can be further stoked by a lack of emotional or material support.

Up until now, I have only talked about *maternal* ambivalence. One reason for this is that *paternal* ambivalence has been written about to a much lesser degree. The few psychoanalytical theorists who specifically explore fathering and ambivalence, such as Frosh or Gonzalez-Torres and Fernandez-Rivas (2019), apply the notion of the 'oedipal complex' to understand fathers' mixed emotions towards their children. In 'Fathers' ambivalence (too)', Frosh (1997) reviews psychoanalysis' views on fathering and suggests that fathers too, especially in times of a "crisis of masculinity" struggle with ambivalence. Gonzalez-Torres and Fernandez-Rivas (2019) argue that fathers' conflicted feelings towards their offspring already sets in during pregnancy, when they begin to feel like a 'third wheel' in the face of the "mother-fetus bubble" (ibid: 140). In my view, the above-mentioned work on paternal ambivalence is not comparable to the research done by scholars exploring maternal ambivalence, as it is different not only from a theoretical standpoint but also in terms of ideas about fathers' 'roles' regarding childrearing.

Ambivalence and Gender in the Context of Switzerland

In an interview with *The Guardian*, Parker comments that fathers have the same conflicted feelings about their offspring, but that "women, unlike men, are always up against an unachievable 'maternal ideal'" (Benn 2006: ; Interview with Rozsika Parker), meaning that fathers have to grapple less with

their emotions towards their children, because they are confronted less with expectations of ‘self-sacrifice’ or the question of how to combine family and paid work than mothers. Still, the body of literature that seeks to ‘normalise’ mothers’ resentments and strives to position it in the bigger social, cultural, and political fabric, falls into a trap. By ignoring fathers’ experiences, they indirectly construe ambivalence in the context of childrearing as something that is specifically maternal. Nonetheless, the state of research also mirrors the situation ‘on the ground’.

As discussed in the introduction, four-fifths of all mothers in Switzerland work outside the home, but four out of five working mothers ‘only’ work part-time. While the birth of a first child usually involves a reduction in working hours or an exit from the labour market for mothers (BFS 2016: 1), most fathers do not change their workload when their first child is born – only 1 in 9 fathers works part-time (BFS 2016: 3). In 69% of Swiss households with children, it is the women who carry out most of the domestic work (BFS 2019: 13), while only 48% of the women with children are ‘very happy’ about how domestic work is organised in their family (BFS 2019: 16).

Government policies surrounding parental leave and daycare costs certainly contribute to women still being the main caretakers (see Introduction). Compared to Germany, for example, Swiss parental leave is very brief for both women and men. Only since 2021, have fathers been entitled to two weeks’ paternity leave. Before the introduction of this paternity leave, many men were not able to support their female partners during the postpartum period or experience on a day-to-day basis what caring for a newborn involves (if they were not able to take a paid holiday or unpaid leave). This policy pushed mothers into the role of the main caretaker from day one.

Combining work and parenthood can be a major financial burden for families which can have negative effects on women’s professional development as well as their pension plans and accumulation of wealth. According to the latest government survey, 75% of women in Switzerland who completed tertiary education believe that the birth of a child would have a negative impact on their career. In contrast, only 37% of men with the same education level thought that their professional development would ‘suffer’ if they became a father (BFS 2019: 12).

Gendered divisions of labour in childrearing in Switzerland have been explored by Witzig and Nentwich, who analysed a variety of legal documents discussing the revision of the parental custody law in 2014. The authors conclude that, while these documents proclaim the equality of mothers and fathers regarding their ‘significance’ in children’s lives, women’s role as primary attachment figures is not challenged and motherly love is assumed to be “constitutive of the essence of a woman” (Witzig and Nentwich 2016: 218). Ballif, who examines the ‘psychopolitics’ of pregnancy in a perinatal unit in Switzerland and their reproduction of gender stereotypes, observes that women were motivated by midwives to invite partners or future fathers to appointments, but that men were “primarily encouraged to support, surround and be there” for the women by the staff (Ballif 2019: 16).

Mothers still bear the brunt of unpaid care work and are confronted with their children (and domestic work) more often than fathers, and thus also have more ‘opportunities’ to have conflicted feelings about care work, their career ambitions and their children. As most mothers in Switzerland also work in a paid job, they carry a ‘double burden’ that they need to reconcile – something that many fathers are still spared from. Against this background, the importance of taking gendered divisions of labour as well as the political and cultural environment into account when exploring maternal (and paternal) ambivalence becomes apparent.

In the following sections, I will turn to my empirical findings and explore narratives of ambivalence that arose in my fieldwork with parents. I begin with a slice of ethnography and describe my morning with Marta during which ambivalence, specifically in the form of conflicting desires about wanting to be there for her children and wanting to advance her career and education, came to the fore. Based on Marta’s account, I then describe and analyse the different situations in which conflicting emotions and desires arise in daily life. Unsurprisingly, it will emerge that, depending on their individual situation, parents feel ambivalent or regretful about specific aspects of parenthood and, in certain cases, this invites a comparison between different families. Unlike Brown (2011), my primary aim is not, however, to compare ambivalence in terms of class or other

social differences, as my sample is small and the majority of families came from a similar middle-class background. Rather, I will analyse participants' accounts of becoming parents, care work and the relationship with their children, to form a deeper understanding of the conflicts that produce ambivalence, how it is voiced by parents and in what ways intensive modes of childrearing (Hays, 1996) may be connected to the experience of ambivalence.

My Morning With Marta

On a rainy autumn morning, I rushed through the streets of an unfamiliar peripheral district of Zürich City while again and again consulting Google maps to find Marta's address, who had invited me to her home after learning about my research on Facebook. Google maps led me to an estate with high-rise blocks towering over a park with several playgrounds. After spotting Marta's house number, I pressed the doorbell, but no one answered. I rang again and a woman's voice came through the loudspeaker:

"Who is this?"

"Laura Preissler, I'm here for the interview."

"What interview?"

"I am doing research on parenthood in Switzerland, we agreed via email..."

"Damn, I totally forgot!"

"We can re-schedule..."

"No, please wait!"

After two minutes the door release was activated, I entered the building and got into the elevator to reach one of the upper floors, where Marta's apartment was situated. The apartment door was still closed when I exited the elevator. I heard children screaming, heavy coughing, and clanking noises, as if someone was hectically cleaning the kitchen and moving pans and pots into the sink. Hesitantly, I knocked on the door, then, after waiting to no avail, I rang the bell. The door opened, and Marta and her two children, a five year-old girl and a 15 month-old boy, stood in front of me.

I shook Marta's hand, which was still wet from her kitchen-cleaning endeavours. I offered again to come back another day if the timing no longer suited her, but she invited me in and apologised for forgetting our meeting: "I was playing the piano and the children were dancing" (field notes, 18.10.2019).

Marta invited me to sit at the table in her living room and offered me something to drink. The living room window provided a beautiful view of the foggy autumn landscape. While I got my notebook and recording device out, Marta's daughter settled down on the sofa and started watching TV on a laptop. Marta's son was playing happily and every now and again requested to be breastfed, which Marta patiently permitted every time although it looked like a bit of a struggle. She informed me that his wish to be nursed was more about soothing than about being thirsty.

I began to learn more about Marta, with whom I had just exchanged a few emails to set up our meeting. She had a Slovakian background and had moved to Switzerland a couple of years ago. Marta had a university degree in the humanities and a few months earlier had re-entered the workforce part time, after taking a long maternity leave. Marta, who was in her early 40s when we met, tells me that she got pregnant "late in life" and had already gotten used to the idea of staying childless, "because it just never happened" (ibid.). Although she had wanted to have children, when she was in a long-term relationship for several years she had not pursued any medical assistance to get pregnant, as she believed that children were "gifts and we cannot ask for them" (recorded interview, 18.10.2019). Shortly after moving in with a new boyfriend, who was now her husband, however, she unexpectedly got pregnant with her daughter, when Marta still lived in Slovakia.

Marta: After —[my daughter was born], I thought I had met an old soul. I had a horoscope made for her, and me as well, and it also said that we've known each other for a long time. And well (...) my daughter is my teacher. She shows me a lot of things that I must learn.

Laura: Like what?

Marta: Patience! This is very different from how I was raised because she shows me that she is equal to me, OK? That we are equal. We are not – 'I am your mother; you are my daughter' – but we are equal. 'What you can do, I can do.' Through this she shows me what I am doing wrong. (Recorded interview, 18.10.2019)

A year after giving birth to her daughter, Marta got pregnant again. Marta sighed and said with a faltering voice that this was a sad story for her. She started crying and explained that her second pregnancy ended in an abortion, because the child's¹¹¹ heart had not developed properly. The doctors told her that she could not continue the pregnancy and, when it was not possible to have an amniocentesis to determine the cause of the heart defect due to a lack of amniotic fluid, Marta decided to follow the doctors' recommendations immediately. She did not want to feel her baby move and then "have to say good-bye". I was moved to tears by Marta's story, knowing that being in the situation Marta was describing was the nightmare of many women expecting a baby. After this event, Marta disclosed, while drying her tears with a tissue, she "went crazy" (ibid.). Although she was anxious about what another pregnancy would bring after what had happened, every month she hoped to conceive again and took pregnancy test after pregnancy test. At some point, she felt drained by the fruitless hoping and waiting and planned to start focusing on herself again. She signed up for an advanced studies course at a Swiss college (in the meantime Marta and her family had moved to Switzerland) and, the same month the course started, Marta got pregnant with her son.

While we smilingly observed Marta's son rolling around on the carpet in the middle of the living room, Marta continued talking about how she handled her son and how this had changed her experience of mothering: "Being a mother with my son is very different". After having her son, Marta had revised her parenting style, which she described as needs-oriented, intuitive, and natural, which, she said, also had an impact on her son's behaviour. It seems that her views regarding what 'good' parenting was underwent a transformation. In contrast to her daughter, with whom Marta thought she needed to stick to routines, such as strict bedtimes, she let her son show her what he wants and needs:

I am very relaxed with him. I don't have this thing any more – 'you must do it like this, you must do it like that, you must be a better mother'. I told myself that I will orient myself towards *his* needs. He can do whatever he wants, he can go to sleep when he wants. With

¹¹¹ Marta referred to the foetus as "the child", which is why I have also used that term here.

my daughter, I thought she has to go to bed at eight o'clock, because I thought children develop better when they sleep. (...) He shows me when *he* wants to sleep. This is how we do it with everything. (...) I must say that I have two different [parenting] styles. With my daughter, I developed this stress, she already has this inside her. I fight a lot with this. With him, everything is more natural. When I tell my son 'you cannot do this', he stops. When I tell my daughter to stop, she won't stop. Then I need to find out how to solve this, and this is very difficult. (ibid.)

Putting her son in daycare was hard for Marta, who then told me about the job in accounting she had recently taken on, which was a perfect fit for her. She had the impression that her son – who was now offering me his Duplo bricks with a big smile – had suffered greatly when he was separated from her the first few times she took him to daycare: “I was always scared that this will leave a mark on him, that later, he may have trust issues, that our relationship will change” (ibid.)

I stacked some Duplo bricks and handed them back to the little boy. Marta complained that, for her taste, the daycare was not operating “needs-oriented enough”, as, for example, she wanted her son to take his naps in his pram in the first weeks at daycare, as the pram was the only thing he knew from home. This, explained Marta, would have given her son a sense of security in an unknown environment. The staff, however, had found it more convenient to quickly transition him to a bed for his naps.

Marta, who liked to use Montessori resources to educate her children, also believed that her son's development was not being fostered adequately by daycare staff. In the end, Marta noted, her son had integrated well into daycare life, for he was an “easy baby”. Had he been a “difficult case” or had putting him in daycare complicated her wish to continue breastfeeding her son, Marta added, she would have stayed at home with him and would have dropped the job opportunity. While Marta thought that in general children are given more freedom in Switzerland than in Slovakia, where children were often forced to give up their dummies and nappies at an early age, she was considering moving back home, where mothers could take up to three years' parental leave

and where she would have her parents to help with childcare.¹¹² In this context, Marta did not mention her husband and his opinion on moving back to Slovakia. Neither did she consider the possibility that her husband could reduce his workload and take over the childcare responsibilities while she worked.

Marta described her experience of mothering her children as conflicting. The desire to work and attend further training courses was not easy to align with her urge to prioritise her children's needs. The fact that she had started having children in her mid-thirties also played a role for Marta, who believed that her long independence had made her feel even more other-directed – an idea I also encountered when talking to other mothers who had had their first child in their mid or late thirties:

100 Percent. You're always there. This is also very difficult for me sometimes, because of course at my age, I could do what I want, I could read, I could watch films, I could do whatever I want, I could attend those courses and so on. And now I am very constrained. For example, I think – 'they are old enough, I could actually go to these systemic training courses' – but then I think – 'well, how will they survive this?' (...) Again and again I put the kids first, although I know that I should put myself first, because if I am happy the kids are happy, but again and again I look out for them, what they need (...). It is really difficult (laughs), because the head is here and the soul is there. (Recorded interview 18.10.19)

Marta went on to explain that she had taken up again the advanced studies course she had dropped out of when pregnant with her son. The demand to advance her education to finally feel “good enough” had also been pushed by her husband, who always told her “you must, you must” (ibid.). Marta complained that focusing on her studies alongside working and raising her children was not working out. She simply did not have time to study. Marta wondered why she could not relax and do things just for fun, like a befriended mother who she said, reserved some ‘me-time’ to paint. Marta noted that the stress that this overload had caused her was transferred to her children:

When I gained another certificate I said again and again – ‘no, I cannot fall asleep with you, I have to study, no I cannot do this with you, I have to study.’ Always. I don't want this any more. I've told myself now – ‘no’. I want this time (...) because I am really a mother now, I have small children. ‘I want to be there for you now. When you are grown up I can

¹¹² Switzerland has other advantages for Marta, who is sceptical about the safety of vaccines and has not immunised her children. She fears that if she moves back to Slovakia, where policy makers have stricter immunisation policies, doctors will pressure her to have her children immunised.

still study. I can still do what I want. But now I need to focus on you.’ Otherwise, they will break. (ibid.)

Marta’s daughter came over to the table and talked to her mother in Slovakian. I guessed that she was telling her about the film she had been watching. Both Marta and her daughter laughed. Marta then excused herself and went to the kitchen. She returned with a chocolate yoghurt, which the daughter had probably requested. Marta said: “Sweets (...) this is another topic for us”, and began to elaborate on the deliberations she and her husband had about what a healthy diet was.

After asking Marta some more questions about her maternity and postpartum care in Slovakia and Switzerland, I turned my recording device off. However, the conversation continued. By this time, we were no longer sitting at the table, but standing in the corridor between the living room and the entrance area. Marta told me about her somewhat difficult but close relationship with her parents and older sister, who had different ideas about how to do childrearing ‘right’.

Marta suddenly apologised for talking so much and added that she rarely had the opportunity to talk about motherhood and childrearing with anyone. I stressed that I was very happy she was talking so much, and that hearing her perspectives was the reason I had come in the first place. Marta then talked about her own childhood and the role of corporal punishment in the *Erziehung* she had experienced as a little girl. Although Marta did not believe in corporal punishment, she recounted that she had given her daughter a slap on her backside in situations that had made her very angry – when, for example, the daughter had woken her sleeping brother on purpose. Spanking, said Marta, always made her feel “guilty” afterwards and she deemed apologising to her daughter after such occurrences extremely important. This way, her daughter knew that she was loved and that it was not her fault, but her mother’s for not controlling her emotions properly.

Now that she was a mother herself, Marta went on, she could understand her own mother, who rarely had any help with her children from her husband, and her occasional resorting to violence, better: “Sometimes, one is just done with it”. When she felt like this, Marta explained, she

sometimes begged her husband to take over – who, as already mentioned above, did not play any role in Marta’s account of how she organises childcare. Especially after returning home from a long day at work, she often felt ‘swamped’ and then told the children that she needed a couple of minutes to catch her breath. The children, however, would notice that she was stretched thin at that moment and would make a big drama to provoke her. Explaining to children why she lost her temper by saying, “look, I was tired, this was not your fault, I should not have behaved that way” (field notes, 18.10.19), was how she dealt with her outbursts of anger in situations of overload afterwards.

When I left Marta’s apartment two hours later, I was surprised at how much interlocutors are willing to share with a ‘stranger’ they have just met, especially when it comes to ‘maternal ambivalence’, a topic often designated as ‘taboo’ or ‘unspeakable’ by authors such as Parker (1997), Almond (2010), some MVBs, as well as some parents I talked to. But maybe I was not a stranger to Marta, but another mother, who could relate to the feeling of being torn between one’s own wants and needs and the needs and wants of one’s children, as someone who has also experienced inconceivable love and seemingly ‘contradictory’ emotions like anger that caring for them and caring about them can trigger. Moreover, it may have been an opportunity for Marta to be ‘heard’, as she noted that she could rarely talk to anyone about these issues.

The conversation with Marta was one of the most memorable of my research. Although almost all parents interviewed described the inner and outer conflicts that gestating and rearing children bring about, Marta contemplated and bewailed the ambivalence that mothering children entails on many different levels and with great reflexivity and emotionality. First, mothering as a site of life and death. On the one side, the grief of losing a child in the womb, the difficult decision to end a pregnancy that still held a grip on Marta after many years, and, on the other side, the fervent wish to conceive again despite the fear of what the next pregnancy may hold. Second, the all-consuming love for her children and, at the same time, the exhaustion and anger that they sometimes engendered in her. Third, the clash between the urge to care for her children, the desire to always put them first, and the aspiration to advance her own career, to finally be “enough”; the

delight of being “really a mother”, and the mourning of her freedom and independence as a childless woman; the idea of children as teachers who show Marta what *she* is doing wrong, what *she* still needs to learn, to which needs *she* must respond; and her own craving to rest, the desire to take time for herself, to do things just for fun, and the worry about damaging her children by doing this. Rearing a child who “trains” their parent and not vice versa (Hays 1996: 45), to refer back to Hays and her notion of intensive mothering, is a labour-, time- and emotion-intensive undertaking that can conflict with mothers’ own needs and desires.

Additionally, the aspect of gender, which Palmberger claims is central to the experience of ‘relational ambivalence’, was a salient element of Marta’s account. Marta had considered quitting her job if her son did not fare well in daycare or if it had made breastfeeding him impossible. Aligning paid work and further training courses with childcare, at least in the sense of morally reconciling her children’s wellbeing with her wish to advance her career, seemed to be Marta’s concern, not her husband’s. These aspects not only exposed the gendered divisions of labour in Marta’s family, but also shed light on the moral and emotional challenges mothers face when attempting to combine motherhood with paid work.

Marta felt the pressure to advance her career and said that this was also strongly encouraged by her husband. In her narration, however, her husband did not play a supporting role when it came to care and domestic work. At the end of our conversation Marta described how she sometimes had to ask him for help when she felt exhausted, which may infer that, by default, she was mainly responsible for looking after the children, although she held an 80% paid position at the time we spoke. Conflicting demands upon herself or from her husband’s side contributed to producing an ambivalence that resulted in inner deliberations in which she assessed her own needs, her children’s needs and her obligations as a ‘good’ (intensive) mother. These deliberations entailed opposing standpoints that Marta could not easily align. For example, she commented that she should go on further training courses, because this would make her happy. If she was happy, her kids would be happy, too. But her children’s need for a present, engaging mother did not mutually

agree with her absence, distraction, and stress due to the additional workload that the courses would bring. As Palmberger observes, it seemed that the contemplations had already been made several times before our conversation happened and were not taking place for the first time (Palmberger 2019: 87). Marta's example also shows that maternal ambivalence is a product of the intimate relations (Palmberger 2019: 87) a mother has with their children as well as partners, and possibly other people, whose 'voices' are incorporated into the deliberations during which conflicting dispositions are processed. Marta had had many disagreements with her parents about the 'proper' upbringing of her children – something that also triggered insecurity and inner dialogues in Marta. As such, narratives of ambivalence also shed light on power relationships between intimate partners (Marta/husband) or relatives (Marta/her parents) and the way Marta negotiates her position in these relationships. In addition, Marta's example further illustrated the ways that Swiss family policy influences women's experiences of carrying the 'double burden'. Marta would have welcomed the opportunity to take care of her son at home until he had reached a certain age. However, the brief maternity leave in Switzerland had put her in the 'morally' difficult position of enrolling her son in daycare, which she did not perceive as an ideal place for his development to be fostered.

In the following sections, I will address some of the themes that surfaced in Marta's narrative and also stood out during my conversations with other parents in more detail.

Childrearing is Rewarding but Burdensome, but Still so Wonderful

'Narratives of ambivalence' usually unfolded when I asked parents how they experienced raising their child(ren). As discussed, Marta noted that for her being a mother felt like always having to be present "100%" at all times for her children, which made her feel restricted, especially because until her mid-thirties she had been very independent. At the same time, Marta expressed great love towards her children. Most parents expressed in a 'needless to say' manner that parenthood gave them a lot of fulfilment and joy. Usually, the statement that rearing their children felt rewarding, however, was succeeded by a 'but' that then introduced the other side of parenting that meant, for

example, great exhaustion in terms of lack of sleep or always having to be available, feeling bored by their daily tasks as parents or being frustrated by their children's tempers and moods. After expressing the negative experiences or emotions regarding rearing their children, which were often times defined as only fleeting, parents resumed to stress that all in all, parenting was still wonderful and fulfilling.

Lara, a trained hairdresser,¹¹³ defined herself as a housewife, a position she had not taken on voluntarily. After her second son was born, Lara had to quit her part-time job as a hairdresser, because giving both her children to her parents (who used to look after her eldest son while she was working) to babysit seemed too burdensome for them and paying daycare for both children was too expensive. She described her experience of raising her two sons, aged four years and eight months, as: "For one thing, it is very fulfilling. Right now, I must say, it is more exhausting. At the moment I get in situations where I sometimes would just like to leave (laughs a little bit). But I know that this will pass. I know the first year [of my younger son's life] is hard". While stress and "getting nothing done" with two children seemed to be one source of experiencing mothering her sons as "exhausting", her inability to work as well as a perceived lack of time for herself were additional factors that contributed to her rather ambivalent depiction of her situation at home. It seemed like the arrival of her second son had changed Lara's life in a more profound way than the birth of her first child: "Nobody tells you how difficult it is to find a babysitter for two children. I still had a lot of free time [when my first son was born], my husband as well – everything's changed since [having my second son]" (Lara, 31, recorded interview, 03.07.19).

Nancy characterised raising her three children, a twin boy and girl, aged four, and an older daughter, aged seven, the following way:

I do enjoy it. It's a lot of work (...). It is rewarding, but I've had times where it is just... especially at night-time, with the ages that they are at – the twins at the moment – they are four year-olds, phew (...) it's a lot. It is a lot. How do I experience it? It's challenging. It is really rewarding on the one hand, and it is just a hell of a lot of work on the other, especially in the early years, right? (...) The four-year-olds, phew (...) a lot of energy. They are great

¹¹³ Lara had also completed a commercial apprenticeship on top of her training as a hairdresser.

kids, I am told by everybody how great they are, they are just so active and happy, they are great kids, but sometimes I just want to throw them out of the window. (Nancy, 45, recorded interview, 08.10.19)

Nancy lived in a large house with an imposing interior design style. She told me that she had never really wanted children but thought that “regretting not having children would be worse than having them”. While this may sound “horrible” to some people, Nancy reflected, it was her reason for having children and she felt that having them “was the right thing to do” for her. After becoming a mother at the age of 37, Nancy had always continued working in her job as an HR manager full time and was supported by a live-in nanny. When we met, she had just taken some time off to finish her Master’s degree, which she had started some years before, alongside her paid job. Although Nancy came from a different socioeconomic background than Lara, she described her experience of rearing her three children in a similarly ambivalent way – on the one hand rewarding, on the other hand hard work. In contrast to Lara, however, Nancy had become a mother later in life when she had already established her professional career. She earned a high income together with her partner and did not have to grapple with the financial barriers that hampered Lara’s wish to combine family and paid work. Rather, Nancy expressed regret that she “went back to work so quickly” after having her children and complained about the short maternity leave in Switzerland. The different economic situations of Lara and Nancy brought about different kinds of ‘regrets’ – while Lara regretted that she had less free time and had been unable to work since the birth of her second child, Nancy regretted returning to work too soon after having her children and handing over the care work to a nanny.

Agathe, whose daughter was a two year-old toddler the first time we met, defined becoming a mother as the “most extreme change in lifestyle” that she could have ever imagined. She cited her mobile job in the cultural scene as well as being single for a long time, and only moving in with her partner shortly before her daughter’s birth as reasons for her difficulty in adapting to new

motherhood. Like Marta, she noted that the fact she had had her first child at the age of 38 contributed to her experiencing becoming a mother as a huge ‘adjustment’:

Only since she has turned one have I had the feeling that things are getting better. I do not mean that I did not find all this beautiful, but I felt that my freedom was restricted. I noticed this quite extremely. This physical dependency [of the child], which many find annoying, was not so bad for me, but not being able to do what I want, when I want, how I want – it was hard for me to get used to that (Agathe, 40, recorded interview, 24.02.20).

For Daria, the experience of raising her daughter was overshadowed by the sleepless nights she had suffered since giving birth eight months before:

It’s demanding! Not as demanding as I thought (...). I mean, I think it’s great, I enjoy being a mother, I enjoy being at home (...). She [her 8-month-old daughter] has just been sleeping very badly since the beginning and this is just exhausting (...). But then you think: ‘I had what I always wanted, but I always just thought, I am tired, and she is demanding’. But actually, I have what I always wanted. It is exhausting and very intensive, but you cannot ask for more in life. (Daria, 34, recorded interview, 15.07.19)

In the quote above, Daria described the “internal dialogues” (Palmberger 2019) with herself induced by feelings of exhaustion and perceiving her daughter as “demanding” during sleepless nights that clashed with the fact that she had always had a fervent desire to become a mother. Daria had conceived her daughter in a lesbian relationship and thus required a sperm donor. As lesbian women are banned from accessing sperm donations in Switzerland, Daria and her partner Zita had to go to Denmark and invest a lot of time and money until Daria finally became pregnant with their daughter. The opposing emotions of joy and exhaustion were a source of guilt or the requirement of having to ‘get a grip’. Daria reminded herself that she had want she always wanted, but now only felt tired and stressed by her daughter’s demands, in the sense that she was not grateful for her daughter or did not enjoy caring for her enough. The idea that motherhood should only feel positive and rewarding also emerged in this context and, in Daria’s case, may have been magnified by the great effort invested in conceiving her daughter.

Some days after visiting Daria at her home, I sent her a copy of the informed consent sheet via email. She seemed to feel that she had emphasised the fact that she experienced motherhood

as exhausting too much during our conversation and may have had a guilty conscience about that, alluding to the social sensitivity of the subject. In her reply, she remarked, again in a rather ambivalent way: “I just wanted to tell you that I don’t find being a mother ONLY exhausting 😊, ok? I find it wonderful! But also exhausting ;)”.

Narratives of ambivalence can also remain ‘untold’ within couple relationships. When Daria and I first met, she told me that she wanted to have another child, but she was unsure how long she should wait. She wanted to access the same sperm donor that was used in her daughter’s conception, whose donations, however, may be used up by the time she decided to try for a second child. However, Daria noted that her partner was not convinced that a second child was a good idea and if it was up to Zita, they would not opt for another baby. Daria worked in the wellness sector twice a week and did most of the care work at home, while Zita worked full time and was only at home in the evenings. Daria commented that she tried to hold back ‘complaints’ about their daughter being exhausting, because it gave Zita ammunition to be able to say: “and you want another one of those?” (interview notes, 15.07.19). It seemed that for Zita, Daria’s expression of the stress that mothering their daughter involved contradicted Daria’s desire for an additional child who may make things even more exhausting. However, the exhaustion that their daughter engendered in Daria did not ‘dampen’ her wish to conceive again. When I met Daria twenty months later on Zoom, she was in the early stages of pregnancy with her second child, who she hoped would be a better sleeper than her firstborn.¹¹⁴

Thus, the reasons for keeping conflicting emotions ‘internal’ by not expressing them to intimate partners or other people may be not only connected to the notion that maternal ambivalence is ‘unspeakable’, but can also represent a strategic choice, in order to reach a certain goal, such as convincing one’s partner to have another child. Accessing sperm donation abroad is

¹¹⁴ Daria and Zita did not seem to organise divisions of labour differently from heterosexual families.

a costly and time-intensive endeavour and Daria, who ‘only’ worked part-time, certainly needed financial support from Zita, who worked full time and held a position with a higher salary.

Experiencing parenting as strenuous did not keep Miriam from having an additional child either. Miriam, who was an event manager by trade, first described herself as a “housewife” to me. Entering the workforce was pointless, she explained, as her salary would, to a large extent, be ‘eaten up’ by the daycare costs for her sons. After I turned off the device I had used to record our conversation, however, she told me that she worked part time as a cleaner and did evening shifts so that her husband, who worked as a truck driver, could watch the children. When we had coffee in her apartment in August 2019, she remarked that raising her sons, both under the age of five, was:

Exhausting, stressful, one has no time for oneself, not very much (...). Generally, it is just functioning, every day and in every condition. I cannot afford to be sick, I cannot afford to rest for half an hour, I am always on duty. This is how I experience being a parent. (Miriam, 26, recorded interview, 12.08.19)

Aching Love: The Bittersweetness of Parenthood

Although Miriam’s experience of being a mother sounded very burdensome, she told me that she planned to have a third child, who was eventually born in December 2020. Soon afterwards, we set a date for a second telephone call, and I asked Miriam why she had decided to have another child when she had already found parenting to be strenuous with two children. Miriam explained that “the answer was very simple” – she just had the feeling that she had “not finished yet”, for she really wanted to have a daughter after having two sons – a wish that was fulfilled with her third pregnancy. Although caring for a newborn meant that she now was “on duty 24 hours a day”, she felt melancholic that this would be her last baby:

I am scared that this is the last child – well this is how it is supposed to be – we already know that, because having more than three children is a mammoth financial task. But I am wistful that this will be my last baby. I want to enjoy her to the fullest. I was already very wistful on Monday because this was officially the last appointment with my midwife who is providing my postpartum care. This again was one of these milestones – ‘OK, the first hot phase is over’. I know she will only get bigger now, and this will happen fast. (Miriam, recorded interview, 12.02.21)

Although the conclusion of postpartum care meant that she had ‘overcome’ the first few weeks with a newborn, which several parents described as especially challenging, sensitive, exhausting or as a long sleepless ‘haze’, it generated melancholy in Miriam, because it indicated that her daughter would not be a baby forever. Seeing her child grow – albeit that was a sign of good health and meant that the period of frequent breastfeeding sessions at night would eventually come to an end – it achingly reminded her of the fleetingness of babyhood. In a similar fashion, Susan, who had conceived her then eight month-old son through IVF after a lengthy struggle with infertility, characterised parenting rather ambiguously as a continuous ‘letting go’, despite being close and dependent:

Like in a relationship, this closeness and dependency, I’ve experienced this as very extreme. It was always this feeling of closeness, well love, but you always have to let go. I was pregnant, but you could lose it. You are in love, but the partner could leave. The child grows up and leaves; it becomes independent. The main objective is to guide it to this point and experiencing this with a little human is experiencing parenting (...) the sleepless nights and having patience (...) these curves that every month brings with it. After three months it was like ‘pew’, the worst is behind us, or let’s say the most intensive time. (Susan, 36, recorded interview, 01.05.19)

The experience of loving one’s children, often described as being greater than for anyone else in their life, was simultaneously evaluated as painful or sorrowful, and therefore also a cause of ambivalence: “(Parenthood) means loving a human being like you’ve never loved anyone before. It’s painful almost, this constant worry as well (...)” (Nancy, 45, recorded interview, 08.10.19). Similarly, Carolize, an expat from South Africa who had three children, two boys aged 13 and 9, and one girl, 15 months, contemplated the meaning of being a mother, while rapidly preparing a milk bottle for her little daughter:

It [parenthood] means everything and it’s all consuming. It changes your life forever, it’s the best thing. It’s the happiest, saddest thing. It’s the most exciting thing, but also really scary. (...) It’s really fulfilling, it means love. My husband said something very good the other day: ‘You have so much love that you don’t know what to do with it’, and there is so much fear that the children could get hurt, that something could happen to them. (Carolize, 38, interview notes, 16.10.2019)

Loving one's children was described as inevitably going hand and hand with the endless worry for their wellbeing, especially in the early days of motherhood. Amelie, for example, the mother of a 20 month-old toddler, stressed that she had been in a state of perpetual concern when her son was a newborn:

I was constantly worried about this little baby because you love it so so much. This is extremely irksome, but at the same time also so beautiful, but it is just highly exhausting. This constant *worry* - *but* it is very beautiful. Well (...) It is beautiful, but also so much effort – both. (Amelie, 37, recorded interview, 04.12.19)

'All-consuming' love also resulted in parents worrying about their own health and not being able to be there for their children. Daria asserted:

It (parenthood) also has something heavy to it. I constantly have to think – what if something happens to me? What if I get very sick and I die when she is three (...)? I am more aware (...) I am aware that theoretically we may not have forever, and one wants to enjoy the days more consciously (...) You think 'what if something happens'? And then you did not cherish this time when everything was good? (Daria, 34, recorded interview, 15.07.19)

Several women, all of whom had only one child and therefore talked about their first experiences of birth and the postpartum period, expressed the idea that new motherhood especially should feel blissful. The first few weeks were thought of as particularly precious and therefore something that ought to be enjoyed and valued, especially because they were thought of as very fleeting. Constant worry, however, prevented Amelie, who also evaluated becoming a mother as a harsh adjustment, from appreciating the newborn phase with her son. She hoped that if she had a second baby, she could be more relaxed and able to cherish wonderful moments more consciously. Seeing other women thrive as new mothers gave her a guilty conscience towards her child:

I must say that the adjustment [as a new mother] is just hardcore. Personally, I'd never thought it would be such a big change. It is just so emotionally charged, that is the problem. It was a little bit overwhelming, (...) but fortunately, you get used to it very quickly. After a few weeks, well, after a few months, as soon as I could sleep again, it improved tremendously, and I appreciated many things much more. At the beginning... I was a bit... and now I always think... I hope that when I have another baby I will value some moments at the beginning more than I did with my first child. (...) It was so beautiful at the beginning, this cuddly... when the baby sleeps a lot (...) and you are cuddling it, you always keep it close to your body. That was actually really nice, but I think I almost did not enjoy it enough,

because I was thinking the whole time: ‘Oh my god, I cannot breastfeed, I cannot do this, and cannot do that’ – when I constantly drove myself mad with nonsense. But we will see if I’ll enjoy it with a second child – I’ll probably be busy again with all sorts of problems. (...) I hear from many [new mothers] that they did not cherish the moment enough. But I don’t know – then there are others, who just blossom [as new mothers], and I just was not like this and that almost made me feel guilty. Feelings of guilt are also shit... you also get those a lot at the beginning. (Amelie, 37, recorded interview, 04.12.19)

Daria, who lost a lot of blood during her daughter’s birth, felt shaky during the first weeks of the postpartum period. She had imagined her ‘start’ to motherhood would be easier and was disappointed by her lack of energy as a new mother. Her birth had left her totally “drained”, so “this super flash of happiness hormones” failed to materialise for her when her daughter was born – something she had waited for all her life: “[I’d imagined] when the baby came I would cry tears of happiness, but I just lay there like a dead fish – of course I was happy and grateful that she was delivered safely and all, but I’d imagined it to be more intense and had also really wished for that (...)”. At home with her new baby, Daria noted, she still felt “dead”. All the things she had planned to do as a new mother, such going on long forest walks with her daughter and cooking healthy food, seemed too demanding in the first few weeks after the delivery. The lack of “this complete bliss” made Daria feel inadequate and brought about the sense that she may not feel joyous enough about the arrival of her daughter: “I asked myself ‘what is wrong with me? I wanted this child’. You also develop a guilty conscience towards the child” (recorded interview, 15.07.19).

Love and Rage: Ambivalence in Everyday Situations

The previous section discussed parents’ accounts of the experience of becoming parents and childrearing more generally. However, parents also described specific situations during which ambivalence could arise. In this context exhaustion, worry, or the great burden of care work were less of a topic; rather, the situations depicted generated feelings of anger or frustration directed at the children themselves. Here, children’s temper tantrums, their urge to “test boundaries” as well as disagreements between parents and their offspring, often termed ‘power-struggles’, in particular

during the so-called *Trotzphase* (defiance phase) or *Autonomiephase* (autonomy phase) played a major role.¹¹⁵

Again, some parents' narratives were marked by significant parallels. While they noted that they generally intended to be understanding, educational or needs-oriented in the sense that they wanted to find out what *Bedürfnis* (need) was behind their children's behaviour in order to address it, their own mood, lack of sleep, or stress could thwart all their 'good' intentions, resulting in them losing patience, yelling, having hostile feelings, or even getting physical with their children. As discussed, Marta described her parenting approach as needs-oriented, but admitted having resorted to spanking her older child in moments of anger and stress. The ideal of a needs-oriented parenting style that was promoted in advice literature as early as the 1940s, such as in Spock's baby bible (see Chapter 2) was widespread among my sample of parents and experts.

Lotte, the mother of an almost three year-old son and a six month-old daughter, struggled to meet her son's defiant behaviour with patience, especially in moments of tiredness. After yelling at her son, she felt guilty and confided in her husband, who, Lotte said, reassured her that losing her temper was justified:

Especially at two years old, he is constantly challenging, pushing, pushing. It's hard to stay patient and calm when you are tired, and of course every now and then you just snap, and you yell a little bit. And then in the evening I say [to my husband] 'I am a bad mother, I screamed at him', and he says, 'he was probably bad to you, don't worry about it'. (Lotte, 35, recorded interview, 09.03.21)

¹¹⁵ The *Trotzphase* is understood as a developmental phase of toddlerhood during which children develop a sense of self-awareness and, in relation to that, their own will. When faced with resistance, toddlers can react with so-called 'temper tantrums'. In English, *Trotzphase* is commonly known as 'the terrible twos', because often behaviour seen as manifestations of this phase occur at around the age of two. However, experts such as the MVB remarked that the *Trotzphase* could set in earlier, around the age of one or one and a half, and could last until the age of four (field notes, Online Talk *Trotzen*, 28.01.21). Furthermore, the term suggests that for many parents this phase can feel 'terrible'. The German term *Trotzphase* highlights the child's 'defying' behaviour during this phase, which today is negatively connotated. For example, the German Wikipedia article on *Trotz* deplores the term as being condescending and suggests using the term *Autonomiephase* instead, which is also used in psychology and pedagogy. See: <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trotz> (accessed 19.01.2021). Some MVBs as well as parents specifically used the term 'autonomy phase' instead of 'defiance phase' to give it a more positive connotation and emphasise that it represents an important developmental step as explained above. But the term *Trotzphase* has not completely disappeared, and it was still used by both the parents and the experts I talked to.

During our second meeting, Daria noted that her daughter, who was now a toddler, had started with *trotzen*, which manifested in her daughter refusing to walk home with Daria or climbing up the stairs to their apartment. The way Daria dealt with such tantrums was highly dependent on her own mood, and the resulting ‘quarrels’ could generate unpleasant feelings of ‘estrangement’:

I really try to avoid getting loud, but of course you sometimes just lose it, and you think ‘it’s just not your day’ and [you think] ‘go sit on a tack’. And you notice that it has *so much* to do with yourself, how you are doing on a particular day. If I have a good day, I can act pedagogically very valuably – I can take the child in my arms and say, ‘are you sad?’ and sometimes I just say, ‘you know what, then just stand there’ (...) you don’t have to put up with everything as a mother. I thought I can just let her stand at the entrance of our house, it does not matter if she cries there for a bit. And then she’ll come upstairs by herself after ten minutes. And then I notice she is hungry, she is tired – it’s a combination of different reasons why she acts up. Then I always go and hug her. It is such a pity because there is a kind of estrangement happening during these arguments. (Daria, 36, 16.03.2021)

Some parents asserted that their children could detect their *Schwachstellen*, ‘weak points’, in the sense that they knew which behaviour would cause them to lose their temper. Others, such as Marta, opined that her children could sense when she was tired or moody, which was then taken as an opportunity to act up to induce even more stress. Elisa and Hannes, a couple from Lucerne with two sons, had experienced their elder son’s *Autonomiephase*, which at some point during toddlerhood ‘came into full effect’, as especially challenging. They also described specific situations that caused them to run out of patience, which, they claimed, were deliberately provoked:

Elisa: Our older son can detect our weak points *very* reliably. (...) My weakness is definitely composure. He can provoke me extremely well, for example, by making a mess, when he just starts throwing things around. That makes me extremely angry (...) When I notice that he is not respecting the value of his toys any more, that makes me angry. Or when I am tired – then he realises ‘ah, she cannot stomach that right now, now I will make a lot of noise’ (Hannes laughs and expresses his agreement).

Hannes: For a while eating really [challenged me]. When he just [fumbled around] with the fork, [saying] ‘I don’t want this’ and then just threw it on the floor and so on. This really made me lose it and I sometimes really shouted at him. He just knows, [saying] ‘Papa, look’ – full-on provocation. (...) When we say ‘stop’, he thinks that means it’s time to rumble on. (Elisa, 33 and Hannes, 33, recorded interview, 16.06.19)

When I met Elisa and Hannes 20 months later, their son’s behaviour still posed a challenge; especially, it seemed, to Elisa, who made a somewhat downcast impression when we discussed the

issue. She noted that 2020 – independent from the Covid-19 pandemic – had been a hard year for her, as she had felt overburdened by her “family constellation”, which was thrown out of balance by the birth of her second son in 2019, as his arrival had caused a lot of jealousy in her older son. While Elisa had already booked a session with a parent coach to develop strategies to address her older son’s jealousy in 2019, in 2021 the couple noted that they were about to see the parent coach again, in order to discuss the issue of “setting boundaries” with children. Elisa, who remarked that she felt frustrated in this regard, hoped that in collaboration with the coach, they could develop ideas that would make daily life more “joyous” again: “I sometimes feel that I get up in the morning and it’s a constant battle” (recorded interview, 08.02.21). Both Elisa and Hannes stressed on several occasions that they wanted to look out more for their own needs and that they now strived to take more time to do things together as a couple.

Pamela, whose second son was born in summer 2020, was also visibly disgruntled about the behaviour of her older son, aged four, which interrupted our conversation on Zoom in February 2021 several times. Pamela worked part time for an insurance company, while her partner was working full time. Both her sons attended daycare. Pamela noted in our first conversation when we met in person in summer 2019 that she had made the conscious decision to work part time and pass on the salary that she used to have to spend more time with her children.

During a video call in March 2021, Pamela closely watched the movements of her older son, who seemed to enjoy stealing his baby brother’s toys, who in turn opposed the theft through ear-splitting wailing. Every time the son took another toy, Pamela loudly admonished him to leave his baby brother’s toys on his play blanket, threatening that otherwise he would have to go to his room. During her grumbling and the boys’ screaming, the camera on her phone, which she was using to make the Zoom call, was turbulently swirled around, which gave the whole scene unfolding on my laptop screen an even more hectic ‘note’. At some point during our conversation, the older son decided to hit his younger brother on the head with a toy train, who subsequently cried out in pain. The conversation abruptly halted as Pamela rapidly set her phone aside, my screen now only

showing the ceiling of Pamela's apartment. The older son, who was loudly and adamantly told that "this is it now" and "now, you have to go away", seemed to be transported to his room, whose door I heard snapping shut. A minute later Pamela reappeared on the screen, breathing heavily, and stated that the situation had escalated and that the reason for this was that her sons were both very tired. Pamela remarked that her older son's *Trotzphase*, which included behaviour such as hitting and biting, sometimes left her "stumped". In such situations, she harboured negative feelings against him and craved physical distance:

He hits and bites. He is a real devil then and then I just don't want to have him around me. He can come back when he has calmed down, but when he bites, I don't want to see him. It does not help when I tell him 'no, I don't want this'. I've said this 10,000 times already. When he acts up, then I don't want to see him. When I walk away, it is to no avail because he just follows me. (...) He sometimes has the feeling that Mummy is not giving him attention, although he has Mummy all the time, although I've played with him all morning. But as soon as I do something for me or I make a phone call, then he is a really nasty dwarf. (Pamela, 39, recorded interview, 05.03.21)

Pamela's remark that it was impossible to walk away from her son when he was displaying this kind of behaviour is connected to expert advice suggesting to parents that *they* should remove themselves from such situations, rather than removing the child (Hoffman 2013; ProJuventute 2018e, 2018h). While Pamela noted that she would like to read what Remo Largo had to say about her son's *trotzen*, she was often too tired to read an advice book after she had put her sons to sleep. Our first meeting had transpired without any interruptions or 'naughty' behaviour from Pamela's older son, who was then still an only child. When Pamela contemplated the nature of her relationship with her son, she described it in an ambivalent way, emphasising the two extremes of him being able to make her angry like nobody else, but also his ability to make her forget her anger immediately:

There's nobody else in this world who can drive me up the wall as quickly as him, but there's also nobody I can forgive as quickly as I can forgive him (...). I always love him the same, even if I could shoot him on the moon ten times a day, when he floods the apartment again or draws on the walls. In those moments, I could just grab him and quickly... but then he smiles and it's over. (Recorded interview, 09.08.19)

In a similar fashion, Agathe stressed the two ‘extremes’ of love and rage that marked her relationship with her daughter: “How you can love somebody so much and how she can drive you insane – just this extreme – [she can be] incredibly stubborn, when you notice this huge ego” (Agathe, 40, recorded interview, 24.02.20).

Accounts of ambivalence that resulted in physical violence were rare, but in light of the absolute tabooing of corporal punishment in *Erziehung*, as for example in the Pro Juventute parent letters, I still found it surprising that three mothers reported that they sporadically used spanking or a cold shower when faced with behaviour that had triggered feelings of anger, frustration, or helplessness in them. These actions were not described as ‘punishments’ but were portrayed either as unwanted acts of desperation or rage or a last resort aimed at countering a child’s behaviour, such as spitting or biting, or to end a temper tantrum.

Ruth, a mother of four children, who identified as an active member of an evangelical Christian church, presented an exception here. She expressed clear support for spanking, however, she claimed that she never resorted to it in situations of anger; rather she and her husband implemented spankings in a targeted manner. Ruth rated resorting to physical measures in moments of anger as potentially harmful because they could result in too severe punishments: “For me, disciplining out of anger, I try not do that, you make mistakes” (Ruth, 40, recorded interview, 11.11.2019) – which alluded to the idea that anger could lead to a loss of control, and in turn to inappropriate practices, a theme that will be explored in the next chapter. Spanking, she explained, was consciously deployed to discipline specific behaviour of her children, but she only considered it appropriate until the age of five, as children had no understanding of the real consequences of their actions yet, and spanking was the only measure that would make them comprehend not to do something:

[I am] All for discipline - we used spanking as well up until the age of five, especially for three things: for putting yourself in danger, for breaking something and for... it was ‘disobedience’, ‘destruction’ and... I can’t remember the third thing... [an] ‘insolence’ type thing. At that age, they don’t really know what insolence is, and now my 11 year-old, he knows what it is, and he still does it and I can’t give him a smack (laughs). At a certain age

[spanking has to stop], because they understand the consequences of their actions better. Until a certain age, all they understand is: 'if I do this, I am going to get a spanking'. They don't understand, 'if I run into the street, I may get hit by a car'. There are other factors that come into play when they are older. Police come into school and they show them things, teach them things, other helpers, in terms of education, and that is more helpful. Also each child is different, and they react differently to spanking. My eldest did not react well at all, if anything it made him more aggressive, so I tried different things with him. He is still my most difficult child – the eldest. My other son, I did not have to spank him much, because he was so compliant. (Ruth, 40, recorded interview, 11.11.19)

Ruth's attitude formed a strong contrast to the attitudes of other parents as well as experts, who were of the opinion that, because young children did not understand the consequences of their actions, punishing them even through non-physical means was senseless, as they could not make the connection between their deed and the subsequent punishment. Moreover, all the other parents interviewed agreed that corporal punishment was generally 'bad' and those who stated that they had resorted to spanking felt guilty about it. One mother feared that her son may tell teachers about the cold shower incident as soon as he entered school and believed that school psychologists would also ask children about whether they were afraid of their parents, which might then result in the child protection services knocking on their door.

Communicating Ambivalence

Although ambivalence represents a universal element of mothering, Parker writes that admitting to it can only be securely done when it is framed as joking: "In novels, women's magazines and national newspapers, column after column is devoted to comic accounts of maternal ambivalence. Safely cloaking their 'confessions' in laughter, mothers admit to being forever enraged, entranced, embattled, wounded and delighted by their children" (Parker 1997: 17). Parker asserts that expressing ambivalent thoughts to others otherwise is taboo. A similar view was held by Elisa and Hannes, who noted on Zoom in February 2021 that their attempts to discuss their experience of rearing their two sons – which they felt was often marked by monotony, but also exhaustion, anger,

and frustration caused by their older son's need to "test boundaries" – was thwarted by friends and relatives:

Hannes: We rarely discuss this with my parents because the usual answer is, 'this is just the way it is, be glad that you only have two children, I had three!' This is no help at all.

Elisa: I rarely talk to my relatives or acquaintances [about this]. After the birth of my younger son, when this whole thing started and I really struggled, [Elisa is referring to her older son's jealousy towards his younger brother that resulted in her yelling a lot and being frustrated] I tried a lot to discuss it with the people around me, and I got the same answers as Hannes: 'Well this is normal, be glad that you have two healthy children'. I really reached my limit, and I did not feel like I was taken seriously at all, like no one understood me. I then stopped and thought, 'if I get advice, I will ask professionals'. (...) The crazy thing is that all parents feel this way, but there's no discussion about this. I experience this as very taboo. When you address this, everybody says 'this is normal'. This is all good and well, but still, one must somehow cope with this.

Hannes: We [Hannes and Elisa] also discussed that one is not allowed to admit this – I mean we are parents, we are supposed to be happy, we have healthy children – this is not boring (speaks in an ironic voice)! This has no space – it was also as if this was something bad. If this [raising kids] is a pain in the neck [for us], then this means that we are bad parents. I interpreted this as 'people do not want to talk about this'. (Recorded interview, 08.02.21)

Elisa and Hannes had the impression that people around them did not want to hear that they did not experience parenting as only being fulfilling and discounted their accounts as 'normal' and nothing worth complaining about. While Elisa noted that she believed that all parents often felt that way, there was no room to express mixed emotions about parenting to others. Elisa especially seemed eager to find ways to make her daily life with her kids "more joyous" (recorded interview, 08.02.21) again and had hoped that relatives or friends would share 'coping strategies'.

When I met Elisa and Hannes for the first time in June 2019, they used sarcasm to speak about their experience of parenting. Hannes, who was currently on four months' unpaid paternity leave from his employment in the field of nursing care, evaluated his leave "as the most meaningful job" in his life so far. Later, he related an anecdote about a childless work colleague, who had compared Hannes' paternity leave to a long holiday:

Elisa: [Parenthood gives me] total fulfilment (speaks in an ironic tone, everyone laughs).

Hannes: Exactly. Sunshine and flowers. I should begin with a statement from a work colleague who is 40 and childless. He said to me – 'you are going on unpaid leave now, that's great, isn't it? Now you can go on holidays for four months, because children give you so much, don't they?' Then everyone who had children burst out in laughter (...). No,

I believe one has this rosy idea at the beginning. When you have your first child, it's this baby, it's cute, right? But suddenly they are three years old, and this autonomy comes into effect more and more – *Erziehung* is just back breaking work, it is exhausting! (Elisa, 33, and Hannes, 33, recorded interview, 16.06.19)

Using figures of speech such as 'throwing them out of the window' as in Nancy's quote were common when parents described feelings of anger or frustration towards their children. Another example was Pamela who described her relationship with her son and used humorous figures of speech (e.g. "I could shoot him on the moon ten times a day") and an unfinished sentence ("I could just grab him and quickly...") that did not state exactly what she would like to do to her son when he angered her. This hints at maternal ambivalence being 'unspeakable' if not mitigated by humour and vagueness. As suggested by Parker and other authors, employing joking when expressing such feelings or thoughts is connected to the idea that they are not socially acceptable. Thus, such statements are 'coated' in humour in order to be able to 'safely' admit to ambivalence.

Apart from joking, frequent laughing was recurrently 'built into' narratives of ambivalence, something which was also employed by Marta when she told me how her children made her feel 'restricted'. Ruth declared that "it's great to have kids, it is a fantastic experience", after which she then laughingly added: "and of course you cannot get rid of them once you have them!" (Ruth, 40, recorded interview, 11.11.19). Ruth also laughed when she expressed regret that she could not give her son a 'smack' any more. Sina, the mother of a 17 month-old son, who worked part time as a social worker, laughingly remarked that only the great love towards her son could account for how she put up with all the work that having him created: "Parenthood brings with it so much strenuousness and effort, and that you just accept it and do it shows how much you love this child, otherwise you would never in this life take this stuff on (Sina, 34, recorded interview, 26.06.19).

Today joking about maternal ambivalence has moved onto social media. On my personal Instagram account, I frequently encounter mothers posting about their lives, using hashtags such as #ihatemykids or #kidssuck underneath humorous posts that outline how their children have ruined their day. Joking is a classical anthropological topic and it has long been established that

joking is used to regulate social relationships (Radcliffe-Brown 1940). New lines of research, however, explore other contexts in which joking is applied. In a paper on joking about HIV by HIV-infected people in South Africa, Black (2012) argues that joking and humour in general are “ideal for addressing issues (...) beyond the boundaries of what is considered acceptable to talk about in most other contexts” (ibid: 87). In the context of maternal ambivalence, using humorous figures of speech or laughter to admit to bouts of anger or express the fantasy of ridding oneself of one’s children – behaviour and thoughts that the women felt were socially unacceptable or abnormal – may have the same function. In ‘Uncomfortable Laughter: Reflections on Violence, Humour and Immorality in Argentina’ (2016), van Roekel studies humour about violence in the context of state violence in Argentina and argues that jokes provide fruitful insights into informants’ emotional worlds. In a similar fashion, jokes in the context of childrearing experiences gave a glimpse of parents’ mixed emotions towards their children that have been “reworked into a socially accepted form” (Roekel 2016: 68).

The emergence of anonymous online platforms like *YouBeMom* or *Reddit*, or the only recently-introduced possibility to post anonymously in Facebook Groups that normally disclose users’ identities, such as *Mamalicious*, represents a ‘game changer’ when it comes to ‘confessing’ maternal ambivalence without having to resort to joking.

In the mothers’ fora on Facebook that I monitored on a daily basis there were regular posts by mothers, most of them anonymous, addressing conflicting emotions and resorting to practices conceived as ‘bad’ in moments of anger or overload. For example, users complained that mothering their child felt mostly frustrating and unpleasant to them, that they often didn’t like being a mother. Other women ‘confessed’ that they had been impatient with their children, had yelled at them, or had experienced such rage towards them that they were afraid to be around them and had to physically remove themselves. The posts’ initiators felt that there was something wrong with them or expressed shame about their feelings and behaviour towards their children. Sometimes they wanted confirmation from fellow mothers that they had had similar moments or reassurance that

they were still a ‘good’ mother. Posts about ambivalence received a lot of attention and oftentimes yielded at least 50 responses. Commentators usually voiced support and reassured the post’s anonymous initiator that she was ‘normal’ and that they had experienced or acted the same. Others suggested getting help by visiting a psychologist or the MVB, or signing the children up for daycare so that the mother could have more time off from her children.

The expression of ambivalence about children on social media certainly plays a major role, but has only recently become the subject of research (Garncarek 2020; Heffernan and Stone 2021; Lacy 2015; Matley 2020; Moore and Abetz 2019). Lacy understands anonymous online platforms, such as her online ‘field site’ *secretconfessions.com* as a ‘therapeutic space’ where mothers can openly discuss negative feelings about motherhood without having to present it as harmless humour (Lacy 2015). In her study on the voicing of maternal regret on *Mumsnet*, Matley explores online fora as sites of “counter-discourses of maternity and femininity” (Matley 2020: 1) that allow women to conquer the taboo of wanting to “redo or undo” parenthood (Moore and Abetz 2019: 391) if they could make that decision again. The ubiquity of the enunciation of motherly ambivalence and regret in the digital realm and the high response rate to such posts as observed on *Mamalicious* as well as by Lacy on *secretconfessions.com*¹¹⁶ indicates that this topic attracts wide attention because of its social and moral sensitivity and controversy, but perhaps also because so many women can relate to it. As Parker notes in *Torn in Two*, mothers “look to other mothers to find ‘absolution’ for maternal emotions which the dominant cultural representations of motherhood render unacceptable, and which mothers themselves experience as both painful and unforgivable” (Parker 2005: 5). While internet fora for mothers were not a ‘thing’ when Parker first published her book, they allow mothers just this – finding ‘absolution’ from their peers.

¹¹⁶ Lacy’s study engages with a post in a discussion forum that stated: “I am depressed. I hate being a mom. I also hate being a stay at home mom too!”. Between 2009 and 2014 the post has generated a message thread with 2,344 responses (Lacy 2015: 26).

Combining Motherhood with Paid Work

Another theme that featured prominently in Marta's narrative was the difficulty of aligning her career aspirations with her children's wellbeing, which in turn led to ambivalence produced by conflicting desires. She was torn between wanting to attend further training courses and pursuing paid employment and wanting to be there for her children. The importance of both were assessed and Marta concluded that her children's requirements as well as her desire to focus on "really being a mother" as long as her children were still small, were a priority for her. As discussed, the negative effects of motherhood on professional development were cited as one of the main reasons why mothers regret having had children.

Similar to Marta, some mothers wondered how much work outside the home would 'hurt' their children and noted that this was a question they often contemplated. Agathe sometimes regretted not being available for her daughter while she was working, which resulted in internal debates. Agathe, who split care work with her boyfriend 50/50, shared that she often felt torn between pursuing her professional engagements and being there for her daughter, who was signed up for daycare part time and was also sometimes cared for by her grandmother. Agathe commented that evaluating whether her daughter was cared for by others too much triggered an "inner dialogue" (Agathe, 40, recorded interview, 24.02.20) in which she tried to assess: "What do I think is good, when do I have a bad conscience, when [do I] not [have a bad conscience], when do I have the feeling that I am being too selfish? Finding this out is a quite a balancing act" (ibid.). An upcoming business trip sparked ambivalence in Agathe, who wondered if being absent for so long would have negative effects on her daughter:

Being torn between my job and my family – no, rather [being torn between] my job and my daughter. I find it really hard to stomach that. Soon I am going to Tanzania for two weeks and she will stay here, and I find this pretty hard. I have been thinking about this for months. I always try to understand – what is this [concern]? I trust my boyfriend; I think they will have a good time (...). Of course, it will be a lot of work for him, that's clear, and she will miss me, and I will miss her, but actually we can handle this. But still I have been pondering this for a really long time – is this too much [for my daughter]? Oh my god... (Recorded interview, 24.02.20)

After becoming a mother for the first time, Erika had quit her commercial job in an office and later started a training to become a wellness coach. At the time we met, she worked 50% in this field and was mostly self-employed. Erika stressed several times that it was extremely important for her to spend as much time as possible with her three daughters, aged four, seven and ten. Especially cooking lunch for them after school and eating together had great value for Erika, who sometimes, in order to be able to work, arranged for her daughters to have lunch at the neighbour's house. Although she wanted to be more than "just a housewife and a mother" and show her daughters that "Mummy also has her own life", she still often asked herself "am I allowed to do that?" (Erika, 43, interview notes, 02.07.2019) when working or taking time for herself. Like Marta, Erika tried to accommodate her own needs with those of her children, which involved negotiating different dispositions – my children need me at home; I need to have my own life and career.

When I spoke to Erika a second time in 2021, Erika had separated from her husband. Her views regarding combining motherhood and paid work seemed to have changed somewhat. In our first conversation, Erika had not spoken in an ambivalent manner about care work and the divisions of labour between mothers and fathers. However, these issues were specifically addressed when we met again. While sending her daughters to her neighbour for lunch so that she could work still gave her "a bad conscience", she emphasised that she had come to the conclusion that women who carry out most of the unpaid domestic work "needed to look out for themselves more" (interview notes, 08.03.2021). In retrospect, Erika questioned her decision to give up her office job after having her first child. While it seemed like the right thing to do at the time, and she cherished the time she could spend with her daughters, she would not quit her position again. It seemed like after the separation from her husband, conflicting feelings in relation to the unpaid care work she had done for her family started to emerge. While Erika asserted that she enjoyed the tasks involved in mothering children, such as "cleaning", "getting the children ready in the morning", or "packing their backpacks", she also remarked in a critical manner, "the work at home is not paid. Women just do it, and it is taken for granted" (ibid.).

In contrast to Marta, Erika or Agathe, Lara did not find herself in a dilemma about how to align paid employment and being there for her two sons, as motherhood prevented her from pursuing paid employment altogether. After describing her experience of raising her two sons as being fulfilling, but mostly exhausting, she went on to talk about the *Frauenstreik* (women's march) that had taken place a few weeks prior to our meeting and addressed ongoing gender inequalities, such as the gender pay gap in Switzerland. She explained that she was increasingly bothered by this “typical Swiss thing – Mummy does everything, Mummy has everything under control, and preferably she does it all for free” (recorded interview, 03.07.2019). She explained indignantly that she was the “classic example” of a Swiss woman who would like to work but was unable to pay daycare fees, even if they were subsidised by the state, due to the low salary that she would earn. While raising her children was hard work, and mothers, in her view, not only have a lot of skills, but also a lot of nerve, there was no social appreciation or recognition for it: “[When people ask] ‘what is your job’ and you say, ‘I am a mother and a housewife’, [people answer] – ‘ah, in that case, you have no job’” (ibid.).

Lara's account of how she experienced raising her sons was clearly marked by discontent that her aspirations to seek paid employment as a mother were foiled by current state policies that make daycare unaffordable for low-earning mothers as well as her perception that there was little social awareness that childrearing was also a form of work, even if unpaid. Gendered divisions of labour supported by government policies that, in Lara's view, expected mothers to ‘do everything’ and self-evidently ‘for free’ created ambivalence regarding motherhood and the related care work. Here, the notion of conflicting demands engendering relational ambivalence (Palmberger 2019) loomed large as well – on the one hand, Lara believed that people gave her the feeling that she was not pursuing important work as a stay-at-home mother. On the other hand, financial constraints and family policies ‘trapped’ her at home full time. The fact that Lara's account of the experience of rearing her sons included a reference to the *Frauenstreik* and her inability to work may be

connected to her belief that paid employment and time away from her children would have a positive effect on her experience of mothering.

As discussed, the question of how to combine parenthood with paid work while still being a ‘good’ parent is specifically female. While the ambivalence engendered by being torn between career and motherhood did not result in mixed emotions in relation to the children themselves, it is an example of a form of ambivalence that mainly relates to the circumstances surrounding childrearing (Moore and Abetz 2019), as well as gendered divisions of labour (PalMBERGER 2019). Feeling torn between mothering obligations and paid employment often resulted in inner deliberations in which the needs of the women themselves and those of their children were weighed, while also invoking themes like ‘guilt’ or ‘selfishness’.

These tensions felt by Marta, Agathe, and Erika clearly point to the ‘ideology’ of intensive mothering that Hays (1996) described as being utterly conflicting. Mothers want to work and have a career. At the same time, they feel like they should spend as much time as possible with their children, in order to ensure ‘secure attachment’ and ‘healthy’ development. Marta, for example, worried that putting her son into daycare may destroy their trustful relationship and “leave a mark” on her son. She deemed boosting children’s development through educational playtime important and lamented that her employment impacted negatively on her son’s development, as daycare staff did not foster his development adequately. Here, mothers’ ‘intensive responsibilities’ towards their children – such as proper attachment and boosting development – clash with their career endeavours in a society that places high value on education, professional success, and the working world. Motherhood as “an almost sacred endeavour” (Faircloth 2014b: 28), so important that mothers are expected to carry out the tasks involved ‘honorarily’, collides with the sparse social recognition of care work and the little governmental support for mothers who want to work – a contradiction that especially Lara, who was not able to work in a paid job due to financial constraints, grappled with.

Accounts of ambivalence, such as Marta's or Erika's, who described wanting to put their children first, but at the same time desired to advance their careers, also challenge the stereotype of the selfless mother without an agenda: "Mothers do not always revel in the self-forgetting and sacrifices that frequently characterise motherhood. A mother may have a longing for independence that is at odds with caretaking, revolt against the relentless empathy with one's child and mourn the loss of her maiden self" (Adams, 2014, p. 45).

While family policies as well as cultural representations of what 'good mothers do' contribute to mixed feelings regarding how aligning career aspirations and motherhood is done 'best', they can be further stoked by women's personal environment. Some mothers, especially those who chose to work full time, noted that relatives or work colleagues insinuated that they worked too much and spent too little time with their children. However, not all mothers interviewed reported feeling torn between their career and their children. Several stated that they were happy with how they combined paid employment and family, and some even noted that becoming a mother had enabled them to find a better balance between paid work and personal life.

Hrdy raises the important point that the difficulty of combining motherhood with paid work is a historical and geographical particularity. Except for periods of economic upswings, as for example, after World War II when the great majority of married women were able to stay at home because one 'bread-winner' was sufficient, mothers have always engaged in productive work. Combining reproduction with production – even though it always involved "trade-offs" for women in terms of efficiency – was possible, because mothers living in pre-industrial societies can/could simply take their children along with them when, for example, gathering fruit, working in the fields or selling at the markets. However, the working conditions of modernity are specifically hostile to small children and assume a strict separation of "productive and reproductive lives: The factories, laboratories, and offices where women in post-industrial societies go to "forage" are even less compatible with childcare than jaguar-infested forests and distant groves of mongongo nuts reached by trekking across desert" (Hrdy 1999: 109). The conflicts generated in the lives of my

interlocutors are specific to their contemporary circumstances. Motherhood clashes with the desire to experience individual fulfilment, to acquire ‘status’ through a job and to do more than ‘just’ rearing children – which, according to Hays, is seen as devalued work – and having time off from children while working. However, motherhood can also hamper the desire or requirement to earn money to be able to provide well for one’s child. As Hays observes, children today require an increased amount of financial resources to pay for organic food, piano and tennis lessons, or psychologists and speech therapists – things deemed not only a necessary for a healthy and happy child (Hays 1996: 167), but also an investment into a good future for the child.

Ambivalence and Intensive Mothering

Parents’ narratives are tinged by the intensive mothering ideology, which I attempted to tease out in the different sections of this chapter. As in the last chapter about the MBV, which highlighted advisors’ strong focus on mothers’ ability and willingness to read and address their children’s needs, the parents’ ideal of pursuing a needs-oriented childrearing ‘style’ loomed large as well. When children acted up parents tried to be ‘sensitive’, patient or calm and aspired to figure out the need behind the behaviour, which – as this chapter has shown – could not always be realised. The notion of the ‘sacred’ child who deserves an “unselfish nurturer” (Hays 1996: 167), who fosters secure attachment and development and does not spend too much time away from home also became apparent, as for example in Marta’s case, who at least in our conversation assured me that she would have given up her job if her son had struggled in daycare, or like Pamela, who deliberately earned less so that she could spend more time with her sons. However, Lara’s case also alluded to what could be called the ‘not-just-being-a-mother ideology’: Lara felt that childrearing was a devalued, unappreciated task and that she could only find her real recognition in a society that mostly centres on professional achievements by pursuing gainful employment.

Intensive mothering or not, ambivalence produced by conflicting emotions and desires must be a key experience of rearing children which always involves aligning different needs and

desires. Still, intensive mothering as a child-oriented, expert-led and emotionally, time-, and resource-intensive mode of childrearing that is propagated by advice book authors, policy makers and childcare experts may aggravate the experience of guilt, shame or inadequacy if feelings such as anger, boredom, exhaustion or frustration are presumed to stand in conflict with – or even to ‘contradict’ – the love for the child or the joy, reward, and fulfilment that caring for it brings. Thus, intensive mothering (Hays 1996) as a cultural representation of what ‘good’ mothers do and feel (Parker 2005), directly impacts on individual mothers’ experiences of childrearing and how they cope with that ambivalence.

Many authors writing about maternal ambivalence argue that social and cultural ideologies suggest to women that raising children should feel delightful. While I had the impression that, in the context of an anonymous interview, parents were quite open about experiencing ambivalence, the way it was addressed still implied that they must avoid depicting parenthood as *too* burdensome. Parents’ elaborations on their experience of raising their children had striking parallels and usually followed a similar pattern. After venting about the ‘downsides’ of caring for their children, parents usually ‘backpaddled’ and assured me that, despite everything, they still thought it was all worthwhile. While I do not question whether the parents really felt this way – I believe that they did – the need to emphasise it shows that they felt compelled to ‘counterbalance’ negative statements about their experience of childrearing – perhaps because otherwise it would give them a guilty conscience towards their children or would not coincide with preconceived notions of how raising them should feel. Joking, humorous figures of speech, vagueness as well as laughter were frequently integrated into parents’ accounts of mixed emotions, conflicted desires, and outbursts of anger, which hinted at the sensitivity of the issue. This ceases to apply, however, when parents post about ambivalence anonymously on online platforms, where the posts’ initiators anticipate and receive consolation and ‘absolution’ (Parker 2005: 5) from ‘comrades in suffering’.

In terms of fathering and ambivalence, which so far has been neglected by research, Hannes’ account of fathering was especially insightful, as he grappled with the same experiences as

his female counterparts. However, one must consider that Hannes was also deeply involved in the care work at home, as he took long-term paternity leave and in 2020 decreased his workload to be on a par with his wife. This does not represent the standard model of divisions of care work between mothers and fathers in Switzerland (see Introduction).

Parents' narratives were marked by ambivalent accounts that strongly conveyed that being torn between the 'joy', 'beauty' or 'reward' and the 'struggle', 'burden' and 'pain' of loving and caring for children was at the core of what it meant to be the parent of their child/ren. In this context, parents' age, socioeconomic background, number of children, working or not working in a paid job, or active involvement of their partner in care work had no large impact on parents experiencing raising their children as *generally* ambivalent. Nonetheless, the 'degree' of ambivalence – without wanting to suggest that I attempt to 'measure' ambivalence – but rather pertaining to how intensely the ambivalence was expressed within the context of an interview, varied from parent to parent.

The conflicts that give rise to ambivalence are of a relational nature when opposing needs, desires and dispositions must be 'juggled' in intimate relationships shaped by gendered power relations and divisions of labour, and sociopolitical factors such as family policies and cultural representations of what 'good' mothers do and feel. The examples also highlighted how circumstances specific to the individual families, such as sleepless nights, a challenging *Trotzphase*, jealousy issues, having no free time, or not being able to work in a paid job, are additional factors that can further contribute to producing ambivalence.

Here, it also became clear that the general characterisation of mothers' feelings as 'loving' and 'hating' in the ambivalence literature is not nuanced enough. In my conversations with parents, different emotions and states such as anger, sorrow, worry, frustration, exhaustion, boredom, and tiredness stood in conflict with parental love or joy; desires such as having free time or a career clashed with children's needs. Thus, ambivalence as the coexistence of 'love' and 'hate' in parents

towards their children seemed too flat to describe how ambivalence is actually experienced and produced.

The next chapter will address parents' work on themselves in order to be a certain kind of parent equipped with a certain emotional state. Ambivalence produced by conflicting emotions is a site that is especially apt for shedding light on how parents seek to 'govern' and re-shape themselves, as the desire to do so is rooted in the experience of ambivalence. Here, coping with emotions like anger that are perceived to result in violence will be specifically explored. Parker argues that maternal ambivalence represents a "source of creative insight" because it induces women to try to understand their own feelings and their children's behaviour (Parker 1997: 21). For some women I met during my study, feelings of anger triggered by children's behaviour did indeed elicit self-reflection and a search for 'tools' to thwart 'dangerous' emotions and prevent inappropriate 'practices' such as yelling. In this context, I will also address early childhood experts' views on parental ambivalence and its proper 'management'.

5. *Becoming a Better Person*

Accounts of the experience of raising children provided insights into parents' ethical 'self-work' (Aarsand 2014; Foucault 1993) aimed at managing negative emotions and, in conjunction with that, abandoning responses and behaviour which are seen as inappropriate. In line with Aarsand (2014), who explores parental self-work in Norway, I argue that parenting can provide a fruitful lens for understanding how the self is governed – and this is particularly the case in the context of 'undesirable' emotions, such as anger, whose occurrence was often addressed in parents' accounts of ambivalence.

The 'self-transforming powers' of individuals are an essential entry point for government interventions (Rose 1990a: 3-4), as well as for experts working with parents, as seen in Chapter 3. Entering parenthood had foregrounded the shaping of a new 'self' for some of the parents I met during my research¹¹⁷. In order to meet the requirements of contemporary notions of 'good' parenting (or being a 'good' person in general), many of my interviewees deemed self-development and discipline especially important; they expressed the idea that having children entailed becoming more self-reflectively engaged in the search for personal development. Ethical considerations played a major role in the context of parental self-work, which is reflected in the quotes below. Based on Foucault, who developed a distinct conception of ethics which is explored in the last two volumes of *The History of Sexuality* (Foucault 1986, 1990), Rose argues that technologies of self are strongly linked to ethics as part of the necessary transformation of the self:

Ethics are thus understood as means by which individuals come to construe, decipher, act upon themselves in relation to the true and the false, the permitted and the forbidden, the desirable and the undesirable. Hence we might consider the ways in which the contemporary culture of autonomous subjectivity is embodied in our techniques for understanding and improving our selves in relation to that which is true, permitted and desirable. (Rose 1990a: 4f).

¹¹⁷ Perhaps becoming a parent is, in itself, a re-shaping of the self.

With the birth of her son, Susan had started questioning her ways of thinking and behaviours that now needed re-evaluation:

What challenged me a lot... a lot of things you used to do automatically, you [now] question. Why do I think like that? Those behavioural patterns... For us, those patterns that we brought into our relationship or our marriage, we were partially aware of them, but they were now [that we are parents] magnified. It triggered a lot of reflecting in me... being a parent. (Recorded interview, 01.05.2019)

For Susan, this meant, for example, becoming conscious of how she spoke and what words she used when she talked about other people in front of her son, how she acted towards her husband or how she handled objects when she was angry. Elisa and Hannes described how having children made them more aware of their habits, which they had newly assessed in terms of their exemplary function and tried to adjust accordingly:

We must face up to ourselves much more since we have children. Like character traits... that make me think that these are behaviours that I don't want to set an example with to the kids. Things that before [having children] you just did and you kind of knew that it was something annoying, but there was no need to change it. Kids force you again and again to reflect... 'do you really want to set this example?' (Elisa, 33, recorded interview, 13.06.19)

Hannes and Elisa gave concrete examples of how their behaviours had changed, such as using 'softer' language, opting to eat healthier foods, produced in more ecologically sustainable ways, and sharing mealtimes:

Hannes: Before we had children, we used swearwords much more. Today, when I drop a fork on the ground, I rather say *Mist* ('shoot'). Before we used harsher words. (...) Our whole eating culture changed (Elisa agrees). Our son likes vegetables a lot. Before [we had children we thought], 'ah *The Simpsons* is on, let's make a pizza and eat in front of the TV'. And now we don't even have a TV any more. Behaviours change...

Elisa: You also think more long-term. This whole awareness of being ecological became important to me in a different way. It is no longer just important that I have it good on this planet, but also that my children will have it good. (Hannes, 34, Elisa, 33, recorded interview, 13.06.19)

Hannes emphasised that, even though he occasionally wished that he could have some time off from his children, he could not imagine a life without them as, in retrospect, his existence before

the birth of his sons appeared somewhat meaningless. Becoming a father had transformed Hannes into a self that had obtained a more definite purpose in life:

When I think about a life without my sons – what was my life before? I don't know. You went out with the boys at the weekend, and then you had a headache on Saturday or Sunday. You just vegetated on the sofa (...). I could not imagine that any more. They do give you a lot, even if I sometimes think, 'I want to take this weekend off and go out'. (ibid.)

Carolize emphasised the need for self-development and improvement as a mother – a role she saw as requiring constant introspection and emotional control and which she framed in very 'institutional terms': "You have to change and become better, a better teacher, a better nurse. You have to control your emotions better. (...) You always ask yourself whether your behaviour is going to cause damage" (Carolize, 38, interview notes, 16.10.2019).

Interactions with children, their behaviour, and parents' responses to their children's behaviour allowed some parents to 'achieve' what they saw as self-recognition, which opened the door to self-improvement. Some described how the anger their children generated in them enabled them to get to know themselves better. This theme emerged clearly during my morning with Marta (see Chapter 4): she described her daughter as her teacher, her interactions with whom stressed her own shortcomings and what she still needed to learn, such as becoming more patient. Similarly, Agathe said that she could observe her own behaviour in her daughter's actions, which she described as a "mirror" in which she could "take a look at herself". Agathe asserted that this glance into a mirror served as a basis for "self-development". When her daughter had a bad temper tantrum, Agathe nevertheless admitted laughingly, she sometimes found it hard to accept that her daughter's behaviour was really just a reflection of her own (Agathe, 40, recorded interview, 24.02.20). The notion of children as mirrors of their parents' behaviours and current emotional state is also propagated by experts. By informing parents about this, they suggest that their child's behaviour is really just an outcome of their own practices and emotional state, and in turn aspire to motivate parents to govern themselves accordingly. MVB Fiona described babies as "delicate beings" who mirror the state and mood of their mother as well as the quality of the relationship

between mother and father. She claimed that if a baby sensed tensions “it cannot swallow properly, it cannot not digest well”. That’s why it was important to “calm things down”, for if the “mother is calm, the baby is calm” (interview notes, 15.04.19). Similarly, in parent letter 5, Pro Juventute informs parents that their own emotional state is transferred to their child, which is why children were often whiny when one was not feeling well oneself: “It is also not intentional when your child is whiny, querulous, or troublesome, when you yourself are not doing well. Children are very sensitive and feel the nervousness and tension of father and mother and react accordingly. The child’s behaviour is so to speak a mirror of the parent’s state” (ProJuventute 2018d: 29; my translation)¹¹⁸. Mothers’ accounts of self-recognition through interactions with their children in the context of, for example, temper tantrums, which resulted in critical self-reflection and in turn the possibility for self-development show that “what Foucault calls practices of the self are not wholly individualistic but instead are always developed in the context of and through relations with others” (Allen 2011: 52), which will be further explored in this chapter.

Before delving deeper into parents’ self-work, I want to discuss Foucault’s notion of technologies of self in more detail. In his lecture series *Technologies of the Self* (1988), Foucault examines the emergence of the “hermeneutics of the self” in Graeco-Roman philosophy as well as in Christian spirituality in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D, when “the experience of oneself was intensified” (ibid, para 49). Foucault argues that there were two main ethical principles in antiquity, the first being ‘know yourself’ and the second being ‘take care of yourself’, which were closely interconnected. The latter, however, Foucault claims, was later “obscured” by Christianity, which made “self-renunciation the condition for salvation”, thereby making care of the self an “immorality” (ibid, para 24). Foucault gives examples of Stoic texts in which technologies of self are described, such as disclosure of self, examination of self and conscience, as well as “a review of what was done, of what should have been done, and comparison of the two” (ibid, para 79). In the

¹¹⁸ The mirror idea can also be found in twentieth-century childcare manuals. In *Dein Kind*, expecting mothers are told that their emotional state during pregnancy is of utter importance: “Whatever the mother feels, thinks and does affects the body and soul of the child” (Dietrich 1946: 17; my translation).

second part of the lecture Foucault investigates what he calls ‘truth games’, which he sees as the primary technology of self in early Christianity. These include a deep commitment to certain propositions as well as confessional practices, which go hand in hand with introspection and knowledge of self:

Christianity is not only a salvation religion, it is a confessional religion. It imposes very strict obligations of truth, dogma, and canon, more so than do the pagan religions. Truth obligations to believe this or that were and are still very numerous. The duty to accept a set of obligations, to hold certain books as permanent truth, to accept authoritarian decisions in matters of truth, not only to believe certain things but to show that one believes, and to accept institutional authority are all characteristic of Christianity.

Christianity requires another form of truth obligation different from faith. Each person has the duty to know who he is, that is, to try to know what is happening inside him, to acknowledge faults, to recognize temptations, to locate desires, and everyone is obliged to disclose these things either to God or to others in the community and hence to bear public or private witness against oneself. The truth obligations of faith and the self are linked together. This link permits a purification of the soul impossible without self-knowledge. (ibid, para 96-97)

Foucault stresses the importance of ‘verbalisation’ for self-disclosure in early Christianity, such as confessing sins to God or a priest. ‘Disclosure of self’, however, was also tightly correlated with the ‘renouncing of self’, which was later further strengthened through the introduction of penance as a sacrament. Self-knowledge, according to Foucault, still represents a fundamental principle in the modern world. He sees a continuation of the use of technologies of ‘verbalisation of self’ in the context of the human sciences, such as psychology, where they are not applied to renunciate the self any longer, “but to constitute, positively, a new self” (ibid, para 131).

Rose, inspired by Foucault’s ideas about self-forming technologies, wrote intensively about the role of psychology in the modern “regime of the self” (Rose 1985, 1990a, 1990b; 1998: 1). He observes that today it is no longer religious authority or traditional morality that provides directions for the proper conduct of the self. Guidance in this matter has been handed over to what Rose calls ‘experts of subjectivity’, such as therapists trained in the field of psychology or psychiatry, social workers, or counsellors (Rose 1990a). Rose argues that psychology and its technologies are

especially useful for liberal democracies because they support the self-transforming properties of the individual:

The seduction of the psychological enables ‘private’ domains such as the business enterprise and the family to be regulated by means of, rather than in spite of, their autonomy and responsibility. (...) Psychological expertise is disseminated not only through the activities and ministrations of experts themselves, but also through school curricula and educational courses, radio and television programmes, popular books, magazines and advertisements. (...) Now mothers, fathers, managers, bosses can themselves take on calculations and make judgments in these terms. And, when problems get too great for self-regulation, they can consult the experts to seek to overcome the anxiety formed in the gap between what they are and what they want to be. (Rose 1991: 95)

As the following sections will show, drawing from ‘experts of subjectivity’ (Rose 1990a) can play a major role in shaping the parent-child relationship and ‘governing’ emotions seen as undesirable when handling children, specifically anger.

Coping with Anger

Authors exploring maternal ambivalence warn of the ‘dangers’ of ambivalence, when ambivalence becomes “unmanageable” (Parker 1997: 21) or leads “to the depths of the dark side” in the form of child abuse (Almond 2011: 9f). For some parents, self-regulatory practices played a major role in managing conflicted emotions in daily life: anger, impatience, or frustration were seen as representing a risk factor for becoming violent towards children, to some parents no less than for experts.

When Claudia became a mother, people warned her about the dangers of ambivalence that could result in a loss of control, so she installed an emergency plan with her husband:

Claudia: When we became parents, I said – first we need a list of people we can call when we cannot deal with it any more. I heard that at some point you reach your limit, and you want nothing more than to shake the baby – but we are not allowed to do that, so we should install an emergency procedure.

Laura: Where did you hear this?

Claudia: From everyone – parents, relatives, acquaintances – everyone says at some point you just... (Recorded interview, 21.03.19)

Some parents were guarding against drawing on inappropriate measures when handling their children, specifically in connection with so-called ‘power-struggles’ or defiant behaviour during the defiance phase. Here, it was not just physical violence that had to be avoided, but verbal violence too.

Going into a detailed discussion of the different definitions of violence would go beyond the scope of this chapter. There are many different conceptions of ‘violence’, and the term usually comes with a lot of moral weight. The notions of violence found in this chapter are very broad and cover a wide range of physical, verbal, and non-verbal practices. Commonly, violence is understood to cause harm, pain, and suffering. In the context of my research, it becomes clear that it is also understood as obstructing children’s ‘natural’ development.

Nicole and Claudia, in particular, were committed to using ‘nonviolent communication’ (NVC) with their children and strived not to resort to verbal violence – yelling, threatening, or manipulating – when they lost patience or became angry. Such practices had been used in their own upbringing and would sometimes ‘creep up’ on them when they were stressed. Avoiding such practices, in their opinion, required studying advice books, self-monitoring, -reflection, and -transformation. Miriam told me that she sometimes became so infuriated by her eldest son’s defiant behaviour that she was scared of herself, to the point that she had consulted a psychologist to learn some specific body techniques to keep her rage in check.

Before going into more detail about how Nicole, Claudia, and Miriam (with some cross-references to other parents for comparison) sought to construct and cultivate themselves to become a certain kind of “parental subject” (Aarsand 2014), I will briefly discuss the concept of NVC, which informed the practices of several parents I met during my fieldwork, and related to notions of ‘good’ communication with children propagated by some MVBs. I also introduce NVC here because it is a clear example of what Rose categorises as ‘self-help’, an:

alliance between professionals claiming to provide an objective, rational answer to the question of how one should conduct a life to ensure normality, contentment and success,

and individuals seeking to shape a 'life style', not in order to conform to social conventions but in the hope of personal happiness and an 'improved quality of life'. (Rose 1990a: 9)

Furthermore, it illustrates the strong focus on emotions in modern child raising as well as the great significance of 'knowledge of self', and verbalising inner feelings for self-disclosure and transformation, which, Foucault argues, can be traced back to the 'truth games' of early Christianity and play an important part in the crafting of today's new, positive self.

Nonviolent Communication

NVC is addressed in many contemporary advice material in the German-speaking region, such as *Das gewünschtste Wunschkind treibt mich in den Wahnsinn. Der entspannte Weg durch Trotzphasen* (2016)¹¹⁹, which several mothers I met had read. As mentioned in Chapter 2, in line with Heimdinger (2006), I understand *Erziehungsratgeber* as the product of contemporary discourses, tensions and concerns that facilitate their drafting and sale, while the question of if and how advice given in these books is followed by parents is a different matter. Numerous online and offline workshops can be found on the internet that offer parents courses in NVC. The concept of NVC was developed by American psychologist Marshall Rosenberg (1934-2015), founder of the *Center for Nonviolent Communication* (CNVC), which offers training in NVC worldwide. NVC is not solely intended as a communication tool for parents but is also applied to enhance communication in adult relationships, as well as in work and institutional settings. According to the CNVC website, NVC enables us to "learn to hear our own deeper needs and those of others" (CNVC n.d. a). As the name implies, NVC aspires to ban 'violence' from communication. In *Nonviolent Communication. A Language of Life*, Rosenberg (2015) defines 'being violent' as acting in ways that result in hurt or pain, which can also be caused verbally. The CNVC advertises NVC as being deeply transformative; it claims that applying the approach will not only enhance one's

¹¹⁹ In Exlibris, one of Switzerland's largest booksellers, the book is listed under the genre 'Self-management'.

understanding of oneself and others, but also improve one's wellbeing and quality of life (ibid.). Hence, NVC is also connected to the concept of *bedürfnisorientierte Erziehung* (needs-based upbringing), which informed many of my interlocuters' notions of 'good' parents who can 'read' and address children's needs; this, in turn, connects up with the MVBs' concepts of 'maternal sensitivity' discussed in Chapter 3.

On the German website of *Das gewünschtete Wunschkind treibt mich in den Wahnsinn*, Danielle Graf published a blog article on applying NVC to resolve conflicts with children, based on Rosenberg's principles¹²⁰. As the book seems to be widely known by parents and experts alike, I will use Graf's deliberations on NVC to shed light on its employment in the context of parenting.

Graf notes that using NVC will initially feel unusual to parents, who are still shaped by their grandparents' and parents' communication practices, but, with enough training, NVC would soon feel "natural" and additionally foster children's innate cooperativeness. NVC distinguishes itself from the common use of parental power to get children to do things they don't want to do. For example, a father may be annoyed by a messy living room littered with toys. The father makes use of his more powerful position to command the child to clean up the mess and threatens that he will throw the toys in the bin if the child disobeys. This command causes a defiant reaction in the child and subsequently the situation escalates into a conflict between parent and child. In the blog article, Graf explains that children, just like adults, want to be asked politely. In line with Rosenberg, Graf deems recognising and understanding the child's needs and one's own needs, and their clear articulation the core principle of NVC. Instead of commanding children to do something, parents should take a turn inwards, label their emotions and then phrase their needs and requests clearly and positively to children.

¹²⁰ The website is administrated by Danielle Graf and Katja Seide, whose first book with the same title addresses how brain development shapes children's *Autonomiephase*. Over 300,000 copies of the book have been sold and it has been translated into twelve languages. The website was established in 2013 and, according to Graf's and Seide's own figures, has since been accessed 36 million times. It contains blog articles about different childrearing-related topics, a podcast, recommendations for children's games and books, as well as an online course in NVC. The online course lasts for a year – participants receive one email every week for 52 weeks containing 100 exercises. The course costs 52 Euros.

Voicing needs and requests must transpire in a nonviolent way, which NVC posits can be achieved in four steps. Firstly, the parent describes a situation in a neutral, non-judgmental way ('I see that many toys are lying on the floor' instead of 'You have made a mess'), secondly the emotions that the observation has triggered in the parent are evaluated, labelled and then voiced ('I am annoyed because I don't like it when so many toys are lying on the floor'), thirdly, the need is expressed ('I would like the room to be tidy'), and fourthly, the request to the child is framed in a positive manner ('I would like you to clean up your toys')¹²¹.

The de-escalation of children's temper tantrums (*Wutanfall*) should be handled in a similar way. Graf understands threats, or the withdrawal of affection, as reactions to tantrums that parents internalised during their own childhoods; these practices are not only rated ineffective and outdated but are described as violent. Empathy towards the child during tantrums is the key to calming the situation. Observing the child, reflecting on and naming the cause of the child's anger, Graf asserts, is important to give the child the feeling that it is being taken seriously. The parent should then formulate what the child might expect from the parent. For example: "You are annoyed because I told you to come to me. You wanted to play a bit longer instead. You want me to be more patient and let you finish your game" (Graf n.d.).

Rosenberg's concept of NVC has received criticism from some authors. Bitschnau (2008), for example, evaluates NVC as a time-intensive approach that could be hard to implement in practice, because it requires a lot of patience and discipline. Bitschnau also contends that it could be misunderstood by NVC workshop participants, who may perceive it as a tool to gain compliance and thus as an instrument of power. She further comments on NVC's spiritual 'coating', which was supported by music developed and performed by Rosenberg himself. In 'The Subtle Violence of Nonviolent Language' (Chapman 2006), Chapman expresses concern that NVC has a somewhat reductionist view of human emotions and needs – here, he is probably

¹²¹ Graf uses a different example to describe the four steps of NVC. She describes a situation in which the parent finds rubbish lying in front of the entrance door that the parent wants the child to pick up.

referring to the CNVC's inventory of feelings and needs, designed to "support anyone who wishes to engage in a process of deepening self-discovery and to facilitate greater understanding and connection between people" (CNVC n.d. b)¹²². Drawing from a catalogue of feelings and needs may lead to a simplified and directive description of a person's 'inner world', which may require a more nuanced and ambivalent understanding than the inventory allows. Furthermore, Chapman suggests, NVC exerts violence by establishing a "speech rule under which matters of concern or dispute common and important among serious people may be inexpressible, dismissed, and unheard. A person who steps outside the speech rule to try to explain the trouble may, in the trap Goffman called 'looping' find that effort itself dismissed for the same reason"(Chapman 2006: 324f).

Other scholars who have not specifically examined the use of Rosenberg's NVC in parenting, but have studied very similar discourses in US parenting literature, observe that its recommended practices are tightly connected to values and manners of the educated middle and upper classes (Hoffman 2009: 22; Tobin 1995). As Bitschnau (2008) points out, using NVC requires a lot of time and emotional energy but also a certain level of education as well as patience, which some parents just may not have. As such, NVC could also be described as an 'intensive' childrearing method (Hays 1996), as it expects parents to be emotionally very engaged with their children and invest a lot of time in figuring out their own as well as their children's emotions and individual needs.

A detailed discussion of the critical responses to Rosenberg's concept of NVC would exceed the scope of this chapter. However, this brief digression on NVC and applying it to parent-child relations makes clear that it represents a tool for parental self-work. NVC promises the ethical transformation of the self through introspection, discipline, and exercise; the 'pay-off' is a more compassionate and nonviolent relationship with one's child, which itself can represent

¹²² See <https://www.cnvc.org/training/resource/feelings-inventory>.

a means to some desired end – it may prevent certain dangers during the teenage years such as drug abuse, and assist in producing healthy, happy, well-to-do adults. NVC claims that children’s ‘natural disposition’ to be cooperative will be cultivated by such practices. NVC is also an example of governmentality when technologies of domination and of the self meet. The expert decides which mode of communication with the child is ‘ethical’ and ‘effective’ and sets up rules for the parents about how their communication with the child must be conducted to achieve a desirable outcome. The parents draw on the expert’s suggestions in the ‘private’ sphere of their homes; they use them for the conduct of their self; they monitor, introspect, and self-disclose emotions and needs in order to transform themselves into a certain kind of parent.

In the following sections, I present four case studies which shed light on practices aimed at managing negative emotions, which are a clear example of what Foucault dubbed technologies of self.

Nicole: Living *Unerzogen*

In June 2019, I met Nicole, 36, her partner Stefan, 37 and their almost two-year-old son for the first time in their home, in a rural region in the canton of Grison. Nicole and her partner were not married but planned to marry in the future. They had conceived their son through IVF after a struggle with infertility. Nicole’s fertility issues had had an impact on her identity as a woman, she told me. For her, becoming a mother also meant “becoming a woman”. This idea of attaining womanhood through motherhood, she added, may sound unfair to other women who wanted a child but were unable to conceive, but having a child made her feel more feminine and in tune with her body. Nicole worked 50% in the health sector, while Stefan held an 80% job. In 2019, their son went to a local daycare centre once a week, which Nicole and her partner decided to increase to two days a week in 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic hit, because they felt that their son was not having enough social contact with other children.

Nicole positioned her parenting style in opposition to the ‘mainstream’, emphasising that she and her partner were not doing what other parents “normally do”. She characterised her style as *unerzogen*, which was inspired by an anti-authoritarian parenting movement from Germany with the same name. There is an *unerzogen* magazine as well as a Facebook page with over 4,000 members. Literally, the adjective *unerzogen* means ‘ill-bred’, but in the context of the parenting movement it points to the fact that children are not given an *Erziehung* in the ‘classical’ way: they are not actively taught certain behaviours which are generally considered to be ‘proper’, do not have to adhere to many conventional rules and courtesies, and there is a strong focus on NVC. For example, Nicole noted that she did not teach her son to say ‘please’ and ‘thank you’, that he was not obliged to say hello or goodbye to visitors, that he did not have to put shoes on when going outside. She told me that she used neither rewards nor punishments to encourage or discourage certain behaviours. Active *Erziehung* was seen as redundant, because children are understood to imitate adults anyway, so forcing them to do certain things is not only ineffective but is also seen as an act of violence. However, this approach does have its limits: in order to ensure his physical safety, Nicole’s son had to stick to certain rules such as wearing a seatbelt in the car or holding her hand when crossing the street.

Nicole and Stefan’s *unerzogen* parenting style led to tensions with relatives, who believed that their son lacked manners. Nicole reported that she stood up for her son whenever relatives requested a thank you from him after giving him something, and made it clear to them that she thought her son need not comply with their idea of appropriate manners.

Nicole and Stefan agreed that Nicole was the one who searched online or consulted literature for support in bringing up their son, whereas Stefan “just picked up the stuff” Nicole told him (recorded interview, 24.06.19). Stefan was rather passive during our conversation and most of the time played with their son. Only in rare instances did he comment on something Nicole said or offered his own view, usually after being encouraged to do so by Nicole.

Becoming a mother had made Nicole think a lot about her own childhood and the way she was treated by adults, which posed the question as to whether she wanted to treat her own son that way. For example, Nicole noted that her own mother often did not clearly communicate with her when she was a child, and that she sometimes did the same with her son. Here, Nicole considered NVC a helpful tool to enhance communication skills:

I sometimes have the feeling that I'm not communicating very clearly. I'm trying to learn to be clearer when I speak, so I say what I really mean. My mother also did that sometimes, she was not always so connected with herself, even today, and that annoys me. I am the same sometimes, and I am trying to change that. (ibid.)

She had also re-evaluated some of her personal beliefs (*Glaubenssätze*) and wondered how she could 'dissolve' those she found to be inadequate (ibid.). Reflecting on all this was an "intense" experience, according to Nicole. She volunteered that she used to believe that the idea that childhood has a big influence on later life was invented by psychologists, but had more recently come to the same conclusion; she now agreed that childhood experiences would "follow" and "stress" a person for life, and, therefore, violence should play no part in her son's upbringing.

However, Nicole still grappled with her emotions when her son sometimes made her angry. She described how, in such situations, she noticed her own father's influence, whom she experienced as rather "impulsive" when she was a child. The anger gave her a lot of food for thought: "Then I think 'how can you get so angry with a child who you love so much'? It is frightening. I also have these moments. But then I think about it: 'Why did this happen? What can I make of this? How can I get out of this situation quicker?'" (ibid.). To face such situations more calmly, explained Nicole, one had to deeply introspect what the real cause of the rage was, as it was not really the child who provoked the anger, but something deep within her "inner self":

When a situation makes me very angry, then I ask myself 'where does this feeling come from?'. It is not just a feeling that is angry at him, it comes from somewhere inside here (points to her chest), and I try to pursue this. Sometimes I find the reason, sometimes I don't. (ibid.)

While Stefan pointed out that he partly relied on his gut feelings when it came to rearing his son, Nicole had the opinion that handling children appropriately could only be achieved by reading advice literature and constant self-reflection. Flying by the seat of one's pants could mean making the same mistakes as one's parents, as gut instinct was informed by one's own upbringing.

Stefan: I decide a lot of things from my gut instinct.

Nicole: Do you?

Stefan: Yes! I just have the feeling that something should be done in a certain way. Maybe it is not always right, but....

Nicole: Well... I don't think gut instinct is good. Because I am sure that your gut instinct is what you yourself experienced as a child. This is common...

Stefan: No, I don't see it this way...

Nicole: Well, then we disagree here (...). In retrospect, one always has to ponder: 'Why did a situation happen in a certain way? What can I do different next time? What stressed me out so much?' (Recorded interview, 24.06.19).

Nicole's description of self-reflective questions ensuing from feelings of anger brings to mind Parker's idea of ambivalence as a creative force that prompts self-reflection and in turn has positive effects on the mother-child relationship – "She needs to 'revere' about herself if she is to understand her baby" (Parker 1997: 26). In Nicole's case, the experience of anger that (seemingly) contradicted the love for her son did elicit 'revere' and the search for a kind of inner 'truth' regarding the source of her anger. This, however, may not be due only to the fact that ambivalence inherently provokes self-reflection and boosts a mother's understanding of herself and her child. Not all the mothers I interviewed expressed the view that conflicting feelings resulted in introspection. Pamela, for example, who furiously banished her son from the living room for hurting his brother with a toy train during our video call and then commented that he could be a real devil (see Chapter 4) noted that she sometimes had to shout at her son because this was the only way to make him understand. She did not express the urge to manage her yelling or the mixed emotions towards him, or not wanting him around her in these situations.

However, especially in the sources that Nicole consulted, discourses regarding intuition, the internalisation of practices or ideas experienced during one's own childhood, as well as the

importance of ‘governing’ emotions loomed large and may have provided the ‘grounds’ for her ‘reverie’. In June 2021, two years after my first conversation with Nicole and her partner, the *unerzogen* Magazine published an article with the title *Misstrauede Deiner Intuition* (‘Mistrust your intuition’), which echoed Nicole’s ideas regarding gut feelings. The article’s author, Susanne Wawer, argues that the common advice to trust one’s intuition as a parent was very convenient as it liberated parents from the burden of studying numerous advice books. Wawer claims that ‘intuition’, in the sense of ideas that first come to mind for how to react to your children’s behaviour (and in this context specifically children’s behaviour perceived as unpleasant), represents experiences learnt during one’s own childhood, that usually suggested the introduction of “authoritarian” measures:

As a mother of two children, I was and am often confronted with the *erzieherische* intuition. When a toddler threw a tantrum and it was not possible to calm it down, my intuition was: the child needs boundaries and punishments. Intuitively, the idea of constraining the child in its room until it has calmed down came to my mind. When my child wailingly refused to continue walking during a stroll, I thought: ‘I must now threaten to continue walking and leave him behind’. In short, my instant and direct feeling spat out quite reliably authoritarian ideas, which I rejected after close consideration. (Wawer 2021: ; my translation)¹²³

The culprits – the people who Wawer had learnt these reactions from – were her own parents and grandparents, whose dangerous ideas crept up on her in situations of overload, such as caring for her challenging newborn: “When I rocked and sang to my *Schreibaby* who was just a few months old through the night, I had to fight the inner voices in my head that whispered to me that the child wants to drive me over the edge with its screaming” (Wawer 2021: ; my translation).

While the article was published after my conversation with Nicole, discourses about the negative role of ‘intuition’ in *Erziehung* might have already circulated on the *unerzogen* Facebook page that Nicole used to visit. Furthermore, as discussed, Graf expresses similar ideas about the source of parents’ reactions to tantrums and conflicts, and Nicole listened to Graf’s and Seide’s

¹²³ This concept of ‘intuition’ is very different from the MVBs’ ideas, which were influenced by attachment theory.

Das gewünschtete Wunschkind podcast¹²⁴. Here, the idea that the ‘old ways’ of dealing with children mediated through informal kin relations must be shaken off and replaced by new, more positive ways mediated by ‘experts of subjectivity’ is central. The themes of self-reflection and consequently positive self-transformation figured prominently in Nicole’s narrative, who tried to ban ‘undesirable’ traits inherited from her parents, which required a review of her emotional state and behavioural patterns as well as the study of advice literature to establish new codes of conduct.

Parker’s suggestion (2005: 86-94) that a mother’s own mother has a formative influence on women’s experiences of mothering was also exemplified in Nicole’s case. Memories of her own childhood played a significant role in Nicole’s account. Nicole thought that her mother had lacked communication skills, which resulted in Nicole, who also perceived herself as not being able to communicate clearly with her own son, to search for ways to become better at communicating. However, remembering her father as impulsive had an equally formative effect, as it induced reflection about what the ‘true’ cause of her anger might be. The fact that Nicole also recognised traits of her father in herself indicates that it is not just the mothers’ mothers who shape experiences of childrearing, but that a mother’s relationship to her father also has an impact.

When I talked to Nicole a second time in February 2021, we met online due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Nicole had completed a seven-week online course in NVC in May 2020 and was currently in the process of reviewing the course material for a second time, before the instructor would delete them. When I asked Nicole why she had attended the course she explained that it had given her “tools to handle certain situations better”. Additionally, it had provided her with more empathy towards not only her son, but also adults, which enabled her to take a different point of view in personal interactions. As in 2019, Nicole emphasised the importance of being “in connection” with herself, which helped her to feel her own emotions and evaluate the needs behind

¹²⁴ See <https://audionow.de/podcast/5803b5de-6a4c-4e3d-9afb-ae8427f57ce3>, accessed on 08.06.2022

certain behaviours better. I asked Nicole whether she could think of an example in which she had applied NVC and she described the following situation to me:

My son wanted to put away a game himself, but I helped him because I wanted it to happen quicker. We were about to have dinner. He started screaming and got really angry... and then I – back in the day I would have said something like... you try to make it less bad; you want to make the problem smaller. You say: ‘this is not so bad’. Then I said ‘oh, now you are sad’ – and this was enough. He replied: ‘yes’ (Nicole imitates her son’s sad voice) and then I can say: ‘OK, then next time you can put it away yourself’. This is enough. You label the emotion – ‘you are sad because you wanted to do it yourself’ – because this is probably the need behind it, that he wanted to do it himself. This is enough, it’s really just small things. (...) I wanted it to go quicker, I was a bit stressed because dinner was ready. It was important to me that we ate at 7 o’clock so that everything [bedtime routine] wouldn’t be delayed. That’s why I helped him. But in that moment he had a different need. I label the feeling and ideally verbalise the need right after. Then you look for a strategy to solve it. It’s enough that I verbalise – ‘how do you feel and why’. Most of the time this is – ‘ah she understands, she knows what is going on inside me’. That way it’s already solved. (...) When my son has a real temper tantrum then nothing goes – then I won’t say anything, then I am just there and I wait until he has finished, and then I try to solve the problem. Recently, he’s been really losing his temper. But when he is sad I can absorb (*schnell abfangen*) it very quickly. (Recorded interview, 15.02.21)

Nicole’s account provided valuable insights into how NVC is applied in practice by parents. On the one hand, Nicole emphasised the importance of avoiding persuading children that something is just a minor problem not worth crying about, but on the other hand, labelling the emotion and verbalising the need is also intended to ‘alleviate’ the emotions triggered in Nicole’s son. Recognising her son’s need enables Nicole to have empathy instead of perhaps being annoyed by his crying – which in turn allows for a ‘positive’ resolution of the incident as well as a more ethical approach to resolving conflicts – one that is assumed to be based on a ‘truth’ internal to Nicole’s son (Rose 1991: 95). However, it seems as if Nicole had mislabelled her son’s emotion in her example. She noted that her son reacted by screaming when she put away the game herself and “got really angry”. When describing how she had reacted to her son’s behaviour in accordance with NVC, Nicole labelled her son’s emotion as ‘sad’, which does not match up with her first evaluation of his emotional state. Nicole may have made a simple mistake in her example and unintentionally switched from anger to sadness. Nonetheless, suggesting to a child that it is sad rather than angry may also be a means to end a tantrum more quickly, as a sad child may be easier to soothe by

offering consolation and closeness – and this was also asserted by Nicole, who said that when her son is angry, she cannot do anything to calm him down. Further, it may be easier for the mother to show empathy and react to needs in the face of sadness than when confronted with anger.

Her own as well as her daughter's emotions concerned Agathe too, who looked for input on how to handle tantrums, during which she experienced feelings of annoyance and anger. Here, a guidance book titled *Kleine Gefühlskunde für Eltern* (Little Study of Emotions for Parents) published by Vivian Dittmar was especially helpful for Agathe.

[I read advice literature] to deal with her temper tantrums, [to find] an approach for how I can deal with them. I notice that when I am annoyed and angry I always ask myself, what is this doing to her, how is she reacting to it? Recently I got a great book, I need to show you – it looks terrible, but... [It is called] *Kleine Gefühlskunde für Eltern*. It talks about how children develop their emotions, how this happens, why this is good; that they experience fear, pain, grief, anger, shame. Basically, this gives you an understanding of how you can handle it [children's emotions]. That you just 'hold' the space and they just must live through these feelings. One neither has to negate them and say: 'don't be sad, this isn't so bad'. On the other side, you don't have to say: 'yes, this is horrible, yes this is really bad'. But of course, this has a lot to do with how you handle your own emotions. (...) Often I don't know when I should be very consistent and just pull through against everything that is coming from her, and when it's more reasonable to give in. This is a really difficult question for me. It's the exact polar opposite between my mother – 'now you have to be clear and say no. That child cannot be allowed to do everything' – and my feeling – 'well, actually...'. I truly need to sense 'what is happening right now?' Is this my ego against her ego? Then I notice 'OK, I have to cut it out, this will go nowhere, this is a pathetic power struggle, this won't make it better for anyone'. Or is this rather about the principle that it's important she understands – 'this is the boundary, and it will always be there'. I think this is why I read advice literature. How can I better understand what is happening with her in terms of developmental steps? And this book – I mean Jesper Juul¹²⁵ is great – but this book has helped me much more. How do emotions form, why are they good, what happens when you put up resistance, what if you don't? (Agathe, recorded interview, 24.01.20)

The book Agathe mentioned was published by Vivian Dittmar who calls herself a 'wisdom teacher' on her website. Dittmar also founded the *Be The Change* foundation, an NGO that is dedicated to generating 'cultural change' to bring about more sustainability. The cover text of *Kleine Gefühlskunde für Eltern* states that the book intends to make a contribution to addressing the question of what modern relationship formation "beyond authoritarian and antiauthoritarian" can look like and

¹²⁵ Jesper Juul is a Danish family therapist who has written several advice books on parenting and family life.

strives to give input to a life with children where everyone's needs are addressed and the "exercise of power" is renounced¹²⁶. Similar to NVC, there is a focus on addressing needs as well as the elimination of coercive practices. Agathe sought to inform herself about children's emotional development, in order to react to her daughter's tantrums in an appropriate way – in this case giving her daughter space to act out her emotions and avoid falling into senseless 'struggles for power'. Significantly, Agathe also referred to her own mother's views regarding "power struggles", who seemed to more 'pro resistance', which contributed to Agathe's tentativeness regarding how to deal with them. Agathe pondered the 'appropriate' use of domination when dealing with her daughter and strived to not take advantage of what she felt were asymmetrical power relations between herself and her daughter.

Of course, I have to pre-set some rules, but still I have the feeling that by no means do I want to treat her in a condescending manner (*von oben herab behandeln*). I often re-assess myself in terms of adultism – whether I use this power – whether I use this power imbalance that is there, or whether I deal with it in a smart way and only use it [the power imbalance between herself and her daughter] in situations when I know that it would be dangerous for her [if I didn't use the power imbalance]. (Recorded interview, 24.01.20)

Agathe thought that exercising power over her daughter was only ethical when it ensured her safety. Patronising her daughter purely on the basis of her young age would be 'adultism', "the oppression experienced by children and young people at the hands of adults and adult-produced/adult-tailored systems" (LeFrancois 2013: 1). Avoiding coercive practices and using adults' position of authority to get children to do what they want them to was also a major concern for Claudia, who is the focus of the next case study.

¹²⁶See book description and author information on exlibris https://www.exlibris.ch/de/buecher-buch/deutschsprachige-buecher/vivian-dittmar/kleine-gefuehlskunde-fuer-eltern/id/9783940773203?gclid=CjwKCAjw3riIBhAwEiwAzD3TiZB4wi-eih6lrK9Cr6csbMSYCaTw1u0ADhZnZQX1MNaXuG_uhJJlRoCmxoQAvD_BwE&gclidsrc=aw.ds, accessed 14.03.22.

Claudia: Getting Rid of All Violence

Claudia, 42, had three children – two daughters aged four years and four months as well as a two year-old son. She described herself as an ‘entrepreneur’, something that seemed to be an important part of her identity. She owned a company in the cultural sector, which she had founded with her husband. When we made contact via telephone for the first time to set up a date for a meeting at her home, she stressed that her family model was rare in Switzerland, as she and her husband both worked full time and shared care work 50/50. The decision to have children had come at a point when she “dared to go her own way”, that did not coincide with what she perceived to be ‘mainstream’ family life in Switzerland. She explained that before she had children, she first needed to be sure that no one could manipulate her to stay at home, or only work 50%, which would not have made her happy and may have had a “weird outcome for all parties involved”. Claudia described having an internal discourse about people’s reactions to her decision to work a full-time job, albeit being a mother:

I first had to feel this courage inside me, and I imagined that I would have to respond to people who say ‘yes, but you don’t have much of your children [if you work full-time]; other people influence your children’. All those things that people say at the *Clubtisch* (regulars’ table). I imagined this internally, and at some point, it did not bother me any more. (...) Then I knew, now I can have a family. (Recorded interview, 21.03.19)

Claudia pondered the question of what qualifies as violence in *Erziehung* a lot and stated that she wanted to get “rid of all violence” when dealing with her children, as violence never had good outcomes. Claudia had also informed herself about NVC and read a book about the topic, which she described as “very strict”. Managing to communicate in a nonviolent way was one of her main goals. Having children had made her think about the misuse of power in interpersonal relationships. She strived not to be “bossy” with not only her children, but also with adults, such as the employees working in her company, as she considered “bossiness” a form of violence. Like Nicole, Claudia remarked that NVC was a tool not only to communicate with her children, but also with other adults around her. Thus, self-work in Claudia’s case (as in Nicole’s) went beyond

parenting. Not being bossy with others required learning about what ‘authority’ really is and putting what she learned into practice, which Claudia said entailed a lot of work on herself, but also contributed to the formation of her own opinion, which she assessed as a positive outcome:

[Becoming a mother] gave me a quality of life, because I made up my own opinion about things much more. I thought a lot about the issue of authority and I first had to learn a lot about this, I had to work a lot on myself, because I had a different idea of not being authoritarian. Thus, I had to work a lot on myself and also find role models, because I did not have those in my own *Erziehung*. (ibid.)

Claudia often referred to her own upbringing, which she perceived as authoritarian. She expressed the idea that she had internalised these authoritarian practices as a child and ran the risk of now using them in the *Erziehung* of her own children. Claudia attached special importance to the way she was raised, as she often brought it up during our conversation, especially when it came to the issue of having to change and work on herself.

During the *Autonomiephase* of their first child, Claudia and her husband realised that they sometimes yelled, which they sought to avoid. Here, Claudia and her husband found advice literature helpful, especially the work of Danish family therapist Jesper Juul. In this regard, it is notable that Claudia and her husband did not consider it appropriate to change or work on their children’s behaviour, but rather to regulate their own emotions and practices. This involved constant self-admonishment to avoid the pitfall of applying practices seen as remnants of her own *Erziehung*:

During the autonomy phase, it emerged that we sometimes yelled, not extremely loudly, but in a way that we perceived as yelling – and we didn’t want that. (...) What do you do then when the child is lying on the floor screaming? When you want to know what to do, you have to start searching. We decided of course that we didn’t want to do anything [with the child], because it is pointless, and then we ended up with Jesper Juul. However, I need Jesper Juul more for myself, because I don’t believe that I have to do anything with my children, but always just with me. From the beginning, it was our understanding that *we* must change. I believe that children are actually very cooperative, but when we adopt the wrong tone, it won’t work out. That’s why we actually used Jesper Juul for *us*, or even for managing our employees. I get him [Jesper Juul] out again and again. I have written down a few sentences [from his book] to reprimand myself with again and again, because I think that your own *Erziehung* catches up with you so quickly. (Recorded interview, 21.03.19)

Claudia and her husband generally agreed that they wanted to act in a nonviolent way. What nonviolent behaviour looked like in specific situations was sometimes unclear, however, and created room for discussions between the couple. Here the ‘mundane’ contexts during which anger or frustration can arise in parents – in Claudia’s example during meals – becomes apparent again:

Is it nonviolent when I just verbalise my emotions, or is this in itself a form of violence? (...) Especially with two and three year-olds... I think this is the most challenging age, especially during meals, when a child throws their food on the floor. Do you take the food away at some point or not? Do you explain it to the child or not, how do you explain it? Are you allowed to say at some point: ‘hey, now I am tired of this!’? Or do you have to maintain patience? Which I am not able to! (laughs). It does depend on my mood. The question is, to what extent can I surrender myself, to what extent do I have to pull myself together? And then I always ask myself: ‘how is violence ‘transported?’ It is not only conveyed through the volume [of your voice], but also non-verbally – it gets pretty hairy when you have to discuss these things. (...) Am I allowed to express my emotions? Because three year-olds are not doing it on purpose (...). Or do I have to leave the table quickly and go for a quick spin and come back to the table and [explain it] again five times? (ibid.)

Claudia wondered if expressing her emotions was exercising violence towards her children. She contemplated whether suppressing the display of emotions by, for example, removing herself physically from her children, was the appropriate approach when she was losing patience and starting to feel angry. Here, the idea of emotions as a vehicle for violence emerges.

Claudia described handing the children over to her husband when she was about to lose patience and vice versa. Claudia and her husband reminded each other that, due to their developmental stage, their children had no bad intentions when they behaved a certain way that triggered annoyance in them. Handing the children over before expressing anger seemed to be of great importance:

While the children are still so small being nonviolent is not yet so much of an issue. Well actually, it is an issue when you have your first child, because *you* don’t understand that *they* don’t understand. We had to tell each other again and again – ‘bear in mind that it [the child] does not understand it yet. Give it to me when you can’t stand it any more and give it to me before it is too late!’ (ibid.)

Nancy was also convinced that “there was this automatism from the way you’ve been raised that just comes through” in situations of overload. This happened unintentionally, as it was “engrained”

in her: “it [the control over her behaviour] just switches off (...), I sometimes even surprise myself, it’s just crazy, I don’t think you can control a lot of it”. Like Claudia and her husband, Nancy and her partner monitored each other to prevent anger from resulting in inappropriate handling of the children that, according to Nancy, was always a cause of regret later on. Nancy emphasised that the ability to stay calm very much depended on someone’s mood as well as their own upbringing. While making ‘mistakes’ was unavoidable, one still had to reflect and question how situations during which one lost one’s temper came about, in order to act in a more positive way next time:

There are times where I wish I could put more into it [parenting]. Times where I wish I was more patient than I was. But I guess no one is perfect, right? My partner and I try to catch each other. I mean, not catch each other, but if I am being impatient or if I hear him being impatient, he’ll call me out on it, I can call him out on it (...). I think everybody has their good and bad days, but I think not being reflecting, not wanting to do better, I guess not taking a step back and not thinking about what you did, how it worked out [is bad]. (Recorded interview, 08.10.19)

Miriam: In Tune with Myself Again

I already introduced Miriam in Chapter 4. In contrast to Nicole, Claudia, Agathe and Nancy, who had all had their first child in their mid- or late-thirties, Miriam became a mother in her early twenties. Unlike the others, Miriam could not afford daycare for her children and thus did not work in the field she was trained in. When I met Miriam for the first time ambivalence played a role, especially in the context of conflicts with her oldest son, who sometimes displayed defiant behaviour, such as disobeying or spitting. Although her aspiration was to “*immer mit Liebe erziehen*” (always parent with love), she was “not always able to conform to this ideal”. When her older son was being naughty, she could become “strange” because, Miriam explained, she had experienced this in her own *Erziehung*. Miriam was raised by her grandparents as her mother was usually “on the road” due to her job. I did not push Miriam to tell me more about her mother and she never played a role in her narrative. Although Miriam did not agree with all the practices used in her own *Erziehung*, Miriam’s grandmother was her most important source of advice and moral support, also because she was a trained pedagogue.

Miriam, who was born in Germany and only moved to Switzerland three years earlier, felt that in Switzerland the need to practice nonviolence in *Erziehung* was emphasised even more than in Germany. During our first meeting Miriam wondered how mothers who stick to non-coercive measures discipline their children, as there was no way she could get her sons under control without sometimes resorting to threats. Miriam stated that she had not consulted advice books or experts in this matter when we met in 2019.

In February 2021, Miriam and I exchanged Facebook messages to set up our second meeting. Miriam preferred to have a spontaneous phone call, as her baby daughter had been born a few weeks prior and having to stick to a certain time made her feel stressed. One morning Miriam let me know that it was a good time to call her, as her daughter was just taking a nap in her swing.

On the phone Miriam told me that a lot had changed: “Last time I told you that I sometimes struggle to control myself in situations when the children act up (*auf der Nase rumtanzen*), and I have worked on this”. Miriam described a typical situation to me which, as she worded it, had great “potential for escalation”: “This ‘no, but’ plays a really big role in our daily life. I say something and my child replies: ‘no, but’. And then he does the exact opposite of what I want, or what he should do (...)”. Miriam had become increasingly fearful of the anger triggered in her during conflicts and consulted a psychologist with her son, who evaluated them both. He had told Miriam that the ‘problem’ was not her son but she herself, and referred her to his wife, who also worked in his practice and was responsible for adult therapies. Miriam’s husband was also present during some sessions, to learn how to support her better in daily life. Miriam rated the therapy as successful, as she was now able to be “more relaxed”, which enabled her to handle not only her children, but also herself differently. While coming to terms with her past had played a major role in the therapy, the psychologist also gave Miriam practical advice on how to “function” better in stressful situations: “She showed me how to calm myself down, and how to avoid falling back into old patterns, how I can solve it in a different way. Sometimes, but very rarely, I fall back into old

patterns, but then I realise it and try to...”. The methods intended to calm Miriam down included bodily techniques such as breathing exercises, that were supposed to diffuse ‘risky’ emotions:

When I notice that one of those situations is about to erupt then I quickly turn inwards and take a deep breath. She [the psychologist] showed me a spot in my belly which I should breathe into. In that moment, I concentrate on my breathing and I forget that I actually wanted to get upset, and this works wonderfully. (Recorded interview 12.02.21)

While Miriam cited her own upbringing for applying inappropriate practices in moments of anger several times in 2019, she no longer brought this up in 2021. Instead, Miriam noted that taking the contraceptive Pill had contributed to her “aggression”. After she stopped taking the Pill, asserted Miriam, she was much more in tune with herself again (*viel mehr bei mir selber*).

Elisa: Gemstone Moments

The cases I have introduced so far focused on the ‘management’ and ‘mitigation’ of negative emotions in both mothers and children when it came to conflicts in daily life. However, there was another example that showed that parents and the experts working with them can take a different route, too. This may have also been down to the mother’s reluctance to suppress expressing her emotions. As noted in Chapter 4, Elisa and Hannes had struggled with their first son’s jealousy issues when their second son was born, which had triggered feelings of annoyance and overload in Elisa, who then started to “yell a lot”. One “hot-spot” for the emergence of conflict was when Elisa had to breastfeed her younger son and her older son, who felt like he was not getting any attention, started to act up: “I felt like I played with him forever, and then I needed to breast feed my younger son, and my older son would still start to revolt” (recorded interview, 16.06.19).

Elisa had visited the MVB and described her situation to her local advisor. When the advisor expressed the view that one had to stay calm even when a child was really annoying, Elisa admitted to her that she was not capable of staying calm in such circumstances. The advisor then suggested that she “get help”. After leaving the advice centre, Elisa thought about the MVB’s comment that she had to stay calm and concluded that suppressing expressing her emotions was

not the way she wanted to go about this: “I left and thought – ‘no, actually I don’t want this’. I don’t want to be annoyed but stay calm. I think it’s OK if my son notices that I am annoyed – this is a question of authenticity” (ibid).

Elisa and Hannes had finally decided to consult a parent coach in this matter, who did not give concrete advice how to handle conflicts but developed different ideas in cooperation with the couple about how they could go about resolving the issue. This was based on a diligent assessment of their family situation as well as what was important to Elisa and Hannes in their personal life. Elisa told me the result of this evaluation was that many issues she experienced were down to herself and not her son. It was down to Elisa to realise that “the power struggle is beginning” and to assess “how to stop it” before it got out of hand. Elisa described trying out different strategies with her son, but the only thing that really worked was introducing “gemstone moments”. Both she and her son had two gemstones each which they could ‘redeem’ throughout the day. While Elisa could ‘buy’ some time for herself, her son could ‘buy’ a play session with his mother during which she would focus solely on him, even if the baby wanted attention as well. Here, designated playtime with her son to ‘appease’ his urge for his mother’s exclusive attention, but also having the possibility to signal to him through the gemstone that Elisa was now taking time for herself, represented the appropriate solution to decrease the frequency of power struggles and in turn feelings of anger and overload.

Still, in the context of expressing ‘negative’ emotions, (self-)surveillance, one of the core aspects of Foucault’s concept of discipline, emerged in Elisa’s story as well. As a parent, Elisa described always feeling “a little bit observed” by others. One particular incident had made Elisa feel ‘caught’. A woman working in an office situated below their apartment had once remarked in an empathic way when meeting Elisa on the staircase: “This is just a difficult age [in regards to her older son], isn’t it?” Elisa was struck by her comment, thinking to herself: “Oh no, they [the office workers] hear this [yelling] sometimes. What are they thinking?!” (Recorded interview, 13.06.19). While Elisa did not suggest that this incident was a reason for eventually consulting the parent

coach, it alludes to the significant role of ‘uninvolved’ third parties in parents’ self-governance, who may express empathy or concern after overhearing screaming by a parent (or a child). In Elisa’s case the comment made her head spin, wondering what the office workers had heard and what they thought of her, and possibly induced shame for being a mother that yells at her child. Feder describes how families do not feel surveillance coming directly from ‘the state’, but from their social environment, for example from neighbours, which can make them more inclined to conform to certain societal expectations (Feder 2007: 43), such as *not* yelling at children. In her book, she refers to Foucault’s essay *The Subject and Power*, where he points out that, while disciplinary institutions are important for establishing power relations, “the fundamental point of anchorage of the relationships even if they are embodied and crystallized in an institution, is to be found outside the institution” (Foucault 1982: 791)

This alludes to another important point when it comes to parents’ self-work: the observation of and comparison with other parents and their children (in terms of their development and behaviour) also played a significant role in parental self-regulation. Many mothers described how they evaluated and questioned their own practices and choices and adjusted them accordingly, or self-affirmed their choices and practices when confronted with ‘good’ or ‘bad’ examples of parenting. For example, Lotte self-affirmed her choices about her son’s diet after observing another family she passed on a walk:

But sometimes you think ‘arrghh, what are they doing?’ Even yesterday I said to my husband – like I am always trying to be careful what my son eats, to be healthy, so he does not eat too much. He knows what chocolate is and if he does not get it, there is screaming on the floor. Then I see this kid in the pram with a bag of crisps, just like... the mother is pushing him around – and I think: ‘What am I worrying about?’. So, in a way I feel bad, because you are judging it, but at the same time, it does help to relate a little bit. (Lotte, recorded interview, 09.03.21)

Lotte describes being shocked at the sight of a little boy who was being pushed in his pram with uncontrolled access to a bag of crisps. This observation, which left her wondering what the boy’s mother had been thinking when she handed the crisps to the boy, helped her feel better about how

she feeds her own son. In ‘A New State of Surveillance? An Application of Michel Foucault to Modern Motherhood’ (Henderson et al. 2010), Henderson et al. argue that self-surveillance and surveillance of other mothers is how intensive childrearing methods are primarily perpetuated among contemporary mothers: “mothers surveil other mothers, they also use these interactions to surveil themselves and their own decisions about parenting” (Henderson et al. 2010: 231f). While self-regulation through interactions with other parents is not a focus of this book, it draws attention to the ways childrearing practices are shaped by non-experts such as other mothers or ‘uninvolved’ third parties like neighbours, who can play a central role when it comes to parents’ self-governance.

Disarming Dangerous Emotions

The cases discussed above all share several features. First of all, Nicole, Claudia and Miriam had experienced their own (grand)parents as sometimes strict, authoritarian, impulsive or lacking in communication skills. Second, they were convinced that ‘negative’ emotions, especially anger or impatience, triggered by their children’s behaviour and the practices used to react to this behaviour had been internalised during their own upbringing. Third, they wanted to unlearn the responses triggered by the emotions (and, by understanding *why* they had those emotions, ridding themselves of them in the first place?), as they considered them harmful and outdated. Fourth, unlearning these practices required self-surveillance (and surveillance of their partner), self-reflection – what do I feel, why do I have these feelings, why do I react this way, how can I react differently next time? – as well as studying parenting advice material or consulting an expert in person in order to receive both mental and practical tools to apply at home. In the case of Nicole and Claudia, in particular, the critical examination of their own childhoods and their parents’ behaviours had resulted in them becoming determined to take a different approach and, by consulting advice material, to learn the proper way to handle their children.

Every parent used to be a child her or himself and thus everybody is confronted with this past. Being in the position of one's own parents as a parent oneself probably produces some kind of reaction in many parents in which one's own parents' practices are remembered and evaluated. I am not suggesting that the engagement with one's childhood is a technology of self in itself, or that it indicates that someone wants to work on her or himself. However, if one assumes that this past has a 'negative' effect on one's parenting practices it can trigger a wish for a 'positive' transformation that requires practices of the self.

In light of mothers' childhood memories and relationships with their own (grand)parents as children that interact with their mothering experiences, Parker describes mothering as "a multi-generational process"(Parker 2005: 86). This is also illustrated in the case studies, where the older generations' thoughts and practices are perceived as seeping into mothers' minds and reactions to children's behaviour in moments of anger and overload¹²⁷.

While Nicole and Claudia described learning the principles and techniques of NVC from advice material or courses in order to enhance interactions with their children, Miriam applied breathing techniques on the advice of a psychologist she had consulted because of frequent bouts of anger. What is particularly conspicuous in all three cases is the wish to be able to govern emotions; in Nicole's case, her son's emotions were also the target of regulation through NVC. Here, the role of psychological techniques (Rose 1991: 95) as well as a therapeutic language loomed large. As discussed in the previous sections, the discourses on emotions and ideas regarding their proper management recounted in the mothers' narratives are reflected in advice

¹²⁷ Mothers are not only influenced by their childhood memories when it comes to the experience of mothering and governing emotions. They may continuously receive (unsolicited) advice on how to deal with temper tantrums and other issues from their own partners, parents, grandparents, other relatives, friends, neighbours or random people who observe a tantrum in public and believe that they should interject. Relatives, friends, and other parties' comments can lead to tensions or result in mothers' insecurity regarding how to 'properly' handle a situation and in what ways emotions should be expressed. Thus, mothers' experiences may be continuously 'formed' by older relatives and other parties who feel inclined to tell mothers to react in a certain way to their children which, in conjunction with childhood memories, makes mothering a multi-generational process (also in terms of the support mothers receive in rearing their children from relatives, friends or nannies).

literature, blogs, and magazine articles. While Parker contends that mothers' feelings of hatred and anger in the context of 'manageable ambivalence' can be sources of creative insight, can result in introspection and self-understanding – which, from a Foucauldian perspective, can be conceptualised as practices of the self – it becomes clear that the tools aimed at transforming the self do not exist in a vacuum. As Foucault writes, practices of self “are models that he finds in his culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon himself by his culture, his society, and his social group” (Foucault 2003: 34).

Another striking aspect of the case studies presented here is that both mothers and advising experts believed that it was exclusively the mother who had to 'work' on herself. Children's behaviour such as defying and disobeying was seen as manifestations of the *Autonomiephase*, a 'natural' developmental step in which parents should not intervene too much, because it was crucial for forming the child's autonomous self¹²⁸.

However, allowing children to live through their emotions, or reacting to conflicts by applying NVC also has an effect, which is laid out by Hoffmann. Hoffman explores discourses on emotion in American parenting and describes a very similar approach regarding governing parents' and children's emotions – the idea that parents should verbalise their emotions as well as assist their children to label their own (Hoffman 2009; 2013: 82). In 'Power Struggles: The Paradoxes of Emotion and Control among Child-Centered Mothers in the Privileged United States' (2013), Hoffman explores the power struggle between parents and children as a cultural trope in her work with upper middle-class mothers. Hoffman finds that the tools applied during power struggles, although allegedly intended to acknowledge and appreciate emotions, rather led to 'disarming' and detaching them from emotions:

¹²⁸ This stood in contrast to the beliefs of some of my research participants' older relatives, who remarked that they believed such behaviours were signs of *Unerzogenheit* (being ill-bred) or being spoiled, and needed to be countered with authoritarian measures. While this is not the focus of this chapter, the tensions between different conceptions of children from parents' and grandparents' generations surface in this context and perhaps indicate colliding values in terms of fostering children's individuality versus teaching children to integrate into a group.

Ironically, however, the strategies that supposedly encourage emotions and validate them are more about defusing them or dampening their felt immediacy: Verbalization, using “peace wands” or other material items to encourage calm, thinking about consequences and alternatives are all ways that both parents and children learn to defuse emotion and rationalize during power struggles with peers and adults. (Hoffman 2013: 83)

Furthermore, the questions posed by Chapman as to whether NVC is itself a subtle form of violence arise not only regarding the speech rule, but also regarding labelling emotions felt by the child. As Hoffmann suggests, labelling emotions on behalf of the child represents an increased governing of children’s emotions, as they are told by the parent what they are feeling (Hoffman 2013: 88), which may not coincide with what they really feel, and they may also be prevented from choosing *not* to say what they feel (Hoffman 2009: 21). As Furedi observes in *Paranoid Parenting*, parents instructed by experts assume the role of therapists, who begin to guide the child’s emotional world (Furedi 2002: 85-87)¹²⁹.

The importance of managing emotions is also addressed in the media. In ‘Family Makeover: Coaching, Confession and Parental Responsibilisation’ (2014), Dahlstedt and Fejes explore how ‘good’ parents are constructed in TV nanny programmes¹³⁰ in Sweden. They comment on the striking focus on individuals’ emotions in such shows and their therapeutic framework:

The shows devote a large proportion of their time to teaching the participants various ways to deal with, talk about and reflect on emotions. The series appears in other words, like many other reality productions, to be framed by a kind of therapeutic worldview which focuses on the individual and her emotional state, frustrations, anxiety, stress, self-confidence, motivation and self-realisation. (Dahlstedt and Fejes 2014: 6)

Elisa’s account of her visit to the MVB who told her that even when children triggered annoyance, parents had to remain calm made me think of another result of NVC. NVC not only attempts to mitigate negative emotions; it also results in the disembodiment of emotions. While NVC does

¹²⁹ For a wider discussion on the increased governance of children’s emotional lives see Coppock (2011).

¹³⁰ Nanny TV series are a reality TV format which usually transpire in the following way: a trained parent coach visits a family who faces certain struggles relating to *Erziehung*. The coach, usually a woman, observes daily family life and later instructs the parents in order to establish harmony and order. Various such shows exist in different countries such as the UK, Sweden and the US. Germany also had a well-known TV nanny series called *Die Supernanny*, which aired from 2004-2011 and starred trained pedagogue Katharina Saalfrank.

allow parents to verbalise emotions, it seems that those emotions are required to become detached from the body. The expression of anger, frustration or impatience is usually accompanied by body language, such as a certain manner of speaking, tutting, making a face, stamping, slamming a door, shaking a fist or crying, all of which must be suppressed when framing feelings and needs in a positive, neutral way. This was also on Claudia's mind when she wondered in what ways she needed to control her body language and voice when getting impatient with her children in order to avoid transferring violence in a non-verbal way. Furthermore, the question arises of whether children whose parents use the NVC speech rule or attempt to express their feelings in a neutral way but are still expressing anger physically by making an angry face, are receiving a somewhat ambiguous message from their parents.

In the subsequent section, I will discuss discourses on ambivalence and governing emotions encountered in the Pro Juventute parent letters (very likely the most distributed advice literature in Switzerland) as well as during my fieldwork with the MVBs.

Experts' Views on Ambivalence and Managing Undesirable Emotions

As Hoffman points out – and I briefly alluded to this in Chapter 2 – experts' concern about maternal emotions is not new. Historical reviews by various scholars such as Stearns and Stearns (1986) show that authors of childrearing manuals of the twentieth century held mothers' emotions to be possibly harmful to children and made the need for parental self-control explicit (Hoffman 2009: 16). Ambivalence is on the minds of childhood experts in Switzerland, and addressing and monitoring ambivalence as well as providing parents with self-help tools to manage conflicting emotions plays an important part in the prevention of violence against children. Making parents aware of their ambivalence and warning them about the negative consequences of what Parker would call 'unmanageable' ambivalence (Parker 1997: 21) is omnipresent in the Juventute parent letters as well as in the work of MVBs.

During my fieldwork with early childhood experts, but also while analysing Pro Juventute's parent letters, I noticed that parental ambivalence was addressed at different 'stages' of parenthood, beginning in pregnancy. Shila, who worked as a midwife in a public hospital, remarked that during gestation, birth, and the puerperium, feelings of ambivalence came in phases, even if the child was planned. She also vaguely alluded to the role of the environment to 'absorb' ambivalence that – if kept unchecked – could have negative health outcomes for mother and child:

It can be frequently observed in the everyday world of midwives that it [conflicting emotions] is very very very common in the first three months [of pregnancy], of course also afterwards. Some days are rosier than others, but also this – 'Oh, now this child is here, oh my god, what do I do now?' This is very normal and there needs to be an adaptation and if this does not happen on all levels it can lead to the mother or the child becoming ill. Partly, this adaptation takes place through the body, but another part is also that women need tools for it, some more than others. The environment plays a big role here. (Shila, midwife, recorded interview, 15.11.19)

Conflicting Emotions as Helpful Signals

Pro Juventute addresses parental ambivalence and its potential to cause harm to children in eight of the thirteen letters it sends out monthly in the first year of a baby's life (*Elternbrief* 0, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10 and 13). In the first letter entitled *Eltern Werden* ('Becoming parents'), Pro Juventute describes the "emotional rollercoaster" marked by "contradictory feelings" such as "happy, sad, joyous, anxious" towards the arrival of the baby that some parents experience during pregnancy and that may continue after the birth, adding that these emotions are "helpful signals" in our lives that not only show us that something important is happening, but also enable us to "address our needs" (ProJuventute 2018a: 10-11; my translation). In the first few pages of the booklet, Pro Juventute stresses that occasionally being angry, exhausted or sad is normal for a new parent due to the great changes that having a baby entail. Despite deeming "contradictory feelings" normal (ProJuventute 2018a: 10; my translation), Pro Juventute advises parents to ask themselves why they are experiencing these emotions and look for support if needed (*ibid.*). In other letters, Pro Juventute suggests relaying feelings of sadness, anger or exhaustion to a trusted person, but also encourages scheduling an appointment with an expert, such as an MVB or a paediatrician in due course

(ProJuventute 2018b). Pro Juventute mentions the great stress and exhaustion caused by the attempt to combine housework, caring for the baby and taking time for oneself, which seems almost impossible in the first few weeks with a newborn (ProJuventute 2018c: 4f). Here, Pro Juventute is specifically referring to mothers, who still bear the brunt of unpaid care and domestic work, and thereby also alludes to the gendered divisions of labour in Swiss households.

In Letter 5, Pro Juventute dedicates two pages to the “contradictory feelings” (ProJuventute 2018d: 27; my translation) of parents towards their children and parents’ reluctance to admit those feelings to others, fearing that they may be branded ‘bad’ parents if they do. But verbalising those feelings is highly encouraged by the letter’s authors. In this context, they also refer to ambivalence as a catalyst for violence:

At some point many parents encounter a situation in which they – out of desperation and overload – are about to lose control of themselves and hit or shake the baby. If you feel that you are not able to control yourself any more, put your child in its crib to create a distance. Try to calm yourself down. Call a trusted person or the Pro Juventute parent advisor. (ProJuventute 2018d: 27-29; my translation)

The letters sent out in the second and third years of life address negative feelings towards children again and again in connection to the defiance phase which, as discussed, is defined as a universal and important developmental step. On several occasions parents are admonished to never use hitting as disciplinary methods and are reminded that punishing in general is useless, as children cannot understand the consequences of their actions until the age of four (eg. ProJuventute 2018h: 21). Another issue that is brought up in several letters is children’s rights, also in connection to protection against violence. Here, Pro Juventute points out that violence is not only physical but can also be transferred via language such as ranting, accusing, intimidating, threatening, or mocking as well as non-verbal measures such as ignoring a child and its needs. The following example is given of “silent violence” that, if applied in a systematic way, can have the same outcomes as “raw violence” such as hitting, and will have long-term effects on children’s development and wellbeing:

The mother goes on an excursion with two year-old Milan. She has been looking forward to this for a long time. Milan, however, is discontent, he whines and complains. In the

evening the mother is disappointed and in a bad mood and does not want to respond to Milan's chitchat. Thus, she ignores her son's request to read him his favourite story and puts him to bed without their usual night-time ritual. The mother thinks that Milan should notice her grief. (ProJuventute 2018h: 28; my translation)

Milan's mother's inability (or unwillingness) to not take her son's behaviour personally and see it in the context of his developmental stage has an effect on her mood: she is annoyed and disappointed. She wants to relay to Milan that he is the cause of her bad mood by ignoring him, which Pro Juventute defines as a form of violence. Reflecting on and controlling such feelings towards children is thus seen as being of paramount importance in preventing violence in childrearing. As Martin and Macvarish point out in "Towards a "Parenting Regime"" (2021), parents are encouraged to "adopt a distanced view of their child and of their own feelings towards him or her" (Martin and Macvarish 2021).

Another theme that recurred in parents' narratives during our conversations is also brought up by the letters' authors, that is, parents' own upbringing and its effects on their own experiences as a mother or father. Pro Juventute advises parents, especially those who have negative memories of their childhood, to evaluate the treatment they received from their own parents as a child and warns that, in situations of stress, one easily resorts to internalised experiences or behaviours unwillingly. Expert counselling is recommended for those parents who cannot come to terms with their own parents' childrearing methods (ProJuventute 2018a).

The Defiance Phase and Child Development

During my conversations with MVBs the topic of ambivalence in terms of the apparently opposing emotions (or dispositions) such as joy, love, exhaustion and rage that children 'unleash' in parents came up several times. When discussing the general tasks of an MVB, MVB Olivia told me that she always informs new parents that, from the sixth until the eighth week of life, newborns have their *Schreipeak* (screaming peak), when statistically, they are the least calm and cry the most. She cautioned parents that, during this time, there was a danger that they might reach their limit and

shake the baby: “I warn them about this anger they may experience for the first time [as a parent]” (recorded interview, 05.12.2019).

MVB Fiona saw the prevention of violence in childrearing as one of her most important tasks as an MVB and noted that parents sometimes admitted they yelled at their children, locked them in their room, or threw them into their bed. She claimed that it was often completely incomprehensible to parents how they could have treated this “little human” who they love so much in this way and that one needed to find the exact reason why the parents had become so angry (interview notes, 15.04.19). Fiona specifically asked parents with toddlers whether their child had entered the defiance phase yet and how they were coping mentally with their child’s behaviour or with sleepless nights. By asking these questions, Fiona hoped to encourage parents’ who had ‘lost self-control’ and yelled at, or spanked their child to confide in her. Fiona taught parents who reported outbursts of anger special communication “tactics” – similar to those of NVC – which would allow them to clearly communicate their emotions. Fiona explained that it was important for parents to notice their own emotional state and their needs so that “they did not end up losing themselves” (ibid.). Fiona suggested that if parents only catered to their children’s needs, they would eventually find themselves overloaded, which, in turn, could result in them inappropriately handling their children.

Informing parents about their children’s development and mental capacities according to their age was seen as another effective way to prevent parents’ outbursts of anger. Some MVBs opined that parental anger and frustration triggered by children’s’ behaviour was also caused by parents’ lack of knowledge pertaining to children’s brain development. Here, reminding parents that their child was not mentally capable of seeking to provoke them with annoying behaviour, or that their child was not able to communicate its needs verbally yet, and therefore ‘acted out’, was seen as an appropriate measure to reduce anger and encourage *Bedürfnisorientiertheit* (being needs-oriented) in the sense that parents could observe their child’s behaviour and try to figure out why it may be acting defiant and address the need behind it:

Parents see their child as a little adult and must learn that the child does not mean it in a bad way, and that their child does not want to annoy them, and that they then [when confronted with certain behaviour perceived as defiant] must address the child's needs. (MVB Anna, recorded interview, 08.05.19)

Often it is the problem of us adults, not the problem of the child. The child wants to say something but is not able to. Very frequently [parents] declare: 'I asked the child why he is doing this but he won't say anything'. [Then I must] show that he [the child] cannot verbalise it, he does not know himself, but there is a reason behind it. A human is not fundamentally evil and just hurts its loved ones. Frequent topics are new siblings and then [older siblings] start to hit the new sibling. Then I try to calm the parents down and show them how it might feel for the child at that moment. This is one aspect. Plus, it's the development, the child, the 'I' is more and more awake (...) the defying, testing boundaries is part of the development. A child that does not do it would be abnormal. (...) The question is, how do I deal with this as adult? (MVB Rita, recorded interview, 10.05.19)

MVB Nina had a poster in her consultation room which showed the Synchronising Sphere Model by psychologist and coach Markus Jensch, which I had also spotted in other MVB centres. She used this model, which consists of two spheres that have red and green areas to demonstrate to parents which practices were appropriate (the green area inside the sphere listed practices, such showing interest, being sensitive, motivating, listening) when dealing with defiant children, and which practices were not recommended, because they were coercive and did not foster cooperation skills in children (the red area inside the sphere for example listed practices like coercing, forcing, smooth-talk, blindsiding). Defiant behaviour, according to Nina, was really just about a child wanting to become independent but being restricted in its autonomy by the mother. In reference to the poster, MVB Nina explained:

One enters the red area very quickly, one forces and coerces a little bit, and overlooks [children]. The red terms are no good any more. One must take care to stay in the green area, and this requires much, much more time, many, many more discussions – one also must be up for it, and not be too tired. It's also up to the mood of the mother and the child. I do notice the more mothers remain calm and react in a relaxed manner, the better it works with defiant children at the age of three. (MVB Nina, recorded interview, 28.05.19)

Addressing children's needs during the defiance phase the way MVB Nina suggested sounded like a time- and emotionally-intensive endeavour that required parents to maintain discipline and patience. Furthermore, it was dependent on factors that might be outside parents' control. MVB

Nina considered getting enough sleep – something that can be hard to obtain as a parent of small children – taking enough time, having the right attitude and a calm state of mind to be especially important when dealing with children in the defiance phase. Parents who work full time or have several children may just not be able to invest a lot of time and energy to stay in the ‘green area’ of the synchronizing model, however.

In January 2021 I attended an online talk about the defiance phase entitled *Trotzen – ein wichtiger Entwicklungsschritt* (Defiance – an important developmental step) organised by Zürich City MVB. Putting on online events was novel territory for the MVB at that time and had been specifically introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic. Why the MVB decided to ‘go online’ during Covid still needs to be explored, but during the pandemic there were several awareness campaigns about children being at risk of experiencing violence by their parents during the lockdowns. The fact that the MVB chose the topic defiance phase for one of their first online talks was certainly not a coincidence.

Three other mothers apart from me took part in the online talk, so we were rather a small group, which showed that the MVB’s online presence had not yet attracted many clients. We were invited to introduce ourselves and say briefly whether our children had already entered the defiance phase. In the first part of the talk – accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation that showed pictures of children who were throwing tantrums – the MVB explained the importance of this phase for developing a sense of self, during which a child learns not only to become independent, but also to deal with negative feelings. She remarked that she hoped no parent was spared from this phase due to its significance for a child’s individual development and because children acted with the greatest defiance towards people with whom they had a “good attachment”. She added, “You can consider yourself lucky if your child defies you, because this means that it is securely attached to you”.

The second part of the talk revolved around practical tips regarding the proper handling of children as well as oneself during this phase. The MVB emphasised that patience with children –

whose point of view parents should try to understand – was key: “Try to put yourself in your child’s shoes – how does it feel? Imagine how it feels if nothing works out, how frustrating this would be!” Thereby, the MVB alluded to the fact that children at this age are sometimes determined to do things, such as dressing themselves, that they are not yet capable of, which can be the cause of a tantrum. She advised that parents should give their children more freedom, take their wants and needs seriously, and leave enough time to do things, because this would make their children more content and more cooperative. Distracting children during tantrums or offering them alternatives if a tantrum was caused by a ‘no’, such as “No, you cannot walk on this wall now, but we can jump in this puddle over there”, was given as an example of how to defuse a tantrum. While distracting children in order to dissolve a tantrum diverts from the idea that children should live through emotions or that parents should not negate their children’s feelings, it presents another form of dispelling undesirable emotions like anger in children.

The MVB also discussed inadequate practices that should never be applied, such as using “empty threats”, saying that parents should be consistent with their children. Violence, the MVB emphasised, was “taboo”. The MVB appealed to parents to remove themselves before resorting to violent practices and informing their children: “I am leaving the room now; I cannot handle it any more”, and then suggested that parents should do something that calmed them down, such as making a phone call. If a situation got out of hand, a ‘debriefing’ of the event during the bedtime ritual was extremely important for the child to digest a conflict. Here, parents should admit to the child that they did not know what to do, or ask a child what it would have needed from them in that situation. The MVB suggested that parents could also speak through a plush animal or a doll to review a conflict and reflect on the reasons that had caused the conflict, specifically in relation to the mother’s state of mind: “The doll can say: ‘Oh, you and Mummy had a big fight; Mummy yelled loudly. Maybe she was tired, or what do you think? Why do you think she behaved that way?’” Here, not only the significance of the reflection on and verbalisation of emotions is made

central again, but also an admission on the mother's side that she was helpless or unable to read her child's needs in a certain situation.

The MVB concluded the practical part of the session with the advice to take a cute picture of one's child. Looking at the picture as well as recalling positive interactions at the end of the day could help parents to remind themselves of all the things their child had already learnt. This could put parents in a better mood after a difficult day (field notes, 28.01.2021). The MVB's proposal can be interpreted as a tool for parents to 'safely mitigate' (Parker 1997: 21) ambivalence through love after challenging, anger-provoking interactions.

MVB Olivia noted that ambivalence was a topic many of her clients brought up during consultations and that it was important they had the MVB as a space where they could give voice to this. Still, it was her task to ponder and evaluate whether reports of ambivalence indicated that a child was in danger: "When do I have a bad feeling? When may I have to query if another measure must be implemented, [when should I] talk to the father or announce a home visit? A little bit in this direction, but without judging too quickly, but so one could still hear a cry for help" (MVB Olivia, recorded interview, 05.12.19). Accounts of ambivalence thus resulted in MVB Olivia's acting in an alert and careful manner in order to assess whether a parent might pose a risk to a child.

Olivia held that her own experiences as a mother were essential to her ability to assure mothers that ambivalence was normal. While she did not want to "say it too loudly", Olivia thought that having children oneself was "a must" for an MVB, as only mothers could understand what raising children really entailed on an emotional and organisational level: "One does everything, but it is still not right. Explaining and normalising these feelings for clients is more authentic if one is a mother oneself... One takes the client seriously and supports them. Parents feel this" (ibid.).

MVB Tina acknowledged the extreme burden of parents under today's conditions. In her view, parents often neglected their own needs to focus on those of their children. However, she thought that staying true to one's emotions was important for parents' wellbeing:

There is so much information, one must know everything, one must have everything. My child must be well and your own needs slip in the background so that you are not well yourself any more. This represents a change – a few decades ago, it did not matter how the child was doing, this is how it was at home, there were rules. The child either played along or did not. If the child did not play along then there was trouble, either in a physical way or yes... Today one makes sure: ‘Oh god, the child must be well so that it can develop and flourish’. And that’s great! But one should not forget one’s own needs, so that one does not completely give up on oneself. The child is only doing well if you yourself are doing well. One must stay authentic. It is OK if one rants, it is OK if one has to yell sometimes, one is also allowed to be sad and to start crying and this is completely normal, this is a part of being a young parent. (MVB Tina, recorded interview, 05.11.19)

Like MVB Oliva, MVB Tina referred to her own experiences as a mother. She observed that her children infuriated her at least once a day and described to me how she relayed this to friends on the phone – which represented a shift from her point of view as an expert to that of a fellow mother and her own experiences of childrearing.

On the one hand, experts’ discourses – but also mothers’ narratives – on conflicting emotions, the defiance phase, tantrums, conflicts and ‘power struggles’ are very much child-centred in the sense that reading and addressing children’s needs is made a priority, while parents’ emotions and needs are pushed to the back of the line. Authors of advice literature, but also experts, call on parents to ‘work’ on themselves, to reflect on their state of mind and to regulate their feelings, rather than attempting to ‘work’ on their children’s behaviour. On the other hand, some MVBs as well as some parents also stress the importance of ‘self-care’ on the side of parents, who should, for example, not give themselves up completely or should make more time for themselves in order to be less stressed so that their children can be met with more patience. While child-centeredness versus ‘self-care’ could be taken as yet another example of the ‘cultural contradictions of motherhood’ (Hays 1996), ‘care of the self’, according to Foucault (Foucault 1988), is another instrument of technologies of self that, in the case of parenting, could allow for positive self-transformation in the form of, for example, being able to be more relaxed or needs-oriented in the defiance phase. In this context, however, the question remains of how much ‘room’ for self-care

there is for parents who cannot rely on relatives or nannies when they need a break in order to cater to their own needs.

Cultivating ‘Docile Emotions’?

This chapter has explored the governing and re-shaping of the self through the lenses of parenting and managing conflicting emotions. As such, it contributes a special angle to the literature on self-work and governmentality inspired by a Foucauldian framework. The case studies provided practical examples of how parents govern themselves and the ‘techniques’ experts offer for conducting the parental self at home. Parents’ accounts highlighted the relational aspects of technologies of self: the aspiration to ‘know oneself’, and ‘disclosure of self’ through verbalisation (Foucault 1988) was tightly connected to interactions with children as well as memories of one’s childhood and relationship with one’s own parents. Children played a central part when it came to shaping their parents’ self, which of course is also in line with what Foucault writes about the relational aspects of power. In light of the idea of ‘parental determinism’ (Furedi 2002, 2013, 2014) which drives many early childhood policies, programmes and interventions however, this insight shows that the parent-child relationship is highly complex and bilateral and that children may ‘steer’ their parents as much as their parents ‘steer’ them.

Against this background, the findings presented in this chapter also contribute to Parenting Culture Studies and the aspiration to investigate what influential notions in scholarship, such as ‘intensive motherhood’ or ‘parental determinism’, “capture about the emphasis now placed on ‘parenting’” (Lee 2014b: 6). Specifically, Hays’ suggestion that modern mothering is intensive in terms of the ‘emotional energy’ invested in children because of the strong focus placed on figuring out and addressing their needs ahead of their mothers’ (Hays 1996: 115, 157) was looked at from a novel perspective by exploring parental self-work in the context of NVC and other tools proposed by ‘experts of subjectivity’ to enhance parent-child relationships. Parents and experts

alike presumed parents' ability to govern conflicting emotions, their expression and reactions to children's emotions appropriately as being crucial for preventing violence and ensuring children's 'natural' development as well as their future health, wellbeing and success, which adds another dimension to why 'intensive mothering' is emotionally absorbing.

While Parker and other authors suggest that maternal ambivalence has been made a taboo topic, it is not silenced in the discourse of early childhood experts in Switzerland. They address its existence and ill-effects on children's physical and mental health quite clearly, as shown in the parent letters or the work of the MVB. Emotions, specifically parental emotions, are seen as being potentially dangerous and prone to inducing violent behaviour towards children, and thus need to be strictly controlled. While the experience of supposedly 'contradictory' feelings and sentiments is portrayed as a normal part of parenthood, it is construed as something that must be subjected to self-regulatory technologies as well as expert counsel. In this context, presenting sadness or anger as being 'contradictive' to one's love for a child might represent a powerful means to persuade parents that expert guidance in this matter is urgently needed.

Experts have devised several strategies for parents aimed at 'shaping' the conduct of the self at home, such as introspection, self-disclosure, speech rules, breathing techniques and 'self-care'. Pro Juventute suggests that parents should admit their feelings to trusted others and seek expert counsel before losing self-control in order to prevent resorting to harmful practices. As such, parents' emotions are a target for biopolitical interventions of the state seeking to guard children's health. Governing parents' emotions is directly intertwined with the state's biopolitical endeavours to maintain children's health and wellbeing and to ensure 'natural' child development. I have highlighted experts' concerns regarding the defiance phase as a trigger for parental anger and a potential cause for the inappropriate handling of children, such as physical and verbal violence or coercion. Experts stress the vital importance of this phase for a child's healthy development of its 'self', so parents must practice self-control. Additionally, children's temper tantrums are evaluated as a sign of a secure attachment, which renders tantrums as something

positive, the result of a good relationship with their child, which further encourages parents to practice ‘sangfroid’ during the defiance phase.

The shaping of ‘docile emotions’¹³¹ is on the agenda of (state-affiliated) experts, whose recommendations are informed by therapeutic frameworks as well as the newest findings of child and brain development, which constitute the conduct of the parental self at home that – ideally – keeps calm when faced with a temper tantrum. Regulating emotions transpired according to guidelines set by advice books authors or professionals working face-to-face with parents who claim expertise in child development. Insights on child development promises to help parents make sense of their children’s behaviours and prescribes the proper reactions to temper tantrums. They provide techniques for regulating and appropriately expressing emotions, such as NVC, through which emotions are verbalised in a ‘neutral’ way but are not supposed to be expressed in a ‘physical’ or directive manner. Through this, a parent is compelled to monitor and work on socially ‘undesirable’ feelings that are deemed prone to induce practices seen as inappropriate or harmful.

While there is a strong focus on emotions, at the same time the discourses surrounding emotions are marked by a kind of ‘flattening’ of parents’ emotional worlds and parent-child interactions in terms of their nuance and complexity. At least in the context of NVC, emotions are required to fit certain labels and are presumed to be connected to a specific ‘need’; ideally, ‘undesirable’ emotions are not displayed bodily, but verbalised neutrally. Feelings like anger, frustration or sadness are held to be contradictive of ‘love’. As discussed, however, love as a disposition can be painful, ‘heavy’ or burdensome, and is implicated in many different feelings, even being angry or frustrated.

As well as gaining insights into why some parents read guidance material and how they seek to apply the advice in practice, reviewing advice material like the parent letters and the *Das*

¹³¹ In *Discipline and Punish* (1995), Foucault introduced the term ‘docile body’ to describe the effects of ‘discipline’ as a specific technology of power on an individual’s body. This posits that the individual body becomes more controllable and productive through various disciplinary practices and thereby more adapted to accomplish the tasks and aims of modern industrial economies.

Gewünschteste Wunschkind website and, in conjunction with those, discourses of parents and MVBs, highlighted current concerns surrounding parenting: informing oneself about child development, ensuring its ‘natural occurrence’ and, in connection therewith, preventing violence in childrearing in the form of coercive practices – physical, verbal and non-verbal. These concerns are echoed in public policy documents. The Federal Office for Public Health, for example, deems the experience of violence and emotional neglect in early childhood risk factors for diseases such as diabetes or obesity as well as social problems that reach into adulthood and can “significantly shorten life” (BAG 2018b: 22; my translation).

Coercive practices, conflicts or so-called ‘power struggles’, a term that frames the ‘fluctuations’ of emotions in the parent-child relationship as a matter of power, are eagerly avoided. Both (some) parents and experts seemed to have subscribed to a notion of the child as a natural, authentic self who is wronged and distorted by coercive ‘domination’, which is why children’s ‘natural’ dispositions, impulses and needs are frequently evoked. According to Foucault, however, the self is always constituted by relations of power, so the practices that parents use are never outside power, even if they are defined as ‘nonviolent’.

Distracting children, diffusing tantrums by speech rules, or suggesting to a child that it is experiencing certain emotions and then defining the needs behind them to mitigate these emotions and foster cooperation equally represents a form control that is simply more ‘subtle’. Here, Lee’s (2017) reading of guidance book author Benjamin Spock (1946) becomes relevant again, as he promoted a different approach to disciplining children in his ‘baby bible’ in the 1940s that he deemed more effective as it made children less hostile and rejecting towards parents’ demands. In contrast to other authors of this time who framed discipline in terms of openly demanding strict obedience, Spock wrote that discipline meant “managing and leading a child successfully” (Spock 1955 quoted in Lee 2017: 67). This entailed making the child less defiant by deciphering its individual needs and understanding its ‘natural’ development, as well as practicing self-control as a parent:

(...) Spock emphasized parental self-control in order for parents to become more qualified as good caretakers. Spock demanded that parents cultivate their own emotional maturity because parents needed to be in control for the sake of their baby or child. His major objective was to increase parents' sense of control, which would make their real control over children more effective by preventing their situation from being uncontrollable. By reducing potential dangers that might cause hostile or defiant reactions in a baby, Spock wanted parents to focus on their own control. (Lee 2017: 30f)

Some of the practices parents or experts described using to avoid or ease children's temper tantrums or diffuse 'struggles for control' are akin to those proposed by Spock and are also motivated by the wish to induce children's 'natural' willingness to cooperate and make conflicts more controllable or less 'dangerous' by diffusing strong emotions in the child and in oneself.

Governing parental emotions is tightly connected to power relations with experts as well as those in the social environment such as neighbours, who, as in Elisa's example, may 'keep their ears open' to events in family homes. Neighbours' comments and gossip can have a disciplinary effect on parents who, after having been 'exposed', may attempt to control the volume of their voice when angered. More importantly, however, it is also connected to the (power) relationships between parents and children. Being a mother had made Claudia and Agathe think about 'authority' and its possible misuse in the position of power which they as adults occupy over their children. The 'cultural trope' of the power struggle between parents and children, coined as a 'scramble' for control (Hoffman 2013), or the defiance phase, during which children develop more autonomy and a sense of self, further illustrate the relational aspects of emotions and power and their interweaving in the context of parenting.

Although experts such as the parent letter's authors suggest seeking counsel when experiencing ambivalence, the women included in the case studies did not search for 'tools' or professional assistance only after this was suggested by an expert¹³². It seemed that this was driven by the mothers' concerns for their children's wellbeing, which of course is also informed by notions of 'good' parenting that promote child-centredness. My findings also raise important questions for

¹³² In Elisa's example, the MVB suggested that Elisa needed to get help because she could not stay calm when her son 'acted up'. However, Elisa was already in the process of finding help when she consulted the MVB from whom she hoped she would get some input.

further investigations relating to the question of how (governing) emotions impact on (power) relations between parents and the state, parents and their children, but also between parents and their older relatives, such as their own parents and grandparents, whose practices are deemed inefficient or even harmful, because they ignore the newest insights on child development.

Conclusion

When a newborn experiences the world as a safe space, by receiving nourishment and emotional attention, the anti-stress gene is activated. It supports the child when dealing with stress-inducing situations. If the anti-stress gene remains deactivated, this has consequences for later life. Chronic stress in the first years of life encourages mental and physical diseases and increases the potential for aggression. (Flyer Frühe Kindheit by the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health; BAG 2018a: 2; my translation)

I found the quote above on a flyer from the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health (BAG) on prevention and health promotion in early childhood. It claims to draw on insights of epigenetics research¹³³ as an instrument to guide parents' relationship with their baby which, if formed properly, the BAG claims, has a beneficial effect on the child's later development. This quote exemplifies the key issues explored in this book: firstly, the ways the Swiss state attempts to 'govern' parents of young children by drawing on disciplines assigned the cultural capital of science, and the concerns that guide this governance, and secondly, the so-called 'intensification' (Hays 1996) of childrearing, which has become an expert-led, time-, and resource-intensive and emotionally-absorbing activity, while parents' practices are deemed to directly determine the future of their child.

This research was conducted in Switzerland. While the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health's flyer talks about the positive effects of 'nourishment' and 'emotional attention' on newborns in general, the findings presented in this book cannot be easily transferred to other settings but are specific to Switzerland. In most European countries, such as the neighbouring country Germany, there are no such institutions as the mothers' and fathers' counselling (the MVB) or advice material distributed nationwide like the parent letters¹³⁴. The (power) relations between

¹³³ Epigenetics study how the environment, experiences or behaviours impact on how genes are expressed in individuals. In regard to the causal relationship between early childhood experiences and the 'anti-stress gene', the BAG refers to publications by Spork (2017) and Bauer (2006).

¹³⁴ There are some places like Berlin, where parents also receive so-called *Elternbriefe* (parent letters) from the *Arbeitskreis Neue Erziehung* (ANE). They are however more like flyers and not little booklets like Pro Juventute's *Elternbriefe* and they are not disseminated nationwide, see <https://www.ane.de/elternbriefe>, accessed 02.05.2022.

the state and affiliated experts and families look very different in other contexts, in which governments do not invest in providing parents with a 'pastor' (Foucault 2009: 126f). In light of the prevailing family, early childhood and health policies, Switzerland could be described as an advanced Foucauldian regime. As an economically secure Western nation, it diverts considerable resources towards the 'voluntary' disciplining of families, while maintaining a neoliberal 'hands-off' approach when it comes to supporting families financially and logistically.

At no time are parents more encouraged to make use of counselling and health services than during the early years of their offspring's existence. Early childhood, thought of as a seminal phase that will directly influence an individual's condition in later life, is a concern of Swiss government institutions, who have an interest in ensuring the health of future citizens. Thus, the condition, behaviour and practices of parents during early childhood is subject to preventative expert monitoring.

The Swiss state provides parents of small children with cost-free and ideally 'seamless' expert guidance for up to five years: prenatal and postnatal care from gynaecologists, maternity nurses, lactation consultants and midwives whose care is covered by health insurance policies until 56 days after the birth; distribution of advice material tailored to the child's developmental stages for up to four years; and finally, an individualised 'accompaniment' from the local mothers' and fathers' advisor (MVB) until the child turns five. This early childhood service has been active for over 100 years and reaches over half of all new families. Policy makers warrant easy access to expert counselling by providing the MVB service free of charge. On top of that, policy makers ensure that the MVB receives notice of every new birth in their community, so that every family can be contacted and informed of the MVB's services. By encouraging the use of the service, the state invests in the "risk management" of families with young children (Vandenbroeck et al. 2011): "The obsession with controlling 'risky' childhoods has shifted the emphasis from a focus on 'problems' to a focus on the prevention of *potential* 'problems'; promoting the dispersal of discipline through the 'universal' approach to child welfare" (Coppock 2011: 393).

During the first half of the twentieth century – in Switzerland as late as the 1970s and '80s – eugenics in the form of reproductive interventions such as forced abortions, sterilisations or marriage bans on mentally ill people were seen as a measure to ‘solve’ social problems in many Western states (Gerodetti 2006; Huonker 2015; Wecker 2012). In Switzerland, the state-sponsored removal of children from families perceived as unfit to parent, such as poor families, single mothers or the Yenish minority, was not just an intervention in the biological and social reproduction of certain groups of parents, but also aimed to improve the population (Furrer et al. 2014; Gallati and Hauss 2014; Huonker 2014).

European states have moved away from coercive child protection measures targeting marginalised groups, which marked many welfare interventions up to the 1980s, and have since taken up an ‘empowering’ approach to governing families that centres on risk prevention (Vandenbroeck et al. 2011: 71). Rather than introducing invasive child protection interventions and expanding welfare measures for those whose early childhood years did not set them on the ‘right track’ (BAG 2018a: 2), the state deems a ‘prophylactic’ and friendly expert accompaniment more effective. This accompaniment is aimed at both preventing, or recognising and addressing ‘negative influences’ before they can cause long-term problems for the child, and educating parents in child development (BAG 2018a, 2018b). As Rose points out in *Governing the Soul*, educating parents about the sequences of child development allows the governing of families “not through coercion or the disabling of personal familial responsibility, but through the wishes, hopes, and fears of the responsible, autonomous family” (Rose 1990b: 199).

Governing Families Through the Pastor

To investigate how the state seeks to govern parents in Switzerland, I have examined the MVB, a state-funded early childhood service that is present in every commune and employs advisors with special training, who work face-to-face with parents. I have studied the MVB in detail – its overall

mission as an institution and the counselling practices of individual advisors, the “instruments of power”(Foucault 1995: 184) they draw on and the concerns that drive their guidance, which have also provided some important insights into broader social issues and trends in civil society and state institutions.

The MVBs exercise a power that is both individualising and centralising. The MVBs’ individualising power rests on building a trustful, long-term relationship with clients that allows for insights into ‘conscience and conduct’ through hierarchical observation, examination, inducing ‘confessions’, encouraging the verbalisation of inner ‘truths’, and psychological ‘tests’. This, in turn, makes advice (or disciplining) tailored to the individual clients’ ‘needs’ possible. At the same time, the MVB’s work allows it to gather data at the population level, so this early childhood service makes both anatomo- and biopolitical interventions possible (Foucault 1978).

The MVB’s aspirations and tasks are clearly of a pastoral nature. In an article in the magazine *undKinder*, Tinguely and Berger, two MVBs working in the Bernese Oberland, deem MVBs “specialists for the physical, mental and the *seelische* development of infants and toddlers” (Tinguely and Berger 2009: 37)¹³⁵. From a pastoral power perspective, the use of the term ‘*seelisch*’, which translates as ‘spiritually’ or ‘concerning the soul’ is interesting. The MVB as an expert on the child’s ‘soul’ and its development provides the MVB with an almost spiritual authority – very close to that of a religious pastor.

My discussion of the MVB’s accompaniment has highlighted how disciplinary techniques developed within the Christian pastorate serve as “templates for governing conduct in other spheres” today (Mutch 2016: 268). Pastoral power ‘officials’ take the shape of, for example, MVBs, who act as guiding ‘pastors’ and embrace as well as define the proper concerns of individual clients for the benefit of the whole community (Foucault 1982: 784; 2009: 126; Nadesan 2008: 24).

¹³⁵ The same phrasing can be found on the MVB Zürich City homepage. See, https://www.stadt-zuerich.ch/sd/de/index/familien_kinder_jugendliche/beratung/Muetter_und_Vaeterberatung.html, accessed 06.04.2022.

Modern modes of pastoral power are orientated towards salvation in the mortal world, such as wellbeing, longevity, economic security or safety (Foucault 1982). The MVBs' governing of parents is largely concerned with providing them with 'appropriate' information regarding care and development to enable them to make the 'right' decisions to maintain their child's health and wellbeing – an aim that the MVBs share with parents and the state. Strengthening parents' competences in order to lead them to a state of 'autonomy' in regard to childrearing is another concern of advisors, which many MVBs described as giving parents 'security' or 'confidence'. Here, instilling mothers' trust in their own 'intuitive' or 'instinctive' competences played a major role and, as discussed, involved inviting (some) mothers to self-reflect and self-search about what felt 'right'. For state-affiliated experts, 're-connecting' mothers with maternal 'instincts' constituted a means to enhance families' 'self-governance' in accordance with the liberal doctrine of autonomy and responsibility (Rose 1985, 1991), which gives the notion of 'maternal instinct' a whole new significance.

My fieldwork with the MVBs led to another key insight: that transformations regarding notions about the 'proper' raising of children and practices deemed appropriate to govern parents through state-affiliated experts show certain parallels. As discussed from a historical perspective through advice material in Chapter 2, guidebook authors' ideas regarding children's proper disciplining started changing considerably in the 1940s in the US context. Benjamin Spock, whose book was later published in Switzerland, was one of the first authors who suggested that parents should use what Lee (2017) calls a more 'subtle disciplining' of children, an approach that was also found when exploring contemporary parents' and experts' ideas regarding the appropriate way of handling tantrums or conflicts (see Chapter 5). 'Subtle discipline' is marked by a somewhat 'hidden' control maintained through a positive, friendly disposition intended to spark children's 'natural' cooperativeness and by evaluating the child's individual development, observing and addressing needs, verbalising emotions felt by the child and oneself, or distracting children to diffuse outbursts of anger. This approach stands in stark contrast to the disciplining of children recommended by

guidebook authors pre-Spock¹³⁶, which was characterised by direct and coercive measures, or even physical punishment, aimed at instilling obedience.

The techniques deemed appropriate for monitoring and shaping parents' childrearing practices by state-affiliated experts have also become more 'subtle' and – at least in certain aspects – resemble modern notions of the appropriate disciplining of children, such as the MVBs' deep observation of clients, assessing their needs, and sparking 'cooperativeness' through positive, trustful and non-patronising guidance. In this context, going back to MVB Nina's quote at the beginning of Chapter 3 is especially illuminating: it seems to suggest that even some MVBs themselves recognise the parallels between children's and parents' appropriate 'disciplining'. Interestingly, MVB Nina compared her way of counselling parents to the way "we should treat children" when she stressed her gentle and encouraging way of speaking with parents (MVB Nina, recorded interview, 28.05.19, see Chapter 3).

As discussed, in Switzerland (and other Western countries) up to the 1980s the ways that state institutions and affiliated foundations, such as Pro Juventute, governed families were often marked by repressive and coercive practices (Vandenbroeck et al. 2011) that targeted marginalised parents whose custody rights could be swiftly removed. In contrast, removing a child from its family today is supposed to be a last resort and the reasons for, and procedures of child removal have changed. While child removal is of course considered in cases of abuse or neglect, families who are perceived as not being able to provide 'ideal' conditions for their offspring to thrive due to, for example poverty, low education, or a lack of sensitivity, are usually provided with close expert accompaniment. This accompaniment is framed as 'cooperation' with parents, aimed at 'empowering' or 'enabling' clients and supporting them on their childrearing journey. In contrast to the early twentieth century, the MVB does not specifically target working-class mothers and it

¹³⁶ Of course, not all guidebook authors after Spock have recommended a more subtle approach to disciplining children – Haarer's book *Die Deutsche Mutter und Ihr Erstes Kind* (1934), which was very popular during the National Socialist era, for example, was reprinted up to the 1980s and was characterised by a strong authoritarian approach.

is not devised as a place for ‘problem families’ to go to receive help and be ‘reformed’. As a preventive service, it aspires to reach *all* families in one way or another, as *all* parents are conceived of as potentially presenting a risk to their child’s development.

The MVB is a (usually) voluntary service that promises to improve families’ lives and children’s futures. The advisor intends to be a benevolent figure who seeks a friendly and durable relationship with families. Similar to how parents are encouraged to observe, evaluate and address their children’s needs, my research found that advisors observed their clients’ individual needs and monitored their ‘development’ as mothers; they evaluated whether clients needed a counselling style that was mainly reassuring or more instructive, prescriptive counselling, or further interventions, such as psychotherapy or regular home visits. Women who showed a lack of sensitivity or insecurity in reading and addressing their infants’ needs were not ‘punished’ or ‘condemned’. Rather, some MVBs described introducing ‘soft’ measures, such as baby massage courses, which were supposed to ‘transform’ clients positively by motivating them to dedicate time to observe and emotionally engage with their baby and to ‘imitate’ and eventually incorporate the MVB’s display of sensitivity and proper communication with an infant in a friendly, calm atmosphere. By introducing ‘soft measures’ like this, of course, more observation and monitoring of the mother’s ‘development’ can take place without making clients feel too controlled and regulated.

Having this kind of relationship to families is essential for the MVBs’ exercise of pastoral power: clients are more likely to cooperate and less likely to resist and the MVB does not have to adjust her disciplinary practices. The majority of MVB interlocutors had some experience of commissioned-based work, where their voluntary accompaniment was transformed into involuntary counselling assigned by child protection services. Many MVBs expressed a somewhat critical attitude towards this work, and some even seemed uncomfortable with it. It not only contradicted the normally voluntary nature of their accompaniment as well as their general ‘style’ of advice-giving, but also posed some challenges when it came to gaining a ‘real’ insight into clients’

‘conscience and conduct’, which of course makes setting families on course to ‘salvation’ (Foucault, 1982, p. 783f) more complicated.

Exploring resistance to pastoral power has illustrated that the MVB’s ‘power-over’ and ‘power-to’ depended on the quality of the relationship with the client, which enhances her ability to monitor and steer parental conduct on a long-term basis significantly. Clients can choose to ‘follow’ a certain MVB who they deem more likable and competent than other advisors or they can decide to terminate counselling altogether, if they perceive the MVB’s guidance as unhelpful or too ‘pushy’. Against this background, perhaps the relationship between MVB and client could also be thought of in terms of ‘discipleship’: “The relation between expert and client is structured by a hierarchy of wisdom, it is held in place by a wish for truth and certainty, and it offers the disciple the promise of self-understanding and self improvement” (Rose 1991: 96). If the MVB cannot ‘deliver’ on what Rose describes as the disciple’s aim when consulting a certain expert, the relationship between advisor and client ends (if not formed in the context of a commission by child protection services), which highlights the limits of pastoral power and maybe also the more ‘subtle’ approach to governing parents.

Emotions and Power Relationships

When childcare services in Switzerland took root in the first half of the twentieth century, expert guidance – at least according to the historical sources available – mostly revolved around hygiene, care and proper diet in order to curb high child mortality rates. As the quote found on the BAG flyer above indicates, however, the state’s concerns regarding parenting have moved into the emotional dimension (Kanieski 2010). This was also detectable in the MVBs practice, which constitutes another key insight of this book.

Children’s bodies are still a major focus of the MVBs: they are monitored in terms of growth, mental and motor development, or signs of neglect and abuse. Parents are still educated

about care-related matters, while making parents aware about the sequences of child development has also become an important focus in recent years. However, a central concern of experts like the MVBs is the emotional state of mothers themselves and the emotional quality of the mother-child relationship, which was evaluated in terms of attachment behaviour and addressed through anatomo-political measures. As discussed, experts' concerns surrounding mothers' emotional engagement and commitment to their infants is not new, but the ways mothers are expected to display this have transformed significantly and have intensified. This is also connected to the influence of psychoanalysis and developmental psychology, which stress the utter importance of needs-oriented childrearing based on the developmental stage of the individual child. In light of the ubiquitous discourse surrounding children's needs, a mothers' sensitivity – which enables her to read her child's needs and fulfil them consistently and reliably – is seen as a prime determinant of the childrearing outcome – and thus a major focus of the MVB's work. As Rose notes: “Psychoanalysis was to become a theory of development, and, what is more, a theory of the role of the mother in the development of the adjusted and maladjusted ego” (Rose 1990b: 164).

Governing maternal emotions did not only focus on enhancing mothers' sensitivity and thus establishing secure attachment between mother and child, but also involved ‘safely mitigating’ (Parker 1997, 2005) maternal ambivalence. Parents' experiences of childrearing were marked by ambivalence produced by mixed emotions towards children or care work and opposing needs and desires from the parents' and children's sides. As elaborated in Chapter 4, juggling and negotiating these conflicts in intimate relationships shaped by gendered power relations, divisions of labour and other political and sociocultural factors must be a core experience of rearing children. However, notions of how ‘good’ mothers care for their children, how they feel about their children and the tasks and ‘sacrifices’ involved in their upbringing, which are ‘tinged’ by the intensive mothering ideology, impinge on the experience of ambivalence and in turn on the management of maternal emotions.

In this context, it also became apparent that the desire to achieve positive self-transformation in order to conform to a certain kind of parental subject with a calm state of mind, and undertaking the disciplinary practices necessary for this, are not an individual process (Allen 2011: 52). As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, ‘reverie’ ensuing the experience of ambivalence about oneself took place in the context of emotionally charged (power) relationships with others (parents’ own parents and parents’ children).

Experts like the MVBs, but also the authors of the parent letters intensively engaged in making parents aware that (supposedly) contradictory emotions towards children or childrearing tasks were a normal part of parenthood, but also provided them with ‘tools’ to manage undesirable emotions like anger, which included self-reflection, self-regulation and self-care: “the parent must recognise their own potential as a risk to their child’s development, modifying their behaviour and emotional disposition, in accordance with expert knowledge, to avoid harming the child or to optimise their future” (Martin and Macvarish 2021: 443).

Thus, a major insight of my research was that to a large extent the governing of parenting revolves around emotions, which as discussed in Chapter 5, is tightly connected to the state-affiliated experts’ biopolitical endeavors to prevent violence against children, protect their rights, to assure their needs are met and ensure ‘natural’ development, which was seen as being disturbed by ‘unmanageable ambivalence’ and direct ‘domination’ through caretakers.

As Heany (2011) writes in ‘Emotions and Power: Reconciling Conceptual Twins’, emotions are contained within Foucault’s relational concept of power:

(...) they [emotions] are implicit in much of what he writes, particularly in relation to discipline, bio-power and the normalizing society (Foucault 1977, 1978), as they are exercised on the body they are exercised on the emotions. As such, Foucault’s conception of power as networks of force and strategy which constitute the subject could be conceptualized as producing emotional structures within the individual. (Heaney 2011: 266)

Heaney argues that, despite both concepts being crucial for understanding social and political life, the relationship between emotions and power relations has been neglected by theorists of power:

“(…) if all social relations are seen to imply relations of power then, I contend, they should also be seen to imply relations of emotion: relations of power are emotionally valanced” (Heaney 2011). In his paper, Heaney introduces the work of German sociologist Norbert Elias (2000), who, like Foucault, advocates a relational concept of power in which, however, emotions take “centre stage” (Heaney 2011: 265). In *The Civilizing Process* (2000), first published in 1939, Elias argues that power relations influence individuals’ “emotional habitus” (Heaney 2011: 268), for example, the formation of nation-states in Europe and the structural transformations involved in this process led to a more self-controlled mindset in individuals, who react to others in a more measured and considerate way (Elias 2000).

Mothering, Disciplinary Power and Gender

My research on the governing of parents in Switzerland sheds light on the interlinkages between intensive mothering and disciplinary power, especially in regard to the relations between parents and experts. In ‘Foucault and Familial Power’ (2012), Taylor explores Foucault’s changing perspectives on familial power – the power of, for example, parents over their children – in different publications. In *Psychiatric Power* (2006), originally published in 1974, Foucault suggests that familial power is mainly sovereign: “(…) the family is a sort of cell within which the power exercised is not, as one usually says, disciplinary, but rather of the same type as the power of sovereignty” (Foucault 2006: 79). While the family has been subjected to new technologies of power, its sovereignty over its members remains and it collaborates with disciplinary society. Taylor gives some examples of this collaboration:

For one thing, the family’s sovereign power is essential for inserting family members into disciplinary institutions. The family insists its children go to school, that its sons do military service and that its members go to work each day. When children and spouses fail to do these things, it is often the family that hands them over to disciplinary institutions, consigning them to asylums or taking them to therapy and rehab. (Taylor 2012: 205)

However, this is not true for all families. While many families voluntarily hand over their children to disciplinary institutions like schools, there are also families who refuse to do so. In Germany, for example, where home-schooling is illegal, the media regularly reports about families who defy compulsory school attendance and teach their children at home, which can get them in trouble with child protection services. This also shows that some families only hand over family members to disciplinary institutions because they will be ‘punished’ by state institutions if they fail to do so.

In *Discipline and Punish*, first published in 1975, Foucault suggests that the parent-child relationship may become disciplinary in the future by integrating disciplinary power practices found in external institutions:

(...) one day we should show how intra-familial relations, essentially in the parents-children cell, have become ‘disciplined’, absorbing since the classical age external schemata, first educational and military, then medical, psychiatric, psychological, which made the family the privileged locus of emergence for the disciplinary question of the normal and the abnormal. (Foucault 1995: 215f)

In the later *The History of Sexuality* (1978) Foucault characterises the family as an institution that combines both sovereign and disciplinary power when becoming the target of bio- and anatomopolitical endeavours (Taylor 2012: 207). In *Abnormal* (1999) from 1975, Foucault claims that, in the nineteenth century the family, specifically in the middle and upper classes, became a “medicalized, panoptic, and normalizing entity” (Taylor 2012: 208), which is connected to the emergence of biopolitics. In this new family, parents act as the “instruments of doctors, therapists” and engage in supporting the biopolitical interests of the state (ibid).

Taylor notes that, in light of Foucault’s publications, no clear answer can be given to the question of what kind of power is at work between family members. However, this is not the aim of Taylor’s article. She argues that scholarship should engage instead in deepening the understanding of the family’s ‘history of becoming’, which should be approached genealogically. This, Taylor asserts, allows for “debunking” (Taylor 2012: 215) predominant conceptions of the

family that are political in nature and aim to achieve ‘normalization’. Furthermore, she explains that Foucault’s understanding of familial power was context-specific:

Arguably, Foucault viewed the family as sovereign when he considered it as a patriarchal institution, and biopolitical when he considered maternal power or parental power more generally. In *Psychiatric Power*, when Foucault argues that the family is fundamentally sovereign, and although he does not make this explicit, he is clearly thinking of familial power exclusively as patriarchal and paternal and does not theorize the caretaking role of mothers at all. In contrast, in *The History of Sexuality*, having theorized biopower, Foucault considers the father to have “fallen” and concentrates on the kind of power that both parents, and especially mothers exercise over their children in their role as caregivers. (Taylor 2012: 212)

Even if defining a “single model of power” (Taylor 2012: 201) that characterises the family is impossible, in the context of intensive mothering and the (self)governing of parenting, understanding power relations in families is important. Taylor draws attention to the fact that, in recent decades in the West, the family has legitimised its power “through its ability to produce well-disciplined subjects” (Taylor 2012: 205). Parents who are deemed unable to provide the conditions necessary for children to develop into healthy, normal adults risk losing authority over their children, when the state and its “disciplinary agents” intervene in the family (Taylor 2012: 205). Rose emphasises the role played by the biopolitical promotion of constant, reflexive self-evaluation and self-surveillance which generates families who immanently feel the responsibility to conform to expertise. Rabinow and Rose assert that this has transformed the “home into a machine for health, and the education and solicitation of mothers as ancillary workers in the health care of their children” (Rabinow and Rose 2006: 204).

Rose’s and Rabinow’s idea of mothers as experts’ ‘ancillary workers’ alludes to the gendered power relations inherent in intensive mothering. Mothers are the main clients of MVBs and thus are also the main receivers of guidance and instructions pertaining to their children’s care and *Erziehung*. Especially in Switzerland, as the main caretakers at home, mothers exercise more disciplinary power over their children when implementing the MVB’s advice in order to, for example, regulate a child’s weight or foster a certain developmental step. Experts and other third

parties such as other parents or relatives also may hold mothers more accountable if the disciplinary power she exercises towards her child is not producing the desired effects.

On the one hand, this illustrates the diffusion of governmentality through delegation to various actors (Shin 2016: 305) and the ways family relationships are interwoven with the apparatus of the state. Thus, exploring the ways mothers are 'led' by experts and the effects this has on, for example, the mother-child relationship, helps to show that the modern state is more than "a set of government agencies and functions that are clearly marked off from society at large" and sheds light on "how social relations in institutions such as schools, churches, and families, which are normally thought to lie on the "society" side of the state-society dichotomy, are annexed to the project of domination and governance" (Sharma and Gupta 2006: 45).

On the other hand, however, the evaluation of mothers' practices and their outcomes by third parties other than experts importantly draws attention to the fact that every mother is part of a network of relatives and friends. 'Non-experts', like other mothers at playgrounds or on virtual parenting fora, family members and neighbours also observe and evaluate mothers, give (un)solicited advice or, by telling mothers how they are handling *their* children, give subtle cues on how they believe childrearing is done 'properly'. Hence, notions of 'good' childrearing reach parents through many different channels. The MVBs I met were very aware of this, as they emphasised the advantages of their service compared to the guidance given by non-experts in parents' personal networks or on social media, who, according to the MVBs, did not tailor their advice to a family's specific circumstances or were uninformed about the latest findings on child development.

Gendered power relations in the context of intensive mothering also led back to the feminist critique of Foucault's work – especially his omission of how biopower affects women and men differently (King 2004; Miller 2016). In *Femininity and Domination* (1990), Bartky writes:

Foucault treats the body throughout as if it were one, as if bodily experiences of men and women did not differ and as if men and women bore the same relationship to the characteristic

institutions of modern life. Where is the account of the disciplinary practices that engender the “docile bodies” of women, bodies more docile than the bodies of men? (Bartky 1990: 65)

Bartky gives various examples of disciplinary practices that apply more to women’s bodies than to men’s, such as dieting to produce a body with the ‘right’ shape or make-up routines and “good skin care habits” for a feminine face (Bartky 1990: 69). This observation holds just as well in the context of mothering in early childhood. During pregnancy and the perinatal period, women – in contrast to men – are subjected to regular medical examinations to ensure the health of mother and child. This extends to the postpartum period, when, for example, the mother’s production of milk is monitored and midwives or MVBs look out for signs of postpartum depression or the ‘bonding’ between mother and child. As Chapter 3 showed, not only are new mothers’ physical functions monitored, but also their ability to display ‘maternal sensitivity’, which is taken as being crucial for the formation of a strong emotional bond between mother and child.

MVBs, who mainly counselled women, largely omitted fathers from discussions around attachment and ‘instinct’, and thus disciplinary measures aimed at producing caretakers who are emotionally committed also primarily focused on mothers. These disparate effects of biopower on mothers and fathers directly relate to the gendered intensification of childrearing. Mothers are the primary subjects of expert monitoring, as their ‘sensitivity’ is seen as laying the groundwork for their child’s healthy development.

However, the disparate effects of biopower do not apply to only gender, but also to other aspects, such as ethnicity, citizenship or class. As discussed in Chapter 3, MVBs stated that it was mostly poor migrant families who were enrolled in the MVBs’ early intervention programmes, which provided families with a ‘closer accompaniment’, such as regular and longer home visits. Further, I observed more instructive and problematising advice-giving during two consultations that involved migrant families enrolled in early intervention programmes, who were not invited to self-reflect and self-search to find a ‘solution’ to an issue. The MVBs did not encourage *all* families to use these kinds of technologies of self to come up with solutions or to positively self-transform.

Thus, the ‘accompaniment’ of families is not always equally ‘subtle’ and the effects of disciplinary power also vary along ethnic and class lines.

As argued above, mothers are more exposed to expert guidance and engage more in its implementation at home. In ‘Foucault’s Mother’, Simons argues that Foucault failed to address “the most significant manifestation” of subjectification in his work, namely “women’s enormous role, especially as mothers, in the process of subjectification. His focus on disciplines that produce masculine rather than feminine bodies is implicitly a denial that we are all ‘of woman born’ and mostly by women raised” (Simons 1996: 179). Women, who are associated with gestation, care-taking and, as Chapter 3 showed, are defined as the main ‘attachment figure’, makes them the primary target of biopower (Simons 1996: 180). Here, however, they are not only in the position of the subject, but also actively engage in “the subjectification of others” (Simons 1996: 181), namely their children and other caretakers (because mothers observe and judge others’ parenting), alluding to the transformative and normalising aspects of maternal power, which Simons (1996) and Taylor (2012) claim has not been satisfyingly theorised by Foucault.

The concept of intensive mothering has been extended to parenting in general, as certain aspects of fathering have also been intensified (Barlow 2004; Faircloth 2014a; Lee et al. 2014). The intensification of mothering is not on a par with the intensification of fathering, however (Dermott 2008, 2009). In Switzerland, paternity leave, for example, was only introduced in 2021 and, at only two weeks, is considerably shorter than maternity leave. Mothers still act as primary caretakers, and this was reflected in MVB discourses but also detectable during my fieldwork with families. While I met mothers at home, in almost all cases their partners were at work. While the mothers usually worked part-time, their partners worked full-time or at least had a higher workload. Nevertheless, some families I met had one ‘*Papi-Tag*’ (daddy day) per week, in one family the father carried out most of the care-work, while his wife worked full time, and two mothers emphasised that they split care work 50/50 with their partner, which shows that, in some families, fathers are increasingly becoming involved in care work. There are indications that the MVB – in itself a deeply gendered

institution with all-female advisors when I conducted my research– is aspiring to become more father-oriented. As discussed, the MVB Zürich advertised a position for a male MVB who would be responsible for counselling fathers and devising courses for them. Future lines of research on the governing of parents, gender and biopolitics in Switzerland might explore how the MVB as an institution addresses fathers' involvement in childcare in the future and whether fathers' MVB accompaniment revolves around similar concerns to mothers, such as 'paternal sensitivity' and secure attachment, whether fathers are subjected to the same disciplinary practices as mothers, how fathers receive the MVBs' guidance or what fathers' resistance to pastoral power looks like.

Additionally, the MVBs' conceptions of families are still very heteronormative; in discourses surrounding childrearing advisors assumed a nuclear heterosexual couple who conceive a child via 'natural' reproduction and immediate 'bonding' between mother and child is deemed possible directly after birth. Although childrearing beyond the heterosexual family does exist in Switzerland, other family constellations such as parents who adopt children, couples who use assisted reproduction, or queer parents, did not feature in the MVBs' discourses. However, the introduction of 'Marriage for all' in Switzerland in 2022 will affect queer couples' access to adoption and sperm donation¹³⁷ and may thereby transform queer parenting in Switzerland. This change provides another fruitful line of investigation regarding the perception and guidance of queer parents by state-affiliated experts in Switzerland.

Other aspects that inextricably link modern parenting to disciplinary power relations relate to the idea of early childhood as a 'seminal' phase that will directly influence the child's future in connection with the notion of parental determinism. Parents' practices are measured by their outcomes, which – at least in regard to policy makers' foci, such as general health status in adolescence and adulthood, academic 'success', or 'potential for aggression' – are not immediately

¹³⁷ Sperm donation is reserved for married couples only and egg cell or embryo donation remains illegal in Switzerland.

‘detectable’. This is one crucial anchor point of the disciplinary power relation between parents and experts, for:

the “punishment” for the sin (e.g. a too authoritarian approach of children, rather than “positive parenting”) does not follow upon the sin, but will become obvious only in later life (e.g. in adolescence). (...) This has two major disciplining effects, the first being that one is deprived from his senses in judging what is good, since the effects of parenting are only to be measured many years later. The second, related to this is a specific and mutual dependency on the expert pastor to advice [sic] us on what is good and to assist us in scrutinizing ourselves and in reflecting on our parenting. (Vandenbroeck et al. 2011: 72)

From this perspective, whether someone has parented ‘properly’ will only be assessable when their children have grown up. This contributes to the ‘insecurity’ felt by some parents regarding judging the adequacy of their practices or their difficulty in trusting their ‘intuition’, which was reported by many MVBs. It also greatly diminishes parents’ authority in determining for themselves what adequate childrearing practices are and prescribes the necessity for expert guidance informed by the latest insights on childrearing practices and their outcomes aimed at safeguarding parents from (unknowingly) ‘committing sins’ in early childhood that will only be exposed many years later.

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