

ORIGINAL PAPER

My mother, my mirror? Three generations encounter family therapy

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Abstract

This article tells the story of the encounters of my mother, my daughter and myself with family therapy during divorce. The narrative employs evocative autoethnography, a research method in which my voice is viewed as a continuance of other voices emanating from the culture. I am researcher and informant both, and thereby, my own source. Events from the marital break-ups of three generations are explored in relation to family therapeutic practice using an insider perspective. The results indicate that shame has been prominent for all of us. A common thread through our stories is how shame can be seen in the ways we each experienced the distribution of power through the exercise of family therapy, in which practice appears to be strongly shaped by social discourses. The method of autoethnography can be useful to expand the concept of knowledge as well as produce detailed research into family life through elevation of intimate stories often suppressed by larger meta-narratives.

KEYWORDS

discourse, divorce, evocative autoethnography, Family therapy, memories and narratives, mother and daughter

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Practitioner points

- Three generations of women who have participated in family therapy in three different periods describe a shared theme: shame. The breach of the usual is labelled by the culture.
- Reflection over professional discourses can make family therapists more attentive and critical towards the taken-for-granted practice of our profession.
- Using autoethnography, the researcher can study, from the inside, the usual and every day, as well as the complex and difficult, in familiar situations.

When I was 10 years old, my mother wanted to divorce my father. My childhood memory of this time surfaces regularly along with curiosity about professional–therapeutic modes of understanding, scientific–philosophical positions in research and epistemological questions about truth and the nature of reality. With life experience, this memory has continuously acquired new contexts of relevance. I have experienced a relational break-up of my own, and so has my daughter. All three generations of women have felt need for and sought out family therapy. My memory has thus become part of a story that is also in a perpetual draft version, the contents continuously re-written. Also, when I look back on my decisions regarding my choice of profession and my professional interests, it is easy to see that it is not chance happenings but rather my life experience that has created this path and formed my life. After working for some years in the health service, I retrained as a family therapist at the institution at which I am now a lecturer.

The story as it appears today is personally significant because the experience described changed the course of my life. This article is built on an understanding of experience as foundational to how people interpret, understand and shape meaning in their own lives. According to Bruner (1993), lived life is expressed through narratives that assemble events to form meaningful stories. Narrative structure provides a useful way to encompass complex experiences and render them understandable. Similarly, the narrative turn within the social sciences has moved the position of the researcher from observation towards interpretation and meaning construction. At the same time, there has been a movement from the general towards the unique, with the starting point for investigation being specific experiences of individuals in varied contexts rather than the perspectives taken by general social theories. There is also acknowledgement of multiple ways of understanding a person's experiences (Sørli & Blix, 2017).

This understanding is contextualised within a social constructionist epistemology, in which human social reality is negotiated through language, relationships and culture (Lock & Strong, 2010). One commitment of this position is to the exploration of the discursive practices which influence people in negative ways. Important here is the call to identify normative conditions that impose hidden power structures and ways of being and to give voice to people vulnerable to marginalisation by grand narratives (Gergen, 2015). This form of modern power is often practised through societal discourses and professional disciplines (Payne, 2006). In this article, these practices are related to experiences with family therapy as a professional practice.

With the help of autoethnography, I explore my story from within a scientific context. I use myself as source and my history as data. However, this history involves others besides me because personal stories have a relational aspect in which we relate ourselves to a world of others (Short et al., 2013). My self is also other selves, and my story is also that of others (Bruner, 2003). Autoethnography has been described as impossible to publish ethically because experiences will

always be related to stories involving other people (Delamont, 2007). An ethical assessment, thus, involves thinking through what I wish to achieve by applying this method and why the story is important to tell. I include family members, ex-partners and other acquaintances within my own immediate lifeworld. Some of these have died, some might have presented the story in a different way. Consent has been obtained from those who are central in the narrative – my closest family members, who are my mother and my children – though there will always remain a dilemma in relation to those whose stories have contributed to and played greater or lesser roles in my own (Short et al., 2013). What I *can* do is maintain their presentation as complex, multifaceted people and not caricature them as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ (Adams, 2018). This is consonant with taking a relational perspective in which connections, not causes, are sought. It is not other people who are difficult; it is situations that are demanding to manage and hard to live in. We are all participants in a discursive cultural meta-narrative in which the roles we play are shaped by current cultural notions about family life, gender roles and good parenting (Grasaasen, 2021). At the same time, to be meaningful, this text must give voice to those who have not had sufficient space within these meta-narratives. To acknowledge the unsaid and suppressed is also to act ethically (Short et al., 2013).

Autoethnography as a method

Autoethnography is described as both a research method and literary genre (Ellis, 2004). To provide the reader with a richer and more engaging experience, techniques are employed from non-scientific literary traditions, such as poetry and novel genres. The method is, thus, as close to the humanities as it is to social science, although one important distinction from the memoir or autobiography is that of how the subjective story is understood as a dialogical expression emanating from a culture (Short et al., 2013). Through rich description, thoughts, feelings and reactions are vividly evoked to highlight aspects of experience and of the lifeworld. In this way, the research text acquires an introspective depth that prioritises autobiographical experiences with emotional power. In the practice of evocative autoethnography, lived experience is the focus, and less weight is placed on theoretical analysis (Baarts, 2010). The reader is invited into the author’s world of concern to use the content to reflect over their own experiences, whether within life or research and academic practice (Muncey, 2010). These experiences are recognised as social science data because they form aspects of the societal, political and cultural worlds of the researcher. Method and writing process connect the autobiographical with the cultural (Short et al., 2013). Personal experience is used as the point of access to cultural analysis and critique and, thus, to writing scientific knowledge into being (Baarts, 2010). By using a personal voice, researchers can present experiences that reflect real, lived life and can thus appear as fellow people coping in a living world (Gergen & Gergen, 2004).

About autoethnographic research on family life

Which family stories should be told? How do my own familiar experiences accord with research accounts? What significance can my experiences have for others? The dual role of researcher/family member can provide unique proximity to parallel stories about parents and children, friends and relatives. Adams and Manning (2015) state that autoethnography can expand the epistemological dimension of family research and thereby generate new insights into the family

as a phenomenon. The familiar aspect provides access to that which is most intimate, to nuances and knowledge otherwise unavailable for study (Gergen, 2015). As a researcher, I can explore the typical and everyday as well as the complex and difficult aspects of intimate relations and situations from the inside out. In this way, autoethnography can provide comprehensive knowledge about family life.

As I saw it

I grew up in Oslo but come from a long line of farming people on both sides of the family. My grandparents on my mother's side were down-to-earth farmers in Hadeland, a village set in open, rolling landscape with rich, fertile soil. My father comes from a little place in the southern part of Norway surrounded by dense woodland. The family was religious and strictly observant, though I do not know how much of a believer he really was. In any case, he lived in different life-worlds according to different relational contexts. At home in Oslo, and despite having a wife and children, he lived a fashionable life of wine, women and song. With his relatives in the South, life was all conscientiousness, prayers at table and conservative upbringing of children.

When my mother announced her desire to divorce, there was great commotion. It was the late 1960s, and never had anything of this sort occurred in the history of the family; powerful forces were set in motion to save the marriage – and thereby family honour. My grandfather, an uncle and my aunts arrived one after the other with serious expressions on their faces and tearful voices – and with hope for salvation. Family therapy was in its earliest beginnings in Norway, but it had been accepted. A family foundation had been established as a Christian advisory service offering help for those with 'troubled sexuality' and failing marriages. A department for the treatment of families had also been established, with the same basis in religious faith and with the goal of saving marriages on the verge of collapse. The family suggested to my parents that they admit themselves to the unit and, with the grace of God's help, resurrect the Holy Grail of their marriage.

As a child, I experienced my home as something behind glass, something cracked and fragile. I moved around, spoke, and played carefully. I asked few questions but listened even more intently for anything that might give the drama an understandable context. For my parents, this was an additional pressure, and with three small girls to raise, travelling to the treatment unit was out of the question. However, fear not; help was near. If you do not come to us, we will come to you. The therapist moved into our home. Three tiny tots became part of a dramaturgy which, as I remember it, could rival one from Ibsen's literary world. I snuck around, uncertain of what was waiting behind the next door and wary of the adults' reactions and outbursts. I can still feel the same bodily tension when I think about it, a mixture of defensiveness and resistance as well as great wonderment. I attempted to avoid the therapist, but he was determined to speak to me, and one day I was trapped on a green sofa where the pillows were so deep against my short limbs that it was impossible to exit in an unstrained way. I do not remember his words, only my great discomfort and that I did not know how to fulfil my role in the drama that was

playing out. I do not remember how long he lived with us but have a good memory of what happened the day he left. Fantasy or reality, this is how I remember it. I had gone to bed but was awakened by a violent argument between my mother and father. My sisters were also awake. We all sat at the top of the staircase near the landing on the second floor, each on her separate stair, one–two–three, with our heads stuck out through the bannisters. The staircase was covered in carpet, with a pattern of green palm leaves that spread outwards and upwards like the words from the floor below. My father accused my mother of having begun an affair with the family therapist. At one point, the latter came running out of the living room. His thin hair stood on end, and under his arm was a file folder in brown leather. On his way through the hall, he sent us a confused glance and thereafter ran out the door never to be seen again.

An autoethnographic study must be systematic but also allow for creativity and reflexivity. To be authentic, the research process must be open and without censorship of the ideas that emerge from it (Short et al., 2013). The content and text can thus develop in all directions. This is happening now; as I sit writing my story, my mother appears. I immediately notice that I am just as interested in hearing her version as I am in telling my own.

Me: Mamma, I'm exploring a new research method, and I've been inspired to write down some stories from my life. We have experience with divorce, you and I, and now also my daughter. This last one, of course, upsets us both a lot just now. I know you like to write, and I thought you might also have some stories that should be told.

Mamma: To whom? What good would that do?

Me: No, I do not really know, but I think we are three generations who have had dealings with family therapists. For each of us, it's been both good and bad. This has given us some experiences that, for me anyway, have left traces, scars actually. I think it could be interesting to write about – what we have experienced, similarities and differences, maybe. It's interesting in itself, is not it? How ideas change from one generation to the next?

Mamma: Do you know back then what I was called? The house help! Not even a housewife; I should have been valued economically, and housewives were not back then. However, I could be written off as house help. That was what I was worth; that was how they talked about me, to me, called me. Think about it; that it was like that, that they could do that. So horrible.

Me: You're getting agitated now, Mamma, and it's been almost 50 years since. That means perhaps that you still have feelings about what happened, even after such a long time. That's maybe worth writing about?

Mamma: I'll have to think about that. I do not know if I can stand to face all that again. It was awful. It's painful for me when we talk about it; I can still feel that shame. Isn't that strange? Everything one has done, and forgotten, but this bit of history I remember as though it were yesterday.

In a phenomenological perspective, the past is composed of a series of experiences. When we are born, we attach to others who are already in the process of living. We enter life as participants in an already-living society and become part of a culture where opinions and concepts are negotiated and interpreted (Lock & Strong, 2010). Through telling our own stories and listening to those of others, we navigate the world and create understandings of one another (Bruner, 1993). Experience, then, is a lived process of meaning construction unique to the individual but related to the surrounding world. My voice is a continuance of other voices and flows out of the culture of which I am part.

Memories are reconstructions of events from the past and, thus, contribute to the stories we tell about ourselves (Muncey, 2010). They refer to moments in which biographical breaches arise in our life histories, distinctions in our experiential worlds between the immediate present and the future (Lock & Strong, 2010). A ‘plot twist’ occurs, an event outside the mundane. Memories about this are neither complete nor static but, rather, change according to cultural expectations and over time. They provide access to a subjective reality observed from a current standpoint and are narrative truths in the sense that they are remembered as such by the one who relates them (Muncey, 2010).

Not all memories are to be memorialised aloud or told as stories. Our understandings of phenomena are characterised by cultural themes. Constraints in the form of meta-narratives set the conditions that determine the stories that get highlighted and those that remain in the dark. Meta-narratives are those told so many times that they take up residence in our understanding, becoming cathedrals of thought and truth. They legitimate some stories and disempower others. Small local stories are suppressed in this way, and the voices that tell them are marginalised (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018). Thus, not all events are written into the story of a life. Mamma’s experiences have not been highlighted until now. The divorce occurred at a time when the role of women and the importance of marriage were contextualised within values and conditions of possibility located in discourses and meta-narratives from which she was excluded. Events with no immediate meaning experienced as uncomfortable and shameful remain sensory experiences until an understanding of what it is that has happened is created. According to Wittgenstein, ‘The limits of language are also the limits of my world’ (in Gergen, 2009, p. 52). Perhaps Mamma lacked the language to express her previous experience. Now, she has access to a new one with words for what before had to remain unsaid. It is only when we become the bearers of language that we can expand our understanding and knowledge. Marginalisation is achieved indirectly through its communication in language in the public arena; verbal connotation is identity-creating and has power of definition (Lock & Strong, 2010).

She who shouts in the forest gets pinecones in her mouth

I never spoke to my parents about what, even so, has remained one of my strongest childhood memories. I am a family therapist myself, I have been through a divorce and I am the recipient of family therapy. These experiences continue to have the power to disturb.

Report from the family therapist: ... Mother shows little interest in cooperation and can become a problem ...

Me: The divorce was an extremely difficult time for the children and me. We had to move from our home, and for a long time, things were unpredictable. The betrayal was significant, the fall from normal daily life was a shock, and it was demanding to have to re-create a new

everyday existence economically and relationally. The kids had it rough, reacting in challenging ways, and at one point, we needed professional help. I never felt any understanding, just prejudice. I never got to tell about but instead was told to. I found I was never believed but rather interpreted. I was small, thin and, after a time, very nervous, and my voice got louder and louder in my efforts to be heard. As if in a bad movie, the family therapist became convinced by an attractive man with a soft voice and the ability to package lies and promises in rosy, shiny wrapping. At one point, shame took over, and I became silent. The move from there to new hope came only after the troll appeared in broad daylight and was melted away. The story took an abruptly revealing, and thereby clarifying, new turn. I managed to resurrect myself and pitch the tone of my voice in a more masculine range. I took my power back, wounded but with new strength.

Memories can be brought to life by sensory experiences such as smells, images, voices or touch. These often create their own emotional reactions (Muncey, 2010). Whether they are tucked away as guilt and resignation or expressed externally in the form of despair and anger, shame and victimisation are often common threads, and the reactions they cause are, at best, problematic. At the same time, anger can be a starting point for resistance if its power is used for reflection and insight. This is contingent on the adoption of a dialogical approach and the acknowledgement of what is then related (Gergen, 2009).

I grew up at a time of significant change in the equality of the sexes. I had with me the story of my mother. Nevertheless, I lacked words and remained silent. My encounter with the family therapist is still difficult to think about, and it still colours the relationship I have with my kids. It is hard to speak about what happened, and we quickly ignite. They are adults, and each of us wishes the others well, but even after many years, we continue to lack a fundamental sense of peace between ourselves. Nevertheless, the plot of the story has changed and now lies outside the original event. The experience of violation is no longer about an ex, a collapsed marriage and a broken family but lies instead in experiences with those who were there to help, particularly one especially unreflective and monological therapist. These memories are like bruises on the soul, tender points that, even at a light touch, still produce a defensive reaction.

I say what I say, but you hear what you hear

My reality is viewed now in the light of new experiences and family-therapeutic, professional and academic knowledge. However, while I seek a multiverse and try to reflect professionally from a meta-perspective, I continue to live life around my own navel. Just now, I am most concerned with my daughter, who is what I choose to call a *singular parent* responsible for two small children. Again, there has been a difficult break-up involving strong emotions. The Family Welfare Services have played it out as a *high conflict case*, requiring management by a *priority specialist unit* within the department. The father has requested *forced arbitration*. According to the woman who called her today, it is therefore crucial to begin talks quickly, even though she understands, of course, that Mother has just given birth and is on maternity leave. Her grave words, heavy with professional authority, capture me. I attempt to package them more attractively for my daughter but find myself feeling tense about what the Family Welfare Office will propose.

My daughter: Mamma, it was so awful, they did not listen to what I said. I did not get to tell anything about what's happened. They aren't interested in me or that my little boy

is ill. They just wanted to find solutions. NN says he has the right to have him, and he talked almost the whole time. They say that the children have the right to contact with their father, that they must spend time together from early on and that I must start co-operating. Or else it'll affect the kids. I do not know what to do. He's so little and needs so much, and I just cannot bear to hand him over.

I do not understand; does not it mean anything that he's a newborn, premature and sick or that my daughter has just given birth? Animals have it easy; their children belong to the body that birthed them. Hearing what she is saying now, I feel there is again a story being suppressed, an offence unacknowledged, and a voice unheard. I Google the family therapist; she's a woman my age. We have had the same professional training. What is she thinking? What is it that I cannot see?

I feel troubled. My daughter is the problem. The plot of this narrative moves abruptly from one of grief and pain to the current leading professional discourse about the importance of two parents. Her emotions also change, from betrayal to shame. With shame comes underestimation of her identity as a woman and as a mother. When a breach with normality is the dominant feature of a narrative, it receives the stamp of the culture (Bruner, 2003). At the same time as this shame is hard to grasp, it has come to colour the whole situation.

I feel a great disquiet. My muscles become stiff, and my shoulders are drawn upwards towards my head. Experiences reside in the body, and I feel resonance with the earlier stories. Merleau-Ponty (Lock & Strong, 2010) maintains that the body is the foundation of consciousness, and that Western philosophy has overlooked how people spend most of their time in activities that involve embodied vitality. Language makes it difficult to speak about this in anything but a dualistic way because the body is generally referred to as something we 'have'. Thus, we overlook the human experience of a nonreducible whole that includes thinking, feeling and acting. The body reminds us of feelings central to how we understand our experience. Love, victimhood and shame are not merely psychological and hidden in consciousness; they are also ways of behaving visible outside of the person (Smith et al., 2009).

As well, I sense this space between the personal and the professional, between reason and emotion – or is it a metaphorical vision that makes these in-between spaces so challenging? What makes me think there are walls between them, or fewer discursive directions, if I restrict myself to one or the other? Presenting oneself as a professional in relation to one's own life can be interpreted as an attempt at placing oneself in a position of superiority regarding private relationships. On the contrary, I can be too much of a therapist in terms of the expectation's others have of me as a family member. Being a professional in one's own relationships can be more of a challenge than a strength (Dahl Tyskø & Lorås, 2017). Experience is relational, and I shift between different roles. I am not me, stable and consistent, but am becoming me through encounters with others (Lock & Strong, 2010). I acknowledge my desire to defend my colleagues but am more strongly aware of how my daughter feels herself bound to silence. So, I follow suit. Family loyalty is a strong discourse.

About the research process

This text is a complex story in which the plot, roles and the narrative voices are central, but simultaneously related, to a theoretical framework (Adams & Manning, 2015). Instead of thinking about structure and form, I have felt how the memories and ideas have propelled me forward during the research process; stories, reflections and theoretical connections have been noted

down as these have emerged. Overall, I have tried to describe how the method can be applied and have relevance for research on the family. I have found that this process enables exploration and communication in ways other qualitative research methods do not.

My preconceptions have been difficult to tame, as always. Experience never provides a neat baseline or point zero but instead forms a confusing background of prior events. Before reflection can begin, preconceptions have filled the space, and during the writing process, themes force themselves into prominence. Further, I have tried to write something new into being that has been understood along the way and, thus, can provide meaning and knowledge about life. One aim of an autoethnographic text is to shed light on past experiences in a way that can create meaning, both for oneself and others (Gergen, 2009). This has occurred here, and that realisation is a small epiphany. From understanding the power of discourses and language from a scientific-theoretical, top-down perspective, significance has become concrete, almost tangible. Mamma could not account for the shame and her victimisation or speak about injustice. Such problematising lay outside the situation because it could not be contextualised within the thinking of the time. There were no words for understanding or explaining what had happened, only feelings, and they have hidden themselves in the body and taken care of the story, until now. This is both emotionally moving and professionally inspiring, and it has activated an old, not forgotten but misplaced gender perspective.

About ethical assessment in research

Research ethics are part of academic practice and have to do with being a decent person. As a researcher, I must strive to ensure that the consequences of my actions are constructive and that any shortcomings will remain within acceptable limits. To what extent have I managed to draw on practical wisdom yet remain critical of my own interpretations? This question maintains attention on one's preconceptions, blind spots and the taken-for-granted (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2014) and is highly relevant in an autoethnographic process. While one's own history affords intimate access to the phenomenon of study, it can be dimly lit and narrow, making reflection difficult (Muncey, 2010). Sometimes distance from an experience is required to balance understanding with curiosity and wonder (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018). It is a thought-provoking exercise to write about episodes from the lives of people from three generations and attempt to place these in an academic frame. Writing has moved me beyond previous limits of how to use myself, and the text is a personal piece of work. I have had to continuously assess my own comfort with self-exposure and inviting others into my intimate family narratives. Also, I am opening myself to academic criticism. I believe there is enough generosity among my colleagues, however. We engage in continuous reflection over the methodological possibilities that can expand the somewhat conformist master's thesis work of our students. On the other hand, I am aware of the general requirements in academia for what constitutes and is acknowledged as research (Adams, 2018; Muncey, 2010). In the text, peer reviewers are also implicated, though they remain a faceless group, so in a way, I may have made things more difficult for myself. When I reflect over this, it is to try to understand the premises for my work and how I have used language (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018). My preconceptions about the topic concerned professional practice understood through discourses of professionalism. My presentation of colleagues here is not to criticise them personally but rather to critically highlight issues of practice and culture. The concept of discourse is thus significant because it can raise our awareness of our

clinical work and help us ask critical questions about the unconscious and taken-for-granted (Lock & Strong, 2010).

For my mother, who has doubts about whether she can bear to go over old history, one argument is that such activity can be meaningful, even though it is painful. It can be valuable to have the chance to tell a coherent story and, thus, reconstruct one's own narrative (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2014). In any case, having the opportunity to speak about ourselves can help us to understand and to change our lives because the narrative form has a meaning structure that can open, lay out and reveal in new ways (Svenaesus, 2011). Painful feelings can be acknowledged through breaking silence and giving voice to the previously untold. The method can promote the ability to reflect over marginalising experiences and make them valid (Glover, 2003).

On the way ahead and on seeking diversity

Had I chosen analytical autoethnography, I might have had a more explicit focus on analysis and development of theory (Muncey, 2010). Regarding family therapy, there are themes in my narrative for further reflection. The feeling of shame is prominent for all three of us. During the original experiences, this was paralysing, and yet it has also accompanied us further, well hidden but never forgotten. Michael White (2007) describes how conclusions about identity connected to negative self-understanding can become interpretational frames for future events. In this sense, researching the significance of shame appears to be important. Common also in the stories is how the shame can be related to how each of us experienced the management of power in the exercise of the professional practice. Discourses of shame determine whether stories are allowed to emerge in conversations and in therapy. I have tried to describe our experiences as help-seekers. As senior lecturer in a family therapy program, I feel a special responsibility to raise this issue. As in research, awareness of epistemology is important in making decisions about how to position oneself in professional practice in the best interests of vulnerable people.

Reading a draft of this article to my sons, I was immediately asked how it can be that three generations in a row have needed and sought out family therapy. This comment was quickly countered with the explanation that the women in our family have always been strong. This was an expanding but also somewhat taxing thought. Nevertheless, I can see how this resonates with my tendency to use ideas from family theory. I choose stories that accommodate the life I want to live. We become families through family narratives (Bruner, 2003). I grasp for the metaphor 'my mother, my mirror'. A multigenerational perspective can afford a way to seek and understand the connections between our experiences.

Autoethnography as method is itself interesting to explore further. Traditional forms of scientific writing can be understood as communication to an academic research elite, and it is suited to specific purposes, though of limited usefulness if the goals are dialogue and knowledge development (Gergen & Gergen, 2004). Making space for small stories suppressed by grand meta-narratives, including those within the world of research, we can expand the concept of knowledge. Personal reflections can make the research more accessible (Adam & Miller, 2015). The method can be viewed thus as an expansion of research practice that provides an opportunity to communicate experiences in ways that can be useful for those besides academic readers (Gergen, 2009). At the same time, the constant critique of traditional knowledge development in certain autoethnographic articles has been questioned in terms of how some researchers might be attempting to establish an opposing, but not completely new, dominant discourse (Delamont, 2007; Short

et al., 2013). There is a saying that one should follow those who are searching for truth and fear those who say they have found it. Gergen (2009) notes that researchers who can occupy a diverse world try to fit many voices into their texts, including critical ones, because this invites readers to form their own opinions. Research literature does not merely provide a certain kind of content but is also conditioned by the invitation the reader is given to enter a relationship.

About greeting resistance with open arms

I am at the Systemic Cafe where the Association for Family Therapy has invited us to a conversation with therapist Ella. From reading her published work, I know that she is concerned with promoting the voice of the child in the therapy room.

Ella: People need to be met in different ways. We must not think that we know what's best for others. We're sitting here locked into discourses without listening. Today, young fathers believe that they aren't good daddies if they do not demand to have the child half of the time. We need to use tailoring, not the assembly line!

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ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical approval was obtained from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD), with reference number 786308. Informed consent has been obtained from those who are central in my narrative.

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