Practicing togetherness
– Ceremonial objects aiming to increase presence and consciousness in families with small children

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I have worked together with three Swedish families with small children, focusing on their intrinsic goals as a way to increase well-being in their everyday life.

I have designed ceremonial objects for the families to use to create their own ceremony, as a way to practice togetherness by being more present in the moment. These objects are made in a do-it-yourself manner so that other people can make their own objects from the instructions.

By practicing togetherness people can have an entry way for focusing more on what they actually want and need, on a personal level, but it could also cause a ripple effect and support a more sustainable society, both socially and environmentally.
Over the last year, I have been investigating different relationships to belongings and consumption, mainly in the Swedish middle-class. I’ve also looked at ways to change the attitude towards buying less and owning less material things, since the consumption behavior in the west is harmful for the environment, the economy and the mental health of humans. If everyone on earth consumed as much as Swedes, we would need 3,7 planets according to the WWF.

The investigations I did has been the inspiration for this project. During that process I learned a great deal, especially about myself – how many things I own that I don’t really need and how much time I spend thinking about things I want to have. But more importantly, I’ve come to a greater understanding about that I don’t become happier or feel better about myself the more things I acquire, something I already had understood intellectually – but not emotionally. And our emotions are important if we want to change our behavior.

I also realized that it’s not just me who has – sometimes unknowingly – a “materialistic” mindset. I refer here to the definition by the Oxford Dictionaries: a “tendency to consider material possessions and physical comfort as more important than spiritual values”. Most of us here in Sweden are a part of a capitalistic system of consumption and materialistic ideology, and it’s so intertwined in our everyday lives that we don’t even see it any more. Therefore we need alternatives.

Only removing the behavior of unreflected material consumption from people’s lives will not be a sustainable solution though. It needs to be supported by an interest in doing other things, an emotional understanding, and a pursuit of other goals than the ones promoted to us by companies and governments. The consumerist society is a constant strife for something new or better, but mainly it’s a strife for acquiring something that we don’t have – yet. So to stop over-consuming things we don’t need, we need to adopt a different mindset.

In my research about the subject on how to decrease over-consumption I found interesting proposals from the field of psychology. For instance by pursuing intrinsic goals instead of extrinsic ones you can experience increased well-being. (Explanations of “intrinsic” and “extrinsic” on page 9).

But in order for these activities or methods, suggested by psychologists, to become a part of people’s lives, they need to be somewhat enjoyable and easy to implement so that the person trying to change his/her behavior doesn’t fall back into old habits.

One specific group that I found interesting, in relation to the subject of over-consumption and well-being, are people who newly became parents or parents with small children in Sweden. Having children is a life changing experience and many parents feel stressed about the future of their children as our planet is becoming warmer and our nature more and more polluted. But having children also affects the consumption of material things. A study done in southern Sweden in 2001 showed that children in the ages between 3 and 5 own more than 500 toys each. Parents with small children are a group with generally great purchasing power. Therefore they are often targeted by companies, like car companies with commercials depicting families with small children, often playing on the parents emotions and/or anxieties. For this reason, I chose to focus on exploring ways for them to step out of the consumerist norm and question what they really want to pursue in life.

5 http://www.vf.se/node/46688 (Retrieved 6/3/2016)
Project intention

For parents and their families to potentially enjoy more well-being – in the context of a western consumerist society (Sweden) – I want to provide an entryway to a more sustainable way of living, and at the same time a more fulfilling way of living, by less focus on extrinsic goals dictated by society.

By practicing a more mindful way of living you could get a better understanding of what gives your life meaning. To enable a change of behavior that will sustain itself, we need to really understand ourselves – what we really need and desire. Our emotions also needs to be on-board since they are more powerful in determining our behavior than our conscious mind. By making change of behavior more enjoyable, it will have a bigger chance of creating new habits.

If just one person decides to live in a more sustainable way, it will not have a big impact. However, it can cause a ripple effect and lead to that many more change their ways, and then it suddenly has a lot bigger impact. It could possibly even influence companies, politicians and organizations in the long run. And often change needs to start on a grass-root level for it to have the support it needs to become a real societal change. A popular movement, deeply rooted in people, is not as interchangeable as political parties in a government.

Parents are generally a group with great purchasing power, and therefore has a big impact on the market. But most of all they have an impact on the upbringing of their children. By socializing children from a young age to put less value on material consumption, it could potentially have a great impact on the future of that generation and generations to come, as focusing on intrinsic needs and goals is not something we are taught elsewhere.

I also think it’s important for researchers in other fields than design to be able to reference to a different approach to this issue than a textual one. There is no single “solution”, so there is a strength in displaying a multitude of outcomes. I hope that the outcome for this project could be used for further investigations in the subject of over-consumption and well-being of parents, as well as be used together with research from other fields to create a more diverse and extensive picture.

But most of all, I hope that one result will be to inspire parents and non-parents, including myself, to become a little less materialistic, and that the visitors of the spring exhibition at Konstfack 2016, or those who read this report, will feel a curiosity to focus more on their intrinsic goals and enjoy what they have instead of feeling bad about what they don’t have.

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6 C. Heath et al., *Switch: how to change things when change is hard*, p.7-8.
Context and positioning

The main context for this project are parents in a western consumerist society, in this case Sweden. The families I’ve interviewed are middle-class, both from the lower and mid-section, and live in Stockholm and Umeå, Sweden, but also in Bergen, Norway.

I’ve chosen to work with the present situations for families in Sweden. Future scenarios can be inspiring or alarming, but they often feel distant as they often don’t show they way leading up to the scenario – and most of all they don’t show ways to avoid unwanted scenarios. Atelier Van Lieshout’s work SlaveCity–Cradle to Cradle presents a scenario where humans are used as slaves to produce energy, but neither shows how this could happen or how this could be avoided. The purpose of Atelier Van Lieshout’s work is of course not to present ways to achieve or avoid this scenario, but it is important for my project as I wanted to explore possible actions one could take.

The present situations are closer to those who are stakeholders in the consumerist society today, and can give inspiration for what people could do right now – themselves. Therefore I would not position this project as speculative or critical design, like Atelier Van Lieshout’s SlaveCity–Cradle to Cradle, as I am providing proposals and not just critique. Therefore I consider it to be closer to transition design than anything else.

The norm to work full time to afford material wealth is promoted by for instance the Swedish government and the social security system in Sweden, and it is therefore very strong and hard to step out of. There are many forces that come in to play to change how things are done. It can be frustrating to try to influence employers, politicians, corporations or organizations to take their responsibility and you can feel powerless just waiting for it to happen, whether it is because of public opinion, new legislatures or their own initiative.

At the same time it’s unfair to put pressure on the single person to be the change we need in the world, when the big corporations and governments don’t take their responsibility. But by becoming less materialistic you can feel better about yourself and your life, and that’s at least a good incentive by itself, just like the feeling of at least doing something can be better for your self respect. Therefore I have chosen to work directly with families and through that work with one link in a possible chain of reactions.

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9 J. Chancellor et al., Happiness and thrift: When (spending) less is (hedonically) more, p. 131-132.
Constraints

There are many ways to approach this subject both according to different disciplines, but also depending on ideologies.

I’ve decided not to work on a societal scale in this project as working with bigger systems demands a bigger time frame for changes, and I was more interested in what you and me can do right now, as resilient, societal changes often start on a grass root level.

I’ve also chosen to work with a starting point, where a change of mind begins, and therefore not included methods for consuming less in this project. As future scenarios and many other design proposals present something that might be a bit further ahead I wanted to explore where the journey begins and how it might begin.

In the form-giving of the objects I’ve also chosen to use materials you can make yourself or that is generally easy to buy and use. This is because I wanted the objects to be an outline for objects that other people could make without needing access to a workshop or special skills.

I’ve also focused on families mainly in the middle class. They are a big group in the Swedish society and generally high consumers. Politicians and companies see this group as important to listen to so they are in many ways more influential than other groups. They also generally have more influence over how they live their lives than the working class or socio-economically more challenged. Many low income families might need changes on a societal scale to be able to choose how to spend their time and money.
Key concepts

**Intrinsic goals**
Goals that are “inherently satisfying to pursue because they are likely to satisfy innate psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness, competence, and growth”. 10

**Extrinsic goals**
Goals that are “focused on obtaining rewards and the positive evaluations of others”. 11

**Ceremony**
There is no canonical definition of the human activities that could be called rites, rituals or ceremonies. 12 Therefore I have chosen to use the word ceremony or ceremonial to describe events of ritual significance.

**Quality time**
Time experienced as more qualitative because of how it is experienced or thought about.

**Gratefulness**
An appreciation of kindness or benefits received.

**Being present**
Awareness of being in a particular place, who and what is around you and what is happening.

**Materialism**
Viewing material possessions and physical comfort as more important than spiritual values.

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11 Ibid, p. 226

**Over-consumption**
A material consumption where the resource use is bigger than the sustainable capacity of the ecosystem.
Way of working

I decided early on that I rather work with more personal experiences of parenthood than look at statistics or general descriptions. Therefore I chose to work with three separate families, two in Stockholm and one in Umeå*, in order to get more into details and investigate the more particular, but also be able to get direct feedback on ideas and prototypes.

To understand the current situations of the families, I met up with each of them and brought some material to interact with them. I had a selection of cardboard sheets with symbols representing a number of questions° that I had in order to understand their intrinsic goals and needs. I asked the parents to write or draw their answers to the questions on each cardboard sheet, and then put them each on a woodblock, so that they could see what they had replied and go back and add things on each question if

*The families:

Amen & Keiyon
Lives in Hagsätra, south of Stockholm, in a rental apartment together with Amen’s boyfriend. Amen works full time as a manager for housing for unaccompanied refugee children. On Sunday’s, Amen and her boyfriend put away their phones and cook food, play and hang out together with Keiyon without distractions.

Liv, Carl, Esbjörn & Gertrud
Lives in Umeå in a rental apartment. Liv is on parental leave, but otherwise works as a teacher. Carl works part time as a psychologist. On weekends they like to go to the museum, go out walking, hang out with friends or just stay at home. They try not to do too many things as they get stressed by that.

Elin, John, Edvin & Lou
Lives in a condominium in Telefonplan, southwest of Stockholm. Elin is on parental leave from her master studies at Konstfack. John works full time as a doctor. Elin and John likes to sit together in the sofa, after all the chores are done, and let their mind run free. They also like being out in nature and just be.
The questions:
- When do you feel the best?
- What enables that situation to happen?
- What hinders that situation to happen?
- Are there any conflicts between what enables and what hinders that situation to happen?
- What do you want to have more time for?
- What has become easier or harder since you became parents?
- What kind of values/habits/mindset do you want to give your children?
- Do you have any expectations or wishes for this project?

needed. Afterwards I bound the cardboard sheets together to a booklet, with the question written on the back of each sheet, so that each family could keep it and remember what they had answered.

Early on in my project I was focusing on over-consumption in relation to parenthood. Therefore I also brought a set of different stuffed, textile bodies together with a selection of features/attributes that they could attach to the chosen body, to make a representation of their inner consumer. After they had made their representation I asked them to relate it to their previous replies of the questions. Then I had some follow up questions.

A small change of direction
After meeting all the families I realized that my focus on consumption and materialism was not a big focus for the families. They mostly saw it as something necessary they had to do to provide their children with clothes etc. Instead they spoke about how they lacked quality time together.

I realized that I had skipped the first step in the journey towards less over-consumption and less materialism without even thinking about it. Buying things means working to earn the money used for the purchase, but also time to make the actual purchase. By having more “quality time” – time we experience as more qualitative because of how we spend it and think about it – together with loved ones, it can give you an incentive to make changes in order to have more time together.
So after a small change of direction I started working on generating ideas for possible prototypes/interventions to try out with the families in order for them to enjoy more “quality time” together. After coming up with a multitude of ideas, I chose two that I wanted to develop further. One was creating a gratefulness ceremony and one was a method to be more present in moment. I decided to start working with the gratefulness ceremony because I felt like it was the most interesting. The other idea would then be developed as much as time would allow me to.

**The gratefulness ceremony**

I started researching religious rituals and symbols, like Yoga originating from Hinduism and the Christian communion cup, but I also looked at historic symbolism, for instance from ancient Greece where tripods were used as tokens of gratitude\(^{13}\), and more secular rituals and ceremonies from modern times, like the practice of putting padlocks on bridges as a symbol of love\(^{14}\). To understand the gesture of giving and receiving gratefulness I explored how we move our bodies in those situations. I tried out different gestures that I then translated into objects. My thought was that these objects could be used in a gratefulness ceremony by the families. But as this was only my own interpretation of gratefulness, I decided to invite other students to investigate the form and haptic experience of both gratefulness and being present.

I organized a workshop where I invited students from Konstfack to create objects that materialize the feeling of gratefulness or feeling of being present in the moment, using a variety of available materials. Making physical artefacts forces participants to take decisions about the form and haptics of the given theme, preventing them from ‘hiding in abstractions’\(^{15}\), which enabled me to interview the participants about their choice.

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15 Elizabeth B. N. Sanders, Jan Stappers, *Convivial Toolbox: Generative research for the front end of design*, (BIS Publishers, Amsterdam, 2012) p. 70
of material, weight, surface, density, temperature of their made objects, and how they relate to gratefulness and presence. That way I got a wide spectrum of interpretations of the words.

Using the objects and stories from the workshop as inspiration I created a variety of quick models of ceremonial objects. Then I let a few friends try them out together with others to see how they would interpret the objects and most of all use them together, while I observed them. After that, I made a compilation of the most liked objects, but also the most interacted with, since they were not always the same. From those objects I selected three that I decided to develop further. I came up with the idea of assigning the families to create their own gratefulness ceremony that could be just about anything, using one or a combination of the objects I would make. I got inspiration from Anthony Dunne’s and Fiona Raby’s “Placebo project”\(^\text{16}\), where the receivers of the ambiguous objects they had made had to interpret the use and the meaning of them, although the purpose of that project was a lot different than this one.

In the designing of these three objects I was conscious about my choice of materials as I wanted to use materials you could find at home or buy easily. I was also careful in choosing colors for the objects. I did a quick survey with some spacial design students about what colors they connected to gratefulness and to presence, and from their selection I chose two different green tones to use in my products. I experienced them as calm and not specifically “gendered”, as I didn’t want an object to be selected or not selected because it was seen to be for a specific gender.

I made a few sketch models of the each of the objects until I was happy with the result. I wanted the form to be ambiguous to afford the families to use them in many different ways, even though I have had a more specific use in mind when designing them.

After finishing the objects I sent them out to the families – the same three objects for each of the families, with instructions to create their own

\(^{16}\) http://www.dunneandraby.co.uk/content/projects/70/0 (retrieved 23-03-2016)
gratefulness ceremony. I didn’t name the objects at this point as I wanted the use of them to be as open as possible.

**Being present in the moment in everyday activities**

After sending out the ceremonial objects, I started generating ideas for something to help the families be more present in the moment in everyday situations. I started out with going back to a shadowing of a family, that I did a few weeks earlier, and mapped out the different activities that they did, and which they did together. It turned out that very few activities included the whole family, so I selected the dinner to work with as it was a moment spent together.

I came up with some suggestions for ways to change the dinner situation so that the families could feel more present and make it more fun for them. I sent out an email to all the families asking for their opinions about my suggestion. At first I only got a reply from the Telefonplan family, who thought that one of my suggestions - a set of cards with themes to talk about and use as inspiration for playing around the dinner table – could help them make dinner more fun for their oldest kid, so that he would stay at the dinner table longer, which would give them more time together.

The Umeå family replied a few days later that they had made their own version of the gratefulness ceremony where they sing a song together before dinner, which their oldest child have learned in nursery school. After dinner, they send around Murmur and everyone says something that they are grateful for or happy about. (Grateful is a difficult concept to grasp for small children so using the word happy can make it more understandable).

I liked that they had taken my objects and idea for ceremony and made it into their own thing where they both practice gratefulness and change the dinner setting so that they could be more present in the moment. Therefore I told the Telefonplan family about it, since they wanted something for their older child to think that dinner was more fun, and they decided
to try that ceremony instead of me designing activity cards for them.

**The reflection book**

As a complement to the ceremonies I started sketching on a reflection book based on the method of “valued direction” used in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)\(^1\). The parents expressed an appreciation for having to reflect on their inner goals when I met them the first time, which they said they rarely had time to think about. The method of “valued direction” is based on pinning down what gives your life meaning and through that making it clearer what kind of value-based goals you have. Then you can break those goals down smaller, more achievable goals, making it easier to follow your inner wishes for your life. So this reflection book I had in mind would use a similar method as “valued direction” but also become a physical artifact that becomes a visual reminder for the families about their values and how to come closer to their intrinsic goals.

In order for the book to become a visual reminder I had to make it difficult to put in a bookshelf, and preferably it would be able to stand on it’s own. I made some sketches of for instance stuffed, soft hard covers but then came up with and idea that the front of the book could also serve as a frame. That way the families could put pictures made by the children or photos they want to display in the frame. So instead of forcing them to have the book on display by making it difficult to put in a bookshelf it could instead become something positive, something you want to have on display. I chose to give the book a dark blue color, as I see it as a stately color that would give gravitas to the book.

I’ve chosen to focus the most on the ceremonial objects as I found them the most interesting to work with, and the time frame for the project didn’t allow me to spend as much time on the reflection book.

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Design proposal

Spiran got its name because it looks a bit regal, but also as it could be seen as a flower with a stem. (“Spira” is Swedish and can be translated to both scepter and to grow).

Spiran can be held by many hands at the same time by the length of its shaft. The shifting dark green color of the cup imitates marble, but is very light and bendable. The ball has a tiny bell inside that tinkles when it moves. This could either evoke a meditative spinning of the ball inside the cup at the top of Spiran, but it could also become a challenge to keep it still, and therefore quiet. The cup could also be used to hold other things than the ball. The diameter of the shaft and the lightness makes it possible even for small children to hold.

Munken is named after a pastry and a haircut that it is similar to. (“Munk” is Swedish and can be translated to both doughnut and monk).

The formlessness of Munken makes it both nice to hold in your hand or for two or more people to hold together. I feels like it melts in your hands by the weight of it and that it’s only filled by three quarters, leaving room for the grains to move around. The weight and size of it makes it nice to place on your head or hang on your shoulder or over your arm as shapes itself after the body. It is also possible to heat because of the whole wheat filling.

Murmur is named after its sound, but the softness of the word also fits its soft fur. (“Murmur” is Latin for an indistinct or low sound).

Murmur fits in an adult hand, but is also small enough to be held by childrens’ hands. It’s fur gives the impression that it’s an animal, but it lacks all the other features a furry animal has. The smallness of it can make you want to protect it when holding it. The whole wheat filling gives it weight and both softness and rigidness at the same time – like a body. When you move it, it gives off a small rattling sound from the tiny box filled with rice hidden inside. The black fur makes it look a bit more mysterious as it is difficult to see the real contours of it’s body. You have to touch and hold it to fully grasp it’s size and shape.
The reflection book works as a complement to the ceremonial objects, and provides you with four questions to answer:

- What gives our life meaning?
- What can we do to live as we want to, according to our values?
- What can we do on shorter terms to come closer to how we want to live?
- How should we celebrate when we reach our sub target?

The questions are answered on a A5 sheet that is inserted in the book on top of older sheets, using the paper clip, so that the history is kept but the most current is on top. These questions aim to support the ceremonies in helping people reflect on what gives their life meaning and help them steer their life in that direction.

To avoid the book to end up forgotten in a bookshelf, the reflection book offers a frame for artwork or photos you want to display.
Discussion

When I started this project I had an idea of that I wanted to investigate methods to decrease material consumption among parents with small children. But as I started interacting with the families, and they all spoke so passionately about how they would like to have more time with the family, I realized I had skipped maybe the first step in the process of change, getting emotions to work with us, helping us by acting as a motivator.

In this project, I’ve chosen to work with ways to increase well-being in the current time these families have together. This was a conscious decision as many people can’t afford to work less and I wanted the examples to be open to as many as possible. For more people to have more free time there is a need for structural changes, otherwise it will continue to be something reserved for those who can afford to work less. I think for instance a 30 hour working week with sustained salary would benefit most people, but especially low income parents with small children. There needs to be political changes in terms of working hours and/or salaries in order for families with low income to have options on how to spend their time.

Gratefulness

The reason for choosing to work with a ceremony and choosing gratefulness as a theme were many. First of all it was to create a situation in their everyday life where they had to be present in the moment together, focusing on each other and themselves. Mindfulness exercises has become popular over the last decade and have been proved to have many beneficial effects\(^{18}\). By being present in the moment you focus less on what lies ahead and more on what you are feeling and experiencing right now, which can decrease feelings of stress and anxiety over what you could or should do.

Another reason was that practicing gratefulness seem to have a positive effect on emotions and interpersonal relationships\(^{19}\). Gratitude-based activities encourages you to re-appreciate things in your life, whether it is people, experiences or objects, giving those things an extra boost of positivity. It also moves focus from being sad for what you don’t have to happy about what you do have. There are of course reasons for feeling sad or discontent about things, like for instance inequalities in society, that shouldn’t be played down. Therefore I am not prescribing being grateful for everything that happens to you. But even though things are not perfect, or sometimes even bad, you can usually find something that you are happy for which can give you at least a temporary feeling of well-being. Focusing on the things that you are grateful for can also help you pinpoint what makes your life meaningful, and therefore help you navigate your life in that direction.

The objects

The older child in the Telefonplan family liked playing with the objects and had already the next morning after being introduced to them asked where

\(^{18}\) http://marc.ucla.edu/workfiles/pdfs/marc-mindfulness-research-summary.pdf (retrieved 21-03-2016)

they were and if he had met me who had made them. They tried many ways of playing with the objects to find their ceremony. One of the games included a carpet beater as a second prop together with Spiran and Murmur. But in the end they mostly used Murmur to stroke their own face while they tell the others about something good that happened that day. They appreciated the ambiguousness of the objects as they could inspire to many types of interactions and games.

The Umeå family used Äpplet, the small wooden ball belonging to Spiran, in their ceremonies and even brought it with them when they travelled to visit relatives. Sometimes the ceremonies led to smaller conflicts as their oldest child didn’t want to stay at the dinner table long enough time for them to perform the ceremony after eating. But instead he would at other times spontaneously speak about things that he is grateful for, which he hadn’t done before. The parents felt that the ceremonies had an overall positive impact on their life and would try to continue with them.

The last family was unable to provide me with feedback, though I’ve made many attempts over a long period of time. But my opinion is that you have to accept people having other priorities, so I decided to be satisfied with the feedback from the other families, although I would have liked to know if the lack of communication was because they weren’t interested, or if they just didn’t have the time.

During the 2016 Konstfack Degree Exhibition, where I exhibited the objects, many children visiting the exhibition were mesmerized by them as they aren’t very similar to objects they are used to interacting with. But the objects also seem to bring out a playful side in a lot of adults as well. There have been many adults of all ages goofing around at my table in the exhibition with the objects. I can’t say that any particular group has been more interested than others, which never was my purpose either. But I’m happy they bring out a playfulness, as I believe ceremonies not have to be all that serious, maybe making them more playful even makes them more fun?

Ceremonies and objects
As my research moved alongside making objects, I found other examples of ceremonial objects already being used by families in the context of the kitchen table. Kristina Schultz, a former student at Konstfack showed me images of a wooden mallet that also works as a peace pipe. This object is used on Sunday mornings during breakfast when they hold a meeting about the coming week and can be used both to decide things and work as a mediator for conflicts.

Another former student of Konstfack, Karin “Kakan” Hermansson talked about “Ägget”, a raku burned piece of ceramic she had made, in her episode of the radio program “Sommar i P1”20. In her family, “Ägget” was used to regulate who got to talk so that no-one would interrupt at the dinner table. Whoever had “Ägget” got to speak his or her mind.

Critique of personal responsibility and lack of complexity
The practice of what I would like to call local ceremonies can of course be criticized from a Marxist perspective, just like mindfulness practices, or ACT. It focuses on personal actions and responsibilities and leaves out the collective responsibilities the general society should take. But I don’t only see these objects as a tool for emancipation from the norms of the capitalist society. I also see it as a commentary or critique to that same soci-
ety, which rarely promotes reflection, and reflection is needed in order to make informed decisions about our lives. I also see them as a critique to the commercial design industry, where reflection is neither promoted nor practiced enough, where products that are in fact harmful for humans are still being produced. And looking at my project from a feminist perspective, there are always connections between the personal experience and larger social or political structures – the personal is political. By reflecting more on your personal values, wishes and goals, it can also give you the incentive to engage more in political issues and maybe organizing yourself with others.

Another critique is that societal problems, like parents not having enough quality time with their children, are complex and demands complex solutions. But I think that simplicity also has a place. As stated before, a small gesture can cause ripple effects leading to bigger change than imagined. A reflective mindset could lead towards a more conscious consumption, even though that’s not the purpose of the project at this point. The purpose is for parents to enjoy more well-being and to focus more on intrinsic goals and needs than what we are told by society that we should strive for. The decreasing of consumption, that I was intending to work with in the beginning of the project, has however a great opportunity to become another project where the increased quality time can be used as a motivator. Hopefully I will get a chance to do that project as well, as I have many ideas for how to work with that theme.

All parents are different, with different needs and desires, but I think I have found some common experiences of parenthood by working together with the chosen group of parents. We have together explored the problem setting and pinned down what their inner values and wishes are, to find possible proposals to help them act more accordingly to those values. And even if the proposals presented in the project are not applicable on all parents, they will hopefully be more relatable by having been experienced by other parents who can tell a story about it.

About a participatory way of working
Moving the gratefulness ceremony to the dinner table was an effect of the open structure of the assignment given to the families, inviting them to co-create the experience and giving them space to adapt the experience to what fits their specific family. Nabeel Hamdi writes about the architect’s role in a participatory process of development as “intervening” or being “invited to disturb”, which I agree with. I’ve been invited by these families to interrupt or intervene their everyday life. But the process has been on their terms, which sometimes has been frustrating for me, but it is part of the beauty of working with others.

Elizabeth Sanders an Jan Stappers write that ‘Co-creation as a mindset’ will have the most potential to have positive impact on people’s lives. This is also something I believe to be true. I see no other alternatives for the future than one where more stakeholders are involved in the creative process, to be able to create more sustainable ‘solutions’, where more needs are being met.

DIY and hemslöjd
When it comes to the form-giving and methods of making that I have used in this project I have focused on making it open for other people to make these objects themselves by using materials that you can find at home or that are not so expensive to buy. This will of course still demand a certain level of skills, or practice, but I think that with a little bit of effort most people could make them when being presented with instructions. DIY as a phenomena has many facets, it’s popular in home-styling as well as in anarchist crowds, but most of all it enables those who don’t have access to something to make it themselves.

But most of all I would like to place this project in the context of the Swedish “Hemslöjd” (Swedish home-made handicraft), and Swedish

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22 Ibid, p.130
23 E. Sanders et al., Convivial Toolbox: Generative research for the front end of design, p. 30
folklore. The word “Hemslöjd” has been debated over the years to pinpoint the exact meaning, but I would like to use the definition used by Clara Åhlvik and Otto von Bush who argue that even though the Hemslöjd movement has been conservative and nationalistic, both when it comes to materials and techniques, it is today moving over to a more “glocal” (locally rooted in a global world) mentality that also allows modern materials and techniques. But what is still at the root of the Hemslöjd is that it is handicraft made in the home for the purpose of making utility articles or decorative objects, mostly for own use, just like the intention is for the objects I’ve designed for this project.

Hemslöjd objects have also traditionally been closely connected to folklore with its traditional techniques. National costumes have been made at home to later be used in traditional ceremonies and rituals, like for instance at midsummer, when also a maypole is made to perform the ritual of dancing around it, connecting it back to my project once more.

The making and the ritual is closely connected in history through the handicraft, which also brings a sense of connectedness to our past in the objects I’ve designed, even though the aesthetics may look different.

Spreading the word
I think one of the most powerful ways of spreading this project is by word of mouth, people inspiring other people by their actions or their interest in practicing togetherness. I think that more than anything gives the project credibility. During the Konstfack Degree Exhibition 2016 I have tried to be present to talk to the visitors as much as possible, to be able to inspire as many as possible.

To enable the project the travel I have uploaded tutorial videos on YouTube for each of the objects so that people can make their own versions from the instructions.

During the exhibition I have given away brochures with links to the videos to those who have been interested. But most of all people have been interested in interacting with the objects, especially kids, which gives me a belief that this is a project that has the possibility to travel a long way as long as there is enough work put in to the process of promoting it.

I think this project could be beneficial for quite a lot of people, not only families with small children, and not only Swedes. Focusing on what’s important to you and those you love is incredibly important for your well-being and your relationships.

As of now, I’m the person behind this project because I think it gives the project credibility. I can’t see it being marketed through commercial channels without it loosing something important, as many people are cynical towards commercially promoted projects. However, I am just one voice and can only reach so far, even though other people will spread the word. And one voice is vulnerable – lack of time or money, health problems or just general lack of energy could all put a stop to it. Therefore it would be nice to involve a non-profit organization working with similar topics to join forces together.

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