Intra-Family relations and willingness to support the ageing parents in a life span perspective: on differential treatment of children, mixed emotions and differing intentions

Dieter Ferring
University of Luxembourg

dieter.ferring@uni.lu
We have to start somewhere …

Intra-Family relations and willingness to support the ageing parents in a life span perspective

I. A view from the OUTWARD – the phenomena
- The view of older adults on family and support
- The view of adult children

II. A view from the INWARD - Theoretical reconstruction of phenomena – and the „family in us“
A view from the OUTWARD

Phenomena – Older Adults

**Ageing Well – European Study on Adult Well-being**

12.478 *autonomously* living older adults

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age groups</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>4763</td>
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<td>60-69</td>
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<td>70-79</td>
<td>2815</td>
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<td>80-89</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>12.478</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Giovanni Lamura (I); G. Weber (A); I. Rahm-Hallberg (S); V. Burholt & C. Wenger (U.K.); D. Ferring (L); F. Thissen (NL)

The view of older adults on family and support

... satisfaction with family relations
... perceived support in case of sickness and disability
... potential caregivers
... age differences

Burholt et al, 2003; Ferring et al., 2004
Satisfaction with Family Relations

How satisfied are you with your family relationships?

- Highly satisfied: 58.8%
- Satisfied: 31.9%
- Undecided: 4%
- Dissatisfied: 3.2%
- Highly dissatisfied: 2.1%

N=12,478

Burholt et al., 2003; Ferring et al., 2004
Satisfaction with Family Relations – Age Group Differences

N=12,478

Burholt et al., 2003; Ferring et al., 2004
Is there someone who would take care of you if you were sick or disabled?

Perceived willingness to support …

- Austria: 97
- Luxembourg: 96
- Italy: 94
- UK: 92
- Netherlands: 91
- Sweden: 87

Burholt et al., 2003; Ferring et al., 2004
Is there someone who would take care of you ...

- for as long as you needed
- for a short time (a few weeks to six months)
- now and then (such as, take you to the doctor or fix your lunch, etc.)

N=12.478 – Age Group Differences

Burholt et al, 2003; Ferring et al., 2004
Who will provide support …

- Spouse: 56.3%
- Offspring: 28.2%
- Other: 3.5%
- Other kin: 3.2%
- Friends: 4%
- Siblings: 4.3%
- Grandchildren: 0.4%

N = 12,478

Burholt et al, 2003; Ferring et al., 2004
Who will provide support … Age group differences

N=12.478

Burholt et al, 2003; Ferring et al., 2004
The view of adult children

Differential parental treatment, relationship quality and willingness to support
Starting point

One might argue that whether older parents currently treat their children differentially in adulthood is no longer an important issue.

or is it?

Boll, Ferring & Filipp, 2003
Perceived Parental Differential Treatment of Siblings in Middle Adulthood

Projects:
“Structure and Consequences of Perceived Parental Differential Treatment of Siblings in Middle Adulthood,” (DFG; FE 502/2–1/2).
“Parental Differential Treatment in Middle Adulthood: Dyadic and Longitudinal Analyses” (DFG; FE 502/2-3);

Sample: 1,208 adults (482 men, 726 women; age: M = 44.95, SD = 3.14).
Measures: Need fulfillment by parents with reference to a focus sibling – relationship quality with parents and sibling – behavioral.

Ferring, Boll & Filipp, 2003; Boll, Ferring & Filipp, 2003, 2005
Parental behavior and personal needs

Parental behaviors (transformed into items) that could meet or frustrate the needs of adult children:

(a) mental and physical well-being (e.g., “mother contributes to our wellbeing”),
(b) positive self-evaluation (e.g., “mother shows us that she is proud of us”),
(c) individuality and self-determination (e.g., “mother lets our opinion count”),
(d) parental affection (e.g., “mother shows us her love”),
(e) filial responsibility (e.g., “mother expects that we feel responsible for her”),
(f) avoiding criticism (e.g., “mother tends to be critical toward us”), and
(g) material support (e.g., “mother is very generous with her presents”).

Comparison with a focus sibling

Derived scales: Recognition, Nurture and Demand for assuming filial responsibility by mother or father

Boll, Ferring & Filipp, 2003
Differential parental treatment by father or mother

Children: 45-54 years

Boll, Ferring & Filipp, 2003
Relationship quality
Relationship quality of adult children with mother

Hierarchical and non-hierarchical clusters analyses
Relationship quality of adult children with father

Ferring, Boll, Michels & Filipp (2009)
Allocation of relationship clusters

Ferring, Boll, Michels & Filipp (2009)
Differential treatment and relationship quality

Boll, Ferring & Filipp, 2003

Disfavoristism  Equal  Favoristism  Disfavoristism  Equal  Favoristism

Positive relationship experiences with the mother

-6.00 -4.00 -2.00 0.00 2.00 4.00 6.00
Differential maternal recognition

Positive relationship experiences with the father

-6.00 -4.00 -2.00 0.00 2.00 4.00 6.00
Differential paternal recognition
II. A view from the INWARD –
Theoretical reconstruction of phenomena

„The family in us“
Dynamic systems – A selection of theoretical positions

Charles Darwin 1809-1882
William Stern 1871–1938
Kurt Zadek Lewin 1890–1947
Burrhus F. Skinner 1904-1990
Erving Goffman 1922 – 1982

Niklas Luhmann 1927 – 1998
Urie Bronfenbrenner 1917-2005
Humberto Maturana
Francisco Varela
Jaan Valsiner

and so many others ....
Intra-family interactions – The exchange of meaning by signs

Socio-ecological and cultural context

Mother – Father – Child
The family as a system – three assumptions

**System**

... defined by its internal logic of functioning (→ identity) and its borders.

**Autopoiesis / self-reproduction**

Systems tend to reproduce according to their internal logic, i.e. producing components that produced these components. → Families reproduce

**Internal logic**

Way of existence (i.e., leading ones life) serving adaptation and survival
Family and adaptation

- Family history is always “shared experience” between members of a family reflecting the adaptation to a given socio-ecological and cultural context at a given time.

- Experiences in dealing with the living context made by family members are evaluated – implicitly and explicitly – with respect to their adaptive value and are thus stored in “family memory”.

- Family values and norms originate from adaptation of the family system and they exert a lasting influence across and between the generations that constitute a family.

Ferring, 2017
How do we communicate meaning - the use of signs and semiotic regulation

- Humans use **social communication** to convey meanings;
- Humans create **signs that** substitute “things” by **verbal symbols** or other **semiotic forms** and that enable us manipulating the world beyond what it is at the given moment;
- Signs convey meanings and have an impact on behavior;
- Signs comprise all forms of implicit and explicit communication.

Zittoun et al., 2013
Intra-family interactions - examples

What is happening in interactions?

- Baby is crying

F1: Both parents immediately react rewardingly
F2: Father reacts, mother does not react
F3: No reaction by both
F4: Parents both show an aversive reaction

Repeatingly making specific experiences builds up a „habit“

Ferring, 2017
Family experiences as frame of semiotic regulation

- The content of Intra-Family relations is the exchange of meanings via signs serving the reproduction and the adaptation of the system;

- Signs (conveying meaning) originate from the adaptation to shared or communicated experiences leading to specific values and norms of the family system, having direct implications for behavior of the family members;

- Experiences of the family system take place in a given historical and socio-ecological context which defines their impact (e.g. being pregnant at the age of 18 today, or 1950, or 1900 ….)

- The structure of the family as well as prior adaptation of the family set the frame for experiences.

Ferring, 2017
Family experiences as frame of semiotic regulation

- Families have a “memory store” comprising episodic, procedural and semantic knowledge originated from the adaptation to significant experiences (i.e., of adaptive value);

- Families have a “historiography” communicating meanings and serving identity;

- Families have an identity (i.e., we are the “Millers”, “Smith” etc.) which reflects the adaptation to these experiences.

Ferring, 2017, Tulving, 1985
From the OUTWARD to the INWARD

Shared and communicated adaptive experiences

Family memory

Values and norms within families

Semiotic regulation

„The family in us“
Examples
Intra-family interactions – The exchange of meaning by signs

Socio-ecological and cultural context

Mother — Father — Child

Ferring, 2017
Intra-family relations and generations
Rural area

Gr-Father
80 years
*1883
+1963
Farmer

Gr-Mother
50 years
*1885
+1935
Seamstress

Brother1
1906
1980

Brother2
1907
1960

Brother3
1909
1989

Brother4
1912
1996

Brother5
1920
2001

City

Father
86 years
*1928
Farmer

Mother
78 years
*1936
House wife

Father
43 years
*1900
+1943
Secondary School teacher

Mother
84 years
*1896
+1980
Primary school teacher

Sister 1
74 years
*1940
Primary school teacher

Sister 2
65 years
*1949
Nursery school teacher

Child 1
54 years
Farmer

Child 2
52 years
Secondary School teacher

Child 3
50 years
Plumber

Child 4
30 years
Nursery school teacher

Ferring, 2017
Family A

Observations

• Rural area
• Being a farmer
• Six boys rapidly born one after the other
• Loss of the mother …
• The war …

What will he teach his children?

Ferring, 2017
Family B

City

Father
43 years
*1900
+1943
Secondary school teacher

Mother
84 years
*1896
+1980
Primary school teacher

1928

Sister 1
74 years
*1940
Primary school teacher

Sister 2
65 years
*1949
Nursery school teacher

Mother
78 years
*1936
House wife

Observations

… urban environment

… being teachers at the primary or secondary school level,

… having three girls

… loss of the father

… the war

What will she teach her children?

Ferring, 2017
Where to look at

City

Father
43 years
*1900
+1943

Mother
84 years
*1896
+1980

Secondary school teacher

1928

Primary school teacher

Sister 1
74 years
*1940

Sister 2
65 years
*1949

Primary school teacher

Nursery school teacher

Mother
78 years
*1936

House wife

Ferring, 2017

Historical-ecological cultural contexts

Material living conditions

Family size and composition
- Number and gender of children
- Sibling position
- Number of generations in the household

Critical life events

Values and norms
Values and norms of A and B

Family A

Father
86 years
*1928
Farmer

Child 1
54 years
Farmer

Child 2
52 years
Secondary School teacher

Child 3
50 years
Plumber

Family B

Mother
78 years
*1936
House wife

Child 4
30 years
Nursery school teacher

Ferring, 2017
Intra-family relations and generations

- Families have „identities“ and „memories“
- Identity comprises values, norms, and behavior linked to family history described by the adaptation to significant experiences of the family;
- Identity takes place in everyday exchanges by semiotic regulation, i.e. the use of meaningful signs;
- Family is a „learning organism“ with a memory store of its own;
- Depending on the adaptive value of experiences – these may lead to contrast or assimilation effects in the intergenerational discourse.

Ferring, 2017
Some last words
Thanks to my colleagues

Isabelle Albert
Stéphanie Barros-Coimbra
Thomas Boll
Elke Murdock
Isabelle Tournier
Sigi Filipp (University of Trier)
References


Books

Remember who you are and where you come from!

Thank you for listening!