

## **Mastery of Everyday Life in Families: Dream or Reality?**

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This article introduces the theoretical model of the mastery of everyday life in the household and family context. The model created by Liisa Haverinen uses three dimensions and three levels to describe the development and the content of mastery. The common good of the family and care for others are crucial objectives for mastering everyday life. However, not all families and individuals lead a balanced and functional everyday life. Many difficulties with one's duties may arise, and one problem may follow another. A drifting everyday life might lead the family towards the threat of exclusion, which necessitates case support from the community and other outside quarters. This article presents the "one family work method", which aims to help and support the family so that they can cope interdependently without continuing help. This method also takes account some perspectives that are not accounted for by the traditional view of the mastery of everyday life in order to show the complexity and multidimensionality of daily life in families.

## Introduction

I first met my husband Kaj in comprehensive school, but our love blossomed a few years later and we set up a family. Now our children are 14 and 12 years old. Our family is lively and we talk a lot. In recent years, life has revolved around the everyday life of our children, Christer and Charlotte. Evenings are organized around their hobbies. This has been a really nice period in my life. The children are now older and I learn all the time through them. We all have friends and congenial acquaintances.

I have not had time to think about my own dreams because I enjoy our everyday life very much. I like my work as a practical nurse and my workmates. I appreciate the company of the old people, and my family life is the kind of positive tumult that gives me energy and pleasure. We laugh a lot. I dream about new journeys; they refresh everyday life remarkably. Recently we visited Thailand with three other families. (Tuusvuori 2009)

Family life may simply flow as it does in the example above, but everyday life does not always engender energy and delight. Everyday family life may also raise many questions and challenges. How do we master or manage everyday life with all the processes we carry out daily with different kinds of materials, tools and interaction with other people (Tuomi-Gröhn 2008:10)? What does mastery of everyday life really mean? What is understood by “everyday life” and what is understood by “mastery” in family life? This article deals with the concept of mastery of everyday life in a domestic and family context and is a development of some ideas raised in the doctoral thesis of Haverinen (1996), *Mastery of Everyday Life as a Vision of the Activities in Households. Philosophical and Theoretical Inquiries of Household Activities*. The approach in the doctoral study is philosophical and theoretical, the intention of outlining a conceptual framework for use in describing the qualitative characteristics of family household activities (Haverinen 1996).

In the sphere of domestic work and family life, the model of mastery of everyday life is related to duties in different households and how they are shared and managed between household members. The model has mostly been applied to describe and to compare family life in different families. The main purpose of the model is to create and clarify concepts connected with everyday family life and mastery. The model also provides some criteria to evaluate the skills and knowledge of pupils at school when they study Home Economics.

The activities of household members are considered in a larger context which opens the way for research into the phenomena of everyday life through disciplines such as philosophy, economics, sociology, social policy, nutrition, ethnography, history, handicrafts and education. Everybody has some vision of action in the household and home, but as a researcher it is difficult to sense all the meanings associated with it. Many material and spiritual needs are fulfilled at home and many activities promise to guarantee the well-being of family members.

The mastery model provides some tools to evaluate daily family life, but pays little attention to situations that are out of line with the typical and traditional Finnish nuclear family with two parents and children. In my own ongoing study the adequacy of the mastery model is considered in exceptional circumstances such as unemployment or in the single-parent family. The aim is to evaluate the concepts of the mastery theory and to try it in investigations of the everyday life of families living on the edge of exclusion (i.e. in families, where everyday life is drifting).

This article first introduces the theoretical background to mastering everyday life as well as the method used in my own study. The article then presents a model of mastering everyday life and elaborates on its main concepts. The model is applied to the everyday life of families

living on the edge of exclusion and, finally, the article proposes some modifications to the model.

### Theoretical paths to the mastery of everyday life

Studies of everyday life have a long history. In sociology and philosophy, the subject grew in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, not least among the Chicago school as well as Schutz and colleagues (Scott 2009).

The philosophical background to the model of the mastery of everyday life may be divided into two parts ontological and epistemological reasoning (Haverinen 1996). The ontological analysis deals principally with the holistic idea of man and the phenomenological-existential philosophy which underlies it (Rauhala 1970, Heidegger 1979). The epistemological basis rests on the idea of knowledge found in classical antiquity (Aristotle 1984) and pragmatism (Rescher 1975). Holism in the mastery of everyday life is a common point of view in both ontological and epistemological reasoning.

The holistic idea of man claims that the individual consists of three closely interconnected modes of existence: corporeality, situationality and consciousness, where the psychological and mental areas exist (Rauhala 1970). The core of this view is crystallised in the notion of responsibility, which is based on the spiritual aspect of human consciousness. Spirituality enables self-assertion and reflexivity. Self-assertion is manifested in everyday activities, enabling individuals to evaluate their own actions and to take responsibility for them. In compliance with the holistic idea of man, ethicality is viewed as responsibility in household action. The personality developing towards responsibility means that one learns to make decisions according to ethical values in situations of choice and that vulnerability to external influences decreases. In family actions, decisions often affect all family members consequently, the directive significance of ethical values is important in the mastery of everyday life (Haverinen 1996:50–76).

The holistic view is that “The whole is more than the sum of its parts,” where the entity is evaluated from the point of view of the aim (von Wright 1987:48). For households, in order to achieve the aim, the actions of its members require above all that the common aim be recognised and the necessary practical skills be known. In the *Nichomachean Ethics* (1984), Aristotle discusses practical actions as either poiesis or praxis. Poiesis actions are related to techne knowledge, where action is separated from output. In praxis actions, phronesis knowledge is crucially practical intelligence clearly linked to desirable aims (Aristotle, 1140a24–1140b12.)

The Aristotelian view of practical action is useful because it helps us to understand the connection between knowledge, skills and intentions as a holistic unity. The pragmatist view of the rationality of action (Rescher 1975; Dewey 1958) is crucial in epistemological consideration together with Aristotelian thinking.

### ***Critical considerations about concepts in everyday life research***

Both the “mastery” and “everyday life” concepts could be interpreted in many ways. Different disciplines have their own emphases, so providing a single explanation that covers all approaches would be impossible. Words in other languages also have different implications, and translations from one language to another may alter the original meaning.

### ***The concept of mastery***

Dictionaries define the verb “to master” as “to gain a thorough understanding of” or “to become skilled or proficient in the use of something” (Merriam-Webster dictionary online ). We may inquire whether it is possible in general to “master life” or “everyday living” if one must be proficient or skilled. And how could we gain a thorough understanding of such a

complicated and multidimensional concept as life? What kind of situation or life is mastered, and what is the opposite of this? How does one evaluate conditions between extremes and explain alternation during a lifetime or over a shorter period?

The same word may have different meanings for different people, and it may be difficult to reach the final truth or even consensus. For some, everyday life is mastered when every little thing is perceived to be under control, whereas others perceive this mastery with much more flexibility. For example, one may still consider life controllable despite some neglected duties (e.g. overdue payments or unfulfilled promises). Everyone occasionally has problems and may lose control over things either temporarily or permanently. We may consider whether there are any criteria for mastery. Is mastery a condition that could be evaluated according to a particular standard or is it rather a sense of coherence perceived by an individual?

A study by Erlandsson, Rögnvaldsson & Eklund (2004) examined working women and their daily occupation patterns in order to identify indicators of stress and illness. Three types of occupations occur during one's day, which cause complexity or instability in daily life. These "main occupations" monopolise both the performer's time and awareness. Cooking and cleaning are examples of such occupations at home. "Hidden occupations" (e.g. picking up the morning paper, brushing one's teeth or making coffee) are performed with less attention, but are considered as necessary elements of one's daily routine. "Unexpected occupations" interrupt the rhythm of the main and hidden occupations and may be initiated by the performer's own thoughts or some stimulus (e.g. a phone call) from the performer's environment. According to Erlandsson et al., when life involves many hidden and unexpected occupations, everyday complexity is high, and the risk for falling ill is greater (2004:10). In families with small children, numerous situations interrupt actions, and one must always be prepared to change plans and to react immediately.

We are seldom capable of influencing or deciding what happens to us and our families. Our own environment and community affect not only our lives, but also our actions and activities. As Tuomi-Gröhn states in her book, home and household is not an isolated unit in the society (2008b:47). When people live in relation to each other, it is impossible to predict all interactions and to be prepared for everything. Haverinen (1999) discusses the complexity of everyday life in families, claiming that household activities should be considered as "body" and "soul" processes in which material and human interaction is closely interconnected.

In the model of Haverinen (presented below), the concept of mastery is used to sketch a situation in which, according to certain criteria (described above), life is under control. The word mastery is considered a neutral translation from the Finnish word "hallinta". Later on in the context of everyday life, the verbs "sustaining", "controlling", "managing", maintaining, practising and "ruling" serve to add nuanced emphasis to the life situation. Tuomi-Gröhn (2008a) has brought the expression of everyday making to the vocabulary.

### ***The concept of everyday life***

Everyday life has become a popular topic of research and discussion in recent decades, although the phenomenon is as old as human society. Henri Lefebvre published his [\*Critique of Everyday Life\*](#) as early as 1947, on which many philosophers and other scholars have expressed their opinions and in relation to which they have devised their own concepts. Another classic is *The Practice of Everyday Life* by [\*Michel de Certeau\*](#), which examines how people individualise mass culture, altering things from utilitarian objects to street plans to rituals, laws and language, in order to make them their own. The work was originally published in 1980 in French under the title *L'invention du quotidien. Vol. 1, Arts de faire*.

Felski claims that everyday life is the most self-evident yet, at the same time, the most puzzling of ideas (2000:15). Everyday life seems to be everywhere all the time, a continuum of mundane activities which is taken for granted. At the same time, everyday life is a concept

that is almost impossible to research and to explain. Everyday domestic life is very often loaded with negative connotations and associated with social “running errands” and roles such as “housewives”. On the other hand, everyday life with its routines and repetitiveness is considered to be an anchor and a sanctuary in the midst of the hectic and intricate modern course of life (Jokinen 2005). Heinilä (2007:IV) claims that domestic skills could be viewed as like the *poetry of everyday life*. Everyday life could thus be experienced in many different ways, either positively or negatively. Our opinions and experiences about everyday life are unstable, and when we encounter difficulties, the likelihood that we will experience negative matters is greater.

For scholars of home economics, everyday life is an interesting sphere of research because it offers many opportunities to grasp its nature (Tuomi-Gröhn 2008a:7). Everyday life is thus a challenge both for people living it as well as for researchers attempting to investigate it. Managing everyday life presupposes diverse cognitive, social, emotional and practical skills because societal structures and institutions, together with people, constitute everyday life. Perhaps one reason for the lack of scientific research into everyday life patterns and their complexity is that everybody considers him- or herself an expert because of his or her own experience.

### The methods and material used in the ongoing study

The target group in my study are those families experiencing severe difficulties in their daily lives and who have already received help and support from social workers and other local authorities. The study is linked to the Arki haltuun project of the Family Federation of Finland, which has been working with 30 families. The working method (the sequence map) developed by Korvela is explained later in the article. The data are collected by family workers and contain recorded discussions between family members and family workers in various situations. Negotiations with local authorities are also documented.

An initial negotiation always takes place at the beginning of the working phase, followed by a middle evaluation after some weeks of intensive work and a final evaluation at the end of the aid and support period. Two follow-up meetings also take place later on: one after two or three months and another after one year. In addition, some conversations that take place during the practical work under the family’s roof are recorded. Thus several moments are documented such as when family workers cook or clean together with another family member. Notes and diaries also documented when family workers hold meetings with the project team or guidance group. Some pictures and video clips are also taken during working periods with families. I have met none of my informants and am conducting my research on the basis of readily collected material.

In my study, the participants’ experiences and opinions of everyday life are drawn and analysed from transcribed discussions between family workers and family members. For example, if we compare the view of different people, the concept of home, family and the mastery of everyday life may vary considerably. The same happens when the notion of a proper meal or sufficient care of a child is noted. I think that family members must permit to have their say about their situation, so that their own voice can be taken into account in the interpretations. More often, the analyses are carried out with data and observations that express opinions of professionals such as social workers or therapists. The ethnographic method would be very useful in social and family studies, but unfortunately very few researchers have the opportunity to use it because they have no access to field. The same happens in my study. Outsiders, such as researcher, would interfere in the relationship between family workers and family members. Most people want to keep their family life private and do not want to share it with others.

This qualitative case study deals with individuals and their experiences in the world in which they live. In such a study, meanings are essential and are manifested in the actions of people and communities, in setting down objectives in planning activities, and in administrative structures (Varto 1992). The researcher belongs to the same world of experiences and makes his or her interpretations based on that. The material guides the research process, and the researcher must be aware of any pre-comprehension stemming from his or her background and interest. My deeper analyses will include three to five families whose situations I study based on my research themes.

### The Haverinen model of the mastering of everyday life

The concept of the mastery of everyday life is closely related to other concepts, such as the mastery of resources (Deacon & Firebaugh 1988) and the mastery of life (or life control). The mastery of life means that individuals have the necessary facilities to establish aims and to work to attain them (Roos 1988). The definition of life control is the individual's basic belief concerning his or her ability to control the course of his or her life and the extent of this control (Antonovsky 1979). The individual reaches a sense of balance between his or her resources and aims. He or she feels capable of influencing what happens in his or her life rather than simply to go with the wind or to knuckle under the demands of someone else. The mastery of everyday life and resources are included in the mastery of life, which develops gradually.

The core phenomenon of the mastery of everyday life is responsibility, which is manifested by controlling selfishness. Actions in the household develop features keenly associated with the sense of being human. Recognising the meaning of life, one's own aims and resources and trying to adapt them to the demands of the community is therefore crucial. Individuals are active and seek knowledge for use in household actions. The person is aware of his or her values when making decisions or choices. (Haverinen 1996:62–75).

The concept of the mastery of everyday life can be summed up as follows: in terms of objectives, the qualitative content of mastery entails the priority of the common good. Rescher (1975) calls this principle Adequate Moral Economy. As it relates to knowledge and skills, it entails solutions based on individual values, and in the context of interaction means to strive for consensus.

### *The qualitative content of the concept of the mastery of everyday life*

The mastery of everyday life (Figure 1) generally proceeds from material to mental, from detail to generality, and from individual to community. Qualitative change can also occur from totality to details (Haverinen 1996:146–179). Changes can also happen in the opposite direction, as the two-way arrows in Figure 1 demonstrate. One can identify three different levels and three different dimensions in the mastery of everyday life (Figure 1). The levels are: *repetitive mastery*, *applicable mastery* and *reformative, creative mastery* the qualitative dimensions are: the *aims of actions*, *knowledge that guides action*, and the *interaction in action*. The range of household activities is described as three circles, and its dimensions are represented by two-way arrows intersecting the circles. Beside the qualitative features, Figure 1 also shows the development of the mastery of everyday life, which can be considered in terms of both the individual and the household. The elements of the model in Figure 1 will be described below in more in detail.

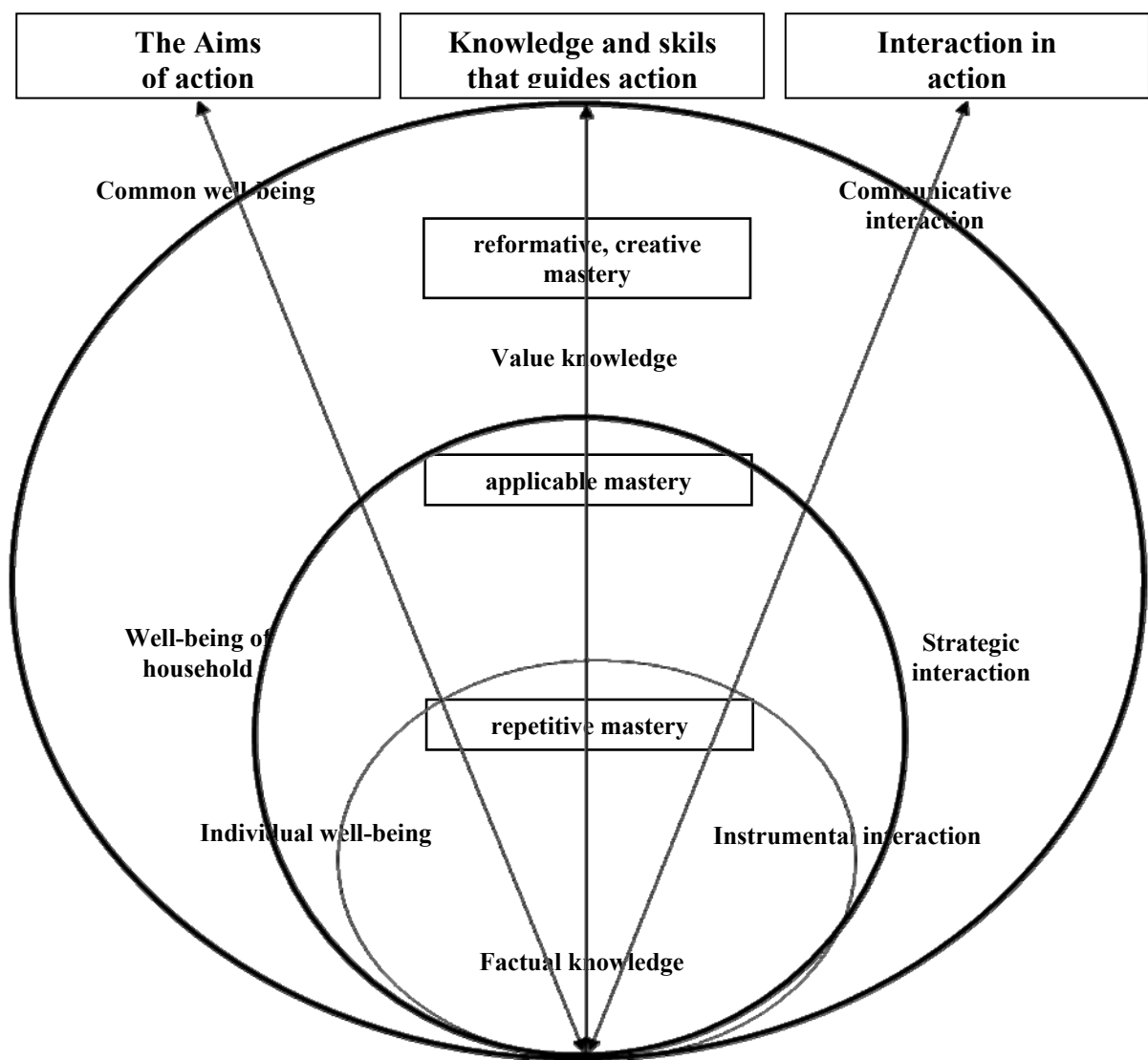


Figure 1. The model of the mastery of everyday life (Lisa Haverinen 1996).

### ***Dimension 1: The aims of action***

Various researchers view the aims of action in the household differently but according to Haverinen (1996), they may be summarised as the common good, human betterment, welfare or the well-being of home and family, and interaction between private and public life (oikos/polis) (Thompson 1995). Ethics, based on the model outlined in this article, is considered the core of household action, and entails responsibility in all activities.

Three levels of the intention of well-being can be distinguished. *Individual well-being* is, in a way, the first and primary level and is quite often related to the actions of children. Personal requirements are the most immediate, and the individual seeks to fulfil them. Nowadays, many adults in Western societies also seek to fulfil their own personal needs and requirements first, which makes it difficult to put the interests of somebody else ahead of your own (Dencik 1997; Vaines 2004). According to Haverinen (1996), the maturation of the personality enables one to reflect on ethical values before hedonistic values.

When individuals plan and execute activities in which every family member and their current circumstances are taken into account, we see that from an ethical point of view, the

*well-being of the household* is essential. Someone may have to forego egocentricity if the aim is the well-being for all. Family members are particularly interconnected and negotiate together. In an ideal situation, responsibilities and chores are shared equitably (Haverinen 1996:148–150). Power relations in families may also affect how duties are handled (Vaines 2004), but the model of the mastery of everyday life ignores this view.

The idea of the common good raises questions, such as whether the common good may also describe the actions of children. Should the small child have the right to be selfish and only see to his or her own well-being (Haverinen 1996:149)? Rousseau (1762) thought that there were two types of egoism “*amour de soi*” and “*amour propre*”. The former is natural for children and is the bedrock of all positive feelings. The latter, however, is negative because it evokes jealousy and the will to dominate others.

We strive for the *common well-being* when a particular action extends beyond the household. We focus our attention on our immediate surroundings, relatives, friends, neighbours and even the entire world. When parents participate in societal actions at school or through hobbies, they demonstrate their general responsibility for well-being. The holistic view of man offers a context in which to consider care-giving at its most extensive (Haverinen 1996:150).

### ***Dimension 2: Knowledge and skills that guide action***

The mastery of everyday life in action rests on three different kinds of knowledge. Knowledge which involves daily skills and facts is called *factual knowledge*. A person’s viewpoint may be narrow, so he or she applies his or her knowledge and abilities to only one type of action or in a familiar environment. The action is bound to a particular context, and the individual is incapable of coping with new situations. Tasks are carried out one by one, and the overview remains unclear (Haverinen 1996:151–152). For example, the mother of the family is able to prepare a meal when she has all the necessary ingredients at home and has a cookbook with clear recipes. But if something is missing the task becomes impossible.

*Procedural knowledge* directs everyday action when an individual finds new solutions to problems. Activities are based on facts and learned working habits, and one can find general guidelines or principles in the background. Bits of knowledge are aggregated together, and their meanings are combined into general phenomena and basic rules. The individual can also justify decisions, and the action is characterised by practical rationality (Haverinen 1996:152–154).

*Value knowledge* is the highest and, in a sense, the most sophisticated level of knowledge. Ethical actions, to which the Finnish philosopher Niiniluoto (1990) links a comprehensive and balanced ideology, are crucial. The most fundamental elements are essential, and other actors are taken in account. For example, ecological consciousness in the selecting of groceries or a mode of transportation would be a manifestation of the use of value knowledge because the environment is taken to account, not merely one’s own family or oneself.

### ***Dimension 3: Interaction in action***

Interaction in this study is analysed by classifying activities as either *poiesis* or *praxis* in nature, while the aim of the action itself differentiates the types. The nature of interaction is determined according to the classification of Habermas (1981). In *instrumental interaction*, the target is material (non-social), and the action aims to produce tangible results. The individual must know how to use equipment and methods. New knowledge is acquired and technical challenges are overcome. Instrumental interaction in the household is applied to particular tasks such as cleaning, food preparation or care-giving.

*Strategic interaction* means that individuals interact with other individuals, and that both are subjects. The purpose is to influence another actor. In the household, someone assumes



the main responsibility and motivates the others to act. The result is crucial. In families, children are often asked, pleaded with and told to perform their duties and the mother or father serves as their guide and supervisor.

In *communicative interaction*, both subjects are equal, and nobody controls the activities of the other. It is possible to negotiate, to compromise and to mediate in order to find a shared understanding in the end. Intuition and creativity are also often used (Haverinen 1996:157–160).

Although discussed separately here, we must recognise that in real life, household activities are often interpreted as an interrelated whole and the dimensions mentioned above are difficult to separate. In the mastery model, dimensions and levels serve to clarify progress in developing the skills to master everyday life according to one's view of child rearing. The experience of mastery depends on the aims of family members, functional skills, knowledge, values, relations and contacts outside the home (Haverinen 1996: 139–183).

### ***Levels of the mastery of everyday life***

Haverinen (1996) names the levels of mastery as follows: the first, and lowest, is repetitive mastery, the second is applicable mastery, and the third, and highest level, is reformatory, creative mastery.

Dreyfus & Dreyfus (1986) discussed their five-stage model of mental activities involved in directed skill acquisition in the case of clinical nursing practice. Benner (1982) used the same idea to explain the improvement of skills. At the outset, the individual (e.g. a nurse) starts out as a beginner or a novice, then becomes an advanced beginner, later a proficient, competent actor, and finally an expert. According to Benner, expertise acquired through practical action contains tacit knowledge and common meanings associated with it. These life skills, the basis for the mastery of everyday life, are also referred to as metaphoric know-how (Haverinen 1996: 162).

#### ***Level 1: Repetitive mastery***

Every level of mastery must be considered in relation to the qualitative dimensions discussed above (see Figure 1).

Repetitive mastery is based on facts and skills that individuals have acquired by following operations models. Their experiences are associated with particular situations and duties, but the overview remains unclear. Pre-existing routines and traditions may also hinder progress or change. Because the individual sets aims to fulfil his or her own desires, the level could be designated “individual mastery of everyday life”. The actual situation in the household and the needs of other family members are impossible to recognise because all energy is concentrated on one individual performance (Haverinen 1996:164–168).

When individuals attempt to solve the practical problems of everyday life in a familiar way, a situation Vaines (1992) calls “custom-bind”, the action is instrumental. The use and control of all kinds of technical equipment have proliferated in recent decades such that we all need to use such equipment sometimes. More than two decades ago, Von Wright (1987) claimed that many people are at high risk for exclusion because so many household activities necessitate the use of devices and machines. Interaction is instrumental, and duties are carried out when someone asks someone else to perform them, not spontaneously. In a family, this usually means that a child or a spouse performs a duty when his or her parents or partner gives the orders and instructions. In child-rearing, according to the research conducted for this study, parents hope that the child will assume more responsibility for chores in the future and attend to them independently (Haverinen 1996:178–181).

### ***Level 2: Applicable mastery***

The mastery of everyday life skills improves and changes in behaviour, and actions, become apparent during individual development. Increasingly often the common good of all family members is the objective. Many chores are either done simultaneously or various tasks are linked together in order to achieve the goals. For example, to arrange a party at home requires much preparation (e.g. cleaning, planning meals, and inviting guests). The environment may also be taken into consideration. Applicable mastery has two dimensions; working is more ethical and problems are consciously reflected upon. Vaines (1992) calls this “interpretative action”. The ecological perspectives in food choices or in buying domestic appliances could be an example of applicable activities.

According to Dreyfus (1986), a person is “competent” when she or he has reached the level of applicable mastery, bears wholeness in mind and plans actions. In interaction, this entails more freedom and mutual understanding. Interaction is strategic or communicative, depending on whose needs and wishes are the priority.

### ***Level 3: Reformative, creative mastery***

Critical reflection is the basis of reformative mastery. Life experience is crystallised as wisdom, intuition and creativity. One chooses activities on the basis of one’s own experience, or finds solutions without rational consideration, action is holistic, and situations are recognised immediately (Haverinen 1996:172–178).

Haverinen (1996) note that the contacts of the household with society, nature and culture are seen broadly, and demands from the community are considered rational and in the interests of the common good. Sarvimäki (1988) describes evaluative rationality as an axiological orientation in which ideals and principles guide action.

When household members take into account the environment, society and culture in their actions, their view of life may be based on particular life choices and their personality may be ethical in character. Social appreciation and interactional skills are emphasised and cooperation involves negotiation and discussion. The family interacts with various institutions; a lot of planning, organising and caring take place. This all presupposes intellectual resources from individuals.

In brief, repetitive mastery means that everyday life carries on, but without clear common aims for household activities. Applicable mastery involves some common aims, and personal activities are evaluated in the context of others. Reformative mastery is an idealistic view of how we should live with each other, aiming at the common good and negotiating together (Haverinen & Saarilahti 2009:73–74).

The mastery of everyday life may be considered either “interior mastery” or “exterior mastery”. The exterior mastery of everyday life involves elements and features, such as cosiness, domestic cleanliness or orderliness, which are noticeable to outsiders. As the action develops, one first notices exterior changes. Plans are made and the situations are considered carefully. Technical skills manifest exterior mastery. Interior mastery, in contrast, is more complicated to observe for a researcher because it concerns an individual’s experiences. When life is experienced as balanced, the individual feels able to master events in life and to keep them under control. This balance means that the individual can negotiate between the principles of life and the solutions one creates. High quality in the mastery of everyday life means that individual aims and needs are balanced with the aim of the well-being of other family members and those closest to them. The immediate surroundings and environment are also taken account. Even global welfare is borne in mind (Haverinen & Saarilahti 2009).

## Living an everyday life on the edge of exclusion

Parental problems with everyday life have a powerful impact on children and the whole family often needs support, not simply one family member. According to Rainio (2006), the marginalisation of children is connected with the exclusion of families from standard livelihood, living conditions and control over life. The most important reasons for children's exclusion are parental drug use, psychiatric problems and factors connected with family situations such as a divorce or change in partners (Lasten syrjäytyminen 2008). The example below is a rather common story in the modern welfare state and in my study entitled *Lapsiperheen arjen hallinta syrjäytymisen rajapinnalla* (in English, *The mastery of everyday life on the edge of exclusion*). This example describes the situation in one family that has participated in a family work project of the Family Federation of Finland (Väestöliitto).

*The family has two boys, 9-year-old Tommy and 13-year-old Henry, who live at home with their parents, while 17-year-old Susanna has just moved away to her own flat. Their father is co-owner of a small company and says that he has to work in the office during the evening quite often, although he tries to return home before 5 p.m. Their mother has been out of working life for many years due to her illness. She has been treated in the hospital many times, sometimes for several months at a time and the family has received domestic help twice a week from the municipality for eight years. The mother explains that she always feels tired and can't do anything. In the mornings she wakes the children up, but then goes back to bed while the boys get their breakfast themselves and go to school. Tommy has had some detentions at school and has also neglected his homework. The teacher has called home about it. Tommy should see a family therapist, but he refuses, and the mother is generally worried about Tommy. In the negotiation, the social workers say that they are worried about both boys. Henry will soon retire and Tommy is too lively, readily forgetting his duties. The children must also be responsible for many things that are normally the parents' responsibility (e.g. cleaning the house or making appointments with the dentist).*

In the course of visits to homes, family social workers often observe that many families have problems coping with everyday life with many situations resembling the example above. The parents' capacity to deal with everyday life is low, and the families often lack a regular structure and a daily rhythm. Children may experience problems in day-care and at school as a result. The concept of "household chaos" resembles drifting daily life (Korvela, Holmberg, Jonsson & Kupiainen 2008). A balanced daily life reflects moderate flexibility and regularity and routine. The extremes of this continuum are drifting, unpredictable chaos and rigid discipline with no flexibility. Household chaos means that the environment is noisy and restless with no clear structure or rhythm to daily practices. The children may be awake as late as midnight or have no real and fixed mealtimes.

Institutions and society are bound to timetables, and the structures of function and customers (families often function with such frameworks) cannot neglect them without encountering difficulty (Tuomi-Gröhn 2008b). The societalisation of everyday life means more formal structuring and organisation for children's lives at school or day-care. Children in one class, for example, must eat at the same time and all have lessons and breaks organised according to a regular timetable.

The understanding of time is completely different in many other cultures, such as those in Africa. Immigrants can seldom understand or appreciate the importance of timetables because for them, there is always time. Our country and society have become more multicultural in recent decades. People who work with immigrants must be aware of cultural differences in order to deal with such situations more easily. Refugees often bear the brunt of

unemployment most acutely, which creates a greater need for social services and social support (Statistics Finland n.d).

Family work, a way of supporting families in difficult life situations, may take the form of child protection services, family therapy, private care, institutional care, or home help services. In a project of the Family Federation of Finland, family workers (social workers working with families at home) used the sequence-map method as a tool to help and to support families. The main objective of the method is to assist families in establishing routines and structure in their everyday lives. Various daily sequences and the “tasks” within each sequence are listed and discussed with the family. The method focuses first on the actions and skills needed in daily life and on how to develop routines. The fundamental concept is that developing a structure for a drifting everyday life frees resources that can now be enlisted to solve problems in other areas (Korvela et al. 2008).

The sequence map makes the structure of the day apparent. Family workers draw up the sequence map together with family members so that they can express their opinions about the various matters involved (Korvela et al. 2008). The idea of sequences is based on the research of Korvela (2003), who found that weekdays in families with small children are organised in a group of four to six sequences, each of which has a kind of “programme” for the actions that constitute it. As one sequence fades out, the second sequence fades in. That moment known as a “transitional phase” is when the actions of two adjacent sequences overlap. When the actions of two different sequences are performed concurrently, tensions readily emerge.

When we consider the levels and qualitative characteristics that are needed to attain a particular level in Haverinen’s model (1996), we may wonder whether all people really are included in those levels. Even the lowest level necessitates a considerable degree of mastery of everyday life and a variety of skills and knowledge. Many presumably remain below even the zero level. How should such people be categorised? Are they excluded from society and do they have any mastery in their everyday lives at all? An ongoing study by Saarilahti entitled *Learning challenges on the edge of mastering everyday life* focuses on finding answers to such questions as:

1. How is life experienced at the edge of exclusion?
2. How does Haverinen’s mastery model function in exceptional circumstances (e.g., unemployment, psychological problems or in single-parent families)?
3. How can families and family members find empowerment in their lives when threatened with exclusion?

The following example shows how family life could carry on in one project family.

*A Mother has three children: 10-year-old Anne, 4-year-old Evelyn and 3-year-old Nick. Some months ago, the children were taken away by the child welfare authorities. The father was drunk almost every day when he took care of the children while their mother was working outside the home. The oldest child was afraid because she often had conflicts with her step father (he was not her biological father). Her mother said that Anne suffered mental violence very often because her stepfather could not stand her. He used abusive language and once even attacked her; an outsider had called the police.*

*After the authorities secured custody of the children, their mother had decided to divorce the father of the two youngest children. She also quit her shift-work to be able to care for her children. She thinks that her biggest problem at this moment is that her ex-husband has no flat and his things are still at home. He also visited their home quite often because he wanted to see his children, which was both irritating and terrifying to Anne. The child welfare*

*authorities were also worried about the basic care of the children because their daily rhythm was destroyed, and the home was very dirty and messy.*

## Marginalisation in the mastery model

One crucial question in pondering and evaluating everyday life is how to determine who is “competent” and within one’s rights to establish borders and criteria for levels of everyday life. How can someone else determine whether a particular family has mastered everyday life? The external evaluator may decide that some features indicate a family living beyond rules and without mastery, whereas the family members themselves may feel that their life is satisfying and organised.

We may assume that certain types of families are at greater risk for poor mastery of everyday life, which may later lead to the threat of marginalisation and exclusion. People often claim and believe that single-parent families have more problems with children, but is there suitable evidence of this? According to Haverinen’s (1996) mastery model the level of mastery in the household is lower in families where individuality is strongly emphasised and the fulfilment of personal needs take precedence over the common good. More research is needed to explain whether it is possible to identify types of individuals and families that are at high risk for losing control over life permanently. It is also important to know how such people feel about their own situation. Do they see themselves as excluded or marginalised or is this diagnosis made by outsiders? Such questions are considered in the ongoing study of Saarilahti. Most studies consider the view of family workers and other authorities to be the only valid one and attach less importance to the view of family members even though it is their daily life that is in question.

Niskala claims that social workers set targets for their work together with their clients (2008:93). The needs and wishes of the clients are taken into consideration, and the relationship is based on mutual understanding and respect. Unfortunately, this is seldom the case in reality. Social services deal very closely with human privacy, and clients often feel they have had no opportunity to be active actors in their own lives because they are too often powerless and dependent on money and help (Niskala 2008:160).

Haverinen’s (1996) study strongly emphasised responsibility, especially that of others. The aim of the common good of all family members should guide activities at home, and individual needs and wishes should be kept in control. Is such a family life possible nowadays in the modern Western world, and what does this mean in practice? Dencik (1997) has classified modern family types into four categories according to the family’s emphasis on individuality and collectivity. In a “modern strong family”, members have plenty of opportunity and freedom to develop their individuality while seeking to maintain solidarity and fellowship with other members of the family. The family functions as a team, and negotiations and voluntary agreements are based on this. The ideal model of family activities, according to Haverinen is quite similar, but individuality is less emphasised.

The “classical strong family”, or patriarchal family, lives under the leadership of one parent. Decisions are made for the sake of the family, and individual needs have less value. Traditions are accorded great respect, and the historical spirit of cohabitation is the basis of action. Haverinen’s mastery model incorporates some elements of this family type (noted in strategic interaction), but on the whole, the ideal family action is more democratic, and all family members have an opportunity to express their opinions rather than be subject to the strong leadership of one individual.

There are also two modern “weak” family types. In what is known as a “revolving door family”, individuality has a high value, and members may choose their own social preferences. Other family members are taken into consideration minimally, and co-ordination and communion are encouraged intermittently. In the family as a “social aquarium”, members

may spend a lot of time together, but do nothing to actively promote a feeling of solidarity and fellowship. How would such family types be manifested in my research group families? Could one type be more vulnerable to difficulties or another more effectively protect its members from the problems of everyday life?

According to Vaines (2004), families have different communication patterns and themes, which can be divided into three organisational models: traditional, cooperative and laissez-faire. Each family type has its own concept of home, which is based on the family's philosophy and the way they manage the activities of everyday family life. Baumrind (1967) identified two aspects of parenting: parental responsiveness and parental demandingness. Using these dimensions, she identifies three different parenting styles: authoritarian, authoritative and permissive. Vaines's categories closely resemble Baumrind's styles.

Vaines (2004) claims that the home could be considered as a factory, a web of interrelationships or a moral centre. If we compare Haverinen's model and Vaines's view, one could say that in Haverinen's view, the cooperative model of the family reflects the highest level of the mastery of everyday life. Family members become committed to working together, and actions are guided by a moral vision of the common good for all and by co-operative ecological sensibilities in which ecology entails all kinds of everyday life activities (Vaines 2004:134).

### Conclusion: Suggested modifications of the mastery of everyday life model

The mastery of everyday life model (Haverinen 1996) was developed to illustrate ideal family life and activities at home. It also sought to provide a background to thinking about upbringing, rather than serve as definitive criteria by which to evaluate practical action. When examining the qualitative dimensions of the model (at least the aims of actions and interaction in action), the highest mastery levels necessitate cooperation between individuals. According to Statistics 2008, 41% of Finnish citizens (1 014 974 people in total) live alone (Statistics Finland). How then should the model be modified to describe the mastery of everyday life of people living alone? For single people, interactions occur outside the home, so it may prove useful to extend the forum of evaluative action to other activity systems such as the work place, educational institutions and shops (Engeström 1990). Nowadays, socio-technical systems and communication systems such as Internet, virtual societies, SMS messaging, and phone calls are also vital ways to communicate and to converse with other people.

In the model developed by Haverinen, levels and dimensions are presented as having distinct dividing lines, but distinguishing clear "cases" in real life is seldom possible. Establishing strict categories for human action is artificial because the evaluation is always made subjectively. The actions in dimensions may also vary, with some being stronger than others. For example, the mother of the family may be very capable to interact with her children, and the interaction may well be communicative (the highest level in the model of the mastery of everyday life). She may negotiate effectively with the children, and the atmosphere in the home may be open and encouraging. Her knowledge and skills in household care, however, might be classified as poor. She may have some factual knowledge about cooking and cleaning (the lowest level according to the model of mastery), but may in fact never prepare proper meals herself, and the home may resemble a chaotic warehouse with removal boxes and masses of clothes. How would one evaluate her mastery of everyday life in this case? The model would probably require more permutations. The figure might sometimes even resemble an amoeba rather than a "classical shape" with circles and lines and perhaps it would be better to leave the original model altogether and to use only its feasible concepts and ideas.

In pondering people's lives and the multidimensionality of them, we might also consider whether setting levels for the mastery of everyday life is even sensible. Who needs such levels

and what purposes would they serve? Haverinen's philosophical and theoretical model offers valuable notions with which to consider many crucial concepts connected with activities at home, but the evaluation of the quality of mastery involves many ethical questions. To understand all the nuances of family life thoroughly will require ever more research. We must question matters of family life that are often considered self-evident and mundane. As Rönkä and Korvela propose, multidimensional and multidisciplinary research which uses situation-specific concepts would yield the most fruitful knowledge of everyday family life (2009:98).

Haverinen strongly emphasises responsibility and the common good, but nowadays individuality and personal ambitions are quite often expressed in newspaper articles or interviews with what appear to be happy and successful people. One may doubt whether modern-day individuals in Western welfare states are willing or able to target the common good the way individuality is admired and emphasised everywhere. Whose good is the real aim of family life? Is it possible to have a family in which both the sense of communality and the sense of individuality are strong (Dencik 1997) and in which all members have equal rights and responsibilities? Haverinen avoided incorporating a gender perspective into her model, but many feminists (e.g. Felski 2000). for example, might consider it necessary to include one in the study of everyday family life and the mastery of it.

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