Choices and dilemmas

Reproduction of classed and gendered power relations through parental practices

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of a PhD degree

UNIVERSITY OF ICELAND
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of a PhD degree

Faculty of Education and Diversity

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April 2021

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A thesis for a PhD degree in Education

Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to thank the participants who selflessly took the time to tell me their very personal stories of school choice, neighbourhood choice and parental practices. I am thankful for their generosity and trust, and I hope that I have earned it. This also applies to the ninety-seven individuals who creatively fabricated a story about a parent coping – or failing – during a pandemic lockdown, thereby providing me with the social imaginary of the fit/failing parent. Without these participants, no articles would have been published and no thesis written.

I also extend my gratitude to my supervisor Dr Berglind Rós Magnúsdóttir, who welcomed me so enthusiastically from our first meeting in 2017. She never had any doubts about my ability to undertake this task, even when I struggled to maintain faith in myself. I want to thank her for her generosity in sharing academic ideas with me and then giving me the freedom to grapple with those concepts myself – to mould them into the thesis that now is born. Our countless meetings in coffeehouses and informal chats in corridors provided me with the necessary fuel for my academic take-off, for which I am grateful. I also owe much gratitude to my second supervisor, Dr Annadís Greta Rúdólfsdóttir. She has been there for me from the start, both mentally and methodologically. The doors to her office have been always been open, and numerous times I have taken the opportunity to drop by unannounced, to learn from her, always to be welcomed. Her academic and personal insights and knowledge have been exceptionally fruitful for my research. I am grateful to the members of my committee, Dr Sonja Kosunen and Dr Gunnlaugur Magnússon, for their support and academic cooperation. Special thanks to Sonja for co-authoring Article 2 with me and to Gunnlaugur for support during my stay at Uppsala University.

I´ve been fortunate to receive funding from several sources. This funding has made this research possible. Smaller grants were received from the University of Iceland Research Fund and NordForsk in the beginning and towards the finalization of this project (approx. five months in total). I received funding for ten months from The Icelandic Gender Equality Fund and twenty-four months from The Icelandic Research Fund. Finally, I received an Assistant Teacher grant from the University of Iceland for my

final year of study, 2020-2021. In the autumn term of 2018, I did coursework at Uppsala University and University of Gothenburg under the aegis of an Erasmus grant.

The academic community at the School of Education has been an enormous source of support for me, in particular the informal society of both PhD students and academic staff at the Skipholt campus – sometimes referred to as the margin of the margin. You all know who you are and how much I owe you. You have supported me through thick and thin. Over lunch we have solved many academic riddles, and our trips to Laugarvatn have brought much-needed peace to my spinning head at times when I most needed clarity. Thank you.

Lastly, thanks to my family – to my mother who so often asks me how it's going, who is endlessly willing to listen to the struggles of academic work and who always has an encouraging word. I also thank love of my life, Íris, who is also so willing to listen to the latest twists and turns in my academic journey, but also – most importantly – knows when to tell me to stop ruminating and enjoy a soak in the hot tub. I am deeply grateful for our love and companionship. And last but not least, I extend my gratitude to my children, Bjartur Einar and Ástrós Inga. Án ykkar væri lífið svo mikið litlausara.

Abstract

This thesis aims to explore how power relations are reproduced through parental choices and practices in Iceland, with a focus on classed and gendered dimensions. The thesis can be viewed as two separate yet connected parts. In the first part, I ask how parental practices contribute to class reproduction in Iceland, with a focus on school and neighbourhood choices. In the second part, I ask how the "good and worthy" parent is defined, with a focus on gendered family life in pandemic times.

Three different datasets are used to achieve this overarching aim. In my exploration of school and neighbourhood choices, I use sixteen interviews with middle- or upper-class parents, thereof one father and fifteen mothers. Alongside these interviews, I use descriptive data on the socio-economic background of families within the Reykjavík metropolitan area and families of children in private schools. The third dataset consists of ninety-seven stories of parenthood in pandemic times, collected with story completion method. Together these different datasets make possible a nuanced and diverse analysis of the topic in question. I analyse the data through the theoretical lens of Bourdieu and neoliberal governmentality. In particular, I use Bourdieu's theories of the reproduction of class to explore if and how the middle class uses symbolic capital to reproduce class distinction, thereby enhancing privilege for their children through school and neighbourhood choices. In addition, I make use of feminist and post-structuralist understanding of power relations. In this way I analyse the gendered and classed factors as they are shaped by choices, feelings, dilemmas, actions, words and discourses.

Three scientific articles form the backbone of this thesis. Article 1 explores private school choice, Article 2 explores neighbourhood choice, and Article 3 is dedicated to manifestations of neoliberal governmentalities in pandemic parenthood. Together these articles achieve the aim of this thesis. On the whole we see that parenthood is now regarded as a social space that is fraught with dangers and pitfalls. The danger of the parent making the wrong choice of school (Article 1), neighbourhood (Article 2) or daily habits (Article 3) is ever-present. This presents the risk of the parents' symbolic capital not being transmitted to the children. The instability of the rules of the social space of parenthood fuels this risk, which in turn creates

anxiety for the parents in question – in particular the mothers. When this anxiety is triggered, it begets the self-governing by which the neoliberal governmentality operates. Parents (especially mothers) begin to question their every move and to self-govern their choices, habits and feelings. These processes are intimately linked to the construction of the fit mother who must choose wisely, be organised, optimistic and happy. This ethos and this subject positioning of mothers contribute to the reproduction of the gendered and classed power relations in Icelandic society.

Útdráttur

Val(þröng)

Endursköpun stétttengdra og kynjaðra valdatengsla með foreldravenjum

Markmið þessarar rannsóknar er að greina hvernig valdatengsl eru endursköpuð með foreldravenjum á Íslandi með áherslu á stétt og kyn. Rannsókninni má skipta í tvo þætti. Í fyrri þættinum spyr ég hvernig foreldravenjur stuðla að endursköpun stétttengdra valdatengsla með vali á skóla og búsetusvæði. Í seinni þættinum spyr ég hvernig hið hæfa og verðuga foreldri er skilgreint með áherslu á kynjun þeirrar skilgreiningar. Þar er rýnt í stöðuna í yfirstandandi ástandi heimsfaraldurs.

Þrjú gagnasöfn voru notuð til að ná þessu markmiði. Til að rannsaka skóla- og hverfaval voru notuð 16 viðtöl við foreldra af milli- eða efri stéttum, þar af einn föður og 15 mæður. Einnig voru notuð tölfræðigögn frá Hagstofu Íslands um bakgrunn barnafjölskyldna í öllum skólahverfum höfuðborgarsvæðisins og bakgrunn fjölskyldna barna í einkaskólum. Þriðja gagnasafnið samanstendur af 97 sögum um foreldravenjur á tímum heimsfaraldurs. Þeim var safnað með sögulokaaðferð. Saman gera þessi þrjú gagnasöfn mér kleift að nálgast viðfangsefnið á blæbrigðaríkan og fjölbreyttan máta.

Gögnin voru greind með fræðikenningar Bourdieus til hliðsjónar en einnig út frá kenningum um stjórnvaldstækni nýfrjálshyggjunnar. Einkum notaði ég kenningar Bourdieus um endursköpun stétttengdra valdatengsla með beitingu táknræns auðmagns í félagslegu rými skóla og hverfa. Til viðbótar beitti ég femínísku og póststrúktúralísku sjónarhorni á viðfangsefnið. Þannig eru kynjuð og stétttengd valdatengsl skoðuð út frá mótandi áhrifum vals, valþröngar, tilfinninga, venja, orða og orðræðu.

Þrjár fræðigreinar mynda hryggjarstykki þessa verks. Fyrsta greinin fjallar um einkaskólaval, önnur greinin fjallar um hverfaval og sú þriðja er helguð birtingarmyndum stjórnvaldstækni nýfrjálshyggjunnar í foreldvenjum á tímum heimsfaraldurs. Saman vinna þessar fræðigreinar að markmiðum rannsóknarinnar. Á heildina litið sjáum við að foreldrahlutverkið er félagslegt rými sem er hlaðið áhættu og pyttum. Sú hætta virðist alltaf vera fyrir hendi að foreldrið taki rangar ákvarðanir við val á skóla (grein eitt), val

á hverfi (grein tvö) og varðandi daglegar venjur fjölskyldunnar (grein þrjú). Þessi óstöðugleiki félagslega rýmisins sem mótar foreldrahlutverkið gerir það að verkum að kvíðinn er aldrei langt undan, einkum hjá mæðrunum. Þegar kvíðinn tekur völdin fara mæðurnar að efast um sjálfar sig, um val sitt og tilfinningar og úr verður sjálfsögun (e. self-governing). Í gegnum þessa sjálfsögun dregur svo stjórnvaldstækni nýfrjálshyggjunnar vald sitt. Þetta ferli er nátengt sköpun hinnar hæfu móður sem þarf þá að vanda val sitt, vera skipulögð, bjartsýn og hamingjusöm. Þessi hugmyndafræði og þessi sjálfsverustaða mæðranna stuðla að endursköpun kynjaðra og stétttengdra valdatengsla í íslensku samfélagi.

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List of articles

This thesis is based upon the following papers. As the first author I led the data collection, conceptual work, analysis and writing of all three articles.

Article 1

Auðardóttir, A. M., & Kosunen, S. (2020). Choosing Private Compulsory Schools: A Means for Class Distinctions or Responsible Parenting? *Research in Comparative and International Education, 15*(2), 97-115.

doi:10.1177/1745499920921098

Article 2

Auðardóttir, A. M., & Magnúsdóttir, B. R. (2020). Even in Iceland? Exploring Mothers' Narratives on Neighbourhood Choice in a Perceived Classless and Feminist Utopia. *Children's Geographies*.
doi:10.1080/14733285.2020.1822515

Article 3

Auðardóttir, A. M., & Rúdólfsdóttir, A. G. (2021). Chaos ruined the children's sleep, diet and behaviour: Gendered discourses on family life in pandemic times. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 28(S1), 168-182.
doi:10.1111/gwao.12519

1   Introduction

From 2014 to 2015 I worked as a project manager of gender equality for the Department of Education and Youth at the Reykjavík municipality. This was my first professional encounter with the school system in Iceland, but I had of course been both a student and a parent before that time. One day at the office in 2015, I came across a single sheet of information. This sheet listed all the compulsory schools in Reykjavik and the percentages of children in the respective catchment areas who actually attend these schools. Some schools had an enrolment rate above 100%, indicating that there were more children enrolled in the school than the number of children living in the catchment area. Other schools had far lower enrolment rates. This information intrigued me, but at the same time neither my undergraduate degree in sociology and gender studies nor my Master's degree in political sociology gave me any tools to understand this list and its societal implications. I knew only that there had to be a sea of interesting stories of power relations lying behind those simple numbers. This sheet was the seed from which this thesis grew.

In the beginning of 2017, I felt I was ready to start a PhD, so I met with Dr Berglind Rós Magnúsdóttir, who I knew for her critical approach to research on education and social justice. I told her about this sheet of paper, which she quickly was able to contextualise for me in British Bourdieusian studies on school and neighbourhood choice. She also noted that this topic had not been studied in an Icelandic context, but she had studied it herself in a US context in her PhD thesis (Magnúsdóttir, 2014). Berglind welcomed me from our first meeting, became my supervisor and gave me books and papers to read. I had never heard of sociology of education and my undergraduate and graduate degree in sociology had taught me little or nothing about educational systems. It was a steep but interesting learning curve; my spark had been ignited.

Together with Berglind, I developed a research project focused on parental practices in a wide sense, on school choice, neighbourhood choice and extracurricular activities. During 2017 I collected both quantitative and qualitative data on those topics. When I began to analyse the data and narrow the aim, I decided to focus on the qualitative data and only use the quantitative data in a complementary way. I proceeded to write Article 1

about private school choice with Dr Sonja Kosunen. I then wrote Article 2 about neighbourhood choice with Dr Berglind Rós Magnúsdóttir.

In the spring of 2020, while pondering the focus of the third article, trying out different analyses and re-reading my material, a global pandemic broke out, bringing childcare services and schools in Iceland to a halt. Having two school-aged children and working as an adjunct lecturer now having to teach online while sheltering at home, I had little leeway to dedicate time to my PhD work. At the same time, I knew it was important to study this new reality of homeschooling and severely restricted school and extra-curricular activities. After discussions with my other supervisor, Dr Annadís Greta Rúdólfsdóttir, I decided to do a simple, yet highly potential, data collection with a story completion method. From this data collection sprung the third and final article of this compilation, on the gendered dynamics of family life in pandemic times.

The data, the material I read on neoliberal governmentalities, and the subsequent writing of Article 3 was exactly what I needed in both my personal and professional life. Under the circumstances of the pandemic, I found it healing to read about the optimistic affective regime (Cappellini, Harman, Marilli, & Parsons, 2019) and neoliberal governmentalities (McRobbie, 2013) and to analyse the thoughtful and creative data that my participants selflessly produced for the study. It allowed me to build on my previous work and expand it to new territories both methodologically and theoretically. In this way my PhD journey adapted to the ongoing pandemic and shed a light on the research topic through new data and a different lens.

1.1 The aim of the thesis

This thesis aims to explore how power relations are reproduced through parental choices and practices in Iceland, with a focus on classed and gendered dimensions. It is mainly a qualitative thesis with descriptive quantitative data used in a complementary way. The thesis can be viewed as two separate yet connected parts. In the first part, I ask how parental practices contribute to class reproduction in Iceland, with a focus on school and neighbourhood choices. In the second part, I ask how the good and worthy parent is defined, and examine the gendered dynamics thereof with a focus on family life in pandemic times.

The thesis draws on two main theoretical foundations. Bourdieu's theories of the reproduction of class are used to explore if and how the middle class uses symbolic capital to reproduce class distinction and

enhance privilege for their children through school and neighbourhood choice. Secondly, the third paper on family life in pandemic times draws on Foucauldian understanding of neoliberal governmentalities. As parental responsibilities and practices are highly gendered, the project also focuses on gendered dimensions of parenthood.

The originality of this thesis is at least threefold. Firstly, the thesis aims to contribute to the field of sociology of education, more specifically on school and neighbourhood choices and how they contribute to class reproduction. These fields have been largely neglected within Icelandic academia. Secondly, one of the derivatives of this thesis will be a deeper understanding of what constitutes and separates middle-class parents from other parents with regard to cultural, social and economic capital in Icelandic urban society. Bourdieu emphasises the particularity of hierarchies and values in each society, and warns against the idea of transferring class analysis from one country to another (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). The thesis therefore is inspired by his analysis but not bound by it. Thirdly, the final paper in the collection addresses gendered dynamics of family life when the global pandemic brought childcare services and school operations in Iceland to a halt during the spring of 2020. I believe that this interruption to children's schooling provides a valuable opportunity to collect data on the dynamics of parenting and reproduction of power relations through discourses on parental practices. In addition, Article 3 of the thesis adapts a novel method, story completion, which to my knowledge has only been used once before in an Icelandic study (S. Sigurðardóttir & Rúdólfsdóttir, 2019). The method is gaining popularity internationally, albeit on experimental stages.

This research is therefore an important scholarly contribution to the field of sociology of education, specifically class analysis in a Nordic context. It gives valuable and unique insights into family dynamics during a pandemic in a time when neoliberal attitudes prevail, and utilizes new and original methods.

1.2 Overview of the thesis

There are seven sections in this thesis. In the introduction I have discussed the personal prelude to my PhD journey and the rationale for choosing my topic. I have also introduced the aim of the thesis. In the second section I will discuss the theoretical foundations of the thesis. This section starts with considerations on the Bourdieusian inspirations for my understanding of the project at hand, including an account of the work of Bourdieu that I

found helpful in approaching and carrying out the research. Secondly, I will discuss the theoretical term neoliberal governmentality, which is central to the conceptual framework of Article 3. The third section of this thesis consists of a review of the literature on school and neighbourhood choices and parental work. This section concludes with a chapter on mothering and school choice in an Icelandic context.

The fourth section of this thesis gives a detailed account of the methods used. This includes a discussion of the different datasets, ethical considerations and personal positionality. The fifth section gives an overview of the findings of the three articles. In the sixth section I will discuss the common conclusions of the three articles and how they contribute to the overarching aim of this thesis. This section will also address limitations and suggestions for further studies. Lastly, the published articles conclude this thesis.

2 Theoretical foundation

2.1 Bourdieusian inspirations

The theoretical foundation of the two first articles of this thesis rests on the work of Bourdieu. His writings have been central to the subject of sociology of education for decades. Bourdieu's broad conceptualisation of class and distinction has proven fruitful for researchers within this field for, as Bourdieu argues, while you can easily bequeath your economic wealth to your children, you need strategies to ensure the transmission of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986). This is where education within the home as well as the educational system comes into play. In my application of his writings, I follow in the footsteps of British scholars such as Ball, Bowe, and Gewirtz (1996); Ball and Vincent (2007); Reay (2006); Vincent (2017) and American scholars Lareau (2011); Lareau, Adia Evans, and Yee (2016). In addition, it is important to note that Nordic scholars have more recently contributed to this branch of Bourdieusian research (Kosunen, 2016; Kosunen & Seppänen, 2015; Magnúsdóttir, 2014, 2015, 2018; Magnúsdóttir & Gísladóttir, 2017). My understanding of class formation is informed and motivated by Bourdieu's work and the theoretical interpretations and applications of the aforementioned scholars. In this section I will discuss the aspects of Bourdieu's work that are the most important to this thesis.

Bourdieu argues that in order to understand the reproduction of class, we must examine the educational system from a sociological point of view, and go beyond a simple analysis of who succeeds within the system and who does not (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). This must be done by addressing and analysing the structures of class reproductions as manifested for example in educational choices and parental practices.

Bourdieu states that 'the educational system masks more thoroughly than any other legitimation mechanism […] the arbitrary nature of the actual demarcation of its public, thereby imposing more subtly the legitimacy of its products and of its hierarchies' (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 496). In line with Bourdieu's argumentation and critical theory in general, I seek to explore power relations in connection to school choice, neighbourhood choice and parental practices. I do so with a special focus on those parents who hold the symbolic power necessary to navigate those hierarchies to their own benefit and that of their children.

2.1.1 Capital and social space

A thesis like this necessitates a broad understanding of class and capital. I therefore use both quantitative and qualitative data, and analyse it with an inspiration from Bourdieu's interconnected concepts of economic, cultural and social capital to understand class (Bourdieu, 1986), as well as his concept of class fractions (Weininger, 2005)[1]. Bourdieu argues that cultural capital exists in institutionalised, embodied and objectified form. The institutionalised form refers to academic qualifications. The embodied state refers to the embodiment and the cultivation of the body. This can refer to, for example, how people move, their posture and tone of speech. The objectified state refers to objects that are linked to the embodied state of cultural capital, for example, artwork or jewellery.

Social capital is the social network to which people have access, which gives them validation within a given field or social space (Bourdieu, 1986). I have also found it useful to bear in mind that the middle class is not a homogenous group, and thus my analysis is informed by Bourdieu's notion of class fractions (Weininger, 2005) whereby the dominant class is divided into an economic fraction (holding primarily economic capital) and an intellectual fraction (holding primarily institutionalised and presumably embodied cultural capital).

Bourdieu underlines class as not only a status, but a process by which class is continuously shaped and reproduced through actions and choices. The upper middle class therefore seeks distinction from lower classes by defining what is good taste or what is a good and worthy lifestyle, including residential and school choices (Bourdieu, 1984). These power struggles take place within a field of power or a social space. A field in Bourdieu's writings is seen as a relatively autonomous social microcosm where agents are hierarchically situated (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 97-98). Because school choice, neighbourhood choice and parental daily habits do not happen within an autonomous field, I will instead use the term social space.

Hierarchies exist between schools and neighbourhoods in the Reykjavík metropolitan area. These hierarchies are created and reproduced through micro-communications and choices made by parents of children enrolled in compulsory education. A power struggle therefore exists within the social space of compulsory education. This struggle is, presumably, heavily influenced by numerous factors or other fields, such as the housing market,

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[1] Please see the chapter on method for a discussion on the operationalisation of economic and cultural capital and class fractions.

transportation, location of services and cultural institutions (i.e. museums), and geographical divisions between municipalities (influencing the ease with which one can apply for schools). Social space is a much broader term than field, and is constituted of many interconnected, albeit relatively autonomous, fields. In this way social space 'can be described as a multi-dimensional space of positions such that every actual position can be defined in terms of a multi-dimensional system of co-ordinates whose values correspond to the values of the different pertinent variables' (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 724). Within this social space is an ongoing struggle between agents, a struggle over values and hierarchical positions. It is clear that compulsory schooling and parenting in Iceland constitutes, and is heavily influenced by, various struggles and fields, and therefore can be related to as a social space. Kosunen (2016) applies similar logic when studying school choice in urban Finland using Bourdieu's theories and concepts. One of Kosunen's main findings is that when analysing school choice, symbolic hierarchies of schools and parents' educational strategies, we find 'transformation and transmission of different forms of capital within and across fields' (p. 74). That is, for this topic of study there is not a single field to be identified, but rather the capital transmission and the reproduction of power relations occurs within a social space, constructed and influenced by many fields.

In this PhD thesis, the relative position of schools, neighbourhoods, parents and children within the social space of compulsory education is considered through Bourdieu's concepts of social space and capital, using both quantitative and qualitative data. The main focus of the analysis is the accumulation, distribution and capitalisation of economic, cultural and social capital. This holds particularly true for Articles 1 and 2 on school and neighbourhood choices. People who hold relatively more arbitrarily valued capital within the social space are said to hold symbolic power. This power is symbolic in the sense that it is an accumulation of abstract forms of capital that is, at the given time, valued and recognised within the social space. The symbolic nature represents the fact that the capital that allows for symbolic power to arise is neither objective nor inherently superior to other forms of capital. Rather, the forms of capital that the agents in the social space happen to value are arbitrary (Bourdieu, 1979). When this arbitrariness of symbolic power is misrecognised, Bourdieu speaks of symbolic violence, a central concept in his work.

Symbolic violence occurs when the dominated come to assume their domination as a natural way of being – when their subordination is legitimised by, for example, their lack of success within the educational

system. Symbolic violence occurs without the need for enforcement through coercive violence on the part of the dominant classes. Rather, since the social space in question is structured around their symbolic capital, the dominant classes need only to 'play the game' in order to maintain their hierarchical position and subsequently the subordinate position of the dominated. In the process of symbolic violence, all agents agree upon the fairness of the game, and misrecognise the fact that it is designed around the symbolic capital of the dominant groups (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

It is worthwhile to ask if and how Bourdieu's concepts are applicable in an Icelandic context. There is no easy, straightforward answer to that. There are examples of Bourdieusian-inspired studies conducted in Iceland within anthropology, (Skaptadóttir, 2019), career guidance and counselling, (G. Vilhjálmsdóttir & Arnkelsson, 2013), literary studies (Aðalsteinsdóttir, 2016), history (Ellenberger, 2019) and disability studies (K. Björnsdóttir & Jóhannesson, 2009). Although a few articles have been published (Magnúsdóttir, Auðardóttir, & Stefánsson, 2020; Magnúsdóttir & Garðarsdóttir, 2018; Magnúsdóttir & Gísladóttir, 2017), Bourdieusian studies within sociology of education are in their infancy in Iceland. None of the aforementioned studies specifically address the applicability of Bourdieu's concepts to the Icelandic context, nor do they seek to explicitly define social, cultural or symbolic capital in Icelandic society. This is not the aim of my thesis; rather, I seek to apply Bourdieu's central idea of the role of the middle and upper classes in creating distinctions through their use of symbolic capital. In a mostly qualitative way, I aim to understand those processes in an Icelandic context. The qualitative nature of my data allows for a nuanced understanding of symbolic capital in Iceland, which is a prerequisite for the local application of Bourdieu's theories. The interpretative openness of Bourdieu's concepts and his understanding of class as an accumulation of practices rather than a static concept also gives way to locally specific interpretations.

2.1.2 Feminist perspectives

This thesis is a contribution to the feminist literature on motherhood and gendered dimensions of family life. It is therefore important to address that many feminist scholars (Lovell, 2000; McRobbie, 2002; Skeggs, 2004) have both employed and criticised Bourdieu's theories and working methods. Skeggs (2004) notes that feminists have long been inspired by Bourdieu's work and that his class analyses have allowed them to 'put the issue of class back onto the feminist agenda' (p. 20). This, she maintains, is done via his

notion of class as a dynamic process that entails much more than a static occupation or a Marxist division of labour. It is this dynamic nature of Bourdieu's writings and concepts that also allows the flexible application of them to different cultures and country-specific circumstances, such as in Iceland. Furthermore, a Bourdieusian understanding of class relations takes into account the arbitrariness and ever-shifting dynamics of classed power relations. In this way, his concepts of symbolic capital and the reproduction of class through education in the home allows for a nuanced understanding of class relations. This in turn makes way for the class analysis to include an understanding of women's labour in the home, and enables the researcher to understand how gendered divisions of parental work fuel these processes. As discussed throughout this thesis, this has been done by various scholars by whom I am inspired; most notably Diane Reay, Carol Vincent and Annette Lareau.

Feminists have also criticised Bourdieu for various reasons. Skeggs (2004) argues that his understanding of gender is not nuanced enough, and that gender cannot be understood according to a simple dominated vs. dominating binary structure. Furthermore, she states that his methods tend to reduce relationships and values to units that can be counted. McRobbie (2002) argues that when it comes to qualitative data, as in *The Weight of the World* (1999), Bourdieu misses the opportunity to explore ambiguities and to socially situate people's experiences and accounts. Lastly, Lovell (2000) argues that Bourdieu reduces women to repositories, that is simple capital-bearing objects on behalf of their family. As Skeggs (2004) notes, most feminist scholars inspired by Bourdieu have amended his theories and/or added further theoretical perspectives to their analyses. In doing so, they have managed to overcome whatever shortcomings of his theories or methods that they believe need to be overcome. As stated earlier, this thesis is inspired by Bourdieu, but not bound by his concepts. I have chosen mostly qualitative methods, and my primary objective has been to understand the nuances and social context of the accounts given in the data. In this respect I diverge from the more quantitative methods Bourdieu uses (e.g. multiple correspondence analysis), and am therefore able to escape the danger of reducing complex social relationships to numbers to be counted. In addition, as explained in the following section, I have added a Foucauldian understanding of power relations within the society as manifested in private family matters. This allows for a kaleidoscopic vision of classed and gendered power relations within micro-communications of families where the binary of dominated vs. dominating is blurred.

2.2 Neoliberal governmentality

Neoliberal governmentality is a central concept in Article 3, which discusses family life in pandemic times. As the focus of this article is less on choices and more on the construction of the fit parent and gendered relations of family life under stressful circumstances, I feel that this framework is more appropriate than a more Bourdieusian understanding. Articles 1 and 2 on school and neighbourhood choices build largely on the same source of literature, and appropriately so. During the beginning stages of Article 3, I decided that it was important for me as a scholar to put different types of literature and theories to the test. Moreover, the data material and research questions are of a different nature, despite the obvious common thread of reproduction of power relations through parental practices. The application of these different yet interconnected theoretical aspects of Bourdieu and Foucault has proven fruitful. While they are separate in the three articles and in this theoretical section of my thesis, the sixth section of this thesis will discuss the combined conclusions of these articles in the theoretical light of both Bourdieu and Foucault.

What has inspired me most in this strand of thought is Nikolas Rose's classic *Governing the Soul* (Rose, 1989), which is rooted in Foucault's theories on discipline, governmentality and technologies of the self (Foucault, 1988, 1991). Foucault emphasises that governmentality applies to all aspects of life, including the private sphere, and that the instruments of government are not limited to laws or force, but contain multitudes of methods. The family then becomes the venue for one of those methods of government, and thus an instrument for governing the population (Foucault, 1988). In this sense neoliberalism is a form of governmentality that goes beyond economic politics. Oksala (2013) notes that, at least in the European and North American context, neoliberalism now affects the most intimate aspects of our lives and applies market logistics to all aspects of society, both private and public. This happens through technologies of the self, for example self-governing and self-regulation.

Rose (1989) further expands Foucault's thought to the family unit and the management of parents and children. He writes about childhood as 'the most intensively governed sector of personal existence' (p. 123), which resonates with studies on the high demands placed on parents as shapers of future citizens. It is not enough to love the child, one must discipline him or her according to the liking of the powerful in society; this discipline legitimises and reproduces existing power relations. The production of the normal, moral, conforming child is by this understanding not a given but

rather an accomplishment of careful choices and regulations within the family (Rose, 1989).

In Article 3 on parenthood in times of partially suspended school services (Auðardóttir & Rúdólfsdóttir, 2021), these demands on the family as a training ground for future citizens are exacerbated. Participants were given the beginning of a story (a story stem) about parents in a semi-lockdown state, and then given free reign to invent how the story evolves and ends. This allows me to analyse possible conceptions of and discourses on family life in neoliberal, pandemic times. In the story stem, the parent receives emails from teachers with suggestions on how to educate the child at home – this of course also happens in non-pandemic times with regular homework. The difference is that during school closure, the responsibility for this shaping and training lies to a greater extent within the home, and disproportionately with the mothers (Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2020). I was curious as to what people imagine when the responsibility of discipline rests so heavily on the shoulders of mothers and in the private sphere of the home. This research interest is fuelled by the Foucauldian understanding of neoliberal governmentality as a mode of governing that occurs not least of all within private homes. The power relations and governmentality that affect the private home and our emotions are exposed as important factors in the reproduction of power relations in society (Rose, 1989; Walkerdine, Lucey, & Melody, 2001).

Neoliberal governmentality makes people as individuals responsible for making the right, often high-stakes choices (Pattillo, Delale-O'Connor, & Butts, 2014) for their own and their families' daily life and success (Güney-Frahm, 2020; McRobbie, 2013; Olmedo & Wilkins, 2016; Rose, 1989). Within the home, the mother and the child become the prime subjects of neoliberal governmentality. Rather than exercising coercive enforcement of control, neoliberal governmentality ensures that mothers self-regulate their family by for example striving for hygienic homes and healthy children (Rose, 1989, p. 132). The mother's task is then to perfectly invent her own best self and her children's best self, through entrepreneurship and choices (McRobbie, 2015) that shape future citizens in a society where existing power relations are reproduced (Rose, 1989). These processes then beget competitiveness, and undermine collective and structural thought and solutions.

Neoliberal governmentality has had a profound influence on Western parental practices (Olmedo & Wilkins, 2016). McRobbie (2013) argues that its primary focus is on the professional middle-class mother. As Rose (1989)

notes, we also know that the regulation of family life, hygiene, training of children, and morals stems not least of all from the need to govern working-class families. This surveillance addresses the anxieties of the powerful while also creating anxiety, and is intended to curb social unrest and potential threats to existing power relations. Under these premises, mothers are expected to be conscious consumers who maximise their children's potential through a calculated and informed choice within a market of schools and leisure programmes (Olmedo & Wilkins, 2016; Reay, 1998a). In this sense mothers – at least in affluent countries – have moved beyond 'providing food, shelter, and love' (Vincent, 2017, p. 543). The increased emphasis on parental educative work is an aspect of this development that has been documented in affluent countries throughout the world (Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson, 2013; Vincent, 2017). This also applies to the Nordic countries, including Iceland (Christiansen, 2010; Helgøy & Homme, 2017; Jónsdóttir, 2013; Kristoffersson, 2009; Magnúsdóttir, 2013).

Kristín Jónsdóttir's PhD thesis (2018) constitutes the most extensive study on home-school cooperation in Iceland. Her work is important as it gives an thorough overview of parental involvement in Icelandic compulsory schools (Jónsdóttir & Björnsdóttir, 2020). One of the findings of this overview is that, as Jónsdóttir and Björnsdóttir frame it, parents' rights have increased in Iceland over the past decades. Jónsdóttir and Björnsdóttir refer in particular to the rights of parents to choose a school and the right to cooperation between the school and the home. These increased rights can, however, also be viewed as an increase in parents' workload in connection to their children's schooling. We must therefore examine the construction of acceptable ways to emotionally respond to this, and ideas of how parents can best manage their increased workload. Postfeminist neoliberal governmentality calls for a cultivation of the 'right' kind of dispositions in the face of adversity or challenge. These include aspiration, confidence, positivity and resilience (Cabanas & Illouz, 2019; Gill, 2017; Illouz, 2007). Feelings of anger, insecurity and frustration are replaced by the feeling rules of postfeminist neoliberal culture such as humour and positive thinking, which ensure the cultivation and presentation of the best version of the self (Cabanas & Illouz, 2019; Elias & Gill, 2018; Gill, K. Kelan, & M. Scharff, 2017). In this regard, Cappellini *et al.* (2019) have theorised how the emphasis on optimism and positivity, which they refer to as optimistic affective regime, negatively affects mothers and results in stress and anxiety.

3 School choice, neighbourhood choice and parental work

In this section I will discuss previous scholarly work on school choice, neighbourhood choice and parental work, and how these connect to the theoretical foundations addressed above. This is not meant to be a complete review of literature concerning these issues; rather, it can be viewed as a modified scoping study (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005) and is inspired by the formulations in Magnússon (2015). The selection of research to present in this section is based on the following guidelines:

1. Papers that address parental work or choice from same or similar Bourdieusian and Foucauldian theoretical framework as used in this thesis. Most notably, these papers belong to the predominantly British branch of Bourdieusian parental studies, and also include the work of influential Foucauldian scholars who have addressed parental work.

2. Papers that are relevant to the research question and as such deal with school choice, neighbourhood choice and/or parental work. More specifically, I searched for studies that address the Icelandic and Nordic perspective and/or classed dimensions of the topic and/or gendered perspectives.

3.1 School choice and neighbourhood choice

The choice of compulsory schools either directly or indirectly through residential choice can serve as a means for class reproduction and reproduction of power relations. For school choice to serve this purpose, however, a hierarchy of schools must be in place. Free choice of schools and the emergence of educational quasi-markets have gained considerable attention within the field of sociology of education, with a focus on how these trends contribute to increased hierarchies among schools and subsequently to the reproduction of social distinctions (Bunar & Ambrose, 2016; Kosunen & Seppänen, 2015; Lareau & Goyette, 2014; Power, Edwards, Whitty, & Wigfall, 2003; Reay & Ball, 1998; Yoon, Lubienski, & Lee, 2018). As Ball *et al.* (1996) concluded 25 years ago, parents with symbolic capital, to whom Ball *et al.* (1996) refer as skilled/privileged choosers, thus had 'the free reign to guarantee and reproduce, as best they can, their

existing cultural, social and economic advantages in the new complex and blurred hierarchy of schools' (p. 23). They also state that although private schools in the UK had long served as a way for the upper classes to 'work the system' and reproduce class hierarchies, the then-new emphasis on free school choice further steepened the hierarchy of schools and neighbourhoods, thereby increasing spatial class segregation and inequalities between schools.

The rule of neoliberal governmentality in these processes is important. The neoliberal ethos favours the responsible and rational citizen and parent as first and foremost a conscious chooser within an educational market (Olmedo & Wilkins, 2016) who chooses the right school, neighbourhood and extracurricular activities in order to improve their child's and their own position in society (Ball *et al.*, 1996; Butler, Hamnett, Ramsden, & Webber, 2007; Byrne, 2006; Olmedo & Wilkins, 2016). Pattillo *et al*. (2014) refer to these choices as high-stake choosing, whereby citizens are now expected to choose private or public providers of highly important public services such as education and health care. Parents, however, have very different capacities for obtaining the information they need in order to become responsible and rational consumers within the education market (Ball & Vincent, 1998).

In this scenario, parents of the dominant class are at a great advantage. They retain strong economic, cultural and social capital that, when combined, gives them the symbolic capital to be recognised, respected and validated in society. In the context of schools and neighbourhoods, they have the ability to utilise choice to gain even more privilege for themselves and their children[2] (Ball *et al*., 1996; Olmedo & Wilkins, 2016; Pattillo *et al.*, 2014). Those parents hold cumulative economic, social and cultural capital that they can use to gain further validation and distinction, and to reproduce their own and their children's dominant class status (Bourdieu, 1986, 2002), while parents of lower classes do not have the capital to play the game in the same manner (Bæck, 2017; Brantlinger, 2004; Griffith & Smith, 2005; Kosunen & Seppänen, 2015; Reay, 2005). Accordingly, school choice and private schools have been found to increase social segregation between schools. This also applies to the Nordic countries (Arnesen & Lundahl, 2006; Bernelius & Vaattovaara, 2016; Dovemark *et al.*, 2018;

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[2] However, middle-class parents who are marginalised in some way (i.e. are not native to Iceland, not white or have disabled children) are more likely to question this system-based injustice (Magnúsdóttir & Gísladóttir, 2017).

Göransson, Magnússon, & Nilholm, 2012; Magnússon, 2019). Educational choices are thus not only a means of increasing knowledge, but also a tool for class distinction and reproduction, and for the intensification of class inequalities (Butler & Hamnett, 2007).

3.2 Motherhood and parental work

The gendered dimensions of parental educative work have been documented. Although many of the policies and much of the research on the home-school relationship are gender neutral, we know that parental school work falls mainly on the shoulders of mothers (Pétursdóttir, 2012; Reay, 2005; Vincent, 2017). In the case of upper-middle-class mothers, their work becomes infused with anxiety and the fear of not being able to reproduce or further their class position. At the same time, their actions set an impossible example for working-class mothers, thereby setting up working-class mothers as defects (Gewirtz, 2001; Vincent, 2010). This definition of desirable parenthood and childhood has come to be defined as the normal (Rose, 1989). The middle class sets the norm and parents from lower classes are defined as defects and in need of guidance to achieve this arbitrary normality. As a result of neoliberal governmentality, active school and neighbourhood choices as well as extensive parental management of children's academic success have increasingly become a part of the normality of parental practices. Mothers become the subject of consumer culture, where it is their motherly duty to seize every opportunity to establish and reproduce their own and their child's class status; here the choice of neighbourhood and school is of paramount importance (Byrne, 2006; Griffith & Smith, 2005; Hutchison, 2011; Reay, 1998b, 2005; Vincent, 2010).

However, studies have shown that mothers' responses to the neoliberal demands of conscious consumption (Olmedo & Wilkins, 2016) is mediated by whether their children fit into the norm of the school system. Even when this is not the case, upper-middle-class mothers possess greater symbolic capital to respond effectively to this situation (Magnúsdóttir & Gísladóttir, 2017). School and neighbourhood hierarchies increase this unpaid labour required of mothers. When the hierarchies become accentuated, mothers' anxiety also increases. The maternal labour of educative work adds a fourth shift to days that are already packed with demands from paid labour, domestic work and their own education (Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson, 2013). Not only are mothers expected to foster their children's academic achievements, they also must cook healthy, clean and organic food from

scratch (Cairns, Johnston, & MacKendrick, 2013) and monitor their children's screen time and their use of free time (Wheeler, 2014). In this sense mothers socialise their children to serve the ruling power relations, but in doing so they activate their own personal hopes and fears, wishes and guilt (Rose, 1989).

Parenting is fraught with risk and anxiety, as wrong parenting practices are considered to irrevocably harm the child or cause downward social mobility. These trends are intimately connected to the social construction of the responsible mother (Vincent, 2010, 2017; Wheeler, 2014). Furthermore, it is well documented that women's access to the resources necessary to fulfil the demands of the active and involved parent are contingent upon their societal status: in particular, but not exclusively, their social class (Gewirtz, 2001; Reay, 2005).

3.3 The Icelandic context

In this section I will discuss the topic of reproduction of power relations through parental practices in an Icelandic context. This entails a literature review of relevant Icelandic studies on motherhood, neoliberal governmentality of family life, neoliberal ideology concerning the provision of public services and school choice.

In Iceland, the working mother is the norm. In 2018, the birth rate in Iceland was 1,7 children per woman (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2018b), and 82% of women were active in the labour market. This is the highest proportion of female workforce participation in all OECD countries (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2018a). In recent decades, increased rights to parental leave have encouraged fathers' involvement in parenting, (Arnalds, Eydal, & Gíslason, 2013; Einarsdóttir & Pétursdóttir, 2011). Research suggests that young men see fatherhood as an integral part of masculinity (Jóhannsdóttir & Gíslason, 2018), that fathers are now expected to be more active in childrearing (Gíslason, 2018) and that fathers want to be active caretakers for their children (Þórarins Ingudóttir, 2015). Furthermore, pressure from feminist movements has resulted in increased access to reliable and affordable day-care in Iceland, and older children remain on school premises for the duration of their school day.

In Iceland as in other Western countries, motherhood has long been considered integral to feminine identities (Arendell, 2000; Kawash, 2011; Rúdólfsdóttir, 1997, 2016). Historically, maternal selflessness that focuses on the care and nurturing of others in the private sphere has been

considered the proper route for women's fulfilment and happiness (Rúdólfsdóttir, 1997). Despite affordable day-care, the normalisation of women's participation in the workforce and policies emphasising fathers' involvement, Icelandic mothers are still expected to shoulder the main responsibility for childcare (Gíslason, 2018; Júlíusdóttir, Rafnsdóttir, & Einarsdóttir, 2018; Símonardóttir, 2016). In Pétursdóttir's (2009) study, mothers explain how their choices resulted in a disproportionate workload in the home. They seem to confirm the postfeminist ideologies promoted in Western societies, whereby inequality is seen as an historical rather than a current problem (McRobbie, 2009). It is necessary to bear in mind this gendered pattern of family life and care work in Iceland when analysing parental practices and drawing conclusions from my thesis.

I also want to make clear the connections between the conclusions of Pétursdóttir's (2009, 2012) research and neoliberal governmentality. In her analysis of gendered power relations in Iceland, she maintains that women tend to support the existing power relations by reducing them to individual choices. Furthermore, they self-govern so that their behaviour and choices align with their subordinate position in society. This self-governing is one of the main characteristics of governmentality (Foucault, 1991). Neoliberal governmentality takes away from the individual the ability to see structural inequalities, and reduces life courses to one's individual, often high-stake choices (Pattillo *et al*., 2014). The project of the individual is then to perfectly invent their best self, through entrepreneurship and choices (McRobbie, 2015), and the family plays a special role in training children to make the most of themselves and become good citizens (Güney-Frahm, 2020; Olmedo & Wilkins, 2016; Rose, 1989). This in turn begets competitiveness and undermines collective and structural thought and solutions.

We also see the effects of neoliberal ideas on a more structural level. In Iceland, compulsory education has generally been perceived as egalitarian, with a strong public school system (Jónasson, 2008; A. K. Sigurðardóttir, Guðjónsdóttir, & Karlsdóttir, 2014). In an international context, the difference in performance between Icelandic schools has been minimal (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2016), and most children attend their neighbourhood public school. Furthermore, an emphasis on schools' profiling or streaming (with optional courses or emphasis on e.g. music or math) is less prevalent in Iceland than it is e.g. in Finland (Kosunen, Bernelius, Seppänen, & Porkka, 2016). In the provision of public service, however, a neoliberal agenda has flourished in Icelandic politics since 1991. The neoliberal agenda has gained momentum in the

years after 1995, with deregulation of financial markets and privatisation of e.g. banks, natural resources (hydropower) and energy and water distribution (Ólafsson, 2008). Simultaneously, Icelanders saw a systematic weakening of the re-distributional effects of the tax system, which in turn greatly increased inequalities in income. Ólafsson (2008) states that deregulation, marketisation and privatisation of the educational system was both directly and indirectly on the government agenda during this time period. This resonates with Dýrfjörð's and Magnúsdóttir's (2016) findings on the marketisation of early childhood education in Iceland, in which they conclude that privatisation of the education system has become inevitable. Furthermore, right-wing politicians along with the Confederation of Icelandic Enterprise and Iceland Chamber of Commerce have begun to advocate publicly for free school choice and privatisation (H. Björnsdóttir, 2018; Borgarfulltrúar Sjálfstæðisflokksins [City council members for the Independence party], 2018; Icelandic Chamber of Commerce & Confederation of Icelandic Enterprise, 2014). In 2005, private schools in Iceland formed a coalition that advocates for free school choice and for increased opportunities for private and voluntary enterprises to operate schools (Coalition of Independent Schools, 2015).

In their analysis of deregulation, marketisation and privatisation of the comprehensive educational system in the Nordic countries, Dovemark *et al.* (2018) note that the process of deregulation is well underway in Iceland, while marketisation and privatisation are less advanced. In countries with a lesser degree of privatisation, such as Norway, the increased consumer role of parents finds its way through the residential choices of parents, where parents with strong economic capital have increasingly begun purchasing property in school catchment areas perceived as good, resulting in increased spatial class divisions (Aarseth, 2015; Dovemark *et al.*, 2018; Ljunggren & Andersen, 2015). The only study on parental neighbourhood choices in Iceland indicates that similar developments might be at play in the Reykjavík metropolitan area (Magnúsdóttir et al., 2020). Trends of increased spatial class segregation and an emerging educational market have been identified in the other Nordic countries (Beach, 2017; Bunar & Ambrose, 2016; Dovemark *et al.*, 2018; Lundahl, Arreman, Lundström, & Rönnberg, 2010), despite those countries' common 'emphasis on public provision of universal welfare and a strong concern with social equality' (Dovemark *et al.*, 2018, p. 122).

As is evident in this section on the Icelandic context, studies on parental practices in Iceland have only been situated to a minimal extent within critical theory on power relations and reproductions thereof. Hence,

neither manifestations of school and residential choice nor their potential connections to class reproduction have been analysed in Iceland apart from aforementioned quantitative study on the socio-economic developments of school catchment areas (Magnúsdóttir et al., 2020). Limited research exists on the connections between social, cultural and economic capital, the education system, and geographical residency in Iceland (for exceptions see (Bernburg & Valdimarsdottir, 2014; A. Vilhjálmsdóttir, Garðarsdóttir, Bernburg, & Sigfúsdóttir, 2016) however, these studies do not engage with the education system and transmission of class). Furthermore, my paper on parental practices in Iceland under neoliberal governmentality in pandemic times was, to my knowledge, the first to be published on the topic although Hjálmsdóttir and Bjarnadóttir (2020) have since then studied the same topic. This thesis is therefore not only important in an international setting, but also in an Icelandic context.

4 Methods

In this section I will discuss the methods used in this thesis. First, I will give an overview of the datasets and their connection to the aims of my research. Next, I will address the interviews conducted for the research. Those interviews form the basis for Articles 1 and 2. I then discuss the story completion method used in Article 3. This section is followed by a section on the analysis of the qualitative data, both the interviews and the story completion data. Section 4.5 contains information regarding the descriptive quantitative data used mainly in Article 1, and to a lesser extent in Article 2 about neighbourhood choices. Ethical issues concerning each dataset will be discussed throughout the sections. Lastly, I will discuss my positionality in a reflexive way.

Table 1. Overview of datasets

Dataset	Collection period	Relation to the aims of the thesis
15 interviews with middle-class mothers and one father	Spring 2017	To address school choice and neighbourhood choice, and how these relate to the reproduction of power relations (in particular class)
Descriptive statistics on the background of students in private schools and catchment areas in the capital region. Derived from Statistics Iceland.	Winter 2017-2018	To understand the context of the interviews and the perspectives from which the parents speak; to contextualise discussions on the characteristics of neighbourhoods and schools
97 stories collected via story completion method	April 2020	To address parental practices in pandemic times. The stories provide insight into what is imaginable and how fit/unfit parents are constructed, which in turn relates to the reproduction of power relations.

4.1 Interviews

I began conducting the interviews in early 2017, shortly before formally enrolling as a PhD student. These interviews were performed in connection with Magnúsdóttir's research on parental practices, choices and responsibilities in compulsory education. The focus of the sixteen interviews aligns with the aim of my thesis; the parents interviewed have opted out of their neighbourhood school. These interviews form the basis for the first two articles of my PhD research, alongside statistical information from Statistics Iceland. The interviews are rich and detailed, and contain multitudes of information regarding class formation, parental practices, gender and reproduction of power relations.

4.1.1 Informed consent and permission

The Data Protection Authority (I. Persónuvernd) of Iceland was informed of this study involving interviews in 2017 (no. S8157), the study received a positive review from the Ethics Committee of the University of Iceland (I. Vísindasiðanefnd Háskóla Íslands) that same year. All participants signed a consent form which informed them of the study and their rights as participants. This form was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Iceland and can be found in the appendix of this document. In addition to information regarding confidentiality and participants' rights to withdraw or refuse to answer one or more questions, the consent form contains general information about the study and its stated aim (i.e. to study parental practices, choices and responsibilities in Iceland). It does not specifically mention classed or gendered analysis; I did not want to reveal this dimension of my research and thereby possibly influence the way in which participants responded, or the information they provided or withheld. Revealing too much detail prior data collection can result in participants tailoring their responses to what they think is expected of them (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000).

4.1.2 Definition of middle class

In this thesis, the term 'middle class' refers to parents who have a university education and an average or above-average income. Their occupations include, for example, teachers, artists, lawyers or lower managerial positions. This is a qualitative way of defining class position, and similar categorization has been used by, among others, Lareau et al. (2016). A minority of the interviewed parents or their spouses occupy a societal position that can be identified as elite. Some of the people in this group

hold a top managerial position within the business or political community of Iceland, and have an income that is well above that of the average household. Other participants in this group have an income well above the average household but do not occupy a higher managerial position. The thesis does not differentiate between middle class and elite for three reasons: firstly, both groups hold symbolic power that allows them to be skilled choosers in the educational market, which is of special interest to this thesis; secondly, as only a few of the participants can be identified as elite, the data corpus is unlikely to be of good enough quality as to allow for an independent analysis of the elite interviews; thirdly, there seem to be little or no differences between educational or residential choices of parents who can be identified as elite and those of middle-class parents. Therefore, this group as a whole will be referred to as middle class. However, the relevance and importance of class fractions between the intellectual and economic fractions (Weininger, 2005) became evident during the analysis of these interviews for Article 1, on private school choice (Auðardóttir & Kosunen, 2020). This allowed for a more nuanced interpretation and analysis of the data, as was to be expected; international literature has previously documented the somewhat different educational and parental choices of class fractions among the middle classes (Ball & Vincent, 2007; Boterman & Bridge, 2015). As further explained in the article, I differentiate between middle-class fractions in a qualitative manner, with reference to occupation, education, characteristics of neighbourhoods and political alignment.

4.1.3 Interviews with middle-class parents

My dataset consists of sixteen interviews with parents who are considered middle class or elite, of whom fifteen have chosen not to send their child to the neighbourhood school. Fourteen of the fifteen participants are mothers, and one father. This father participated because his wife was abroad at the time of the data collection, and she suggested that I interview her husband about their school choice. One mother chose a public school in a different neighbourhood than the family's neighbourhood of residence but the other fourteen chose a privately run school for their child or children. These fourteen interviews with private-school parents provide the material for Article 1 on private school choice in the Reykjavík metropolitan area (Auðardóttir & Kosunen, 2020).

The interviews are semi-structured and vary from one to three hours in duration. They cover various topics connected to parental practices, such

as: support in parenting, gender division of parental duties, formal and informal schoolwork, homework, parents' generational class history, neighbourhood dynamics, extra-curricular activities and the child's friendships. I developed the interview questions and framework in cooperation with Magnúsdóttir. To ensure the uniform collection of similar background information, participants were asked to complete a short questionnaire after the interview. This questionnaire asks about participants' education and occupation, their parent's education, the education of their spouse or other people who play a significant role in in raising their child (up to four people) and the education and occupation of these individuals' parents. This provides important information about the participants' generational class history.

The middle-class participants were mostly self-selected through advertisements posted in Facebook groups representing nearly every neighbourhood and town belonging to the Reykjavík metropolitan area. The advertisement asked parents of compulsory-school-aged children who had chosen not to send their child/children to the neighbourhood school to participate in a study on parental practices and school choice. Some of the participants were recommended by other participants (snowballing method). The aim was to include parents who have the symbolic power to be active choosers in an educational market, rather than those whose choice is constrained. To facilitate this, the advertisement specifically mentioned that the researchers did not seek the participation of parents who had opted out of the neighbourhood school due to the child's disability or special needs, bullying or a recent move. It is essential to the aim of this research to interview parents who presumably hold symbolic power in the educational market. The advertisement did not specifically request the participation of mothers, though only mothers volunteered to participate. The one exception is the father whose wife suggested that he participate in her absence at the time of the interview. The interviews therefore offer good insight into the lived realities of mothers in the capital area, and the social constructions of motherhood. The recruitment of participants was not informed by literature on the differences in parental practices between fractions of the middle class.

4.1.3.1   Researcher-participant relationship

At times, I experienced an uneasy feeling towards my interviews with the upper-middle-class mothers. The aim of this research is to uncover hierarchical structures and privileges with the aid of Bourdieu's theories on capital and class distinctions. As the attention is on privilege and power, it

would have been easy to take a judgemental stance, picturing middle-class mothers as greedy hoarders of capital that will do anything to advance their own and their children's position in society. The apparent conviction of some mothers that I was determined to show the superiority of private schools over public ones only exacerbated my unease. This can perhaps be attributed to their reading of me as a fellow middle-class mother, and their assumption that I would not problematise middle-class parental practices. This assumption is not surprising, as there is an overwhelming tendency among scholars to set up middle-class parental practices as an example for other parents to follow.

Sometimes the upper-middle-class mothers seemed surprised when asked why, for example, they had chosen to live in one of the more prestigious neighbourhoods. I felt that they assumed that surely, as a member of a similar group, I understood why and therefore did not need to ask such a question. Based on their perceptions of me and my project, the mothers were eager to explain their choice of schools, and requested that I let them know when the findings were published. I felt like I was betraying them by problematising their choices. However, I can escape this feeling of betrayal by adding a feminist understanding of constructions of motherhood, middle-class anxiety and neoliberal governmentality. These approaches allow for a more sympathetic and nuanced understanding. Mothers' individual hopes and fears are activated under neoliberal governmentality, so that they socialise their children in line with social norms and existing power relations (Rose, 1989). This understanding allows for a more nuanced analysis of their circumstances, choices and dilemmas.

The commitment to honesty, sympathy and respect also provides me with a tool for a more nuanced approach to their stories. Furthermore, a literature framework that emphasises the societal structures to which middle-class mothers respond and the neoliberal construct of the responsible mother as one who makes informed choices, also allows me to stay true to the mothers' multi-layered experiences, choices and dilemmas.

4.1.4 A commitment to honesty, sympathy and respect

I have committed to the principles that Hollway and Jefferson (2000) suggest when researching psychosocial subjects: honesty, sympathy and respect. Honesty refers to an open and even-handed approach to the data in the spirit of inquiry rather than advocacy, and the employment of a clearly laid out and justified theoretical framework. An honest researcher makes only those judgements that find support in evidence, and does not

ignore evidence that does not suit his or her personal agenda (p. 92). Sympathy refers to a sympathetic attitude towards participants, whereby the researcher refrains from judgement and from sharing his or her feelings. Respect entails paying participants observant attention and recognising them as complex people in complex situations. This does not mean that it is impossible to problematise some of their actions, but I strive to do this in a respectful manner when deploying my theoretical framework, knowledge, honesty and sympathy. The following chapters all relate in one way or another to how I fulfil my commitment to honesty, sympathy and respect. I strive to give an honest account of how I fulfil my role as a researcher in this manner, and of the hindrances I have encountered in this process.

4.1.5 Confidentiality and pseudonymity

The qualitative data have all been pseudonymised, and I have made every effort to change all information necessary when quoting respondents in order to conceal their identity. This is especially important in Iceland, where the small population increases the likelihood of identifying specific individuals on the basis of limited information. This also precludes the use of some quotes that are too specific; for example, one mother describes how her husband bought a very specific, expensive food to serve to their child's entire class at a class gathering. A direct quotation of her description would have been valuable to the article, but I felt that it was unethical to include it, as it may have revealed her identity to everyone at this school, and perhaps to her circle of friends.

The commitment to confidentiality also makes it impossible to disclose detailed information regarding participant background. This applies to Iceland especially, where people often know or know of each other due to the small population. Disclosing a person's neighbourhood of residence and the fact that they send their child to a private school, for example, could suffice to reveal this person's identity to others in that neighbourhood or school. This imposes some limitations on the research, but obscuring and generalising information to the point that the person is no longer recognisable does not in most cases severely limit the possibilities for data interpretations and analysis.

4.1.6 Interviews in a micro-sized community

The small size of the Icelandic population creates special issues for me as a researcher; I personally knew of some of the participants before they took

part in the study. For example, the children of two participants attend or have attended the same school or kindergarten as my children, and so I have interacted with these participants in that setting. This is mostly coincidental, although some participants saw my advertisement due to our connection of social media. Other participants I directly asked to take part while I was still developing the questionnaire, because I knew that they fit the target group. This also means that I frequently encounter these participants in public places – the ones I knew prior to conducting the interviews as well as those I met for the first time during my research – and they inquire about the progress of my research. This is, I believe, inevitable for an Icelander researching Icelanders.

These dynamics serve as a constant reminder of my integrity as a researcher; to interpret participants' words and stories to the best of my knowledge and without judgement, as it is quite likely that at least some of them who have shown interest will read my findings. This holds me accountable to my interpretations and my handling of the data, and aligns with scholars who have argued for the necessity of such exposure (Lavallée, 2014) even when, as in this case, that exposure is neither systematic nor guaranteed.

4.2 Story completion

Article 3 uses the story completion method (Clarke, Braun, Frith, & Moller, 2019) to collect data on how we understand parental practices under lockdown during a pandemic. The story completion method asks participants to complete a story based on a beginning that is provided (a story stem). The stories are fictional but require the participants to draw on their knowledge, ideas and values regarding the topic in question. The stories therefore cannot be presumed to be descriptions of actual events, thought they provide insight into the cultural discourses available to participants in their understanding of the topic in question. The advantage to this method is that it places less demand on participants to express socially desirable viewpoints, as participants are not asked to describe their own views or lives (Clarke *et al.*, 2019).

Story completion is resource-light for the participants, who are not asked to share intimate details about their family life and emotions. Likewise, the opportunity to avoid placing pressure on participants to tell me about their personal and private lives was a great relief to me. Despite my full commitment to honesty, sympathy and respect in my data collection and analysis, I wondered if I could have or should have adopted a

more reflexive method in terms of engagement with participants, i.e. whether and to what extent I could have escaped the traditional conception of qualitative interview, whereby 'Invitations to contribute were called "participant recruitment", the stories people told me became "data", recording them was spoken of as "harvesting", and the sense I made of people´s stories was "data analysis"'(Lainson, Braun, & Clarke, 2019). This question remains unresolved. The story completion method afforded me and the participants some personal freedom from power relations and social desirability. The story completion method therefore suits studies on sensitive matters (Clarke *et al.*, 2019) such as equality and gendered dimensions of family life.

Participants were directed to a webpage where they were randomly assigned a story stem. The Education Research Institute set the survey up using Qualtrics. To encourage participation, we offered participants to enter their name to a lottery pot where we offered three certificates worth 10.000 ISK. The Education Research Institute managed the lottery.

The main protagonist of the story stems was either Ólafur (a father) or Sigríður (a mother). In the write-up we changed the names to Karl and Anna to better suit international readers. We adapted a comparative mode (Clarke, Hayfield, Moller, & Tischner, 2017) to better address the gendered relations and construction of fathers on the one hand and mothers on the other. The participants were asked to provide stories in response to the story stem, but the manner in which they do so was left open. The story stem and instructions are as follows:

> Ólafur/Sigríður has two compulsory-school-aged children (6-16 years). After a ban on mass gatherings, she/he receives an announcement from the school that her/his children will only spend 2 hours every other day at school. Afterwards the children's teacher sends ideas for assignments for the children to work on at home.

> Describe the next few days in the life of Ólafur/Sigríður. You can have the following questions in mind if you like: How does she/he feel? What does she/he do with the assignments from the teachers? Does she/he have a spouse? How is family life going? Does she/he work? How does she/he balance work and private life?

Upon completion of the stories, participants were asked to respond to two questions: firstly, what kind of a parent is Ólafur/Sigríður? Secondly, does Ólafur/Sigríður have a paid job, and if so, what kind of an employee is she/he? They were then asked to provide some background information about themselves.

Participants were recruited through ads posted in highly active Icelandic Facebook groups with large membership and relaxed policies regarding advertisement, e.g. Work with Short Notice (58,700 members) and Stuff for Free (108,000 members).[3] A total of ninety-seven participants completed a story between 7 and 24 April. The total word count of the material analysed is 32,779. The stories ranged in word count from sixty-eight to 1,461 words, with an average of 335 words. Eighty-two percent of the participants identify as women, fourteen percent as men and three as genderqueer. Seventy-eight percent hold a university degree, and eighty-two percent fall between the ages of eighteen and fifty years. Only nine percent of respondents report difficulties in making ends meet. All instructions and study materials are in Icelandic; it is safe to assume that the participants have lived in Iceland long enough to be proficient in the language.

The Reykjavík central area[4] is overrepresented, comprising forty-five percent of total participants versus an expected participation rate of fifteen percent. Based on the descriptive quantitative data on the neighbourhoods in the Reykjavík metropolitan area, we know that the central area is disproportionately inhabited by the intellectual fraction of the middle classes. This means that these neighbourhoods have the greatest number of households with people who hold a degree in social sciences, humanities or arts, and that the educational level is among the highest in the country, while income is close to average. Of the fifty-three of participants who provided information regarding their educational background, forty-four respondents hold a degree in the humanities, arts or social sciences, meaning that the STEM fields are under-represented. Therefore, both the over-representation of inhabitants of central Reykjavík and the under-representation of STEM degrees among our participants indicate an over-representation of the intellectual fraction of the middle class.

The stories collected by the story completion method as well as the interviews that form the basis of the articles in this thesis represent first

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[3] The total population of adult Icelanders in 2020 was 283,000. This group therefore contains a considerable proportion of adult Icelanders.

[4] Postal code 107 or below.

and foremost middle-class, university-educated women native to Iceland. This provides the thesis with the necessary coherence. It is important to bear this in mind when interpreting the data.

4.3 Analysis of qualitative data

I employed reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019) in my analysis of the interviews and the story completions. Even if the methods and the nature of the qualitative datasets are different I followed similar steps in my analysis, inspired by Braun and Clarke (2013) approach to thematic analysis. The first step in my analysis was the familiarisation step, in which I read and re-read the material, and transcribed the interviews. I recorded my ideas, thoughts and questions in detail, and noted contradictions and similarities. I then coded the material using mostly complete coding, as I did not know yet which specific research questions my data might answer. This included all of the stories and the interviews. During the next phase I began to identify possibilities for article topics based on the qualitative material. The topic of private school choice was the only one that I had in mind from the beginning of this journey; and I had thus made sure that the interviews provided ample material on this topic. I reflexively constructed themes around this topic, which came to fruition in Article 1.

I was also interested in a deeper exploration of residential choices; to this end I chose nine interviews that fit a criterion with regard to residency, as explained in the article. I selected these interviews in order to allow for a more nuanced and rich analysis. The procedure became more integrated, as I could take for example, generational class history into account. I constructed the themes and wrote the article, but during the review process, one reviewer suggested a deeper investigation into the particularities of Iceland, in particular family connections to neighbourhoods. I had mentioned these issues in the first draft of the article, and included such an analysis in the next draft upon consideration of this reviewer's feedback. This resulted in considerable change to the analytical process and the final article.

The data from the story completion method is very different from the interviews, as there was greater variation in the content of the ninety-seven stories than in the interviews, all of which were conducted using mostly the same interview frame. The construction of themes was therefore a slower process, and I initially doubted that these data would provide any useful material. Possibilities for interpretation nevertheless began to emerge as I continued to read, re-read, code and discuss the material in co-operation

with my supervisor and co-author, Dr Annadís Rúdólfsdóttir. Four themes eventually came to constitute the article about pandemic parenting in neoliberal times.

I used the Atlas.ti programme to organise the coding and subsequent thematic analysis throughout the entire process, but the software performed no automatic coding.

4.4 Quality guidelines for qualitative research

There is no one formal criteria or procedure by which to assess the quality of qualitative research. Braun and Clarke (2013) note that because of the different theoretical foundations of qualitative work, it is impossible to create one absolute criteria by which to measure all qualitative studies. However, they also note that Yardley (2000, 2008) sets forth four principles by which the quality of all or most qualitative work can be judged. Yardley states that it is neither necessary nor perhaps possible for a single study to fulfil all of these criteria. In this section I will address how my thesis measures against these four principles, as they are understood by Yardley (2008): sensitivity to context; commitment and rigour; transparency and coherence; impact and importance.

Sensitivity to context: Good qualitative studies socially situate nuanced data and findings. This requires that the researcher must, at every step of the study, be able to connect the research topic to both the theoretical background and previous studies on the topic, in order to provide a context for patterns and meanings. I regard this the highest priority in the analysis I make in this thesis. My research is securely situated within a Bourdieusian/- Foucauldian theoretical framework, which I use to make sense of the data. I am, however, not bound by those frameworks, but rather reflexively use the concepts that I find useful for understanding the topic in question. I also make use of relevant previous research to understand the nuances and social meanings of my conclusions.

Sensitivity to context also entails an understanding of the socio-cultural background of the participants. This understanding provides a contextualised meaning to the study. I have done this by collecting information about the participants' background and analysing the data with sensitivity to this context in mind. In particular, I was able to do this in a significant way in Article 2, where fewer interviews are analysed, thereby affording me more leeway to dive into the socio-cultural background of the participants in the analysis.

Commitment and rigour: One meaningful demonstrations of rigour applies to the data selection. My thesis is grounded in three very different datasets: the sixteen qualitative interviews, the statistical data from Statistics Iceland, and the ninety-seven stories collected by the story completion method. This underscores my commitment to the rigour of the study by providing me with ways to analyse the topic at hand from the perspectives of the different datasets.

Another discussion of commitment and rigour addresses the data analysis. My analysis is performed using reflexive thematic analysis, as described in section 4.3 above. My analytical process follows the guidelines described in Braun and Clarke (2013, p. 287). This process includes giving each data item equal attention in the coding process, and making sure that the themes are internally coherent, consistent and distinctive. It also requires a thorough explanation of all assumptions drawn from the thematic analysis, and refraining from mere paraphrasal or description of the data in favour of an active interpretation of the data. I wish to stress that in my role as a researcher, I have been an active agent in the research process and I recognise that throughout the various stages of my analysis, I am creating and moulding stories about the stories that the participants have provided me (Lainson *et al.*, 2019). I therefore include in this kappa a detailed reflexive account of my own story and background (section 4.6), in order to acknowledge that I do not enter the analytical process from a blank slate.

Transparency and coherence: This kappa addresses the coherence of this thesis – in particular the sixth section, in which I discuss my overarching conclusions. In this section I also address the aim of the thesis as a whole, as well as the combination of the twofold theoretical framework (i.e. Bourdieusian/Foucauldian) and the relevant literature. Therefore, while each paper is an internally coherent independent study, this kappa demonstrates the coherence of the thesis as a whole. For the sake of transparency, I have provided a thorough methodology chapter not only in each paper, but also in this kappa, where I provide additional detailed information on the process.

Impact and importance: One way to demonstrate the quality of a qualitative research study is to show its potential impact on and importance to the field of study in question. We must also note that knowledge is important for its own sake, be it only for the fact that we cannot know fully today what will be useful for us tomorrow. As such, any research that creates new knowledge is important. The novelty of this thesis in both an

international and Icelandic context is addressed throughout this kappa. I chose to study this topic because there is little understanding in the Icelandic context of the structures of parental practices and how they contribute to classed and gendered reproductions of power relations. My conclusions can therefore prove useful for teachers, parents and policymakers in education and family policy who wish to work towards social justice. Furthermore, Article 3 directly looks at family life in pandemic times, an emergency social context that has only been addressed by academics to a limited extent.

Another aspect of the quality of this thesis that requires addressing is generalisability. This does not refer to the traditional understanding of statistical generalisability, but rather flexible generalisability (Goodman, 2008) as it applies to qualitative studies. Flexible generalisability can be achieved by ensuring that discursive elements in the analysis relate to certain functions, and that different agents can apply this generalisability in a range of settings. In this thesis, I have taken care to connect the discursive elements that I have constructed through the qualitative analysis to theory (using either Bourdieu's or Foucault's work) and other studies on the topics I address. In this way I make clear the link from discursive data to various functions of power relations and reproductions. My discussions of the findings of each article and of the thesis in its entirety thoroughly connect my analysis to the previous research; in doing so I provide clarification for those instances in which my assumptions resemble those made from these earlier studies, as well as when they do not. The latter holds true in part for the findings of Article 2, for example, where we note that further studies are needed to elaborate on these findings, due to the discrepancy between my assumptions and those of the previous research.

4.5 Quantitative data

The dataset from Statistics Iceland contains descriptive demographic information about fifty-three catchment areas in two of the country's most populated urban areas, Reykjavík metropolitan area (Reykjavík, Kópavogur, Hafnarfjörður, Garðabær, Seltjarnarnes and Mosfellsbær) and Akureyri, from the period between 2006 and 2016. I led the development of the bid to Statistics Iceland for the processing of the data and the variables that were used. I oversaw all communication with Statistics Iceland, and undertook decisions regarding the handling and definition of the data in cooperation with Haukur Eggertsson, a mathematician at Statistics Iceland, and my supervisor, Dr Berglind Rós Magnúsdóttir. Bourdieu's theories on

capital and his notion of class fractions informed the development of the request to Statistics Iceland. Mathematician Haukur Eggertsson was responsible for data processing, and offered valuable insights into the data available from Statistics Iceland's datasets.

This analysis focusses on families with school-aged children, as they shape the social composition of the neighbourhood schools and shed light on the transmission of capital. Furthermore, this data also includes background information about families whose children attend privately run schools, from the period of 2006 to 2016. This dataset forms the background of the comparison in Article 1 (i.e. about private school choice), between families in privately run schools and those in public schools, using the selected variables explained in Table 2. Article 2 about neighbourhood choices also uses this dataset to identify the most privileged and the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods and the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods, thereby facilitating a comparison between these areas.

Table 2. Overview of data variables

Variable	Operationalisation
Familial connection to Iceland	A person is considered to have a familial connection to Iceland if they or at least one of their parents are born in Iceland. Therefore, a person who is born abroad has a familial connection to Iceland if at least one of their parents is born in Iceland. In the same manner, a person who is born in Iceland has a familial connection even if both of their parents were born abroad.
Equivalised income quintiles	The OECD-modified equivalence scale is used to adjust household incomes. Income and asset value is divided by the family size, where the first family member above the age of fourteen years receives the value 1, others above the age of fourteen receive the value 0.5, and children below the age of 14 receive the value 0.3. This ensures comparability between families of different sizes, and therefore allows for a realistic comparison between the living conditions of families. Quintiles are calculated based on all families with school-aged children in Reykjavík metropolitan area and Akureyri. Statistics Iceland collected this data from annual tax reports.
Educational level	Information derived from Statistics Iceland's census, which currently maintains information on the educational background of ninety percent of Icelandic citizens and sixty percent of foreign citizens residing in Iceland. For the remaining forty percent, a hot-deck imputation was used to estimate education based on gender, age, country of origin, and year of moving to Iceland
Field of study	Information derived from Statistics Iceland's census, which currently maintains information on the educational background of ninety percent of Icelandic citizens and sixty percent of foreign citizens residing in Iceland. For the remaining forty percent, a hot deck-imputation is used to estimate education based on gender, age, country of origin, and year of moving to Iceland. This variable was divided into those with a university degree association with the intellectual fraction of middle/upper classes, and those with other educational backgrounds. This refers to fields of study such as humanities, arts, languages or abstract social sciences, such as sociology or political sciences.

As shown in Table 2, I apply a twofold outlook on cultural capital (educational level and field of study). This aims to shed light on class fractions by looking specifically at university degrees in fields of study such as humanities, arts, languages or abstract social sciences, such as sociology or political sciences. According to Bourdieu the dominant class is divided into two fractions. Firstly, the economic fraction tends to work in the private sector (e.g. executives), and their primary capital is economic capital. Secondly, the intellectual fraction tends to work in the public sector (e.g. professors and artistic directors). This group's primary capital is cultural capital (Weininger, 2005) of which I consider a higher education degree in certain disciplines to be an indicator. This twofold outlook on cultural capital allows me to operationalise class fractions in article 1 on private school choice.

There are, however, several problems with this approach to cultural capital. It is not accurate to conflate cultural capital with university degrees within certain fields of study. Using university degrees as a frame of reference reduces this type of capital to simply another form of institutionalised cultural capital; one could say that the data only measures two types of institutionalised cultural capital. However, an understanding of the more nuanced manifestations of abstract cultural capital in modern Iceland, e.g. in terms of taste or cultural consumption, is lacking. As the development of such an understanding falls outside the scope of this research, the alternatives seem to be a simple measure of cultural capital as manifested by university degrees in general, or a rudimentary measurement of the class fractions as manifested in different fields of study. This attempt to operationalise class fractions builds on Bourdieu's theories as well as common sense about the fabric of Icelandic society, where class fractions among the middle classes are apparent in everyday public discourses and interactions.

The distribution of the variable on type of education, that is, the distribution of homes where at least one parent holds a university degree in humanities, arts or social sciences, suggests that it at least partially captures the class fractions that are central to Bourdieu's theories as Weininger (2005) describes. The percentage of households in the catchment areas with a university degree in humanities, arts or social sciences capital differed in 2016 from 4% up to 32%, the average being 10%. The catchment areas with high percentages of households with a university degree in humanities, arts or social sciences turned out to be clustered together in one area of the city. These areas are in and close to the city centre, where most cultural institutions, i.e. museums, fine-dining restaurants, and the

national theatre, are also situated. The concentration of households with a university degree in humanities, arts or social sciences in these areas has increased over the past twenty years, resulting in a higher degree of polarisation of school catchment areas around this variable. In addition, interviews with parents residing in these areas suggest that cultural capital indeed plays a role in their decision to raise their children there (some parents describe the proximity to e.g. other artistically inclined families and galleries as important).

4.5.1 Ethical issues, validity and reliability

The use and analysis of the quantitative data on the background of parents in certain private schools raises an ethical issue. In Article 1 on private school choice, my co-author Dr Sonja Kosunen and I decided to anonymise the schools and not to link participants or descriptive statistics to specific schools. However, given these statistics and the small number of schools, it is quite easy for people to draw conclusions about which school is which. I therefore decided to use ten-year averages to avoid publishing detailed information about the background of a rather small number of families. This also neutralises fluctuations that can appear when the number of families representing each school is small.

I also decided to anonymise the neighbourhoods discussed in Article 2, even though the particular neighbourhoods will be easily apparent to many residents of Reykjavík metropolitan area. However, many of the neighbourhoods discussed in the article consist of two or more school catchment areas; it is unlikely that anyone will be able to link the participants and the background information about the neighbourhoods to specific catchment areas within these neighbourhoods. This is important in order to avoid the stigmatisation of certain schools and areas, which would increase the hierarchies that we set out to critically analyse.

It is useful in quantitative research to examine the validity and reliability of the data. The data is descriptive and derived from Statistics Iceland; as such it contains information about the entire population under discussion. In Article 1, for example, we look at the social composition of all families of children enrolled in private schools the in the Reykjavík metropolitan area between 2006 and 2016. Each variable is thoroughly described in the above section, as well as in Articles 1 and 2 where the variables are used. Furthermore, the statistical data are only used in a descriptive manner rather than an interpretative, thus ensuring high reliability and validity of the data, as well as ensuring the likelihood that another researcher

achieves the same results. It is only with the addition of the qualitative data that the results become interpretative and analytical. The quality of the qualitative analytical processes is addressed in section 4.4 above.

4.6 Personal background and positionality

In a thesis like this it is important to consider the researcher's past experiences and personal standpoint when establishing the framework from which they are working (Bourdieu, 1996). My hybrid class background contributes to my decision to focus on upper-middle-class parents. Brantlinger (2003) argues that middle-class researchers should focus their research on their own group and use their privileges to uncover and question their own and their subjects' actions. My background falls closer to the middle class than the working class, although it is partially hybrid.

My family's history is one of very rapid social mobility across three generations. All four of my grandparents were born between 1912 and 1920, in the isolated and harsh region of the West Fjords of Iceland. They grew up in poverty, in a society reliant upon fishery and had short formal education. However, my maternal grandfather attended a secondary school in Akureyri (Icelandic: *gagnfræðaskóli*) and went on to graduate as a machinist (Icelandic: *vélstjóri*) before returning to the West Fjords. He and his wife eventually acquired around or above average economic capital, as compared to the rest of the fishing village Patreksfjörður, where they resided. This is symbolic of the rapid influx of money to the Icelandic economy as fish was becoming a valuable export product, and ships were becoming better equipped. The economic stability of most Icelanders began to increase (Jónsson, 1999).

My parents moved to Reykjavik in the 1960s, when they were around eighteen years old. My father studied to become a house painter and worked as such for most of his working years. My mother studied to become a textile- and general teacher at the compulsory school level, which did not require a university education at the time. Lacking both the social and cultural capital that were considered valuable in the city, I believe the move from the isolated village of Patreksfjörður to Reykjavík caused them both to experience downward social mobility almost overnight. Pursuing a vocational education was a middle-class strategy within the fishing village, but in the city, this did not accrue much symbolic capital. Near the time of my birth in 1982, my parents established a small business that gradually became a success, thus granting the family material stability. As a result, they could afford extra-curricular activities throughout my childhood, and

music lessons and summer schools abroad when I was a teenager. I also attended private schools for most of my compulsory education, a choice made partly due to convenience and location, and partly due to educational aspirations. I believe that my parents wanted to ensure that the next generation would accumulate the capital they had held in Patreksfjörður, but had lost when they moved to Reykjavik. As a result, they placed a very strong emphasis on education and attending theatre and classical concerts, even if they did not have the generational cultural or social capital usually associated with these cultural activities.

My pursuit of education within critical studies of gender, queerness, class and neoliberalism has taken an emotional toll on me and my family relations, which is recognised as common among students who lack generational history of higher education (Walkerdine *et al.*, 2001). As I read more and grew more radical in my perspectives, questioning power relations at every turn and taking an active part in feminist and queer activism, my father grew more conservative. Or perhaps he had always been so, and only my positioning within our relationship had changed. The man who had once placed such great emphasis on my university education had not anticipated that in that environment, I would learn and adapt personally to a world view that would drive us apart.

My family's story is in many ways typical of the development of Icelandic society. Sharp class divisions have a shorter history in Icelandic society than in other Western European countries. Björnsson and Edelstein (1977) state that virtually all adult Icelanders at the time were the children of working-class parents, arguing that social mobility was a real possibility for Icelanders during the 20th century – even more so than in countries such as Germany and the United States. This makes the setting for this study of class formations in Iceland even more interesting.

Bourdieu argues that it is precisely those who, like himself, experience social mobility that become interested in analysing social hierarchies and understanding them (Bourdieu & Eagleton, 1992). My background in part drives my interest in class formations and the development of class distinctions in Iceland, and also gives me insights into possible interpretations of the data. Having attended private schools for six out of ten years of compulsory schooling, I have an important perspective and insight into why and how such a choice is made. My parents' social class and the rapid transition of class position across three generations fuels my interest in class formations, and affords me insights into these processes. Furthermore, I now live with my family in a neighbourhood associated with

the intellectual fraction of the middle and upper classes. Housing is expensive there and working-class families are underrepresented. My children attend a school where parents' educational level is very high, further aligning me with the intellectual fraction of the urban upper-middle-class of Reykjavík, which in turn justifies my focus on uncovering upper-middle-class privileges. My experience as a middle-class mother and raising my children in the aforementioned neighbourhood also fuels my need to understand the choices, the anxiety and the dilemmas of modern-day motherhood in Iceland.

5 Conclusions of the articles

This thesis aims to explore how power relations are reproduced through parental choices and practices in Iceland. The focus is on the classed and gendered dimensions of these processes. This is achieved through three published articles that study different aspects of gendered and classed power relations in connection to parental practices. Articles 1 and 2 focus on school and neighbourhood choices, and how these choices are embedded within a context of marketisation and class relations. Article 3 turns towards the domestic sphere as an instrument through which governmentality takes place, and explores how the responsible parent is constructed in neoliberal, pandemic times. The three articles inform us on different yet interconnected aspects of the reproduction of classed and gendered power relations through parental practices. This fifth section gives an overview of the main findings of each article, but a detailed discussion of these conclusions can be found in the full text of the articles.

Article 1 of this compilation thesis (Auðardóttir & Kosunen, 2020) addresses private school choice in the Reykjavík metropolitan area. This is done via quantitative descriptive statistics on the background of children attending private schools, and through interviews with parents of privately educated children. The findings show that most of these schools attract children with a privileged background in terms of the families' economic and/or cultural capital (i.e. education level) as compared to the average child in Reykjavík metropolitan area. However, when we examine the characteristics of the neighbourhoods or municipalities where the schools are situated, we find that they bear strong resemblance to the public schools in the nearest proximity; this suggests that they do not function as cream skimmers in their respective neighbourhoods by attracting the highest social groups away from the local public school. When we look at the Reykjavík metropolitan area as a whole, however, we may argue that by virtue of their location in generally privileged areas, they indirectly skim more privileged students. This argument finds further support in the fact that none of the private schools are situated in underprivileged areas (Böhlmark, Holmlund, & Lindahl, 2016). In this sense, choosing a private school serves as a form of educational distinction in the Reykjavík metropolitan area.

Turning to the interviews, we see that the parents construct public schools as failing and even dangerous institutions that are socially and/or academically unsafe for their children. This anxiety is similar across class fractions, and is internationally documented as a result of increased individualism and a widening gap between the rich and the poor (Reay *et al.*, 2008), which in turn raises the stakes for middle-class cultural reproduction. Class fractions become a dividing factor when the parents rationalise their choice of private education. Parents who align with the intellectual fraction describe experiencing a moral dilemma regarding their choice. In contrast, parents who align more strongly with the economic fraction fully buy into the individualism of school choice as a characteristic of the good and responsible consumer on an educational market. Some go so far as to describe school choice as their human right. On the whole, the findings of Article 1 suggest the emergence of a discourse on the failing public school system in Iceland, whereby private schools are presented as the solution.

Article 2 (Auðardóttir & Magnúsdóttir, 2020) aims to address social class reproduction through parents' neighbourhood choices. This aim is achieved through the analysis of nine interviews with middle-class mothers who live in either disadvantaged or privileged neighbourhoods. The results show that middle-class mothers experience anxiety over their class reproduction, with their respective neighbourhoods as mediating factors. This is most notable in the group of mothers who live in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and whose class position is not secured by previous generations. Mothers in this position have all taken measures to ensure reproduction of their – in some cases newly established – middle-class positions via school choice or parental work pertaining to their children's schooling.

The findings also suggest that extended families and proximity thereto play an important role in the transmission of symbolic capital in Iceland. The group of mothers who have family ties to affluent neighbourhoods choose to live in spatial proximity to their generational class privileges, which again increases their possibilities of class reproduction. On the whole, their accounts of being white, native, middle-class mothers in Iceland in disadvantaged as well as privileged neighbourhoods point to a consumer culture of mothering practices. Motherhood practices in Iceland, as in other affluent countries, have moved beyond 'providing food, shelter, and love' (Vincent, 2017, p. 543). These consumer cultures are gendered and intimately connected to the social construction of the responsible mother (Vincent, 2010, 2017) who makes the right choice of school and neighbourhood for her children

Article 3 of this compilation thesis looks at constructions of the fit and responsible parent in pandemic times. This article applies a different method of data collection, i.e. story completion, which is especially effective in examining discourses and constructions of social phenomena (Clarke *et al.*, 2019). The fit and responsible parent (in particular the mother) is seen as effective, organised, and brimming with positivity and gratitude. These trends have all been linked to neoliberal governmentality and technologies of the self. Naturally, resistance is also to be found in the stories where the parents find happiness once they free themselves from the demands of neoliberal parenthood, and redefine the notion of the good and worthy life. An analysis of the gendered dimensions of the data reveals simmering tensions between the mothers and the fathers. This tension revolves around domestic chores and the (im)balance between paid and domestic work. The tension manifests when, for example, the storytellers, who were mostly university-educated women, use the COVID-19 lockdown as an opportunity to teach an inactive and clueless father a lesson about household work and child-rearing. On the whole we see that the COVID-19 lockdown not only reveals but also amplifies the underlying tensions surrounding parenthood, gender relations and paid work. We also find that constructions of the good and worthy life and the fit parent resonate with international studies on the effect of neoliberal governmentalities on family life. The following sections will develop and highlight the common thread throughout the findings of these three articles.

6 Discussion

I will now draw some overall conclusions and highlight the common threads of the findings of the articles. This will be done in four subsections: firstly, I explore the connections that can be made between my findings and neoliberal governmentality and marketisation; secondly, I contemplate how Bourdieu's concepts, in particular social space and symbolic violence, can help us draw conclusions from my thesis; thirdly, I discuss motherhood and anxiety as key concepts of my conclusions; finally, I address the strengths and limitations of this thesis.

6.1 Neoliberal governmentality

I wish to begin by underlining what the findings of the three articles can tell us about the consequences of neoliberal governmentality on family life in connection to child-rearing and parental choices. Articles 1 and 2 are not framed within a Foucauldian understanding of governmentality. I instead employ a Bourdieusian understanding of class and reproduction of class hierarchies. As I will argue, this approach is fruitful and appropriate given the research questions and methods employed in these articles. I nevertheless feel that is both feasible and worthwhile to address what can be learned about neoliberal governmentality from the findings of the three articles combined.

   Framing studies on parental practices and school choice within a Foucauldian understanding of governmentality is not new, and has been done before by e.g. Olmedo and Wilkins (2016). Article 1 on private school choice (Auðardóttir & Kosunen, 2020) reveals that for a group of parents in Iceland, their children's schooling is not a straightforward non-choice of entering the public neighbourhood school through the mechanisms of the catchment areas. Free school choice is now an actual reality in Iceland, albeit marginal and not as mainstream as in many other countries, e.g. the Anglo-American world or European and Scandinavian countries. These trends make parents the subject of neoliberal governmentality, whereby they are responsible for making the right choice as to how best to create and shape their child as the best version of themselves. This is apparent by the interviews with the mothers. The mothers construct an image of their child as superior to those in the public schools, and the child's superiority lies in the parents' good and conscious choice of a private school. This

construction and shaping of the child and of family life is another key element of neoliberal governmentality, whereby the technologies of the self and self-disciplining become a central factor of government. The production of the normal, moral and conforming child is thus the accomplishment of careful choices (Rose, 1989), in this case the choice to send the child to private school.

Article 2 on neighbourhood choices (Auðardóttir & Magnúsdóttir, 2020) reveals how parental practices of the middle classes are mediated by locality. The construction of the image of the locality is tightly connected to the construction of normality and worthiness. The wrong locality in this sense is the locality where those who deviate the norm reside. Middle-class mothers living in those locations must compensate for their neighbourhood choices. We recognise this process in Rose's Foucauldian analysis of how middle-class families are shaped by governmentality to self-governing and avoidance of the other (Rose, 1989).

Article 3 addresses neoliberal governmentality in its construction of the positive, grateful and fit parent as the worthy parent. Those who do not cope with these demands are failing parents. The findings show that in the stories collected by the story completion method, research participants construct the fit citizen as an effective parent who is organised, positive and grateful. Scholars, who examine the effect of neoliberal governmentality on our daily lives, have recognised all of these trends as key elements (Binkley, 2011; Cappellini *et al*., 2019; Güney-Frahm, 2020; McRobbie, 2013).

On the whole, we can identify patterns of neoliberal governmentality on family life and parental practices throughout the three articles. Parental practices are shaped by this type of governmentality in numerous ways, and as a result parenthood is now fraught with anxiety. Parenthood entails organisation, engagement, high-stake choices, shaping of the child and at the same time of the family image. Concurrently, neoliberal governmentality enforces a self-governing of all negative feelings, and traps parents in an optimistic affective regime (Cappellini *et al*., 2019). All of this has been linked to neoliberal governmentality's effect on our intimate lives.

No discourse is possible without a counter-discourse and resistance to neoliberal governmentality (Foucault, 1980), and the three articles discussed here also provide insight into resistance. In Article 1 on private school choice, we see that the intellectual fraction is not at ease with the push towards privatisation and school choice. The intellectual fraction obliges it nonetheless, which shows how strong the hegemony of neoliberal governmentality can be. In doing so, however, parents express a moral

dilemma, a symbol of internal resistance upon which they are not comfortable acting. In Article 2, the questioning of conformity comes from one affluent mother residing in a disadvantaged neighbourhood. She contests the push she feels towards choosing a neighbourhood perceived as more appropriate to her class status, and feels a sense of pride in living in a disadvantaged neighbourhood. We see, however, that she is able to feel this pride because her children are thriving and she is very active within the school community; this ensures that see meets the standards of the active, involved mother. This again highlights the force of the neoliberal demand of choosing wisely and correctly so as to ensure one's position in society; you can only go against the grain if you have enough symbolic capital to ensure that this will not have a detrimental effect upon your family. The resistance is more overt in Article 3, as the storytellers tell of parents who directly recreate the image of the successful and happy mother or parent. This counter-discourse was not dominant in the dataset, which in turn underscores that this is indeed a counter-discourse meant as a criticism of the mainstream neoliberal demands of parenthood that are evident in many of the stories. In the stories where we see counter-discourse, the worthy parent is reconstructed as a parent that dismisses the inhumane demands of neoliberal parenthood, and finds peace and happiness in spite of a household characterised by chaos. In this way a new construction of the self is invented, one that rebuffs the impossibility that neoliberal governmentality imposes on our daily lives.

6.2 Bourdieusian contemplations

An examination of the findings of the three articles in light of Bourdieu's writings gives us further insight into the reproduction of power relations and symbolic capital.

We see in Articles 1 and 2, on school choice and neighbourhood choice, that the mothers who are interviewed are working towards a reproduction of capital and social position for their families. This is evident by the findings of the articles in question. Most of the private schools that are analysed in the first article attract students who come from privileged households. Furthermore, when the parents are interviewed regarding their school choice, they emphasise the superiority not only of the institution they have chosen, but also of the other parents and children who attend said schools. This implies that they are working towards increased social capital; their children get to know the right kind of friends and the family associates with the right kind of parents. This social capital comes on top of

the cultural capital that they supposedly gain from a perceived better academic schooling.

Neighbourhood choices, which are analysed in Article 2, can also be regarded as a strategic move within a social space where a hierarchy of localities is evident. The mothers who live in privileged neighbourhood are at ease with their choice and see the benefits of it. As the findings from Article 2 show, they see their choice of residential neighbourhood especially as a means to be close to their extended families. Those families all have high symbolic capital within Icelandic society. The choice to raise one's children in close proximity to the extended family serves as a means for the reproduction of generational capital, both social and cultural. On the whole, these choices work toward the reproduction of power relations in terms of class; however, Articles 1 and 2 both strongly indicate that this applies to race or ethnicity as well. Many of the private schools predominantly attract native Icelandic parents (Article 1), and the highest proportion of immigrant families in Iceland resides in the neighbourhood perceived as ´wrong´, as discussed in Article 2

Bourdieu contends that the rules of a social space are not static, but continuously shifting; a person who wants to ensure that they have symbolic capital within the social space must constantly re-evaluate and contemplate their actions in order to stay on top. Therefore, class is not static but rather the production and reproduction of the habits and choices of our everyday lives. Everyone, even those who hold a lot of symbolic capital, make mistakes in their choices or habits that diminish their symbolic capital within the social space. This is also evident in my analysis, for example in Article 1 on private school choice. Two of the mothers interviewed are working towards upward social mobility by moving to Reykjavík from the countryside. This move should increase their own and their families' symbolic capital. They, however, make the mistake of moving to disadvantaged neighbourhoods inhabited by the ´othered´ in terms of class and race and/or ethnicity. This causes the mothers anxiety and makes them even more aware of making a better choice in terms of schools and daily parental work. This leads us to Article 3 on parental lives in pandemic times, which focusses less on high-stake neighbourhood/school choices and instead contributes to our understanding of parents' daily habits concerning for example, the structuring of the everyday. The findings presented in this article advance our understanding of the Bourdieusian analysis by emphasising the parents' daily habits and how they too become governed by the rules of the social space in question. Through the story completion method, we see what is expected of the good and fit parent and

how the failing parent is defined within the social space. This construction occurs through daily habits of governing the home and the mundane habits of the family. In this way the data gives us a feel for how our participants understand the rules of the social space of parenthood.

6.3 The ever-changing rules of the game: anxiety and motherhood

This compilation thesis is not gender neutral. Due to the focus on parental practices, which are historically highly gendered, it is important to regard the findings in this light. The results from my three articles all tell stories about motherhood in Iceland today, more so than fatherhood. My participants in the interviews were – but for one exception – mothers, and the participants in the story completion data collection were overwhelmingly women. In both cases the participants were self-selected, and the only father interviewed was suggested for participation by his wife. His final words in the interview were 'You should have talked to my wife, she would have been able to tell you much more'. This anecdote serves as a reminder of just how gendered the topic of parental practices, choices and dilemmas is. Parenting is first and foremost the social space of women, of mothers. Therefore, the stories we can tell and construct from this compilation data revolve around motherhood and women's experiences, choices, dilemmas and feelings.

The common feeling that the mothers experience in all three articles is anxiety; anxiety over having made the wrong parental choices in the past, or the possibility of making the wrong choice in the future. An example of this is found in Article 2 on neighbourhood choices, where the mothers who live in the neighbourhood that they regard as counterproductive to their goal of increasing their symbolic capital all show signs of anxiety. Furthermore, in Article 3 on parenting in pandemic times, feelings of anxiety and shame increase when parents are not able to productively construct their daily habits so as to maximise the children's potential. These feeling of unease underscore the ever-changing power relations within the social space, which perpetuate mothers' anxiety over possible mistakes that they can make in playing the game.

This leads us to governmentality, as mothers begin to self-regulate their choices and feelings. My inspiration in this regard is Binkley's (2014) analysis of the connections between Bourdieu's theories on the field and habitus, and Foucault's governmentality. Binkley argues that self-governing is activated in times of uncertainly over one's choices within the social

space. Bourdieu notes that no field or social space is static, and the power relations within them are subject to change. There are irregularities within the social space, and no agent can take their symbolic power within it for granted (Bourdieu, 2000). When a person is reminded of the unstable rules of the social space and that class is a process, they experience anxiety over their personal habits and choices. This anxiety causes them to self-govern their personal habits (Binkley, 2014). In the case of the mothers, it can be argued that parenting is characterised by uncertainty because it entails governing not only one's own life and fate, but also the life and fate of their children. In this way, parents are responsible for ensuring the transmission of symbolic capital to their children. Parenting is therefore a social space where the reproduction of symbolic capital is a process that is fraught with risk, dilemmas and uncertainties – to an even greater extent than other social spaces. Applying Binkley's (2014) argument, we can conclude that this uncertainly makes mothers prime subjects of self-governing and of neoliberal governmentality that, in this way, permeate our most intimate habits and choices. This self-governing of feelings and habits forces mothers adhere to the neoliberal governmentality that defines the fit parent as organised, optimistic and a skilled chooser of school and neighbourhood. This personal, neoliberal governmentality is, however, misrecognised and deemed the natural and even the only way of living. Those who fail turn their criticism towards themselves, which produces maternal shame and guilt. Here, an application of Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence can help us to understand this process. The uncertainty of the social space is misrecognised, as is the neoliberal governmentality over mothers' daily lives and feelings. This misrecognition begets feelings of personal shame and inferiority, and structural problems come to be seen as personal failures. As discussed in the theoretical section above (section 2.1), Bourdieu refers mainly to institutional power is his discussion of symbolic violence, in particular the arbitrariness of symbolic power within the school system. I wish to argue that we can also apply this term to our intimate, personal lives. Symbolic violence then also applies to misrecognised power when it is asserted through self-governing and through the questioning and regulation of our intimate feelings and habits.

As stated above, my findings revolve mainly around the experiences of women and mothers. As such they shed light not only on maternal shame as explained above, but also on the reproduction of gendered power relations in society. The intensification of the social space of parenthood, with increased high-stakes choosing of schools and/or neighbourhoods, amplifies maternal anxieties. These anxieties then trigger the self-governing

of mothers' daily habits and everyday parental dilemmas, as revealed in the story completion data. Mothers become the subjects of neoliberal governmentalities within the home, which in turn affects their most intimate feelings. This reproduces the gendered power relations of society which keep mothers in check, constantly questioning themselves and their choices. At the same time, the postfeminist ethos tells them that they can have it all; successful families, happiness and their own careers. Should they fail, they are to blame for having inadequately shaped their lives, habits and choices. This development is worrisome for anyone interested in dismantling the gendered power relations of society. I conclude this section by quoting Oksala (2013). She argues that while it is certainly important for feminists to analyse and transform political and economic institutions, we must also analyse 'the kinds of subjects that we have become' (p.44), and how our subjectivity paves the way for neoliberal governmentality. This thesis contributes to this feminist agenda in this respect.

6.4 Strengths, limitations and future research

One of the main strengths of my research is the broad scope that it applies to parental practices, choices and dilemmas. This applies to the research questions, data collection and theoretical frameworks. The research questions deal with school choice and locality, and in addition the everyday habits of parents in pandemic times. I am proud that I was able to adjust my research question, data collection and theoretical framework to pandemic parenting at the last minute, in the final stage of my research. The data I use are diverse, and include interviews with a range of parents, statistical data from Statistics Iceland, and the novel and creative method of story completion. This has given me the opportunity to analyse the research topic from a number of different perspectives.

Another strength of this thesis is the theoretical framework, which consists of a variety of complementary theoretical perspectives. I began with only the Bourdieusian framework, but as I grew as a scholar, read more work by feminists such as Angela McRobbie, and received more guidelines and supervision from Dr Annadís Greta Rúdólfsdóttir, I decided to apply a Foucauldian framework in the last article. I believe these frameworks complement each other in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

This thesis contributes to an understanding of local manifestations of the reproduction of power relations through parental practices. My thesis is a scholarly contribution to sociology of education both internationally and

within Iceland – a field that is nearly non-existent within Icelandic academia. In an international context, my thesis advances our understanding of the reproduction of power relations through parental practices in a Nordic welfare state renowned for gender equality. As such, the locality of the research is important and gives weight to the findings in an international setting. Within Iceland, parental practices and the intensification of demands on mothers of school children have not been the subject of discussion, neither public nor academic. My hope is that the findings of my thesis prove fruitful for Icelandic society to understand how hierarchies within our community are shaped and reproduced through parental practices. This understanding is vital for policy-making in family matters and matters of schooling and neighbourhood planning.

This thesis is not without its limitations. It could have benefitted from a clearer structure and aim from the beginning of the research. The focus of my articles was not yet fully developed when I conducted the interviews. Therefore, the interviews do not at times focus deeply enough on the specific subtopics of parental practices, on which I later decided to focus when writing the articles (in particular Article 2). On the other hand, the broad scope of the interviews allowed me retrospectively to choose those subtopics that I felt were the most pressing and interesting to investigate further during the analytical stage. In this way the analytical process became more reflexive. The loose structure of my aim at the beginning of my research has resulted in a thesis that comprises articles that are quite different from each other. This can be seen as a limitation in the sense that a more structured thesis would have offered me a deeper understanding of one specific topic, e.g school choice or gendered division of parental work. However, this broad scope can also be viewed as a strength for two reasons: firstly, it allows me to look into the reproduction of gendered and classed power relations in parental work from a wide perspective and from different angles, which in itself gives us a broad understanding of the topics in question; secondly, this broad analysis is necessary for a locality such as Iceland, in which nearly no analyses have as yet been made of parental practices affecting school-aged children. As such, it provides a limited overview of the multifaceted angles of reproduction of power relations through parental practices, which can form the foundation for future research.

The conclusions of my thesis suggest a plethora of future research topics. For one, an historical understanding of what constitutes the respectable parent in Iceland would provide an invaluable contribution upon which studies on the current state of affairs could build. Our current

understanding relies mostly on studies on the historical developments of parenthood in other countries. We also need a thorough understanding of the ways in which symbolic violence plays out in the lives of working-class parents and children in Iceland. My conclusions suggest that distinction finds its way through parental practices, and I have analysed this through the actions of the middle and upper classes. This suggests that working-class parents experience marginalisation and symbolic violence within the social space in question. However, we do not yet know how this plays out emotionally or materially for them and their families. Likewise, we do not yet know how disabled and/or queer mothers fare within the social space in question, or under neoliberal governmentality. My thesis does not provide nuanced insights into the effect of race or ethnicity, nor into the possible rift between the capital region of Iceland and the rural areas. However, it offers clues and tools with which to understand the dynamics of parenting in a Bourdieusian/Foucauldian way, and in a neoliberal society. As such, my research is an important stepping stone towards further research into those dimensions of power relations of parental practices.

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