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Regulating Togetherness¹

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Two problems are discussed – first individually and then in relation to each other: (1) Women's regulation of local interaction systems, and (2) the methodological problem of acquiring and processing information about interaction. Data collected by participant observation in a former fishing community in Northern Norway are compared with data from a suburban block town in Southern Norway. In both environments, the creation, shaping and delimitation of neighbourly contact patterns require considerable work, by women especially. This work is increasing with increasing social differentiation and regional mobility. Registering their own problems in the gathering and interpretation of data, the authors attack the veiled subjectivity of objectivated science.

Introduction

This article is about an 'invisible' phenomenon, one which we have called 'the regulation of togetherness'. We describe our methods and discuss how the phenomenon was registered. We want city and regional planners to read it, because we think it is important that they are aware of the efforts it takes to create togetherness. Also, they should know those *who* are involved in the process of ordering and regulating it.

Our material has been obtained by participant observation. In reporting our findings, we describe not just what we observed, but also how we reacted to our own observations. We discuss the phenomenon and the social scientists' possibilities for acquiring information about it. But first we will indicate our problem area by looking at some of the dilemmas that many Norwegians feel in their daily lives.

Dilemmas of togetherness

'People are so busy nowadays. Hardly anyone pops in for a visit, you are always afraid of being a nuisance. . . .' Old people often insist that everything was better in the old days. The younger ones know they do this: 'Painting the past in glowing colours is natural for people who are no longer young and energetic. Besides, it is fashionable nowadays to dream nostalgically of the good old days when life was uncomplicated and the world was small'. But perhaps we ought to take the

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complaints of the elderly seriously, not as a generalization about the changes in neighbourly behaviour but as an expression of a personally experienced dilemma. Can it be true that this dilemma has become more widespread and important?

On the staircase in a block of flats in a suburban town in Southern Norway an elderly couple are talking to their new neighbour, a housewife who has recently moved into the block. She has just visited their flat for the first time, and now she is on the point of leaving. The old couple made her feel welcome, and she would have liked to stay longer, but apparently the visit is over. The attention of her hostess seems to be wandering, the pauses are getting longer – perhaps the flowers need a little watering. As the conversation is slowing down, the guest feels that she is gently but firmly being edged out of the door by the old lady. Her host gives no such sign that she should leave, he chats on happily as if the whole day was available for neighbourly contact.

Somehow or other the newcomer must find out the whys and the wherefores of neighbourly togetherness. It is a process of trial and error. 'Some of the neighbours are extremely stand-offish, almost snobbish, while others in the same family can be really pleasant and friendly.' Seen from the other side, the problem may be quite different. There are too many people today who regard initial friendliness as an invitation to non-stop visiting, with idle chat taking precedence over more urgent matters. One really has to show them that there are limits and if one's better half is incapable of grasping the fact that he is also responsible for setting such limits then one must do all the work alone. The newcomer must learn to interpret her neighbour's wishes and feelings about social contact and to make her own attitude clearly understood. Finding the right way to do this can be difficult even when the new surroundings are genuinely welcoming. The following situation may be experienced just as easily in a modern village as in an urban housing area:

Now that I have been invited to four of my neighbours for coffee, am I supposed to invite them all to my home in return? Or is their invitation only a sign of a limited welcome, one which allows for the continuance of a kind of non-binding contact?

An alternative evaluation of the situation might be:

Even though I really can't spare the time perhaps they expect me to invite them all here next week. Maybe I ought to ask some of the other wives to join us? Or will that give the impression that I keep an open house?

The dilemmas of daily life. Ordinary, everyday anxieties which are trivial to all but the person concerned. – For busy people, the *why* of togetherness is a straightforward question the answer to which lies in the goal, the job or the agreement. More men than women are occupied in this way in our society. The regulation of togetherness is left to the women and is a 'task' that has to be done. But it does not always present itself as a *dilemma*. Sometimes the problem is solved quite implicitly by the routines and rules of a traditional life.

In some cases the jobs to be done can be distributed so naturally in relation to people and their homes that finding reasons for social contact presents no difficulty:

A young couple live in their native village on the coast of Northern Norway. They have numerous relatives in the immediate surroundings. The husband is frequently away on the fishing grounds for long periods at a time. The wife is responsible for the children, the housework and the sheep. She cooperates with her parents and parents-in-law on a number of household tasks. She regularly meets both younger and older women at the

local welfare club. Here they knit, offer refreshments and collect money. In the spring they all help each other during the lambing. They also arrange the annual parties at the Village Hall at Christmas and on other special occasions. To her and to the other women it is obvious that these festive occasions should follow a well-known pattern. It is equally obvious who is in charge and that everyone in the village is expected to attend.

Later we will show that the less formal house-to-house visits between these women also follow a set pattern. In this community most of the daily contact results from other, more specified circumstances. The jobs to be done function as a foundation for social gatherings and the rules concerning when and how are clearly understood by all. This does not mean that there are no problems in individual relationships. These, however, are different from those that arise in environments where meeting new and unknown neighbours is a more common event.

Togetherness is regulated in different ways in the suburbs and in the small fishing hamlets. The suburban housewife has to base her relations with others on the contacts she herself manages to establish. The woman in the village, however, regulates her contact with the neighbours by a variety of more or less well-defined cooperative tasks.

In both localities, it is the women who make the greatest contribution in regulating togetherness. It is their responsibility – maybe a result of their being more often there? Much of the regulating of togetherness is brought about by tiny, unobtrusive actions. These acts either go unnoticed by an outsider or are dismissed as spontaneous occurrences.

The effort put into small acts may go unnoticed by the male observer, may be due to his lack of experience. In his own family others may have the responsibility in such matters.

Our starting point

This article discusses subjective conditions, the ways people arrange their social contacts or feel helpless about them. We obtained our information by acting as subjects ourselves. We talked to people about children, housing, friendships and conflicts (both theirs and our own); we listened to their points of view and participated in social gatherings. Our theme concerns those who gave us information and ourselves. This process of discovery has been a kind of interplay between realizing what happens in the lives of others and a growing awareness of what goes on in our own. In a refined, impersonal version such internal dialogues are well-known in social research: what material to collect and how to analyse it is guided by one's own theory-based viewpoints. The material thus collected is thereafter used to adjust the theory itself. Our version is less impersonal. Instead of removing ourselves from the scene we remain as vital elements in the material on which our research is based. By widening the context in this way we feel that something important will be gained. Later we will explain why this is so.

Before discussing the regulation of togetherness more fully the following facts are of some importance: we are both social anthropologists, wives and mothers and new settlers, one in Veggefjord on the coast of North Norway, the other in a medium-sized town in the south. Jordet, a suburb of this town, is where Inger lived for four months with her husband and children. For several months before

and after living there she paid visits to people, talked with them, and collected information. Lisbet has lived in Veggefjord for some years doing field studies on adults and children as regards the gender socialization which results in the segregated gender pattern in the school and in the community. Inger's research project was concerned with the conditions for contact which exist in the suburb and the reasons for cooperation or rejection. As neither of our husbands acted as homemaker during our projects, our working conditions were at least in this respect quite similar. On the other hand, relations between the two families and their respective environments were different. Because of the nature of his work Lisbet's husband was constantly being visited at home by local inhabitants. No such contact occurred in Inger's family.

It was the disparity in field experience, the contrast between our empirical material which brought about our cooperation. The encounter previously described with the elderly couple in the suburb was the catalyst. Lisbet read about it in a paper circulated at a seminar and reacted immediately. She was struck by the described division of sex roles which differed so sharply from anything she had experienced in Veggefjord. Inger had noticed a complementarity in the way the couple organized the encounter, i.e. the wife set the outer limits for both of them while the husband's province was the welcoming atmosphere. Lisbet had not found anything like it in Veggefjord; in this village couples apparently made no effort to order contacts for each other. Where men came in, women went out and vice versa. This pertained in almost all situations where more than one couple was present. The sharp contrast made us realize that we more easily perceive sexual division of labour where material tasks are concerned, and that we are less aware of the sexual division of responsibility on the communicative level, despite the fact that in the context of a modern town it appears to be at least as important for living conditions as other aspects of the division of labour.

This communicative division of labour does not represent the same challenge in the village as in the suburb. Lisbet became far more aware of its existence after seeing Inger's material. On the other hand she could learn more than Inger about how local people perceived sex roles and what people's image of the world was. It seemed to Inger that in the village where everyone knew Lisbet and each other well, Lisbet was able to get to know about the local culture, people's experiences and their behaviour by simply looking out of her window. In addition to her membership in local associations and the active role she played in the social life of the village, many people visited her home. Actually, these visits became too much, they overwhelmed her and gave her too little time to spend on her own affairs.

In sharp contrast to Lisbet's wealth of material Inger was a stranger in Jordet and found it extremely hard even to get to know people. Every time she knocked at a new door she was nervous of the reception; she had to explain why she had come, the nature of the investigation, how the information she hoped to get would be used, etc. Luckily most people were friendly despite her lengthy introduction, they made her feel welcome and answered her questions. But they had difficulties in seeing the need for subsequent visits, they felt they had already answered all her questions to the best of their ability.

The fact that in our research we ourselves were being confronted with the same

problems which we were investigating in the lives of others created personal conflicts. 'It must be my own inability to make proper observations and my instinct for self-preservation which makes it hard for me to obtain information.' Or 'It must be my inability to limit myself which prevents me from keeping people at a distance'. We felt that our own personalities had radically influenced our hypotheses and our collection of material. And what about our own generalizations if the whole design had become a purely personal affair?

This uncertainty was particularly evident in the interpretation of the material from Jordet. Although Lisbet was sometimes uncertain in her understanding of the local codes, she had a great deal of information on the social relationships in Veggefjord. She knew who visited who and those who were only on nodding terms, and she knew the reasons they gave for their own behaviour. For Inger it was difficult to chart people's mutual knowledge and to discover the significance of a nod or a chat on the staircase of the flats. She got to know few people well and her knowledge of them was mostly limited to their relationships with their immediate neighbours. But this was typical of the level of mutual information in Jordet. Some people, it is true, did have a broader perspective, but compared to Veggefjord their background knowledge of each other's lives was extremely limited. Regardless of our own personal characteristics it was clear to us that there were essential differences in the way information flowed within the two systems. What caused our dilemmas could also have caused the same effect in others. Lisbet's feelings might well have much in common with the subjective experience of many Veggefjord women. The fact, though, that she didn't have to participate in their daily work routines took away one of the most important means for ordering her contacts. By the very method of delving deeply into our own experiences and by comparing we had unearthed something which was true for many others.

But there was more to the problem of generalization. For if the dilemmas of daily life were experienced in just the same way by the people we studied as by ourselves, how then would we become aware of our own cultural biases? Anthropology has taught us that when perceiving the world only through one's own cultural glasses, the character of those glasses remains unperceived. You cannot do without such glasses, but you may try to change them. By comparing our experiences, we tried to accomplish such a change.

Is it hotter in the country than in the summer?

As a result of our way of working we made a number of discoveries and were able to produce ideas about dynamics within the two social systems. This, however, was followed by a far more difficult phase - that of organizing the presentation of our findings. The unit of measurement resembled a cross between a metre and a litre, or a thermometer and calendar. In fact, this new stage in our work was like the nonsense-question: is it hotter in the country than in the summer?

By contrasting our images of the different situations, we provided each other with what seemed to be fruitful and revealing reference frames for describing various types of contact. But when we wanted to present them in a linear, written form we encountered difficulties. Were the contact patterns in the different environments really comparable? The things people did, the way they did them, and what

we observed and experienced were entirely different in the two contexts. In short, what should be the standard of reference and sequence of presentation?

The remainder of this article presents one of our many attempts to answer these questions and to create comparability between our data. We feel that this brief account of our dilemma deserves a place in the research picture, as it may warn against too eager generalizations in social studies. By contrasting interaction systems in two localities, and in comparing our relations to local people, we tried to explore the different contexts of interaction. The validity of our statements about other people's lives depends on the successfulness of this exploration, not on our ability to raise ourselves above the evaluations and subjectivities of daily life.

Veggefjord and Jordet. The localities and their populations

Veggefjord faces the Arctic Ocean on the coast of North Norway. All along the fjord the mountains plunge steeply into the sea except for a broad strip of gently sloping meadows and pastures in the central area. This is the settlement with its small groups of scattered houses.

The village is a mixture of old and new homes. In the centre there is a small typical modern area with identical houses on identical plots. Old boat houses and sheep barns bear witness to past ways of life. New and recently restored houses tell of increasing prosperity. But nowadays the inhabitants are dependent on sources of income other than the traditional ones. There are few large fishing boats or new barns.

Jordet lies at the other end of the country, on the fringes of a medium-sized town in Southeast Norway. Intensive building activity took place in the 1960's and 1970's. Modern blocks were built to house as many people as possible within a relatively small housing area consisting of 1,500 flats in low- and high-rise blocks. The school and the shopping centre offer the only chance of local employment. Everything in Jordet is new; all buildings and other physical reminders of the farming previously practised there are away. In Jordet history is invisible.

Almost the entire population of Veggefjord is interrelated in some way or another. Married sons and daughters have returned to the village with their spouses and have taken over the work of their parents. As time has passed, fishing and small-holding have proved inadequate for maintaining living standards for everyone and many people have moved.

In the old days, fishing provided the main source of income and the men were often away on the fishing grounds for long periods at a time. Today only a few of the men in Veggefjord base their income on fishing, but many commute or are away for long periods of time. They work in town, in industry or in the building or construction trades inland. Others sail in the merchant or trawler fleets. Despite the decrease in the number of jobs in Veggefjord itself the building of new houses has continued. Family ties in Veggefjord have helped young couples acquire building ground there. Consequently the older people keep some of their own young people near by. In Veggefjord women have always cared for the farm animals. Besides being responsible for the children, for feeding and clothing the family, the care and nursing of the old people kept them fully occupied. In recent

years the hard work on small farm holdings has grown less profitable; no one in Veggefjord keeps cows any more and only a few have sheep. Most of the adult women are full-time housewives. Some of the younger ones have taken seasonal work at the fish factory in the neighbouring village.

Newcomers to the community live in the modern houses in the middle of the village. They are young families. All the adults have had a good education into ordinary middle-class professions. Most of them work in town and commute daily. Although it is in the town that they have their most important contacts, they are also interested in their local bonds. Their children grow up there, and they have no plans for moving away from Veggefjord.

Almost all the inhabitants of Jordet are Norwegians from all different parts of the country; a few are immigrants from Asia and South America. People have come to the city to look for work and it is their place in the housing queue which has allocated them flats in Jordet. Many of the Norwegians have family ties in the city or its vicinity and have lived and worked in the district for years. Now, as old-age pensioners they have moved into the easily-kept flats in Jordet. Newly-married couples have moved into their first homes here; while others have moved out from cramped living conditions in the city into spacious flats in Jordet's high-rise blocks.

Jordet is largely a transit suburb, many of the flats have changed hands several times already. Many of the families with children do not, however, leave the area, but move into larger flats in the suburb.

The labour market in the city and the surrounding districts offers a wide choice of jobs. Representatives of many occupations can be found in Jordet. Single and married women have part-time or full-time jobs in the city. As everywhere else, these women also bear the main responsibility of caring for the family, and many of them have the home as their job, they are housewives.

The history of Veggefjord and Jordet

The people of Veggefjord share a common history and can recount similar background experiences. Major changes in the economic structure have occurred during a short space of time. To the elderly and middle-aged villagers, however, it is still the moral standards of the self-supporting local community that apply.

Twenty years ago there was no road connecting Veggefjord with the outside world. Today it is in the process of becoming a suburb of the nearest town. The elderly recall the old days when everyone worked desperately hard, but how at that time people also helped one another more in their daily lives. Fishing called for great cooperative efforts among the men in the family and in the neighbourhood. The daily work of the women was concerned more with individual household management, but they also exchanged a great deal of help, many of them caring for older relatives and fellow villagers. Most of them had about the same amount of money to spend, and although it was little enough it was usual to share what they had with others. Generosity is remembered as being a feature of the old days.

The daily work organized much of the togetherness and a villager's reputation was based on his/her working performance. Men as well as women were judged in accordance with their performance, and the behaviour of one's spouse had little

effect on this assessment. The expert judges were first and foremost people of one's own sex. Work and recreation were based on a simple division of sex roles. In many fields the child's labour force was essential, and training for adult responsibility began at an early age.

Many inhabitants of Jordet would recognize aspects of their own childhood in the description of Veggefjord from the old days. But these memories would be private and individual. To most of the neighbours they would be of little or no interest. They might provide an important contact reference for people meeting others from the same village or school. Otherwise history continues to be a private affair and can only be revealed bit by bit, even to one's closest friends.

The first blocks of flats in Jordet were completed eight years ago. Those who have lived there since that time use these early days as common points of reference. Remembered experiences of these first years are referred to nostalgically time and again. They recall the difficulties of living with small children on what was virtually a construction site: mud everywhere, the distance to the shops, and poor transport facilities. But they also remember how happy they were to have a lovely new flat, and the general feeling of mutual helpfulness and good neighbourliness. 'Everyone made a real effort to do their best and at that time there was a really good atmosphere here.'

At different times, in different parts of the area, various styles have become dominant in the organization of community living. In certain blocks the children are allowed to roam about quite freely. The home block represents a common territory where children are allowed to be without adult supervision. This is what several of the mothers, those describing themselves as 'not belonging to the snobs', claim at any rate. In other blocks there is equally strong agreement that this type of behaviour cannot be tolerated. 'Children need boundaries.'

Fragments from these days and later are pieced together to form the history of the suburb Jordet. Experiences gained from work and togetherness have so far only been registered in the small networks and in the private histories of individual families. There is no common memory, despite the degree of permanence which already exists in the community. The generation which will have its most decisive personal development attached to Jordet is not yet mature. Like many other suburbs Jordet has for years been slandered and rendered suspect in the local and national press by trade journals and by the general public – both in the city and in the surrounding districts. One only has to mention the word 'Jordet' and somehow no more needs to be said.

The regulation of togetherness. Veggefjord: The young and the old generations

In Veggefjord it is mainly the women who participate in the daily debates and 'gossip'. In this way they negotiate old moral standards and develop new opinions about what is significant for them here and now. These negotiations are provoked by the changes within society as a whole which affect village life more and more. It is easy for an outsider to forget the necessary conditions for the creation of new opinions. They lie in the clear but unwritten rules governing both the informal and the more ritualized gatherings which the local women regularly attend. The rules

decide *when* one goes to the shop, *when* the children are called indoors in the evening, *how* casual visits are paid to the neighbours.

The following are the central themes in the local women's discussion: Events in the local fishing fleet and at home. Recipes and ideas for home decorating. Exchange of news about other villagers, cases of illness, journeys, etc. Tasks and the effort put into them are emphasized. They talk about the jobs, big and small, still to be done: repairs to the harbour, the hay harvest, home extensions and birthday celebrations. This type of conversation confirms a number of standards in their lives and maintains the prevailing style of togetherness.

A few women who work in town, and who have become Veggefjord residents by marriage, profess to be uninterested in the common activities of the local women. The older women, especially, speak of these 'settlers' in a way which confirms their position as outsiders. Having a job and commuting to work diverges from the traditional female norms. 'Travelling around too much' is automatically construed by many women as a clear sign of an irresponsible handling of local housewife duties.

Previously, most of the women met in all spheres of community life, the younger women being expected to be respectful towards their seniors. In return the younger housewives received support and advice as well as practical help: the old women mended clothes, looked after the children, etc.

As time has passed the younger women in particular have faced new challenges. The local school has been closed despite the fact that education has a growing importance in the lives of the Veggefjord children. New jobs have been established in the neighbouring village. Improved transport makes jobs in town more accessible. The younger women must also face up to many of the new challenges which arise in the regulation of social contacts. To the older people the young appear frivolous, weak and easily influenced by the daily twists of fate. These senior women are themselves at an entirely different stage in their lives. They do not live in the reality which confronts the young women.

Unable to take over the missionary societies of the past, the young women now seek similar forms of togetherness, where *they* can discuss ways of persuading their husbands to find work ashore, etc. By giving each other moral support, a group of wives did manage to persuade their husbands to work ashore for a year. However, the following year two of the husbands rebelled and returned to sea, after another year the third followed. The fourth husband also wanted to return to sea and when his wife looked to her friends for comfort at a sewing-club meeting she was told: 'Our husbands have gone back to sea, so why shouldn't yours?' The founding of new clubs is based on a good deal of 'negotiation'. It seems as if the implicit rules for membership in the new clubs are based on similarity: age, job, husband's job, economic situation.

The following conversation illustrates the kind of work we refer to, the establishment of new rules for membership: 'May I join your sewing club?' 'Sorry, we don't have any more room in the car. You know we only have one and we are saving money for a trip together in the summer.'

Recently the young women's husbands started a sports club, and some women have now organized their own handball team. Here too the effort put into developing common feelings and agreements can be observed in different ways: If one of the

sewing club members cannot get away from home in order to attend handball practice one evening, then all the other members of the club stay away too. The security inherent in belonging to one of the new clubs is experienced as a necessary qualification for joining another. All the older women's societies are in an entirely different way an integrated part of the community scene; they seem to belong and everyone knows how to act in and towards them.

What interests do the women in the new clubs develop and how do they behave towards the regime? Here, too, the altered circumstances to which the younger women must relate can be traced. Meetings acquire a new form and content. The traditional club rules for what shall be served and how (sandwiches, waffles, cakes, etc.) are rigidly fixed, as the criteria for good performance are a matter of common agreement: Marie makes the best sour cream waffles.

The young wives express a more experimental attitude. They try to give each other the support and assurance which they find is becoming increasingly hard to get from the older women by using ideas from magazines, TV, or the settler wives attending their meetings. They have a need to be accepted as true Veggefjord housewives despite their having 'only' three children, no farmwork and suffering from 'nerves'. As already suggested, the new circumstances in no way represent the same challenges to the older women. Their moral community seems to be strengthened, however, as support from the younger ones is weakened. If they use new and untraditional products their criteria are different from those of the younger women. For them it is above all the *practical* aspects such as cleanliness which are important criteria. Wall-to-wall carpeting is incompatible with their ideals of hygiene as it does not show how often the housework is done. In order to express themselves as good housewives the young women negotiate in rugs, curtains, food, etc. The competition to create new settings such as table arrangements makes them dependent on things – embroidery, cakes, carpets – which themselves create identity. This tendency resembles the older women's dependence on being able to refer to accomplished tasks. 'I can't understand why she had to have new curtains throughout the house, they must be awfully expensive too,' remarked one of the older women to Lisbet as they passed the home of a young working woman. 'She always has the house filled with cakes', one young wife said of an elderly widow, 'She always keeps fifteen different kinds, which she goes on baking year after year. She *always* talks about cakes, but, of course, she's so much alone now.'

Another contrast lies in the different styles of togetherness reflected by the two generations of women. The older women's meetings always have an explicit goal – raising funds for the poor and the needy. The younger ones are more concerned with their own daily problems or with entertainment here and now. We believe that they find their own negotiating work so demanding that there is no time left for being concerned with the fate of people far removed.

Newcomers and others in Veggefjord

When the newcomers settled in Veggefjord they imagined how they would be exchanging baby-sitting and other services. However, accepting this type of assistance meant that they had to be available to help their friends in similar situations. It can be very difficult to find room for this in a family timetable when both adults

are fully employed. The necessary conditions for developing cooperation on an extensive scale do not exist. Thus social life between the newcomers is not based on reciprocal help but rather involves togetherness for its own sake. If this togetherness is to be successful, the participants must also contribute some regulating *work*: the creation of new rules; for example there have been attempts to arrange regular birthday celebrations, midsummer and Christmas festivities.

It has been easier for the newcomers and the local inhabitants to exchange services; help with gardening, household repairs and boat maintenance is traded for advice on taxation, social security benefits, etc. It is also apparent that some contact results from the cultural differences that exist between the two groups; they exchange confidences and experiences from their partly separate networks.

As both husband and wife among the newcomers work in the not-so-distant town they have developed systems for sharing household tasks which are totally different from those of the villagers. In addition their living pattern makes housekeeping heavily dependent on consumer goods. Their extensive consumption and their way of sharing duties in the home inspire the village women. They initiate negotiations with their husbands about new standards of household cooperation and management. To illustrate this we will describe what happens when, in their meeting with the newcomers, the villagers discuss the traditional division of labour. It also reveals the importance of the relative support given to men and women when they negotiate on the division of tasks.

To some of the local inhabitants, seeing men serving coffee or looking after the children while their wives sit chatting with guests has made their own division of labour less self-evident. They become aware of something which they have always accepted as the normal order of things and are forced to reflect on it. Older women who have faithfully played the traditional role all their lives are now negotiating with their husbands to have them take over some of the taken-for-granted tasks. In the two groups of villagers and newcomers, however, negotiations about the division of work take place within different contexts. The newcomer women have work outside the village, work in which much of their identity has been invested during a long education. Their jobs, job contacts and other joint activities outside the village provide them with other fora for personal confirmation in addition to those which are traditionally female. They have all left their childhood homes and family environments, which perhaps would have made them conform more to traditional ways of sharing household duties. It also follows from this that newcomer women who take on the responsibility of running their homes are less likely to receive recognition by the community than the local wives. The former try to make their husbands take on more of the responsibility for the home, because they themselves want to continue with their careers. And as the men find this a justified demand they perform a number of tasks traditionally regarded as women's work. However, no drastic changes in the sexual division of labour have, in fact, occurred. This is most obvious in the relations between the newcomers and the local inhabitants. The behaviour of the coffee-pouring husband is seen only as a sign of good character, and peculiar to that particular individual. His broadmindedness and moral attitude are praised: 'How lucky she is to have a husband like him, most women have to do all the housework on their own!' Among the newcomers it is taken for granted that men are able to undertake household duties. But here too

the traditional code is still upheld; it is the women who more readily see the jobs that have to be done and feel the responsibility for seeing to it that they are carried out. In other words, they remain *socially responsible* despite the fact that the men have the necessary competence and willingness to perform many of the tasks. Among the villagers, housework and child care are still strongly allied to sex. Men take on such tasks when necessary but this does not confirm their masculinity; on the other hand, women performing them get their femininity confirmed.

The rules that are applied in the less formal gatherings shared by the newcomers and the villagers are also under constant revision, for example where the relationship between public and private space is concerned. The newcomer who often invites a lot of children into her home is breaking an unwritten law. 'If one person starts to let in a lot of children they will think they can come into every home. We certainly don't want that to happen!'

Jordet: The young people and an elderly couple

Jordet is a suburb with several thousand inhabitants; Veggefjord is a village with a couple of hundred. Quite apart from the cultural and organizational features, the size of Jordet makes it impossible to generalize about it in the way one can about Veggefjord. We will therefore not try to compare the two localities feature by feature. Rather, we want to compare the contexts for interaction, particularly the context for neighbours' work with the frames of their togetherness. From the larger Jordet population we select a few people who are faced with the dilemmas of regulating neighbourly contact and see how they tackle these tasks. We will return to one of the blocks previously mentioned; a three-storey building consisting of twenty-four flats with laundry facilities and playroom in the basement. This block is one of the oldest in Jordet and has a better outdoor area than many of the more recent ones. There are outdoor facilities where the children can play safely, and there are lawns and shrubs and an open sunny slope where it is pleasant to sit in warm weather.

It is only the young women who sit outside on the grass together, the older ones prefer their verandas. The men do not sit outdoors, no matter how much the sun shines. The outer area has become the meeting place of the young housewives and a tacit agreement has been reached about who belongs there and who does not. No one is directly ousted but some feel it is not a natural place for them to go. The women have developed well-defined rules for their gatherings on the lawn. The most important is that it is an *open* forum, not dominated by smaller cliques.

The lawn is not private ground; it is an easily accessible public area. It is not the place for intimate confidences and deep commitment in the personal lives of others. If a chat comes to an end no one is upset or expects an invitation to continue indoors. The outdoor forum creates the foundation for a public sphere separate from the intimacy of private life. It is a place where topics of common interest can be discussed and where newcomers can get acquainted with other residents.

The older and younger people in the block are on good terms. In particular an elderly couple and a young married couple have become good friends. The older couple are fond of music and songs and they describe themselves as young at heart. But the older woman does criticize what she calls 'the superior attitude' of some

of the young wives. They do not have the right responsible attitude towards cleaning the laundry room, nor are they sufficiently concerned about the behaviour of their children.

The older woman's criticism of the younger ones is not shown openly. The one occasion when she reacted publicly was when she saw one child beating another severely. Mostly she says nothing to the young women: 'It is too easy to make enemies, you have to think twice before you protest about anything.'

The togetherness system in the block does not allow the old lady to interfere in the actions of the younger generations. She does not have the authority of the older women in Veggefjord. Her reputation is what she herself makes it here and now. What merits she may have gained in the past are not known by anybody unless *she* herself tells them. Her present actions are the only ones immediately relevant. She cannot assume that her earlier experiences will be of interest to her present neighbours.

Where relations with the neighbours are concerned the behaviour of one's marriage partner can be an advantage or a drawback. Two families each having problems in cooperating have now moved into the block. Their behaviour is felt as an intrusion by the neighbours, who are put off by the loud quarrelling, the beating, and screaming. In one of these families the wife was treated with pity and sympathy for a long time. She obviously made tremendous efforts to keep the home and the children going but her husband was a brute and a drunkard. Everyone was relieved when she turned him out; the atmosphere improved and there was less disturbance at night. However, she took pity on him, he returned home, she became pregnant and the drinking and disturbances started again.

Her neighbours' feeling of sympathy then came to an abrupt end. They felt that by allowing her husband to return *she* became responsible for the unpleasantness which *he* constantly spread around him. The couple were viewed as a unit instead of as two separate individuals. Many people find it more natural to reduce their availability under such circumstances. This can be done, for instance, by not having the right coins needed for the washing machine in the laundry room when the neighbour comes to borrow again. 'Why can't she go to the bank and get the right change like the rest of us?'

The husband's behaviour definitely limits this wife's relations with her neighbours. The type of response she can expect from them depends on the freedom to act *he* has allowed her. The situation is far less dramatic for most women. Their husbands' behaviour is within the accepted norm, but they still affect their wives' relations with their neighbours. Taking part in many activities and having a large network requires a good partnership.

Many people in Jordet feel that the closed-in atmosphere of a housing settlement can be too intense. There are however a number of ways of administering proximity and distance in the Jordet housing settlement. But many people, in this block and in the others, feel that the best conditions for contact are those which set the clearest boundaries. This does not mean a complete withdrawal from community life, or a constant fear of conflict. It may be seen as a way to create a certain degree of independence, so that not everything which happens in the immediate surroundings affects one's own personal life. 'It is important to be one's own master.'

If anyone is to be their own master in this way then other people must respect the same rules. Visits, for example, must be paid at the right time. For most of the housewives this is not always so difficult; morning is the natural time to pop in for a chat, while they are less accessible for each other in the afternoons and evenings. But sometimes it may require more thought to find out what is the right thing to do. For example one of the younger women never tries to persuade an older friend to join her on the lawn outside the block despite genuine mutual affection and frequent informal visiting each other. She has noticed that her older friend never comes out by herself and she fears that an invitation might make her feel she was being forced into it.

The lawn functions as a meeting place because some people like having their morning coffee there in good weather and because they like to have someone to chat with at the same time. No important common task has to be done nor do any strong sanctions keep the women together as a group. Some go there more often than others, and some take a more active part in the conversation. During the many cold months of the year no one sits outdoors. For the women who meet outdoors in the sunshine there are more important things in their lives: their children, their relationships with their parents and other family members, how to make ends meet, their husband's jobs and income, working hours and stress. The next-door neighbours will probably not be living there for the rest of one's life, and even if they should do so, there are limits to how much of one's private affairs one would wish to discuss with them.

Societies and clubs in Veggefjord and Jordet

Until recently, membership in the Christian associations in Veggefjord has been the accepted code of conduct for all the adult women. Their meetings have been marked by the attitude that what concerns the village also concerns the association. This is not expressed as points in a formal agenda but as comments and references in the conversation which takes place before and after the formal parts of the meetings.

In Jordet most of the societies attract rather limited sections of the population. Since the associations have few members it is obvious to other people that they represent special interests even though the societies themselves may feel that they cover a wide field. They cannot gather the people together in local, joint activities as they do in Veggefjord. The Christian associations are exclusively for the Christians and no one else feels concerned, just as a club for old-age pensioners concerns that particular age group only.

In the societies in Jordet that have a socially varied local recruitment, such as the School Band Parents' Association, there is at the outset little contact between most of the members. The networks of the inhabitants extend in various directions and they continue to do so. The way that the Jordet community is constructed limits the number of common interests that can be developed within the locally based associations.

The comparison

The material from the two communities has now been presented. We have analysed

ways in which contacts are adjusted in a fjordside village and in a suburban town, and we have attempted to lay out the two environments one beside the other and describe their similarities and differences. This is bringing the problem of comparison into focus. Some of our readers are doubtless wondering how we can allege that we have presented a comparison when what we describe in the two environments is so different? In one place the missionary and sewing associations are described and in the other, casual neighbourly gatherings with no particular aim. We also throw in an entirely unmotivated description of married couples quarrelling about the washing-up!

The problem of comparison is methodologically central and occupies a crucial place in our work process. Before discussing this we will give some examples to show common ways of making comparisons. These ways easily come into use when one as a private individual, or as a planner, tries to explore the background and importance of different types of contact.

For example, houses in dissimilar localities are compared in accordance with their size, shape, use of materials, building costs and other distinguishing features. From this comparison conclusions are drawn about the types of contact, and of economic and moral standards found among the inhabitants. A straightforward and clear-cut version of this kind of comparison is shown by the answer a Jordet woman got when she complained to her sewing club that the neighbour's boys had taught her son foul language: 'You surely didn't expect anything else when you live in a block?'

It is easy to dissociate oneself from this stigmatizing type of comparison. Researchers (workers) and town planners have no wish to moralize. On the other hand it is easy to draw conclusions about how *types of housing* correlate with *types of social contact*. The single family houses in Veggefjord create an open, small and idyllic environment. We all know how pleasant life is in the country; the fragrance of the fields in the summer air, fish hanging on the drying racks and the small boy watching his father mending his nets. In the suburb the buildings are large, cold and impersonal. All windows are alike, the doors are alike, mother's face is only a shadow in a window high up on the wall, the children have nothing to do and all the grass is trampled flat.

We have presented this kind of comparison as caricatures. It often appears in a form which seems more reliable because half of it is hidden or occurs only as an unexpressed contrast - 'We are now concentrating on terrace housing because blocks create problems', as a spokesman for a building society said.

How can we avoid reading our own private evaluations into the conclusions we reach about comparisons based on observed differences and similarities? Such unduly placed subjectivity can easily, though perhaps unconsciously, be given the status of theory. But the huge, featureless façade which an adult sees does not necessarily appear the same to the child who is looking for his mother's face. To construct better theory we have to put ourselves at the child's level and learn what he or she sees when searching for the security in knowing where mother is.

However, planners usually have far more concrete material on which to base their conclusions. They can enumerate the differences between environments. Subjective conclusions concerning what is ugly or beautiful, or what are better or worse living conditions are unnecessary. One can talk of frequencies; people's visits

to shops or their talks with their neighbours can be counted. An observer can note how many people go through the entrance door and in which direction. By the use of quantifiable material, by coding, classifying and correlating ages, incomes and civil status, interesting distributions can come to light.

But what does contact frequency actually mean when it is separated from the context which the individual experiences? All the contents of the contact, the importance of the visit to those concerned, disappears when subjective circumstances are treated objectively. When this type of objective division is to be given life and perspective without explaining its original context, the solution becomes a return to the subjectivity of the researchers or planners, but it is not recognized as such. It is understood as general knowledge. *By separating observations from their contexts one easily produces an 'objectivity' which may well become objective, be a social fact; but ironically enough only by becoming truly subjective.* If people begin to understand themselves through the categories and views of reality created by 'objective' science, then their acts will produce the confirming 'evidence' that this subjectively based 'objectivity' is true.

How is our discussion related to this problem? Does it maintain its standard as the shining example one expects to see against the alarming background of misplaced subjectivity?

One of the aims of a scientific comparison of interaction processes must be to find concepts and theoretical perspectives that make it possible both to describe people's own categories and to show the consequences of their acts.

We want to emphasize the work which goes into the regulation of togetherness as a standard or a dimension in comparing local systems of interaction. In our descriptions of Veggefjord and Jordet we hope to have shown that the effort to legitimize initial and limiting contacts is a relatively new problem in the fjord community but is one that affects many people in the suburb. The regulation of togetherness is a problem that is felt in both communities, and in one more than in the other.

In writing up our discussions we have concentrated on the problems concerning women's formulation of rules for neighbourly togetherness. In addition, the writing has been slanted from various angles – Lisbet's special interest has been the way the younger women liberate themselves from the older women's standards by developing their own fora for discussing their most vital problems. Inger has focused on the way in which a certain agreement about restraint in the process of getting acquainted by itself has contributed to the establishment of contact patterns.

Consciousness about the work of regulation

Throughout our work we were aware that one of the main objectives of this article should be to *make the regulation of togetherness conspicuous to planners.* It is essential that they investigate the social landscape in the environment before they affect it by their activities. But if we succeed in this we must also draw their attention to the consequences of consciousness about the regulation work. The initial field work exhausted Lisbet and depressed Inger. In anthropological field work the usual procedure has been to allow oneself to be influenced by the people in the society being studied as far as this is possible. This is done by letting them, to some extent, make decisions on behalf of oneself. This happened to Lisbet but

not to Inger. In the field work after we had begun to cooperate, Lisbet could consciously use her knowledge of regulating togetherness to administer her own relationships with people. Thus our cooperation had consequences; awareness of the technique of regulation became part of our daily lives. At first this made us feel more free, but there are also less pleasant aspects which accompany being conscious of this ability for self-protection while at the same time arranging conditions for contact with other people. Willingly or not, one starts to think about one's own, and others, regulating work. Awareness of one's own regulation of togetherness made the work of regulation heavier.

Conclusion

The togetherness that people may experience at their place of abode does not come by itself. It is the result of conscious acting, of people's striving with the challenges of their daily life. Togetherness may be a by-product, expected as a matter-of-fact but not deliberately planned for. But very often it will be somebody's duty to arrange for it.

In this article we have tried to draw the planner's attention to the *work* involved in creating and shaping togetherness. By comparing our observations and field experiences from a fjord community and a suburban town, we have found that

- the regulation of togetherness occurs in both environments
- togetherness requires work
- this work implies both the creation of contact and its delimitation
- the physical formation of an environment, its history and the composition of its population shape the tasks and the solutions of this work
- the type and extent of work are different for different inhabitants. It varies according to age, sex, familial and occupational duties and privileges
- it is first and foremost women's work

By comparing our observations, and the reactions to our own actions, we also became more interested in the general problem of de-contextualization in social science. Registering our own position in the context of our study, we found that we could attack the veiled subjectivity of planning and of objectivated science.²

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Notes

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2 In Haugen (1978) and Holtedahl (1979) we have presented more material concerning: (i) the dilemmas of contact management, (ii) the relevance for strategies of social policy of the knowledge of people's and researchers' subjective categories.

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The Elderly, Women's Work and Social Security Costs¹

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The article intends to demonstrate the continuing importance of informal care, especially of the elderly, and for social security costs. The author argues that social security costs depend on the availability of informal care, not solely on economic level and the proportion of elderly in a country's population (as maintained by Wilensky). Eight countries are studied. The indicator of availability of informal care is number of women 45-59 years per 1000 elderly. Rates of co-residence between generations are assumed to measure actual care exchanged. Changes 1955-1975 are analysed. The author concludes that a consideration of alternative informal care is a fruitful addition to 'harder' variables in research on the welfare state.

Introduction

In this article we will elaborate on the ancient idea that family and state depend upon each other. Sociological classics like Marx, Tönnies and Durkheim all worried about the 'break-down' of the old informal ties between people. The uneasiness about 'impersonal' forms of care and control is a later phenomenon: 'where welfare policy has intervened, normal social contacts have been broken up' (Zetterberg 1979).

In much popular writing we meet conceptions about an older social order where people spontaneously cared for their own and others' children and the elderly. Many also believe that state protection and interference in private matters destroy man's capacity to care for one's own business. Simultaneously there is growing concern in most Western societies with rising social costs and it is often suggested that we return to care in the family as an alternative to state-supported institutions.

We will stress the significance of informal care already performed today and throw some light upon the interdependence of formal care (supplied by the state) and informal care in different societies. At the same time we will use the data to discuss the role of informal care in determining levels of social security costs. Our main thesis is that a country can spend little on social security and instead impose the burden of care on women.² The empirical data we present are admittedly weak for generalizations. Conclusions should be seen as suggestive of a dimension that we consider fruitful to incorporate into future analysis of the welfare state.