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More-Than-Two-Parent Families

Displaying Legitimate Parenthood in Swedish Media

ABSTRACT

Norms concerning family formation are generally based on ideals of coupled love and the two-parent-family, however, family practices frequently go beyond these norms. Families consisting of more than two parents that are co-parenting have only been studied to a small extent. Analysing Swedish newspaper and magazine articles on more-than-two-parent families between 1992 and 2016 we ask: How are more-than-two-parent families displayed in Swedish media stories? Are they portrayed as legitimate families, and if so, how is this legitimacy discursively constructed? What role does recognition play in the media stories and how is it negotiated in the narratives? We use the concepts *display* (Finch 2007) and *recognition/redistribution* (Fraser 1998; 2003) in exploring the significance that recognition and legitimacy have for the depiction of families with more than two parents in the media material. The display of more-than-two-parent families in the Swedish media stories analysed is generally characterised by repertoires of modern family life, of love and intimacy and responsible and successful parenting. These repertoires are used to display the families as normal, modern, and legitimate. In addition to the repertoires mentioned, there are repertoires of importance of geographical location, of strategies and of critique of current legislation that further emphasise the legitimacy of the more-than-two-parent families in contrast to an outdated legislation that forces these legitimate families to strategise their intimate relationships. Despite several of the people interviewed being described as polyamorous or gay/lesbian, there are no tendencies in the empirical

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material to motivate the need for rights based on an essentialised polyamorous identity; rather, the focus is on the fact that it is the practical care relations that need to be protected.

Keywords: family, parenthood, polyamory, non-monogamy, legitimacy

NORMS CONCERNING FAMILY formation generally mean that there are expectations of there being two parents – in practice however, families are made up in a multitude of ways (e.g., Budgeon and Roseneil 2004), by one or several parents; by parents co-parenting or parenting in succession, as often in cases of step-parenthood; and by parenting with or without being custodians. Families consisting of more than two parents that are co-parenting have only been studied to a small extent. Some studies are made within the relatively new field of polyamory studies, where results show that polyamorous parents have experiences with discrimination and social stigma (e.g., DeFilippis et al. 2015). Being seen and recognised as a legitimate family, is according to these studies important for polyamorous families, however, there are few studies looking at how such a process of recognition and normalisation could happen. In order to study a case of possible recognition and legitimisation of more-than-two-parent families, we will look at the case of Swedish media stories of these types of families. Sweden is an interesting case in relation to this discussion, as it has historically been early in introducing legal rights for same-sex couples and parents (Andersson 2011; Rydström 2011).

Based on this background, we ask: How are more-than-two-parent families displayed in Swedish media stories? Are they portrayed as legitimate families, and if so, how is this legitimacy discursively constructed? What role does recognition play in the media stories and how is it negotiated in the narratives? We use the concepts *display* (Finch 2007) and *recognition/redistribution* (Fraser 1998; 2003) in exploring the significance that recognition and legitimacy have for the depiction of families with more than two parents in the media material.

By more-than-two-parent families, we refer to different ways of organising parenthood where the common denominator is that more than

two persons are active social parents. The concept does not necessarily mean that the mutual relations of the parents are intimate or that they are non-monogamous, they can live in a joint or in separate households (cf., Zetterqvist Nelson 2006, 76). In the selection of articles, however, several of the families are also described as practicing non-monogamy in some way. Central to the concept of more-than-two parenthood is that the different types of family formations it includes have in common that they exist outside of the two-parent norm, which means that the portrayal of this type of family has to be convincing in order to legitimise the family formation (see e.g., Finch 2007). The more-than-two-parent family furthermore has no legal protection, since, for example, custody of children and marriage are based on the norms of coupledness (Andersson 2011).

Thus, in the way we use it, the concept of more-than-two-parent family can refer to a lesbian and a gay couple who have children together and where the child consequently has four parents, and where each respective couple has an intimate relationship. It may also be used in the case where three or more persons who have both friendship and/or intimate relations to each other together decide to become parents. We call these types of families *planned more-than-two-parent families*, as the more-than-two parenthood is not the result of a separation but has been planned from the outset to involve more than two parents. More-than-two parenthood may also arise after the birth of the child, for instance, when more parents are included in the existing family through the initiation of an open or polyamorous relationship. We will not include analysis of media stories on relations that arise when two parents separate and thereafter initiate relations with persons who will act as parents, most commonly described as step-parenthood. Step-parenthood is, admittedly, legally vulnerable in a similar way to the more-than-two-parent families described above, but they do not break the two-parent norm in as obvious a way and we will thus not include them in the present analysis, since we are interested in analysing possible recognition and legitimisation of non-normative family relationships.

Previous Research

Exploring media stories of more-than-two-parent families we are interested in how recognition and legitimacy is discursively constructed. The portrayals of these families are part of the public representation of families beyond the nuclear family and play a part in building a story of non-normative parenthood. In parallel to this, studying media coverage of polyamory has been highlighted as central for understanding how the sexual stories of polyamory are developing (Ritchie 2010). Relating media stories of polyamory to mono-normative media culture, Ani Ritchie (2010) points to the ways framing polyamory in a media setting can raise social awareness of polyamory, but at the same time produce a decidedly mono-normative representation of it. Exploring the politics of representation is, according to Ritchie (2010), important for understanding how it produces relational ideologies. While we do not use the same concepts, we argue that our analysis explores in a similar way the repertoires that form representations of more-than-two-parent families in order to analyse how legitimacy and recognition is produced in the material.

More-than-two-parent families have been studied in different research areas, and we will here describe relevant studies to show how the importance of representation of non-normative families has been highlighted in previous studies.

The need to create a greater support than that offered by a small, coupled nuclear family is highlighted by several studies as a reason for organising more-than-two parenthood (Ritchie and Barker 2007; Sheff 2010). The non-monogamous parents that participated in Elisabeth Sheff's study (2010) draw attention to the increased resources that follow from being a family consisting of several adults. Above all, increased flexibility, responsibility, and time are emphasised. Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli (2010) has interviewed polyamorous families regarding different strategies used, and choices made, in relation to the children's school environment. She describes how most of the interviewed families conceal their life choices from school and health care institutions for fear of legal measures, social stigmatisation, and harassment. Several studies draw attention to the risk of discrimination against non-monogamous

families (Anapol 2010; Barker and Langdridge 2010; Tweedy 2011). Studies also show that there is an ignorance regarding alternative family forms among professionals (e.g., Williams and Prior 2015).

Sheff and Corie Hammers (2011) describe how risks such as dismissal, lost custody, and a decreased social standing can be reduced in different ways through access to economic and social resources. Christian Klesse (2014; 2018) points out how class privilege is central for understanding how vulnerability affects polyamorous families differently. In a similar vein, Erik Mägi and Lina-lea Zimmerman (2015) show how the legal situation in Sweden means that very few family forms have clear-cut legal protection. Many families need to make sure that they know the ins-and-outs of family law in order to protect their family life, a strategy that might not be available for everyone depending on knowledge capital.

In a Swedish setting, non-monogamous families have been discussed in different contexts, but the research conducted is marginal. Studies of rainbow families or lesbian parents based on coupled relations are more frequent (see e.g., Malmquist 2015). Parenthood involving more than two parents is to a certain extent discussed in studies concerning motherhood (Johansson 2015) and fatherhood, where Karin Zetterqvist Nelson (2006) explores families created through shared parenthood between gay men and one or two women.

Theory

Displaying and Doing Families

Research on the family has undergone a radical change, from more or less equating the concept of family with the household to focusing more on how family ties are created and maintained – *doing families* – and to encompassing how families are presented to others, what Janet Finch (2007) calls *displaying families*. Finch (2007) defines the display as:

[T]he process by which individuals, and groups of individuals, convey to each other and to relevant audiences that certain of their actions do constitute “doing family things” and thereby confirm that these relationships are “family” relationships. (Finch 2007, 67)

Displaying one's family may be relevant in many situations for more conventional families as well; however, for families that break one or some of the norms surrounding family life the display of one's family may be vital when it comes to being able to function as a family at all. In accordance with this Finch claims that acceptance from the people in one's environment may be required for a norm-breaking family to function in practice. If the family is not seen as a family by people in their social context, this considerably risks diminishing the possibilities of "doing" the desirable family. Finch emphasises the fact that different families to different degrees, will be dependent on the recognition of their legitimacy by people in their surroundings.

The concept of "displaying family" has been used to understand how, for example, same-sex couples display their families in order to obtain legitimacy. There are, however, few studies where the usefulness of the concept for understanding non-monogamous forms of relationship and family, has been discussed in depth. In this analysis, we want to use the concept to explore stories about the more-than-two-parent family, as the media depiction of these families raises controversial questions about the boundaries of what may pass for an acceptable and normal family. How is legitimacy created in stories about families that break the powerful norms according to which a family should consist of two parents?

Recognition and Redistribution

Through the concept of recognition, Nancy Fraser (2003) discusses in what way the structures of society impact how people are made visible, confirmed and paid attention to, as well as how this relates to social standing and status. In an article exchange with Judith Butler, Fraser (1998) discusses the relation between recognition and redistribution, and addresses the critic she received from Butler for positioning redistribution and economic oppression as more fundamental. However, Fraser claims that she does not see heteronormativity and heterosexism solely as cultural oppression or as *merely* identity politics. Instead, Fraser emphasises that she considers both redistribution and recognition nec-

essary and morally justified. Rather than seeing economic redistribution as addressing a more fundamental problem, she wants to show that in a capitalist society it is, on the contrary, impossible to reduce misrecognition to economic inequality. According to Fraser (1998), misrecognition is not about a psychological state but about an institutionalised social relation that makes full participation in society impossible.

In the stories about parenthood involving more than two parents that are analysed in this article, themes of access to rights and the wish for positive interactions with the surrounding society are important components. We analyse this in terms of recognition and redistribution, as the stories of the parents highlight central parts of their experience, where their full participation in society is conditional or made impossible.

Method

In order to explore depictions of more-than-two-parent families in Sweden we have gathered media articles that in different ways describe families with more than two parents. The articles have been found predominantly via Retriever (a media archive), but searches were also made via Google to test the search terms and make sure that the selection was inclusive enough. We used the Swedish equivalents of the following search words: “more-than-two-parent families,” “rainbow family,” “star-family,” “three parents,” and “four parents.” The articles that have been included in our selection contain interviews or stories told from the perspective of the parents about what organising one’s parenthood as a more-than-two-parent family might mean. Some families occur in two different articles and in that case, we have included both of them in our selection. Primarily, we have been interested in *planned* more-than-two-parent families, but we have also included articles where the parenthood is a result of a non-monogamous intimate relationship. In our selection, we have excluded op-ed pieces or editorials that argue for or against extended family legislation, as we are primarily interested in how parenthood issues and family life are described.

The result of this selection process was twenty articles published between 1992 and 2018, in different types of Swedish newspapers and

magazines – *Dagens Nyheter* (a national newspaper), *Sydsvenskan* (a regional newspaper), *Metro* (a local free newspaper), and *Mama* (a magazine about family and parenting), to mention a few examples.

We have analysed the material using discourse analysis inspired by Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell's (1987) outlining of an analysis of repertoires. This approach enables us to focus on the repertoires used by the journalists to present the families. Analysis using the concept of repertoires entails mapping the language, looking for reoccurring stylistic constructions, metaphors, and tropes. Coding has been made of the material – at first very broadly, and then more narrowly focused on tropes where issues of legitimacy, normality, and strategies can be identified (Potter and Wetherell 1987). From the coding analytical patterns have emerged, where legitimacy is created through accounts highlighting normality. We have also explored how recognition is discussed and problematised and how different everyday strategies are described as central for interacting with the surrounding society and dealing with the exclusion from legal rights.

Displaying the Modern and Legitimate More-Than-Two-Parent Family

The number of articles found through our selection process is relatively small, but several are interviews describing many details and with many quotes, allowing us to analyse how the family is presented and displayed. Generally, the more-than-two-parent families are presented as something “new” and “a bit unusual.” There is sometimes a didactic tone when the family constellations are explained, putting emphasis on labelling the relationships between the adults in the family. For example, the distinctions between friendship and partnership are for established early on in the stories:

Meet the gay and lesbian friends Cissi and David who decided to have children together – and with their partners. “We are so proud of our family!” (Cederberg Gerdrup 2014)

The friends Anna, bisexual, and Anders, gay – decide to have children. They become pregnant through insemination. When the child is born, they each have a partner and the family now consists of four parents.
(By 2011)

When the explanations are being made, positive exclamations can be highlighted, such as pride, but there are also several instances where difficulties of grasping the family constellation becomes an explicit part of the story:

Being three persons who are in love and share a life is often something that has to be explained to outsiders, especially in a small village like Kinnarumma. (Sivac 2015)

Here, context is central, as the more rural environment of a small village becomes a frame of explanation offered for the incomprehensibility of the family. In contrast, an urban environment is highlighted for making life as a “rainbow family” easier.

In their everyday life, the two couples live near each other in [a central district] in Stockholm where rainbow families are not unusual. [...] For the children and their friends, there is nothing strange about this, neither do I think that I have had many negative comments, instead there is a genuine curiosity. (Wallin 2011)

At the day-care centre, there is nothing strange about the fact that Annie has four parents, there are children who have only one mother or two mothers, there are children from other cultures and all kinds of family constellations. For the kids it's a natural thing that families can look different, children are marvellously unprejudiced! (Lindvall Wiik 2010)

Living in a place that indirectly entails being part of a context where there are many different types of families is highlighted as important, creating a repertoire of distinction between different geographical locations when

it comes to being able to display normalcy – the phrase “natural thing” is even used to describe the perspective of children in this environment.

In many of the articles, feelings, such as pride mentioned above, is used in the narratives of the families. Love is another feeling highlighted in the stories:

We just clicked at first sight. However, not two but three persons fell in love. Now the triad live together with all their children in a small villa outside Borås. (Sivac 2015)

The expressions used, such as “we just clicked,” evoke repertoires of love and intimacy – of falling in love. The phrase in Swedish alludes to how the Swedish king in repeated interviews has described his first meeting with the queen, thus contributing to a narrative of real love. The journalist follows up on the statement with a clarification of there being “not two, but three persons” falling in love, thus constructing non-monogamous relationships as analogous to those that are coupled. Creating such similarities and analogies between coupled and non-coupled relationships when it comes to love is a powerful tool for creating normalcy and legitimacy for the relationship (cf., Andersson 2011).

The incomprehensibility and novelty of the families described is negotiated in the stories by letting the people describe this themselves – allowing for an insider perspective on coming to a decision after contemplating becoming a parent in a more-than-two-parent constellation:

– At first it was more of a joke, David says when they are asked to recount how the extended family came about. [...] Cissi and Paula were hanging out with other extended families and their positive experiences convinced David and he too started to see the possibilities of other types of family formation. (Cederberg Gerdrup 2014)

[O]thers in our vicinity started to have children, persons who were living in similar relationships. – If they can, so can we, I remember thinking. (Isaksson Lindemalm 2014)

Having other “extended” families in one’s vicinity is here highlighted as central for going forward with the decision. In addition to highlighting the importance of representation and being in a context with familial heterogeneity, this also contributes to displaying the interviewees as legitimate parents in the sense that this was not something they started unreflectingly, but only after seeing that it was a working way of organising a family.

In the story of Ammi and Kristin, who were interviewed in 1992 about their family, creating a legitimate family entails very different elements of the repertoire:

[H]aving children with a temporary male acquaintance was not something that either Ammi or Kristin was interested in. – We didn’t want to become single parents. A child needs both a mother and a father [...] Two and a half years ago the solution turned up. In RFSL’s magazine *Kom Ut* [*Come Out*], there was an advertisement by two gay men, Ulf and Sven, who wanted to become fathers. Through the advertisement, they wanted to get in touch with lesbian women. The couples agreed to meet. (Johansson 1992)

Being single parents in this story means being only mothers, not being single as compared to in a relationship, as the implication would be today. In these statements, we see a dramatic shift in the repertoires used to create legitimacy in these media stories. Where a lesbian couple becomes “single parents” in the absence of fathers, there are no such examples in the later stories from 2007 and onwards. There are examples of for example women wishing for a father for their children, but this wish does not negate the lesbian relationship they are in currently. It rather compliments what they can offer as two mothers.

The article from 1992 also describes contacts with authorities and preschool from a perspective that is different from the other articles. Here, the parents assume a great responsibility themselves with regard to being well treated and avoiding stigmatisation:

As long as we are open about how we live and tell the staff at the day-care centre, the authorities, and others in our vicinity, that we are lesbian, we eliminate the risk of his being teased. If we are honest with him, and confirm and love him very much I think he will be strong, so that no one will bully him, Ammi says. (Johansson 1992)

There are strong elements of displaying legitimacy here, where Ammi's statements are used to create a display of parents that are both loving and open, creating a strong child that no one will bully. There is a repertoire of successful and responsible parenting here, which contains the hope of individual strategies overcoming stigmatisation. In contrast to later articles, there are no mentions of discrimination, only teasing and bullying – constructing this as more of an individual problem than a structural one.

This is radically different fifteen years later, where instead family relations and legal categories are contrasted – clearly positing the family relations as legitimate by stating:

Annie has four parents – two mothers and two fathers. But in the eyes of the legislator she has only two, the biological parents Rebecka and Jörgen. (Nilsson 2007)

There are several examples of similar phrases, where the social rather than legal categories are displayed as legitimate. Time is also introduced as an element in this repertoire of modern family life, stating that the law is behind and needs to catch up:

It would also be nice if the law caught up with the modern families. Many children grow up with more than two guardians. If laws are changed the situation will be easier for many families, not just ours. (Engvall 2011)

The developments of family law is placed on a time line where the family practices are more modern and the law has fallen behind, not being on

a par with modernity. The phrase of “the modern families” in the quote above, pointing to children with more than two guardians, sorts all of the more-than-two-parent families in the same category of needing an updated family legislation. This type of assertion is interesting since it constructs the demand for a changed legislation as legitimate – it is the lack of legislation for more-than-two-parent families that is out of date and ill adapted. By formulating the problem in terms of an outdated legislation the more-than-two-parent families are clearly displayed as modern, normal, and legitimate.

Conditions for Recognition

Analysis above, of how the more-than-two-parent families are displayed in the media material presents an overall picture of legitimacy, modernity, and normalcy. In different ways, the authenticity of the parenthood is recognised in the narratives, using repertoires of love, modern family life, and responsible parenthood. Nevertheless, there are also more troublesome stories, where recognition is only obtained with some conditions, and where quotes from the interviewees trouble the need for recognition on these terms.

In one of these interviews, the person interviewed is a public figure in his local environment and he talks about resisting expectations that this brings:

– Why should I convene a press conference and tell people about my sexual orientation? That is after all not something a heterosexual person would do. (Wallin 2011)

Pointing to expectations of openness, the statements pinpoint the normative aspects of “coming out” publicly. Recognition as a same-sex couple, a polyamorous family or a gay man, depends on identifying with these categories and being open about it. In the quote above, this is clearly problematised as part of a heteronormative system. At the same time, the newspaper where the story is published is a local paper covering the town where the interviewee is a local politician. Thus,

the statements are resisting the coming out story aimed at seeking recognition, but are paradoxically published in a story doing just that. Hence, recognition is conditioned on telling the story of your family life, and even resisting telling that story can only be made doing just that.

Recognition and the affective aspects of not having it, is part of other stories as well. The paternity investigation performed for persons who are not married are described as degrading, to the degree that getting married seemed a better option despite being friends and not lovers:

In order to have shared legal responsibility for their child they got married. – It felt degrading to have to account for our sexual relations when we registered Jakob's paternity, Ellen Larsson says. Getting married was easier. (Tonberg and Bank 2011)

Turning up for an interview with the family caseworker and answering questions framed to confirm a monogamous couple relation, when that does not correspond to the situation that the persons are or wish to be in, is thus seen as a problem. In light of being able to avoid the paternity investigation, marriage is perceived as the more attractive alternative. Recognition as parents in the legal system is clearly conditioned on coupledness, but the control mechanisms involved are not as invasive when it comes to marriage – making it preferable. Statements in the article trouble the discursive construction of marriage even further when Ellen talks about how she would like to marry the other two parents as well, with whom she has a non-sexual relationship – completely reformulating the ideal image of marriage as a way of recognising monogamous, intimate relationships based on romantic love.

Many of the stories are organised around the need for recognition. Often as a way of gaining more protection in case of separation or death, but sometimes also to avoid suspicions of doing something illegal:

Linda believes that a more flexible legislation would help her family as well as other types of star-families. – The way things are now, people think that what we do is illegal, but if the law said that it was okay they would not think like that or have so many opinions about it. (Horvatovic 2014)

The need for a more flexible and modern legislation that would contribute to recognition is a very strong repertoire in the material and one that is closely connected in the material to the display of families as legitimate. The portrayal of the families is in general very positive and only one of the articles mentions the problems that can occur when this lack of legal recognition becomes a reality and conflicts become impossible to solve on one's own. In an interview, Anders talks about how a planned parenthood consisting of two mothers and two fathers was completely ruled out when his friend, who was the one who was pregnant, started to withdraw and break the agreements made earlier about the participation of the fathers:

It led to a protracted custody litigation. During the litigation process, he was granted the right of access to his son for ever longer continuous periods. – The district court has the whole time settled for an extension for me. Lukas spent his first night in my place when he was 1.5 years old, after a court decision. [...] He also thinks that the legislation should be changed so that children can have more than two legal parents. Our case has been judged like an ordinary custody litigation between two heterosexual parents, but our situation is different. If you have children in this way, alternating living arrangements should be assumed. The law does not take my partner into account either. If I die, he has no say whatsoever. (Werner and Dareberg 2010)

In Anders' case he did, in the end, obtain extended custody of his son and in that sense he feels that his parenthood has been recognised, but at the same time, he points out that the case has been judged like a custody litigation between two heterosexual parents. Hence, the existence of two separate households has not been taken into account and

no consideration has been taken to Anders' partner, who also wishes to be a parent, but who has now been completely excluded.

This conditional recognition of parenthood, where only the biological parent has any legal standing and where the regulations of custody are designed for a couple, is mentioned and discussed in the article in the form of Anders telling his story. However, interestingly this is not countered by the narrative in the story. Since Anders is the only one being interviewed, the narrative very clearly displays him as a legitimate parent, but Anders' partner remains very anonymous in the story. Recognition and possibilities of being displayed as a legitimate parent thus becomes conditioned also on participating in the interviews and being prepared for the exposure this might mean.

Developing Strategies: Resources and Legitimacy

Critique of the current legislation is, as pointed out above, a very strong repertoire in the material. It is present in over half of the articles and in many of these cases; it is a centre point of the narrative:

Linda and Erik are married to each other and they are thereby each other's legal heirs, but they have no right of inheritance from Hampus, and he can't inherit from them. Therefore, they have talked about writing wills in order to ensure that they will all be each other's legal heir. The children that they bring up together can't have them all as legal guardians, since the law only allows two guardians. (Horvatovic 2014)

Characteristic for this repertoire is how the stories create contrast between descriptions of the family relations, which often emphasise emotions and the everyday, and the legal situation, which is often described in a more formal language – becoming a metaphor for how the families are forced to strategise around their relationships. This repertoire often contains a more or less explicit critique of the norms of coupledness and the nuclear family – especially visible when the narrative points to the doubtful effect of the strategies:

In contrast, the family has no legal guarantees that Rio will have equal access to his three parents in case of a separation or death. The triad have written a mutual contract, which among other things states that the third parent shall be the guardian if the two legal parents were to die before Rio comes of age. But such an agreement is not legally binding. (Grönblad 2015)

His advice to same-sex couples with similar thoughts is to write some kind of document before the child is born regarding how they want everything to work out. Having witnesses is also important. – It has no legal validity, but you have something to lean on. You can't deny having been in agreement. (Werner and Dareberg 2010)

The problem is that you can only have two legal guardians, David goes on. Which would cause problems in case of a separation, as I would not, for example, from a legal point of view, have the same access to Joel. In order to facilitate such a situation they have mutual agreements, where they have written that they want to be four parents on equal terms and guardians of both children. It has no legal validity, but they hope that the best interests of the children will be considered if such a situation arises. (Cederberg Gerdrup 2014)

The strategies are in many cases described with great detail, in order to educate the reader and give tips to others in a similar situation. However, this repertoire of strategies is also a display of parenthood practice:

But how would they go about it practically? They wanted to have as equal relations with the child as possible, despite the fact that the legislation does not recognise more than two parents. Many hours spent discussing, scrutinising legal clauses and sketching various scenarios ensued. At last they arrived at a decision about how to proceed. They decided that the person who was the newest in the relation would become the biological parent together with the person who would carry the child. At the same time the newest person in the relation was for a time married to

the third party. After those two had divorced, the person who carried the child married the third party instead. In that way, this person could automatically become a parent, despite not being a biological parent. [...] The arrangement made it possible to get parental allowance on equal terms. (Grönblad 2015)

Describing at length the many steps involved to achieve equal parental allowance, the narrative also becomes a display of responsible and knowledgeable parenthood practice. In terms of resources – the strategies involved are only available for parents with a lot of knowledge capital or economic resources to get help exploring the legal issues. Displaying oneself as a responsible parent in a legal situation that does not offer recognition for your family situation thus becomes conditioned on having sufficient resources. Fraser (1998) describes misrecognition as an institutionalised social relation that makes full societal participation impossible. In the case of more-than-two-parent families, the strategies available for minimising the effects of misrecognition are dependent on economic and social resources, which highlights the importance of analysing recognition and redistribution as intertwined when exploring non-coupled family practices.

Conclusions

Initially we asked: How are more-than-two-parent families displayed in Swedish media stories? Are they portrayed as legitimate families, and if so, how is this legitimacy discursively constructed? What role does recognition play in the media stories and how is it negotiated in the narratives? The display of more-than-two-parent families in the Swedish media stories analysed is generally characterised by repertoires of modern family life, of love and intimacy and responsible and successful parenting. These repertoires are used to display the families as normal, modern, and legitimate. Here, we would like to point out that the selection of articles made, where we have focused our selection on in-depth interviews, will exclude many of the critical media voices as they are more likely to be published in the form of an op-ed or similar.

In addition to the repertoires mentioned, there are repertoires of importance of geographical location, of strategies and of critique of current legislation that further emphasise the legitimacy of the more-than-two-parent families in contrast to an outdated legislation that forces these legitimate families to strategise their intimate relationships. In relation to international research on similar topics, this is not surprising. Legitimacy and recognition risks being highly dependent on ideas of normality and assimilation in the case of media portrayals of polyamory (Ritchie 2010). In the present analysis, legitimacy and normalcy are also closely bound together, making it hard to present as legitimate without also presenting as normal, and also responsible. Interestingly this is not the whole picture, there are also aspects of the stories that trouble how recognition is available and what marriage means. Narratives in the articles go against the idea that recognition should be based on sexual identity, arguing for the heteronormativity of this idea. Despite several of the people interviewed being described as polyamorous or gay/lesbian, there are no tendencies in the empirical material to motivate the need for rights based on an essentialised polyamorous identity; rather, the focus is on the fact that it is the practical care relations that need to be protected (cf., Klesse 2016). This may point to the fact that, in a Swedish context, the narratives of struggle for recognition might be based on actual relationship forms and needs, rather than essentialised identities.

The ideal of marriage is also troubled by the story of an interviewee wishing non-monogamous marriage would be available for her to marry her friends. In an international perspective, experiences of the struggle for same-sex marriage show that same-sex marriage tends to be incorporated into the existing marriage template rather than having the potential to change marriage itself (Barker 2012). A similar development has been seen in a Swedish context, where the norms of coupledness become the glue that links same-sex and different-sex couples and that enables conditional inclusion in the shape of sex-neutral marriage laws (Andersson 2011; 2015). In USA, there is a development towards a more identity-based argumentation for the inclusion of non-monogamous

relationships in the marriage law, which, as Klesse (2016) points out, entails a considerable risk of reducing the complexity and the transformative potential of polyamorous relationships, as well as benefiting only those who are already privileged. Against this backdrop it is highly relevant to note that the display of more-than-two-parent families in the present material is based on ideas of legitimacy and to some extent normalcy, but that these stories are also troubled by critiques of normative legislation and the coupled, nuclear family

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SAMMANFATTNING

Normer för familjebildning bygger generellt på tvåsamhet, kärlek och två föräldrar. Familjepraktiker sträcker sig dock ofta utanför dessa ideal. Familjer som består av fler än två föräldrar och som delar föräldraskap har endast studerats i mycket

liten utsträckning. Genom att analysera svenska artiklar om familjer med fler än två föräldrar mellan 1992 och 2016 undersöker vi följande frågor: Hur ser berättelserna om familjer med fler än två föräldrar ut? Porträtteras de som legitima familjer och i så fall hur konstrueras legitimiteten diskursivt? Vilken roll spelar erkännande i berättelserna och hur förhandlas detta? Vi använder begreppen *display* (Finch 2007) och *recognition/redistribution* (Fraser 1998; 2003) för att utforska vilken betydelse erkännande och legitimitet har för skildringar av familjer med fler än två föräldrar i mediamaterialet. Berättelserna om familjer med fler än två föräldrar karakteriseras generellt av repertoarer som betonar modernitet, kärlek och intimitet, samt ansvarsfullt och framgångsrikt föräldraskap. Dessa repertoarer används för att beskriva familjerna som normala, moderna och legitima. Dessutom finns repertoarer som betonar vikten av plats, strategier och kritik av rådande lagstiftning, vilka ytterligare förstärker familjernas legitimitet i kontrast till vad som beskrivs som en omodern lagstiftning. Trots att flera av de intervjuade personerna beskrivs som polyamorösa eller lesbiska/homosexuella finns inga tendenser i materialet att motivera behovet av utökade rättigheter för dessa familjer på basis av någon essentialiserad identitet – i stället ligger fokus på omsorgsrelationerna som behöver skyddas.