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Different methods – lasting tensions: exploring familial pragmatism through a methodological lens

The concept of familial pragmatism (Pustułka & Sikorska, 2023) was the main focus of the introductory remarks to the first part of our double-volume Special Issue (SI) on *The privacy and politicisation of parenting in Europe: family as a set of practices and as an object of external influence*. We argued that familial pragmatism works as an orienteering concept that makes it possible to highlight the practicalities of what people – at an individual (micro) level do in the face of the public/political sphere invading their private lives. The second volume not only underscores the suitability of a pragmatic approach with regard to the content of the second batch of four SI papers but also offers some methodological insights about the private/public dilemmas, alongside discussing solutions that have helped the authors/contributors to the SI – illuminate new aspects or sites of private/public tensions in family lives. In essence, we argue that – regardless of the methods used – the tensions between private and public realms persist. Just like individuals, social researchers also pragmatically and reflexively navigate the methodological landscape in their efforts to understand the private/public dilemma.

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To illustrate this, it is important to recall and clarify some salutary lessons stemming from methodological approaches taken to examine the key notions of concurrent politicisation and privacy concerns over researching families in the European sociological space, also accounting for how the "family" evolved as a construct in sociology over time. Conceptually, we follow Platt's (1986) determination in recognising that there has been a strong – if not unwavering – interconnectivity between a dominant theoretical paradigm and the preferred methodology within sociology as the discipline up until the late 20th century. Similarly, we acknowledge that the contemporary, i.e., the 21st century's streamlining of multiple perspectives and paradigms (see: Savage, 2009) goes hand in hand with the plethora of research methods.

Furlong (2015, p. 116), reminding the readers that "contemporary sociology often [is] seen as being internally divided, decentered, with the lack of a coherent core", makes a strong case for this multitude being reflected in sociology's various subfields, especially as researchers are pulled between structuralist and poststructuralist perspectives. This is also evident, on the one hand, in the parallel developments and scope expansions in family definitions and studies (see: Farrell et al., 2012), and methods used to study families, on the other hand. In essence, we argue that distinct definitional framings of family/families have been significantly impacting the types of research carried out in the field of family studies, including what can be seen in the papers included in both SI volumes. These changes are both pragmatic and inevitable since every single cohort since the 1920s onwards is believed to have changed priorities in relation to children's socialisation, their degree of scepticism towards family-life regulating institutions as well as their commitment to individualisation and secularisation (Therborn, 2004, p. 22; cf. Pustułka, 2014).

Researching "the family" as an institution

The structural-functional paradigm dominated the sociology of family from the 1950s to the 1960s (Mann et al., 1997), or even into the 1970s (Gabb, 2011; Chambers, 2012; see also: Sikorska, 2019). Talcott Parsons, one of the primary thinkers representing this paradigm (see: Parsons & Bales, 1955), refers in his theorising of kin to the definition of "nuclear family" provided by American anthropologist George Peter Murdock in the late 1940s. According to Murdock (1949), a nuclear family denotes a union of two people of different genders who jointly raise a child or children (biological or adopted), run a household together (in this sense they are economically connected) and have sexual relations of a socially acceptable form. In the nuclear family, the social roles of man, woman, and children (with gender differentiation), as well as the division of their duties were precisely defined as a result of the strong foregrounding of the "natural", i.e., biological traits.

Parsons, upholding Murdock's concept of gender division of roles and responsibilities, attributed to women (mothers and wives) an expressive function in the family (emotional support, care responsibilities), while allocating to men (fathers, husbands) an instrumental function (first of all a breadwinner role). To ensure an optimally "functioning" society, women were assigned to the domestic, private sphere,

whilst men dominated in the public domain. According to Parsons, the two main functions of the nuclear family were the socialisation of children and the stabilisation of adult personality. The successful execution of the two aforementioned functions was expected to guarantee the reproduction and stability of social order. Family in the structural-functional paradigm was portrayed as a functional "institution", one of the most important subsystems or "basic social unit" of a social system.

This type of – now largely challenged and rejected – dichotomous and gendered definition of family should be seen as being in line with the methodological focal points of sociology during this era. For example, regarding gender, attention was often split between looking at male breadwinning within the public sphere, and women's caring roles and duties (cf. Gatrell, 2005; Cheal, 2002). Quantitative approaches – especially survey methodology – were being intensively developed and used to shed light on whether the family fulfils its social function towards the broader social system (Bredemeier, 1955), and to clarify the family's place in the societal axio-normative value-order (Mann et al., 1997; Chambers, 2012).

This approach permeated the development of quantitative measures that retain relevance for family studies up to the present day. Among them is the steady inclusion of family-related question blocks and probes across key instruments of demographic data collection at national, European and global levels, translating to family scholars having the ability to compare, contrast and contextualise the changes at the macro level (see: Casper & Bianchi, 2001; Keilman, 1988; Iacovou & Skew, 2011). Moreover, quantitatively oriented family sociology, together with demography, has been critically informing family policy from the 1960s to the present day (see: Belsky, 1984; Kaźmierska-Kałużna – in this volume). Studying family composition and quantifiable indicators of the inner processes within the family or more broadly linked to kinship structures – including household division of duties, inheritance, intergenerational solidarity, to name a few – demonstrate the lasting significance and entanglement of family in the social system and social structures over time.

The late 1960s and 1970s witnessed significant transformation in family dynamics, particularly in the North American and West European societies. One seminal study that fed into the end of an era regarding the dominance of the structural-functional paradigm and its favouring of survey/statistical methods was Young and Wilmott's work (1957) on family and kinship in Britain. With its reliance on observation methods, attention to social interactions and meanings of social class, the study undermined many of the "functionalist truths" and became a harbinger of the advent of more paradigmatically diverse perspectives, as well as qualitative methods, in the discipline dedicated to family and family life (Cheal, 1999; 2002).

Furthermore, the second wave of feminist scholarship became vocal about the inequalities that dual/gendered organisation of family causes, with "family" emerging – for many thinkers – as the "lynchpin" of injustice (Okin, 1989; Millett, 1970) during this period. This was largely due to the family's primacy in social reproduction, which signified perpetuating social constructions of gender through socialisation (Cano & Hofmeister, 2023; Pustułka – in this volume). Connecting private and political realms, Millett (1970) poignantly argued that the family's patriarchal social organisation was a prototype or blueprint of social order at all levels,

thus rendering women inferior in both private and public realms. Just like the (male) "head of state", the husband/father was often viewed as an omnipotent "head of the family" who manages wealth, issues orders, and metes out punishment. The multitude of feminist critical voices (see: Chodorow, 1978; Firestone, 1970) towards family as a social institution oppressive to women (and children) went hand in hand with the broader transformation that eroded the nuclear family model's legitimacy. Ultimately, these alternative framings, alongside socio-demographic conditions and lessening social control, fostered new setups of family life that informed a notable paradigmatic shift and expansion of the methods toolbox for studying family life.

Paradigmatic and methodological transformations – towards families as "sets of practices"

The key changes happening "within family" through the late 20th and early 21st centuries have certainly been gradual and non-universal (Slany, 2002), for instance with many wondering whether and how the new ways of leading family life may undermine the persistence of marriage as an institution (Billari & Liefbroer, 2016). On the one hand, modernisation and gender equality agendas continue breaking down the traditional patterns of marrying and conducting family life, while progressively making alternative family forms widespread and accepted (Cheal, 1999; Allan, 1999; Chambers, 2012; Szlendak, 2010; Giddens, 1992). On the other hand, familism has not disappeared from modern kin relations (Slany, 2013). Being in a committed and stable intimate relationship in which one has children, as well as framing one's life aspirations on the pillar of family happiness, continues to matter to individuals and societies in late modernity (Jamieson, 1998; Kajta & Pustułka, 2023). While family values are shifting, Giddens' premonition that traditional family values are being fully replaced or sacrificed for individual goals has not come to fruition completely. Instead, changes in families are simply embedded in the ongoing broad processes of social change and more family-specific shifts, for instance, democratisation of couples (Giddens, 1992). As such, we observe the diminishing primacy of a patriarchally-ordered heteronormative marriage as the "model setting" of family life (Smart, 2007; DiGiulio et al., 2019).

Empirically, this could be observed in the growing diversity in family models (e.g., partnership unions and marriages of same-sex couples; LAT – Living Apart Together; DINK – Double Incomes, No Kids; voluntary childless; voluntary singlehood, etc.) and particularly increased social recognition of these models (e.g. Chambers, 2012; Slany, 2002). Over time, families of choice and the recognition of the LGBTQ+ community in regard to reframing or dismantling some of the previous family life models were noted as shedding new light on families, often emphasising the need for a social constructivist lens that can better reflect new and dynamic realities of personal relationships (May, 2011; Weeks et al., 2001; Mizielińska et al., 2017). In the end, "family situations in contemporary society are so varied and diverse that it simply makes no sociological sense to speak of a single ideal-type model of 'the family' at all" (Bernardes, 1985, p. 209), since "[e]vidently no one 'knows' what a family is: our perspectives vary to such a degree that to claim to know what a family is shows a lack

of knowledge" (cf. Cheal, 1999). The same can be stated about methodologies applied within the field.

In parallel, the increase in the economic independence of women revived attention to gendered dynamics in the family, as the third-way feminist thinking played a significant role in fostering new inclusivity of the private/public junction within family research (Walker, 1991). hooks (2004) drew particular attention to intersectional – class, racial, ethnic, among others – aspects that determine women's pathways in gender/family realms, Ehrenreich explored masculinity as an important feature of imagining alternative futures for families (2011), while Wolf (2001) continued Rich's (1976) legacy through her examination of blurred lines between public discourses/institution of motherhood and the realities of mothering of the everyday.

New inspirations, often grounded in micro-sociological perspectives, echo the dual impact of the idea of individualisation, as discussed by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2013). While individualism serves as an instrumental facet for empowerment within broader family dynamics that have undergone major shifts, it is also connected to challenges and complexities that come with a family's no longer stable nature. In the same vein, Adams (2010, pp. 501–503) interestingly listed demographic transition, technology, and globalism/globalisation as the three most powerful theory-driving forces for family studies since 1970. A technological perspective on family highlights, among others, the devaluation of male physical strength in the labour market, the advancement of birth control as a method of governing one's timing and desire for procreation, the increased number of whom we call "high-tech babies" being the result of medically assisted reproduction (Gerodetti & Mottier, 2009; Katz Rothman, 1989; Kramer, 2010), as well as the consequences that the every-day presence of mobile phones, personal computers and Internet have for intra-family relationships.

The demographic transition, namely, the regressive stages of populations in a growing number of countries, impacts familial trajectories through extended longevity, low birth rates, and lower marriage rates. Longer life and newfound aspirations, especially evident among women, strongly affect the ideas about reproduction and its scope in subsequent generations (see: Mynarska & Rytel, 2014). Regarding globalisation, Giddens points out that it significantly changes everyday life by wholly transforming societies and institutions of social practice (Giddens, 1992; Slany, 2002, p. 45).

Personal experiences and everyday family life were positioned much more in the foreground of the studies in the sociology of families and intimate lives in the 21st century. This is evidenced in the widespread adoption of theorisations that focus on the concepts zooming in on the family as it is "done", practised, and experienced by individuals. These ideas are ensconced in the notions of "doing family" and "family practices" (Morgan, 1996; Chambers, 2012; Slany et al. 2018; Sikorska, 2019), "displaying family" (Finch, 2007; Dermott & Seymour, 2011; Gawrońska & Sikorska, 2022; Radzińska & Pustułka, 2022), and "intimacy" (Jamieson, 1998; Dermott, 2014; Gabb & Fink, 2017).

This triad of conceptual framings shifts the definition of family from "institution" through "set of practices" (Morgan, 1996). Morgan defines family as something that people "do" and "in doing, they create and process the idea of family" (2011, p. 177). The author assumes that family (and, one may add, parenthood, motherhood, fatherhood,

etc.) is constantly constructed and reconstructed in family practices, and is created in the daily process of home-building and home-making. Smart summarises that "families are what families do" (2007, p. 27), while Finch states that families are constituted by "doing family things" and thereby "confirm that these relationships are 'family' relationships" (2007, p. 67). In each of these concepts, the emphasis is on individuals, their family practices, relationships, and emotions. These microsocial aspects take precedence over more "objective" or macro-level factors, such as kinship or the formal act of entering into a union through marriage (see: Sikorska, 2019). The new approach is moving away from the assumption that institutionalised pressure associated with family can be challenged, hence family is not the universal "centre" that determines the individuals, their lives, their choices, etc. Instead, the individuals' agency has a crucial impact on formatting and practising family life (Chambers, 2012).

Family does not occur here in the singular (as "The Family") but in the plural "families" or is replaced by the term "family life" (Smart, 2007). The shift challenges the assumption of the existence of a universal, socially acceptable and functional model of the family – a model that determines what is the "proper" social norm and what is "pathology" in family life. Interlinked fluidity, flexibility, and individuality of family practices have taken centre-stage in family research, paving the way for connecting self and society (see also: Allan, 1999; Morgan, 2011) with other notions.

The idea of intimacy in the family has become prominent with the inclusion of beyond-familial relationships (Jamieson, 1998; Smart, 2007), resulting in the emergence of the sociology of personal life focused on the relational and socially constructed nature of the ways in which people build personal connections in the families and beyond (May, 2011; Pahl & Spencer, 2004). Said developments relate to wider social theorising on post-family life, for instance in Giddens' focus on "pure relationship" (1992, p. 58) which views family-hood and relatedness as built on a "rolling contract" (May, 2011, p. 6). It also takes into account the advancements brought by individualisation, risk, disembeddedness and "the normal chaos of love" at a distance (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2013). Discussions of individual autonomy in the ethical, religious and political sense (linked to emancipatory movements, gender equality claims, stratification theory) have been flourishing, while individualism is being fostered not only by the social but also by physical space (Pustułka, 2014). Families are "tossed upon a sea of change" (Adams, 2010, p. 504), being just like the rest of postmodern reality "commodified, uncertain, outmoded, and insecure" (Weiner, 1997, p. 111; cf. Adams 2010).

The shift in the definition of the family alters researchers' lenses. Instead of dealing with the family as a social institution, i.e., a fairly stable entity located in the social system (Belsky, 1984), family life is largely analysed within a dynamic and process-oriented context that accounts for kinship practices that are polyvocal. Similarly, the attention of the researchers has switched to the analysis of what transpires within families and the interplay between families and their broader social environment. Not discarding family as a unit of analysis crucial for policy and public statistics, the research agendas reflect the multiplicity of familial voices that can only be understood on a more granular level of individuals, in line with a personal turn towards intimacy (May, 2011; Jamieson, 1998).

As such, contemporary social research acknowledges the necessity to gather perspectives from various individuals as members of families in different roles (mothers/fathers, children, spouses, etc.; see: Slany et al., 2018; Rancew-Sikora & Żadkowska, 2017; Reimann and Pustułka – both in this volume). Microsociology of emotions, desires, personal crises, practices, and choices made in regard to partnering and parenting is at the forefront of sociological theorising of the continued tensions of personal as political. Unsurprisingly, the vast majority of the papers contained in the SI leverage this approach, as the authors offer explorations of everyday family life, family practices, and the process of "doing" family.

Methodological look at SI contributions

As discussed above, the assumption that family requires constant "doing" designates a methodological lens set firmly on everyday family practices. However, focusing on how the family is "produced" in everyday practices does not simply imply replacing macro-level analysis of families (studying the influence of external factors on family life) with micro-level analysis (studying only what happens between family members). On the contrary, the practice-centred approach advocates combining both levels and analysing the mutual influences between the family practices undertaken by individuals and the cultural, social, economic, or institutional context (see: Morgan, 1996; 2011; Slany et al., 2018).

The articles collected in the two SI volumes are based on several methodological assumptions. Primarily, to discern how modern families navigate the private/public junction, the scholars have predominantly utilised qualitative approaches, focusing on individuals. This means discerning the intricacies observed within their relational sphere and practices, but also recognising how they are shaped by the surrounding political landscape and its invasion of private life. The majority of the papers (see articles by Reimann, Binder, Kajta, Sikorska, Herzberg-Kurasz, and Pustułka) present data positioned this way and obtained from in-depth interviews with different family members. For example, we hear Reimann's children-narrators talking about joint physical custody arrangements as practical reflections of public discourses on post-divorce/post-separation understandings of problematics. Similarly, Binder's interviewees speak about their personal choices of organising family life, yet these are inherently constrained by economic, legal and cultural constructions of gender. Also showing this approach, Pustułka points out the difficulty of attributing intergenerational shifts in family values to just private (family socialisation) or just public (societal values) realms.

As empirical evidence, the data offers deep insights and understandings of the multi-perspective and dynamic nature of contemporary family life at the private/public junction. It enables exploration of the topics dealing with relationships and emotions and, under specific methodological assumptions, facilitates the investigation of everyday practices. Furthermore, despite conducting the interviews in accordance with the specified scenarios, the interview setting lets the interviewees introduce and pursue themes that the researchers might not have explicitly set out to question. The material collected through in-depth interviews serves as documentation of the

language and narrative framings employed by the individuals, allowing researchers to track familial pragmatism in the stories.

To boost the methodological soundness and explanatory value of their data, the Authors of the SI contribution complement the single-person one-time interview approach with additional designs or techniques that enrich it. Firstly, papers by Binder, Herzberg-Kurasz, and Pustułka rely on temporal approaches of qualitative longitudinal research (QLS; see: Neale, 2020) to investigate the changes in individuals' practices and attitudes in response to evolving external circumstances over time. Secondly, articles by Sikorska, Herzberg-Kurasz, and Pustułka use the empirical material from interviews conducted through a multi-perspective approach (Vogl et al., 2019), which recognises that the dynamics of family lives – especially in terms of relational and cultural tensions – may warrant collecting data from multiple family members. Tracking responses in pairs (i.e., intergenerational dyads, intimate/romantic/spousal couples) can shed new light on the relationships and possible points of inconsistency between respondents navigating the political/private junction.

Beyond expanding research designs, it is also crucial to see that the Authors are not only looking at "typical" actors of "doing family" in family research. Specifically, the focus on parenting as it is being "done" by mothers and fathers (which is addressed by Sikorska, Pustułka, Kajta, Herzberg-Kurasz, and Binder), Reimann's paper contributes the viewpoint of children, a group which too often is still overlooked in family studies. Subject-wise, the article by Budginaitė-Mačkinė also focuses on children's issues and positioning, yet adds on another dimension to mapping the family standing in the public sphere. Using discourse analysis as a method, Budginaitė--Mačkinė recognises the influence of media on children's lives and argues that these shape the societal norms regarding "suitable" childhoods, and determine the scope and framings of policy interventions. In contrast, the review article by Kaźmierczak--Kałużna effectively highlights the tensions that occur between personal choices about reproduction and the societal ideas about it established by public policies. Consequently, it serves as a compelling example of how one can integrate both individual and societal perspectives when looking at aspects of "doing family" at micro- and macro-levels.

Going forward, we postulate a need for combining explorations of family practices and family pragmatism with mixed-methods approaches. In order to fully understand the processes of "doing family" (Morgan, 1996) and familial pragmatism (Chang, 1997; Pustułka & Sikorska, 2023), family research should strive to break the existing divides – both between the individual and structural perspectives, and the qualitative and quantitative methods that tend to come with them.

Structure of the second volume of the Special Issue

Four papers forming the second part of this double SI have already been mentioned above, but now they will be discussed in detail, in relation to both familial pragmatism and their methodological contributions to the study of the private/public intersection in family studies.

In the first paper, Irma Budginaitė-Mačkinė uses the concepts of "family troubles" and "troubling families" (Ribbens McCarthy et al., 2013) to investigate representations of transnational childhoods and childhoods abroad in Lithuanian media. The Author sets an explicit focus on sources concerning child protection and children's rights as matters of the public and state's interests. The starting point for Budginaitė--Mačkinė's analysis is the assumption of the crucial role of media in defining "good" families and "appropriate" childhoods. Employing public discourse analysis on two Lithuanian internet media portals, the Author focuses on a subsample of news items referring to child(ren)'s rights and the protection of child(ren) to examine how mobile and transnational childhoods have been constructed and understood as "vulnerable" and in need of protection. To this end, Budginaitė-Mačkinė's paper reflects the tensions that inspire moral panics stemming from the disregard of the voices of the actual actors of the family process – in this case migrant children. Moreover, the paper shows a different side of pragmatism, happening in the media sphere. Specifically, in the era of media sensationalism (Uzuegbunam & Udeze, 2013), it is the media outlets that pragmatically reframe the public discourse around private phenomena. In that sense, the children's "right to tell" (their private stories) is overshadowed by media and political (public) interest "to sell" a troubling vision of transnational families.

In her review paper (the only one of this type in both volumes of the special issue), Izabela Kaźmierczak-Kałużna discusses factors responsible for fertility in Poland and refers to the situation in other European countries. Presenting economic and socio-cultural conditions, the Author focuses on institutional solutions, especially the role of public and (pro)family policies, and then poses questions about the causes of Poland's demographic collapse. The analyses also take into ac-count the impact of recent social crises (e.g., the pandemic, legal changes that limit the availability of legal abortion), which on a microscale may contribute to postponing reproductive decisions and, on a macroscale, may result in further depopulation of Poland. The paper demonstrates the tensions between the private sphere (the individual's decisions on procreative behaviour) and the public/political domain (public policy addressing fertility issues). While Kaźmierczak-Kałużna does not offer direct narratives about familial pragmatism, the paper provides the framing for studying this issue among Polish women and couples of reproductive age. Specifically, we hypothesise that the new abortion law (see: Bucholc, 2022) will result in more familial pragmatism, as women (and couples) who ponder having children (or subsequent children) may limit their procreation due to fear of not being able to legally terminate their pregnancies for embryo-pathological reasons.

Magdalena Herzberg-Kurasz investigates an often overlooked – in Polish scholarly family literature – social and sociological dichotomy between the role of a mother in the early stages of parenting and the role of a mother of an adult child. The research is based on data from a longitudinal and multi-perspective qualitative study of individuals and couples whose adult children have left the family home. Considering life-cycle or life course as determinants of mothering as an everyday practice and motherhood as a social institution, the Author explores tensions between the two conflicting spheres. On the one hand, we see the private situation of women who face a new reality of "doing family", grappling with emotions and reframing their mother-role as the result of their children

leaving the nest. On the other hand, the Author elucidates that women's identity constructions are related to the public policies and social norms regarding motherhood. The article shows how women may pragmatically work on reconciling (successfully or with more challenges) the tensions within motherhood at different stages of their life--course/biographies, as well as sheds broader light on how couples organise their lives in the new phase of the family life-cycle.

Last but not least, Paula Pustułka's article explores the process of intergenerational transmission via the lens of parenting as a value. The paper contributes to a better understanding of long-term socialisational effects in the changing intergenerational context of parenting and families in Poland. Pustułka draws on data from two qualitative, intergenerational, multi-perspective, and longitudinal investigations (interviews with intergenerational dyads of young adults and their parents) and observes the main reasons for failures and successes in the transmission of parenting from one generation to the next. The tensions between the visions of young adults and those of their parents lie in the combination of societal values that are promoted or simply dominate the public sphere, and everyday family lives as transmission channels. From a generational perspective, we can distinguish a much greater familial pragmatism in how young people talk about parenting and reproduction, being especially attuned to the constraints that the political sphere imposes on individuals' private decisions in contemporary Poland. Hence, the issue of intergenerational transmission is a prime example of the "clash" between what is private (individual family transmission in this context) and what is public (social change in values, norms, and parenting patterns).

As the Guest Editors of this double-volume SI, we would like to close this *Introduction* by once again thanking all Authors for their contributions. We are strongly convinced that the papers can inspire further research and discussions pertinent to the topic of the privatisation and politicisation of parenting in Europe.

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