ABSTRACT

MOTHERING AND FATHERING IN FINNISH EXPERT TEXTS IN THE 1980S AND 1990S

Jaana Vuori, Department of Women's Studies

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I explore the role of psycho-social knowledge in family work with mothers and fathers. In Finnish expert texts from the 1980s and 1990s two deeply interconnected gendered discourses of parenting and gender can be found: the discourses of exclusive mothering and shared parenting. In both the father is a special point of interest and concern. The fathers are described in a more multifaceted way than the mothers and the talk about fathers is mostly positive and encouraging. Fatherhood is interpreted as a question of the men's individual choice and, at most, as the result of in-family negotiations. The mother's subjectivity is more ambivalent than the father's agency in both discourses. The mothers' agency is rarely taken up as a consideration of women's agency, of her experiences, thoughts, feelings and words. Although the texts clearly address men, as a genre the texts largely function in relationships between women. Mothers and women professionals are invited to discreetly coax men into fatherhood.

In view of the international perspective and in relation to feminist discussions of mothering and fathering, this is very interesting. In Finland and other Nordic countries, the participation of fathers in child care has been more common than in the rest of Europe. Family experts' texts reflect this change in the gendered division of labour. However, the construction of the “new father” may build on such cultural implications of gender that lead to trouble when looking at mothering from the perspective of women. My results indicate that in feminist research, the role of the father should be analyzed in more subtle ways than before.