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Activity contracts and directives in everyday family politics

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ABSTRACT

In theorizing on family life, children's agency is a feature of a modern type of family, marked by free choice and inter-generational negotiations, rather than parental authority. A video ethnography of everyday life in Swedish families documents directive sequences and inter-generational negotiations, including what is here called *activity contracts*; agreements that form a type of inter-generational account work around target activities (e.g. cleaning one's room). Within local family politics, contracts and revised contracts emerge as parts of such account work.

The analyses focus on how contracts emerge within successive downgradings and upgradings of parental directives. Activity contracts regulate mutual rights and obligations, invoking family rule statements and local moral order, drawing on an array of verbal and nonverbal resources, ranging from parents' mitigated requests and children's time bargaining to nonverbal escape strategies and gentle shepherding.

KEY WORDS: directives, directive trajectories, downgradings, upgradings, social accounts, moral order, and activity contracts.

In theories on modern family life (e.g. Bauman, 2003; Beck, 1997; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Giddens, 1995), agency and choice are key features. In contemporary Western contexts, welfare reforms, modern contraceptives, public schooling and internet society have widened the horizon of choices for the individual, who may now choose and re-fashion education, partners, jobs and friends, beyond the constraints of traditional family life. In a society, where even family relations are "chosen", rather than pre-assigned, rights, obligations, and mutual accountabilities are constantly open to scrutiny and renegotiation (see also Bauman, 2003; Giddens, 1995). Moreover, children's agency is a key issue in modern theorizing on the sociology of childhood (James et al, 1998; Prout, 2005). Socialization into self-regulation can be seen as one of several aspects of a modern childhood where children are recurrently free to choose

lines of action (Ochs and Izquierdo, 2009), as well as positions within the local moral order (Aronsson and Forsberg, 2011). In this process, parental directives can be seen as part of a continuous balancing act between parental involvement and interference and children's individual action.

Yet, there are relatively few detailed documentations of the distinct ways in which modern family members negotiate mutual rights and obligations, or how subjectivity and freedom of choice are interactionally established within situated everyday activities. This study therefore documents such choices in families' ways of handling directives; through parents' and children's negotiations, and children's compliance/resistance.

Early work on family life directives has not analysed in detail, the interactional design of directives, but has instead focused on the recipient's compliance and understanding in relation to the target directive's formal features, for instance whether the directive is downgraded or mitigated (cf. the pioneering facework analyses of Blum-Kulka, 1990; Brown and Levinson, 1987; Ervin-Tripp, 1976; Goffman, 1967). Reason giving, along with tags, collaborative 'we'-forms, endearment terms, and other diminutives, are part and parcel of facework theories and have been discussed as types of mitigation, that is, downgradings of directives or requests (e.g. Brown and Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1967). Similarly, indirectness as in modals and interrogative formats (e.g. 'can you...'), hedges, vagueness, and impersonal constructions are deployed for downgrading requests. These strategies are oriented to respect displays and to the recipient's face in that s/he may choose not to take up the potential imposition involved. In fact, the recipient may not even acknowledge vague or indirect requests for action.

From an interactional perspective, downgradings or upgradings of directives have to be understood from the participants' uptake. The speech act bias of such facework theorizing has therefore been criticized in that what is vague or off record is ultimately an empirical matter, as has been shown in pediatric encounters (Aronsson, 1998; Aronsson and Rundström, 1989;

Stivers, 2001). Yet, some of the basic observations of facework models may actually be deployed as descriptive resources for undertaking sequential analyses of up- and downgradings of requests, directives, and other potential impositions on participants in a conversation (for related contemporary work, see also Craven and Potter, 2010; Goodwin, 2006; Stivers, 2001).

In his analysis of a family reunion, Sacks (1995:vol. II, pp. 318-331) documented ways in which requests, threats, offers and warnings could be read cross-utterances as *sequential versions* of inter-generational identity work, where family members mutually tried to influence each other. In line with a dialogical orientation, the focus in recent work on directives in family life has been broadened to encompass inter-subjectivity, children's agency, and co-participants' uptake (Aronsson and Thorell, 1999; Aronsson and Forsberg, 2011; Cekaite, 2010, Fasulo et al. 2007; Goodwin, 2006; Grieshaber, 1997; Ochs and Izquierdo, 2009; Sterponi, 2003; 2009).

Our study draws on work on family life accounts (e.g. Blum-Kulka, 1997; Sterponi, 2009 on parents' vicarious accounts) and it examines both parents' and children's account work for undertaking or not undertaking target activities, detailing sequential versions of directives and accounts. The present study explores issues concerning the sequential development of contracts in two ways: by analyzing their interactional basis in the family as a multiparty participation framework, and by taking into account the fragility of contracts in a temporal perspective. In her recent interactional work on directives, Marjorie Goodwin (2006) has similarly focused on directive *trajectories* in family life, that is, on the sequential development of directives through the recipients' uptake/non-uptake and negotiations about what is to be accomplished and when.

Our analyses extends prior work on family directives by specifically focusing on interactional features of directive trajectories, and more precisely through sequential analyses

of negotiations of specific target activities across extended time spans (e.g. a day or a week). One of our major findings is that families, as parts of directive trajectories, recurrently engage in formulating a distinct type of reason-giving or account - what will here be called *activity contracts* - that is, spoken agreements about future compliance that make children morally accountable for their future actions (and for failed action). We will demonstrate how contracts involve multiparty design features in that they specify who is to do what, and who is accountable to whom (e.g. 'you promised Dad'). Moreover, we will show how contracts specify various conditions, e.g. when, why or with whom the target activity is to be accomplished.

DATA AND ANALYTICAL PROCEDURE

In line with language socialization theorizing, the present study combines ethnographic and interactional approaches, exploring how social relations are co-constructed sequentially across time (Capps and Ochs, 1995; Goodwin, 2006).

The analyses draw on almost 300 hours of video recordings of family life routines in eight Swedish middle class households, documenting the ways in which family members engage in the multifold tasks, activities, and responsibilities of dual-earner families. In each family, there is a target child of 8 – 10 years of age, and at least one sibling. In total, the present families include 23 children of 2-16 years of age.

In the prototypical case in our data, parents and children engaged in protracted negotiations. Out of a corpus of 90 parent-initiated directive sequences, only a few parental directives (12 cases) were honoured without children's initial non-compliance or negotiations of the terms of the target activity. Our data contain activity contracts and directive trajectories involving children of all ages. Within such directive trajectories, activity contracts were important interactional accomplishments and resources.

Several ethnographic procedures (e.g. video recordings, interviews, and trackings) were used in order to document everyday routines and events. The families were recorded during one week, which has made it possible to document directive trajectories over time. On the basis of activity logs, trackings, and repeated viewings of the videos, episodes have been identified that involve activity contracts, embedded in extended directive trajectories.

Transcription and translation

The videotaped interactions were transcribed in Swedish, and all primary analyses have been based on viewing the Swedish videos, and on reading the original Swedish transcriptions, including analyses of family members' gaze, patterns, body posture, locomotion, and other types of embodied actions (cf Appendix, Table 1). The Swedish transcripts have later been translated into English, and for the sake of anonymity, all names of family members and other key names have been fictionalized. Also, we do not present examples that include unique information that might reveal the identity of any of the families or individual family members.

Identification of activity contracts

Obviously, much of family life depends on the local distribution of household and care duties: infants are initially fed, carried and washed by their parents. Gradually, chores are then delegated to the children themselves, as they grow into independence. In terms of target household activities, located within directive trajectories, that is, series of consecutive related directives, covering a day, some days or up to a week (the duration of our video recordings in each family). The present focus is on cleaning practices, e.g.

personal hygiene and cleaning house activities (see also Fasulo et al. 2007; Goodwin, 2006).

Activity contracts constitute parts of directive trajectories and participants' account work. The term is dialogical in that any contract involves at least two turns that require: (i) a formulation of the contract by one party, and (ii) a ratification by the other party.

An important contribution of this paper is that each emergent activity contract will be tracked from its early instigation to the actual execution of a target activity, including specific moves such as drafts of contracts, ratifications, invocations, and revisions. Directive trajectories are analyzed in sequential detail, with a focus on participation frameworks and affective indexing of interactional contributions (on affective stances, cf. Ochs et al. 1996; Goodwin, 2006; Cekaite, 2009).

Analyses of downgradings and upgradings of directives

As discussed by Sacks (1995), participants may down- or upgrade a target directive, and it is possible to identify *sequential versions* of a given directive or request. Obviously, different versions are linked to different types of demands and social contexts. Familiarity and social distance may play a role: an unfamiliar person is not likely to produce an unmitigated directive, whereas a family member may do so (Blum-Kulka, 1990; Brown and Gilman, 1989; Brown and Levinson, 1987; Ervin-Tripp et al. 1990).

Below are listed some types of downgradings and upgradings that have been identified in the present data (Table 2).

/ PLEASE, INSERT TABLE 2 HERE/

There were no set sequential patterns for exactly where and when activity contracts would be initiated. In most cases, though, activity contracts and revised contracts would appear after the

adult had tried a series of other downgraded and upgraded options (see different versions above). Moreover, activity contracts generally did not mark the termination of a directive trajectory. When the child had agreed to a specific line of action, s/he would still at times resist parental demands for the target action, postponing the target action or initiating a revised contract (see also Excerpts 1d and 2c).

FINDINGS

In the present data, activity contracts are inextricably embedded within directive sequences, where both parents and children engage in extensive account work.

In the prototypical case, the target activity (here: showering, cleaning one's room) was carried out only after series of directives, where the parents first engaged in hints, first mentions, and mitigated directives, then in verbally and nonverbally upgraded directives, emotionally charged warnings or threats. Conversely, the children engaged in flat refusals, evasive moves, time bargaining, revisions of contracts and other negotiations. The target activities were thus accomplished as the outcome of extended directive trajectories that included directives, flat refusals, accounts, and negotiations, including activity contracts, and revised contracts.

A contract would gradually emerge from the first invocation or mention of a target activity to the drafting of a contract. The contracts were initiated a quarter of an hour before an activity or even a week before the target activity. Below, we have selected two cases of extended directives sequences (illuminating common patterns in the present Swedish middle class families), one involving a young child and another involving an adolescent. Both cases feature revisions of contract, documenting the display and co-construction of children's

agency, and the precise ways in which both preschoolers' and adolescents' initiatives may modify initial parental requests.

Social accounts and moral order: an activity contract about “taking a shower”

Accounts have been studied as the basic building blocks of the social (moral) order of family life (e.g., Ochs et al. 1996; Sterponi, 2003). Excuses and justifications (Scott and Lyman, 1968), reason-giving (Ervin-Tripp, 1976) and other accounts for dispreferred activities are inextricably related to the co-construction of social order within family life. In line with conversation analysis, accountability is intimately linked to “ways of doing dispreference” in social interaction (Buttny, 1993, p. 44; Sterponi, 2003; 2009). In asymmetrical social relations, requests or other impositions may still be backed up by accounts, thereby honouring the recipient's right to take part in the choice of action.

As pointed out, one of our major findings is that families recurrently engage in formulating activity contracts. On the basis of two illustrative case studies of directive trajectories, we will demonstrate in detail how activity contracts are negotiated and ratified, and how such mutually ratified agreements constitute a locus where social accountability and freedom of individual choice are interactionally negotiated and accomplished as part of routine directive sequences in Swedish family interactions. These case studies will document ways in which parents provide reasons (accounts) for why children need to undertake dispreferred actions, whereas children may respond with excuses and justifications or other types of reason-giving for not undertaking the target action. Both children and adults employ multiple discursive moves for negotiating the local moral order (on moral order and micro-politics of everyday life, see also Bergmann, 1998).

The following example (1a – 1e) illustrates a case of extended negotiations, where the first documented mention of the target activity took place in the morning, but a mutually

ratified contract (and the accomplishment of the target activity) was not accomplished until in the same evening.

Mother is the first one to mention that her five-year old daughter, Ida, should take a shower (Ex. 1a), and in the face of Ida's flat refusal, she produces a series of accounts.

Ex. 1a. 'First' mention and Ida's account work.

Wednesday morning (7.33) Mother prepares children for leaving home; combing Ida's (5 years) hair, Ludvig (3 years) is in the bathroom. (Father is not at home).

- > 1   Mother   Time to shower tonight right?
     2   Ida   No:pe
-> 3   Mother   Well you did not shower yesterday Dad said.
     4   Ida   No I will shower on Friday.
-> 5   Mother   On Friday yes. ((laughing voice)) You'll shower on Friday x
     6   (.) but before it will smell if you won't shower
     7   you know.
     8   Ida   No: it will not.
-> 9   Mother   Then [your pals will (x). Ida! What is it
     10   Ida   [xxx the guys tomorrow?
     11   Mother   that smells! They'll say. ((theatrically))

In line 1, Mother produces a first mention of the target activity 'time to shower tonight, right?', that serves as an initiation of an activity contract. Within a more authoritarian family model, she could have produced a blunt directive 'you must shower tonight'. Instead, Mother mitigates her demand in two ways, presenting it as an impersonal construction, and by terminating it with a tag. She is thus presenting it as something to which Ida might agree or not agree ('right?'). However, Ida responds with a flat refusal ('nope', line 2). Mother then provides a (first) account for her request, namely father's report that Ida did not take a shower the night before ('well you did not shower yesterday Dad said', line 3).

In response to mother's mitigated request, (backed up by her accounts), Ida in effect does not agree to take a shower the same night; but to take a shower two days later. She thus

demonstrates her agency by re-formulating the proposed terms of agreement, bargaining for time (cf. Goodwin, 2006; Sirota, 2006). In a second account, Mother spells out the reason why Ida has to take a shower; otherwise, she will smell (lines 5-7), but Ida simply denies that this will be the case. Ultimately, Mother then points out the risk that Ida's pals will notice the bad smell (lines 9-11); a reason giving (Mother's third account) that in fact takes the form of a mild warning: Ida might become the object of public shame.

The termination of the topic of showering (line 10) without any explicitly confirmed contract can be seen as a failure on Mother's part. However, it can be noted that such a termination of the negotiations allows the participants to avoid an escalation of the conflict. Yet, the topic has been raised, which means that a family member can be seen as partly accountable even if a contract has not been ratified.

In the evening of the same day, that is, the time frame indicated for showering, Father upgrades Mother's earlier directive about showering, formulating it more directly, underpinning it by a mild threat.

Ex. 1b. Threat and non-responsiveness

Wednesday evening, family dinner (17.46). Mother, Father (F), elder sister (8 y.) and a friend of hers; Ida and Ludvig.

1	Ida	Dad can you (xx) ((displays ketchup stain on sleeve))
2	Father	X your arms. ((cleaning Ida's sleeve))
-> 3		Get going and jump into (.) the shower. Otherwise
4		there will be no (.) Bolibompa. ((referring to children's program))
5	Ida	((does not respond, continues eating))

Father's bald directive ('jump into the shower!') is here backed up by a threat that lays out the consequences of non-compliance: Ida will miss the children's show Bolibompa which will start in fifteen minutes. Bolibompa is a popular children's program that is known to organize the lives of many Swedish families with young children. Families

plan their meals so that they will not overlap with it or, for instance, use it as a kind of babysitting delegate, preparing the evening meal, while the children watch the program. Father's account is multifunctional in its design: it can be seen both as a *negative account* (i.e. threat) and as a *positive account* (cf Sillars, 1995; Goodwin, 2006): it is in Ida's own best interest to get going with her shower, so that she will not miss Bolibompa. Quite in line with the focus on democracy and free choice in modern family life, his strategy is that of persuasion, rather than coercion. His account is formulated as an impersonal, somewhat mitigated threat ('otherwise there will be no Bolibompa'): it does not refer to either the 'I' or 'you' of those involved in the projected negative consequences of non-compliance. His threat does not generate any response though; Ida just continues to eat (line 5).

Father's threat implicitly builds on both his and Mother's prior account work in soliciting Ida's involvement in the upcoming showering project. (In any case, the parents revealed to Ida that they have discussed her showering which could be seen in Ex. 1a: line 3). In this family, as in many other families in our data, negotiations about cleaning practices (and children's other non-preferred activities) are, to a large extent, multiparty family affairs, where the parents collaborate intimately, tying to each others' prior turns, referring to and quoting each other, making the child accountable to both parents (whether they are currently present, or not).

Next, it will be shown how the activity contract is ratified: Ida eventually does agree to her parent's plans for the target activity (Extract 1c).

Ex. 1c Mutual ratification of activity contract

Wednesday evening, family dinner (17.52). Mother, Father, Ida (5 y.) and Ludvig (3 y.) at the dinner table. Ida has finished her meal and starts to run upstairs from the table toward the TV room.

1   Father   Xx come here! Come here! ((disciplining to Ida))

1987). Yet, as can be seen amply in our data: what is on record or off record is to a large extent a dialogical affair or more precisely, a matter of what the participants themselves chose to attend to.

Moreover, and more importantly in the present context, the family members' protests testify to the importance of activity contracts or rudimentary promises and to the multiparty frameworks of the importance of moral order and accountability in family settings.

Downgradings, upgradings, and revision of activity contract

Activity contracts can be seen as a specific type of reason-giving or social account. This also means that activity contracts belong to interactional resources that might be used for downgrading and upgrading parental requests and demands. For instance, when parents make requests or *ask* children what to do, they can be seen to downgrade their demands, drawing on various resources for displaying less entitlement (e.g. constructions, such as 'I wonder if you...'), and when they use bald directives they can be seen to *tell* children what to do (Craven and Potter, 2010; Curl and Drew, 2008). Similarly, our findings show that accounts, and more specifically activity contracts offer parents entitlement for making future (upgraded) demands on children.

The next sequence highlights the emergent nature of activity contracts: while constituting interactional means for upgrading parental request, and holding the child accountable for the target action, activity contracts are simultaneously amenable for negotiations, revisions and reformulations.

Ex. 1d. Revision of activity contract

Wednesday evening, family dinner (17.54). Father and Ludvig are seated at the dinner table. Mother fills the dishwasher. Ida watches TV 'Eurovision Song Contest' (upstairs in the TV room with elder sister and her friend). M leaves the kitchen, locating herself at the bottom of the staircase.

1 Mother IDA: ((calling up toward the TV-room))
 2 (2)
 -> 3 Mother Ida darling can you come down no:w.
 4 (.5)
 5 Ida No: I want=
 -> 6 Mother =But you promised Dad that you'll jump into the shower
 7 Ida YEAH BUT I'M CHECKING! ((watching TV; dancing on
 table, gazing furtively at sister and friend))
 -> 8 Mother NO:W! (.) YOU'LL COME DOWN. Bolibompa starts soon!
 9 Ida I can not!
 10 Mother Well you sure can!=
 11 Ida =It's such a good song!
 -> 12 Mother Yeah after that song you'll come.
 13 (.5)
 => 14 Ida °Good° ((still speaking from upstairs))
 -> 15 Mother OK?
 => 16 Ida YEAH

Mother initially tries to summon Ida, but she does not succeed in soliciting her attention or in making her come down. In line 3, Mother then spells out her message 'Ida darling can you come down no:w'. This directive is mitigated through several linguistic resources, linked to recipient design concerns: personal naming, an affective address term 'darling', an interrogative format, as well as a modal format ('can'), rhetorically positioning Ida as someone who may choose to come down or not. In brief: Mother is invoking Ida's agency and free choice (she is not just told what to do). Yet, these mitigations are of no avail in that Ida refuses. Mother then offers an account that shows her daughter's moral accountability for carrying out the (target) activity: she invokes Ida's promise to her father to take a shower ('but you promised Dad that you'll jump into the shower', line 6).

It is first when Ida refers to her personal taste and her liking of the song, that Mother ultimately suggests a revision of their contract (line 12). Conceding to her daughter's personal preferences, Mother is laying out a novel time condition for the target activity

‘yeah after that song you’ll come’. Apparently, Mother does not hear Ida’s *sotto voce* acknowledgment (line 14). In any case, she repeats her request for ratification that they have now actually reached an agreement. Ida then provides a minimal assent that serves as her ratification of the revised activity contract.

The next sequence (Ex. 1e) shows how an invocation of the revised activity contract allows Mother to markedly upgrade her request and, how she ultimately achieves her daughter’s compliance (taking a shower after the song).

Ex. 1e. Invocation of revised contract

Wednesday evening (17.56). Ida watches TV (upstairs in the TV room with elder sister and her friend). ‘Eurovision Song Contest’ has finished. Mother is downstairs, finishing sorting garbage; she leaves the kitchen and places herself at the bottom of the staircase.

->	1	Mother	IDA now you’ll come <u>down</u> !
	2	Ida	((6) ((watching TV))
	3	Mother	↑I:DA
	4	Ida	YEAH? ((watching TV))
->	5	Mother	NOW! (.5) Now the song is over, I can hear that.
	6	Ida	((watching TV, does not move))
->	7	Mother	COME here! ((goes upstairs, whistles; establishes a facing formation in relation to Ida))
	8		(1)
->	9	Mother	Ida! <u>Come</u> now. I’m starting to get angry at you.
=>	10	Ida	↑Bye then. ((to camera man, follows M downstairs))
->	11	Mother	Well (.) we’ll get undressed and go into the shower. ((shepherding Ida from behind))
	12	Ida	De: dut dut ((looking at the researcher, engaging in sound play))
->	13	Mother	((shepherding Ida all the way into the bathroom))

In contrast to the mitigated directive in the previous extract, Mother has now upgraded her directive: speaking loudly, and in a declarative, unmitigated format, pinning down a specific time conditions (‘now’) and location (‘down’) for the target activity. She is apparently

invoking their shared knowledge of the revised contract, holding her daughter accountable for understanding what action is requested (coming downstairs to take a shower after the song).

Moreover, Mother provides a corroborating account for why it is time (the fact that she can hear that the song is over). In this case, the child's promise is used to corner her into an accountable position (Pontecorvo et al. 2001: 358). We would claim that the interactional design and the outcome of these negotiations is prototypical of modern childhood in that the child is not denied agency; but she herself has successively agreed to restrict her free choice, as part of an inter-generational contract (Ex. 1d).

This invocation of their revised contract does not produce a response from Ida, even when Mother actively secures a facing formation in relation to her daughter (line 7, cf. Kendon, 1990, Goodwin, 2006). Ultimately, Ida leaves the TV room after Mother has produced an emotional threat ('I'm starting to get angry at you'), and Mother engages in shepherding (cf. Cekaite, 2010) Ida from the upstairs room, steering Ida from the room while holding her hand on Ida's shoulder. Although this embodied action is mitigated verbally through the plural pronoun 'we', indexing it as a joint enterprise (cf. Brown and Levinson, 1987), Mother's shepherding Ida from behind allows the child no 'escape route' from carrying out the target activity.

Much in line with the postmodern theorizing on family life and its foregrounding of free choice, in the end of this directive trajectory, Mother comes out as someone who engages in protracted negotiations, spelling out the reasons why her daughter is to undertake the dispreferred activity, instead of invoking her sheer authority as a parent (e.g., 'you have to do so, cuz I say so'). Activity contracts and other accounts are thus deployed to highlight the child's responsibilities, simultaneously they orient to the child's individual choices, personal taste and preferences. Yet, as can be seen in her nonverbal moves, Mother ultimately falls back on mild coercion in that she steers her daughter in the target direction.

A rule statement and an activity contract about “cleaning your room”

Another extended directive trajectory is documented in Example 2, involving a 12 year old daughter and her parents. The first hint of the target activity took place on a Monday, but a mutual contract was not formulated until on Saturday morning, that is, by the end of the week.

Ex. 2a. Negotiation of contract.

Monday evening (20.29) Lisa and her little brother Emil and Lisa are seated in the couch, watching TV, and reading. Father and Mother are in nearby rooms.

- 1   Father   Lisa?
- 2   Lisa   (1) ((reading newspaper))
- 3   Father   ↑LISA ((looks at Lisa from doorway))
- 4   Lisa   ↑YEAH   ((intonation matching F's; gaze on paper))
- 5   Father   For the weekend you'll have a visitor.
- 6   Lisa   ↑YEAH ((gaze fixed on paper))
- > 7   Father   Then I don't think your room should look like it does now.
- 8   Lisa   No but I can do some cleaning the:n ((weary voice, gaze fixed on the paper))
- 9   Father   WHEN? ((angrily))
- 10   Lisa   >Well some time before it gets messy again. So it would be
- 11   unnecessary to clean.< ((does not avert her gaze from the newspaper))

Father's rhetorical question ('for the weekend you'll have a visitor') solicits and receives Lisa's confirmation (line 6). He produces a hint 'then I don't think your room should look like it does now'. This impersonal hint does not specify who is to do the cleaning; nor does it spell out the daughter's responsibilities. Yet, Lisa herself orients to it as if it were a directive, spelling out her accountability ('no but I can do some cleaning the:n'; line 8).

It can be noted that his reason giving for the target activity takes the form of a syllogistic logic: (i) you expect a visitor, (ii) the place should be neat when a visitor arrives, and (iii) logic conclusion: so your place has to be cleaned. The local family rules for most of the present families prescribe that school age children should clean their own rooms. By acknowledging the initial conditions (line 6), his daughter is thus made accountable for accomplishing the target activity. Father's syllogistic reasoning can be read in terms of a rule statement, that is, a distinct type of account or reason-giving: e.g. 'in our family, a visitor means cleaning your room'. As documented in analyses of family dinner conversations, a recurrent type of account work involves such parental statements of rules for proper behavior (Pontecorvo et al., 2001; Sterponi, 2003; 2009). Through tag requests (see also below in Ex. 2b, line 2), such rule statements are recurrently designed in terms of projected compliance. By soliciting a child's assent to rules statements, parents are able to co-construe a mutually ratified agreement with regard to what can be seen as norm deviations. Such collaborative definitions provide a temporally extended resource for nailing down "the subordinate's compliance in the future" (Pontecorvo et al., 2001: 358), and serve as important interactional resources for socializing children into (moral) accountability.

Noticeably, throughout this exchange, Lisa's embodied actions index her reluctance to comply with Father's directive, as can be seen in her weary voice, and her avoidance of mutual gaze, as can, for instance, be seen, and in her display of total 'engrossment' in reading the newspaper. Without denying the logic of Father's rule statement or syllogistic reasoning, she avoids pinning down any distinct time frame for *when* she will clean her room (lines 8 and 10-11).

In the present data, rule statements recurrently served as important parental accounts for backing up activity contracts, regulating what is 'normal' within a specific

family. Almost a week later (on Saturday morning, one day before the visitors' arrival),

Father enters Lisa's room, looking for the newspaper.

Ex. 2b. Mutual ratification of contract

Saturday morning (8.38). Lisa is in her room, Father enters into her room, looking for the newspaper.

```
-> 1   Father  You (.) you must clean here today if you will have
      2           guests you know. ((looking at the mess in her room))
=> 3   Lisa    ↑Yea:h ((reluctant, weary voice))
```

In lines 1-2, Father invokes a family rule for why cleaning is needed (expected visitor) and terminates his account with a tag ('you know'), invoking his daughter's accountability. She follows suit and agrees, even though it is a minimal acknowledgment and in a weary voice. Yet, through her acknowledgment, the two participants can now be seen to have established a mutually ratified activity contract. The activity is to be carried out within a specific time frame, 'today'.

Somewhat later, during family breakfast the same morning, Lisa first invokes the contract but then revises it, supported by her mother. In the multiparty context of family negotiations, Lisa apparently promises her compliance, but displays her agency by choosing a revised time frame.

Ex. 2c. Invocation and multiparty revision of contract

Saturday morning (9.32). F, M, Lisa (12 y.) and Johan (8 y.) are having breakfast.

```
=> 1   Lisa    Then I'll do some cleaning today. ((drinking milk,
      looking at F))
      2   Father  Yeah! ((enthusiastic, chewing food))
      3   Mother  No: why's that? ((turns to F, surprised))
      4   Father  ((lowers his head in exasperation, theatrically))
      5   Lisa    [((looking at F smiling))
      6   Mother  [he he he
      7   Johan   Xx (you put it on the carpet) ((to M unrelated))
      8   Lisa    Yeah but (.) well she [wi-
      9   Father                                     [Tomorrow she'll have visitors.
```

((looking at M))

10 Lisa Mhm=

11 Father =So she'll sure have to (.) well she'll ha[ve to

-> 12 Mother [It should

13 be all cleaned up before the visitor arrives that's

14 what we've said=

15 Lisa =They'll arrive at two o'clock ((looks at F and nods))

16 Johan Today? ((surprised))

17 Lisa No. Tomorrow=

18 Father =(Unloading) them at one o'clock.

=> 19 Lisa Yeah but then I'll have a couple of hours to go to do

20 something ((pointing her finger like a gun, smilingly

'shooting' at Father))

-> 21 Father Okay. Then we agree that things should be nice and

22 clean and so when- when they'll arrive=

-> 23 Mother =Well they must be able to enter into your room [then.

24 Father [Yeah.

=> 25 Lisa That's what you ↑CAN do

26 Mother °Mhm° (.) Good.

While looking at Father, facing him at the breakfast table, Lisa invokes their activity contract (Ex. 2b) announcing her prospective compliance: 'Then I'll do some cleaning today' (line 1) and receives his enthusiastic ratification. She can thus be seen to engage in self-regulation, invoking her prior commitment to the parents' demand. However, their agreement (contract) is unexpectedly challenged by Mother (line 3) who apparently (mistakenly?) orients to Lisa's initial time bargaining. As an outcome of their novel negotiations, the time frame, 'today', is then successively revised to 'before the visitors arrive' (lines 13-14), which actually leaves Lisa with time to spend before engaging in the target activity. Their prior contract is now revised, as she is no longer obliged to clean up immediately

Here, as in our overall data, activity contracts recurrently emerged as multiparty family affairs, where individual members were accountable to other members for promises, initially made to but one family member. Moreover, as shown above, the

multiparty coordination of the activity contract is one of the crucial aspects of the family negotiations, and both parents have their say in formulating and defining children's accountabilities.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Modern family life involves extensive negotiations on the part of both parents and children. The establishment of what we have called activity contracts involve inter-generational negotiations, including reason-giving, time bargaining, and mutual account work about when, how and by whom activities are to be executed. Such activity contracts constitute one type of conversational resource within family life, and they can be seen as prototypical of a modern childhood, marked by negotiations and self-regulation, rather than coercion or unmitigated parental requests (Aronsson and Forsberg, 2011; Beck, 1997; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Cekaite, 2010; Forsberg, 2007; Giddens, 1995).

Activity contracts constitute an important locus for the socialization of children into (moral) accountability within the everyday lives of families. As can be seen, the inter-generational contracts involved allow for the construction of children's agency, on the one hand, and for constraints on children's agency, on the other. By designing activity contracts which are to be ratified by their children, parents can be seen to offer children a choice to agree or not agree, thereby positioning them as active agents, treating them as mature parties as it were, capable of choosing to act in their own best interest (washing in order to avoid bad smells etc). Simultaneously, however, activity contracts constitute parental strategies for exerting control in future contexts, in that they make the child accountable for their promises. Over time, mutually ratified contracts provide a way of pointing out what constitutes normative transgressions in the child's behaviour. Children are thereby socialized into self-

regulation and their commitments lay the ground for holding them accountable, also for future actions.

As demonstrated in prior research, immediate compliance is not necessarily a primary goal of parental requests and directives. For instance, a first mention (see Sacks, 1995) of a target activity may project subsequent requests in family life, setting a horizon of expectation for parents and children about upcoming events such as homework or bedtime (e.g., Wingard, 2006; Sirota, 2006). Moreover, the present analyses have shown how an initial account of the need for target action may function as a request, threat or challenge/warning (depending on its sequential location), providing parents with the possibility to initiate and negotiate a contract and to establish a child's accountability in a temporally distant future (e.g. later in the same evening, or week).

In line with other work on directives, socialization into self-regulations should be related to the interrogative format of requests and other mitigated demands, rather than to the authoritative format of unmitigated directives (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Craven and Potter, 2010; Curl and Drew, 2008; Ervin-Tripp et al, 1990).

Accounts have traditionally been seen as ways of downgrading requests (Ervin-Tripp, 1976; Brown and Levinson, 1987), but activity contracts and the invocation of family rules can, in effect, also be seen as ways of upgrading, rather than downgrading parental demands.

In sum, our findings show that family life is a rich arena for multiparty negotiations, and that theorizing on directives has to encompass trajectories of inter-generational choices across extended directive sequences, covering both directives, activity contracts, and the activities as such. On the micro level of mundane everyday life, the present families enact the modern life of free choice, downplaying authority and a pre-established social order (cf., Beck, 1997; Giddens, 1995). As can be seen, children's self-regulation involves accountability and the building of mutual trust, that is, some of the cornerstones of human relations. Yet, as

demonstrated in the protracted negotiations, and numerous revisions of contracts, family life socialization is a time consuming process. The inter-generational design of self-regulation is thus a never ending affair.

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APPENDIX

Table 1 Transcription notations

- : : prolonged syllable
- [ ] : overlapping utterances
- (.) : micropause, i.e. shorter than (0.5)
- (2) : pauses in seconds

x : inaudible word
 (xx) : unsure transcription
 ° ° : speech in low volume
 YES : relatively high amplitude
 (( )) : comments of the transcribe
 ? : rising terminal intonation
 . : falling terminal intonation
 = : latching between utterances
kissa : sounds marked by emphatic stress
 hehe : laughter
 -> : directive / upgrading of directive / mitigation of directive /
 initiation or revision of activity contract
 => ratification of activity contract

Table 2. Mitigation and aggravation of directives (illustrated by 'come here!')

MITIGATED FORMS OF DIRECTIVES - EXAMPLES (downgraded formats)	RESOURCES IN DOWNGRADING OR UPGRADING DIRECTIVES (AND SOME KEY REFERENCES)*
Come here because you promised to x!	Activity contract (this paper)
Come here after x!	Revised activity contract (this paper)
Come here because ...	Account (S) Reason- giving (E-T) Explanation (A&T; B&L)
Come here, Ida! Come here darling!	Personal naming (B&G; B&L) Endearment term / Affective address terms (B&G; B&L)
Can / Could you come here?	Modal constructions (B&G ; B&L;

	C&P; C&D; EG)
It's time to come (cf 'the shower is downstairs!')	Impersonal construction; off record strategy (B&L)
We'll come down now	Collaborative 'we' (B&L)
DIRECTIVES Come here!	Directive (bald on record) (B&G; B&L; E-T; EG; MG)
AGGRAVATED FORMS (upgraded formats)	
Come here! Come here!	Repetition of directive (A&T)**
COME HERE!	Increased volume of voice in delivering directive (A&T)
Come here, otherwise x	Threat (A&T; MG)
Come here! (and pulling, pushing or other action, directing the child in parent's direction)	Physical action (MG), including 'shepherding' (C)

* A&T (Aronsson and Thorell, 1999); B&G: (Brown and Gilman, 1998); B&L (Brown and Levinson, 1987); C: Cekaite (2010); C&P (Craven and Potter, 2010); C&D (Curl and Drew, 2008); E-T (Ervin-Tripp, 1976); EG (Goffman (1967); MG (Goodwin, 1990; 2006); S (Sterponi, 2003; 2009).

** In some languages and contexts, repetition of directive may involve a type of mitigation (Ishikawa, 1991)