

When One Does Not Want to Be Like Others: The Basis of the Sense of Control Among Conservative Laestadian Mothers With Large Families

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Abstract

Large families are the most characteristic feature of the Conservative Laestadian revivalist movement. In this research project belonging to the field of psychology my aim is to describe the facts on which the sense of control of the Laestadian mothers with large families is based. My research method is a qualitative contents analysis. The results indicate that the mothers' personal faith is the most important element in their sense of control. The values based on the Conservative Laestadian beliefs give a clear and safe structure for life. The most important role of the spouse is to support his wife emotionally, socially and spiritually. Behind the active parenthood of the mothers are the life management skills acquired in their families of origin as well as the experience acquired from motherhood. Family members share both mental and physical responsibilities, consequently supporting the mother. The mothers did not experience that they should not behave according to the family planning practises characteristic of our time. They do not want to be like others.

Keywords: Conservative Laestadianism, personal faith, sense of control, life management, large families, life span of a family, Finland

At the foot of the wall

In Finland, 84.6% of the total population belong to the Lutheran church. Laestadianism was born as a result of the spiritual work of Lars Levi Laestadius (1800–1861) and it is the biggest revivalist movement functioning within the sphere of the Lutheran Church. In Finland it has 100,000 members, which is 2.3% of the members of the church. Laestadianism is divided into many different groups and the majority of these groups, including approximately 80,000 people, represents Conservative Laestadianism. It is considered that the actual year of birth of the

movement is 1846. The revivalist movement began in Kaaresuvanto in Sweden and it soon spread to surrounding parishes in Sweden, Finland and Norway. From the very outset Laestadianism became a common movement of the Finns and Sami living in the Arctic Area of the Nordic countries, whereas in the Swedish and Norwegian speaking areas it has gained relatively small support. (Lohi 1997, 2003.) At present, Laestadianism exists in different forms also in Russia, Estonia, Latvia, Hungary, Germany, England, the United States and Canada. The movement has spread with either immigrants or missionaries. The main organisation of the conservative Laestadianism in Finland is The Central Association of the Finnish Associations of Peace (Suomen Rauhanyhdistysten Keskusyhdistys, SRK). On the local level, Associations of Peace (rauhanyhdistykset) organise activities and there are about 200 of them. Of the religious movements existing in Finland, Laestadianism is the most individual one and its influence on the everyday lives of its supporters is the strongest. The Laestadian membership identity is clear. As a consequence there are only few marginal members among the supporters of this movement. (Lohi 2003.) In this study the term Laestadianism refers to Conservative Laestadianism.

Throughout its history in Finland Laestadianism has been separated from dominant culture (Lohi 1997). The mothers participating in my study regarded the people outside the movement as non-believers, “others”. My desire was look over this wall of attitudes. How do mothers with large families carry on, when motherhood is usually experienced as something tiring (Jokinen 1996)? In terms of the number of children my study is between two discourses. The first one is the worry about lower birth rates and the second is the positive public image of the individualistic small family model (Paajanen 2002). Laestadian families have followed their values and gone against the mainstream of family planning with their determination to give birth. At present, giving multiple births is considered an act of braveness in Finland, and even the privilege of the well-educated and higher social groups (Nopola 1991).

Cultural background, above all religious beliefs, is the biggest motivation to wish for a large family. The Family Federation of Finland reports that in the province of Oulu, where the Laestadian revivalist movement is strongly supported, there is the highest ideal number of children in Finland according to the family barometer of 2002 (Paajanen 2002, 25). In the same region the birth rate is higher than in general. While the total fertility figure in our country in 2000 was 1.7 on the average, it was as much as 3.1 in some places in the province of Oulu (Paajanen 2002, 9; Statistics Finland 2002). According to a study by Kaisa Juntunen (1997, 722) it is common among the members of the Laestadian movement that families have more than 10 children. The largest family included in her study had 21 children (ibid).

Motherhood can be happiness and enjoyment as well as a trap of bad conscience, loneliness and poverty (Nätkin 1997, 173–175). According to Eeva Jokinen (1996)

the most frequently mentioned feeling about motherhood is tiredness. Primitive, instinctive urge to reproduce is part of the desire for being a mother, but it is a social phenomenon, too (ibid., 21–22). Finnish mothers do not typically experience motherhood as their destiny any longer, but a conscious desire (Nopola 1991, 70). For the women participating in my study it is both. The spouses of the women are Laestadian. Having the same faith is typical of married Laestadian couples, because the Bible instructs to look for a wife who is “a daughter of Zion”. While a typical Finnish family of mainstream culture is nowadays individualistic and small, the Laestadian concept of the family is still based on the Bible (see e.g. Jallinoja 2000).

Laestadianism is a very family-orientated, revivalist movement. Its set of values, such as love for one’s neighbour, openness, fidelity and sobriety protect marriages. Divorces are rare, although exact, statistical research does not exist on the subject. Statistically, one third of Finnish marriages end in divorce and in younger age groups the number is as high as half (Statistics Finland 2001, 22). Studies in this field indicate that there are three reasons behind long-lasting marriages. Firstly, there is a warm and loving relationship between the couple. Secondly, children, finances or habit can keep the spouses together. Thirdly, religious or moral beliefs can be an explanatory factor. (Weishaus and Fields 1988; Tolkki-Nikkonen 1990.) Similar temperaments, desires, values and attitudes of the spouses predict satisfaction in the relationship (Rytkönen and Hautsalo 1999). Laestadianism connected the women in my study to their husbands, although according to research social similarity and religion do not relate significantly to the quality of the relationship (ibid., 59–60).

The number of children has an impact on their child rearing practices. A large family can be a threat to the development of individualism, whereas a small family can lead to living on the child’s terms (Kemppainen 2001, 152; Korhonen 1994). A parental style does not necessarily transfer from the family of origin to one’s own family (Harmainen and Ruoppila 1984). The life style of a family also depends on where the family is (Tolkki-Nikkonen 1990; Goldenberg and Goldenberg 1991, 16). Industriousness and diligence have traditionally been appreciated in Finnish families, but more and more often communication skills and individualism are also valued. The actions of mothers have been characterised by care. (Korhonen 1994.) In traditional peasant families, daughters have faced a risk, as a consequence of the family structure, to experience lack of motherly love. The families have been large, like Laestadian families still are nowadays, and the mother has spent her time on chores in the house. The only adult supporting the upbringing of the daughters might have been their grandmother. (Apo 1995, 243.)

The theoretical concept central in this study is the sense of control. It refers to a person’s belief in the possibility of influencing one’s own life (Pulkkinen 1997, 174). The sense of control consists of experiences of being in charge of everyday

life. It is adjustment to the changing situations of life by using psychological, physical or social means of life management (see e.g. Vuorinen 1991). An individual positions the motivation directing his behaviour either in his inner resources or in the external circumstances independent of himself (Nurmi, Eronen and Salmela-Aro 2001, 105–106). An inner way of life management can develop in challenging situations. A person adjusts – “sees things in the best possible light”. (Roos 1987; 1988, 207.) To achieve a sense of control one can try to change either the stressful situation or the importance of that situation, or to regulate his emotions by different means when already under stress (Pearlin and Schooler 1978). Psychological means are for example distancing, looking for social support, planned problem solving, accepting responsibility and positive revaluation (Lazarus and Folkman 1984).

Data and method

When collecting data I went through four different stages. During the first stage I acquired pre-understanding of the Laestadian family model and set of values by reading publications of SRK. During the second stage in 2000, I looked for subjective experiences in motherhood and sent a request for essays on the subject to a Christian folk high school based on the values of Laestadianism. There were courses on motherhood organised at this school. Based on the values mentioned in the publications of SRK I asked the mothers participating in the above-mentioned courses to write about the significance of relationships, family, relatives and friends (see Apo 1980). During the third stage in the autumn of 2000, I conducted a focus group interview at another folk high school. I had chosen the themes of the half-constructed interview using the information I had gathered during the first and second stages. During the fourth stage, when analysing the data from the essays and focus group interview I returned to the publications of SRK. So, these publications became not only the material for the pre-understanding, but also “the comparison data” for the data gathered at the interview. The comparison data had a twofold significance. On one hand, I compared the interviews with the published values of Laestadianism, and on the other hand, I searched for a better understanding of the mothers’ stories with the help of this data.

Three of the 29 women taking part in the course on motherhood replied to my request for writing essays. The number of children they had was between six and sixteen. I assume that the reason for so few replies is the amount of work involved in writing essays. The way I had set the questions in the request had an effect on the contents of the essays. In addition, the themes discussed during the course on motherhood can have affected the essays. The focus group was formed by six mothers out of 22 that had participated in a course on Finnish perseverance. The form of the interview was half-structured theme interview (see e.g. Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2001). The mothers had chosen the participants among themselves. I assume that the mothers who were

chosen were considered by the group to possess the best knowledge of motherhood in a large family. The group members at a focus interview should have a clear view on the phenomenon that is being examined (see e.g. DesRosier and Zellers 1989). The group did consist of mothers with a number of children ranging from eight to eleven. The group interview helped to understand the structural significance and attitudes of Laestadian mothers. However, individualism and deviant points of view may have disappeared due to possible control of the group (see Pötsönen and Pennanen 1998, 1–4). Individual points of view were hard to distinguish.

The women in my study had 9.5 children on the average. The age groups of the mothers varied from young adult to middle-aged. Erja, Liisa and Maire participated in the project by writing essays. Auli, Hanna, Irja, Jaana, Ritva and Terttu took part in the group interview. Erja and Ritva were already grandmothers. The mothers' names and other identifying information have been changed.

At the stage of analysing the data I used the essays and focus group interview as equal sources of information. Throughout the whole research process I simplified and classified themes contributing to the sense of control. At the first stage of research my classification was based on the published values of SRK. After the second and third stages of research I classified the elements of the sense of control according to the data, ie based on the subjective experiences of the mothers. New themes surfaced. Instead of examining solely the contents, I also studied the figures of speech the women employed while speaking about their lives, as well as the subjects that were not discussed at all. Links between different things, which is characteristic of Laestadianism, were also significant. At the fourth stage I compared the themes of the publications of SRK and the themes based on the mothers' interviews, since the classification could not be based solely on the data gathered at the interviews. So, this study was based on the contents analysis of these two types of themes. In addition, my aim was to compare my interpretations of the data with previous studies and theories on life management.

Since I was climbing up *a wall*, I called the themes of my study “*steps*”. The hierarchy of my steps is based on the significance of the theme in relation to the mothers' sense of control. The first step is *the personal faith*. The mothers stated that it was the most important element in their sense of control and the publications of SRK agreed. The second step is *motherhood*, because it affected the sense of control not only as a demanding experience, but also as a satisfying one. This theme was present in the publications of SRK, but its importance was not significant. *The Laestadian family model* and its transfer from one generation to the next was the foundation for having a large family, but this theme was not emphasized in the mothers' interview data. However, according to the literature of SRK the heritability of the family model seemed to be significant. Laestadian faith was “the sun of the grandfather” and

therefore the inherited family model is my third step. The most important supporter of the mothers was their *own husband*, and so they are my fourth step. The fifth step is *the children and family*. *Friends, hobbies and the support of the religious community* were important to many of the mothers and therefore they are the sixth step. According to the literature of SRK the importance of this step should have been more essential.

First step: Personal faith and the Laestadian worldview

According to Laestadius's concept of faith, factor uniting all believers is the love born out of living faith (Lohi 2003). It is typical of religious movements with clear membership identity, like amishes, that the members also have a common language and common customs (Vesterinen 1992). In addition to religious beliefs, the supporters of Laestadianism also have similar habits based on the language and custom. They say "*they are in faith*" and use "*God's greetings*" in their greetings. When saying good-bye "*God's peace*" is used. The mothers in my study use "*non-believers*", "*faithless*" and "*the people of the world*" for people outside the movement. Confession, asking for forgiveness and granting forgiveness "*in the name and blood of Jesus until joy, peace and freedom*" are characteristic features of the Laestadian movement (Lohi 2002, 97). I call this principle *the model of forgiveness*. Although the mothers in the interview did not belittle other religious groups, the only right option for them is to belong to their spiritual home, ie Laestadianism.

In the women's opinion, conscience was the medium of God's speech and guidance. "*There [at the meetings of the Association of Peace] it is not said what we can and cannot do, but we ourselves (...) want to do it, for example have children*", said Auli. For her part Erja wrote: "*It is no use to do against your conscience. That only damages your soul. God has made a human being so wonderful, we have souls and people are responsible for their actions.*" According to Antti Paananen (2002), who wrote in the publication of SRK called *Päivämies*, for Laestadians conscience is not solely a feeling of your own, but "*a common understanding of the complete authority of God's will created by the Holy Spirit*". Auli relates that children learn to distinguish between right and wrong through parenting, events organised by the Associations of Peace and publications of SRK. The values and life experiences internalized in this way formed schemes and mental images for the cultural identity and worldview of a Laestadian (see Nurmi et al. 2001, 105). Adjusting to life situations was adjusting to the will of God within the framework of Laestadian values. That is why religious beliefs were one element of the inner sense of control.

The women accepted the alternation of happiness and unhappiness in life as God's will. According to Maire the strategy of life manifests itself as follows: "*if His [God] intention is different, you have to be satisfied with it, because His works are perfect*".

Irja explained how transferring the responsibility to God relieved her own burden: “...in a way you leave the final decision in somebody else’s [God’s] hands. Then you just settle with that.” Auli agreed: “It does make it easier when I do not have the responsibility for all these things, but in a way it is in higher hands.” Ritva states that a Laestadian mother does not have to be strong herself: “You do not need your own strength anyway. You do not have to think that I’m such a strong person and I can handle it, but God gives the strength to that person regardless.” The mothers’ life management skills were enhanced by the experience of managing the role of a Laestadian mother. Therefore they denied themselves the means of control unsuitable for their set of values and by doing so they strengthened the justification for their own life style. A case in point is Irja relating how she *prayed for a sabbatical* from the repeated pregnancies as a relief from the tiredness caused by multiple births. Leaving everything in the hands of God was the foundation for everything. The Laestadian cultural identity guided the choices of the means of life management, and these means enabled the mother to achieve the sense of control on a personal level. Thus, the sense of control consisted of faith and the means of life management.

Auli, Erja and Ritva had studied as adults. At that time Auli had nine, Erja sixteen and Ritva four children. The narrations of that time were examples of “*the fruit of faith*” offered by God. Auli and Erja said that they had previously given up their studies to get married. Dreams of studying had been postponed due to the growing family. The hopeful action strategy of the mothers can be called *adjusting optimism* (cf. Nurmi et al. 2001, 107). According to the mothers getting into college was God’s will. A conclusion could be drawn from this that the self-image and self-esteem of the mothers were weak. However, their thinking strategy was the opposite: in their opinion *even God* had assessed them capable to study. The attribution style used by the mothers in my study was self-rewarding and it fed self-esteem and positive self-image.

Second step: Motherhood experienced by the mothers in my study

The women’s experiences of motherhood dated from the 1960s to present day. The history of Finnish family planning was reflected in the experiences (see Taskinen 1991). A time was remembered when Laestadian mothers were forced to have an attitude of “*I am sorry I came*” when visiting a family planning clinic. Laestadian mothers had been in a conflict of pressure. On one hand, there had been a strong belief to accept all children, but on the other hand there was a negative attitude towards large families, especially in the 1980s. According to the mothers, the situation had changed at the end of the 1990s. At present, the mothers have experienced acceptance of large families. Adjusting to repeated pregnancies was still difficult for the mothers. Auli said that there was a feeling of rebelliousness against God in the same way as a child rebels against his parents. There was a desire to trust the far-seeing parent

(God) more than one's own will. While experiencing a crisis caused by yet another pregnancy, the women used talking and expressing their emotions as means of life management. The women said that they expected social and emotional support from their spouses and friends sharing the same religious beliefs. The working mothers found it more difficult to accept a new pregnancy. Ritva, who was involved in working life, said that only after rebellion and mental exertion she started to adjust and think that "*it was supposed to go like this*". Acceptance of the responsibility reflects the will and necessity to adjust the new pregnancy to other parts of life. The women were afraid of labour pains and worried about the health of the child. Furthermore, they were afraid of yet another pregnancy:

Always after the child was born it felt like I could not have managed without him at all. (...) But always, when I came home from hospital I started to fear a new pregnancy, but I could not have done anything else, because we wanted to have all the children God had meant for us. (...) Thinking back I would not want to give away any of the pregnancies or caring for a child. (Erja)

Erja said that when the children were small, she did not have the energy to acknowledge her own tiredness. The routines of everyday life forced her to cope. As an experience relating to the sense of control this indicates that the mother was forced to cope with everyday life, and by doing so she enabled the rest of the family to cope. The mothers minimized the amount of housework when the children were small (see Pearlin and Schooler 1978). Erja wrote that the mother became tired, because she had to listen to everybody and support them socially: "*there are babies, toddlers, children going through a defying stage, teenagers, students growing up and people getting married. And the father, too*". As a consequence of the short intervals between the births of their children, it was typical of the women in my study that they were housewives when setting up a family.

The life span of large families differed from the normal classification of the family stages (cf. Goldenberg and Goldenberg 1991; Tolkki-Nikkonen 1990, 18). The first stage I perceived was *a stage of dating*. The second stage came after marriage and it was *the family stage of an expecting couple*. The first child was born soon after getting married. The third stage was *the family stage with small children*. At this family stage when there were only four or five children, motherhood was the most difficult. The fourth family stage was *the stage with small helpers*. The older children formed peer groups while playing and made the mother's life easier in the process. In addition, they were handy helpers with housework and looking after the younger children. The fifth family stage was *the stage with adolescents*. The number of social contacts of the family increased with the friendships of the adolescents. The most difficult thing was the inadequacy caused by different needs of the children: "*when there are so many and there just is not enough time for everything*". The sixth family

stage was *the stage with children growing up*. The children growing up helped their parents by even buying clothing for the younger children and acting as their social support. For women with numerous children the seventh family stage was *the stage of being a grandparent*. A characteristic feature of this stage was that the mother and her child could both give birth. New relatives were connected to the family through the spouses of the children. The eighth family stage was *the stage of the complete family*. The mother's menopause had passed and her own family was completed. It was possible for the mother to focus on fulfilling her own dreams. The ninth family stage, when the children have already left home, could be called *a stage of being a grandparent in many generations*. This family stage came late as a result of the younger children being born when the mother was middle-aged. In large families the concrete support of the grandparents to the families of their children and grandchildren can be insignificant. The most typical way of supporting is probably to pray for the families of the children.

The life stories of the women were traditional and customary Finnish life stories (cf. Roos 1987). External control was established by modern homes and for instance education (see Roos 1988, 208). The mothers remembered their lives being hard at times and partly without options, but they also had experienced living according to their own set of values. It should be noted that the pleasure from caring for a new baby increased when the number of children grew. Erja wrote as follows: “...people think that a baby in a large family is not as miraculous as the first or second miracle baby. A baby was always miraculous to us. In a way, a baby seemed the more miraculous the more we already had.” The value of a new baby began to appear in a new light from the family stage with small helpers onwards. Due to the mother's increased skills in caring, the task of caring for the new arrival became a pleasure. In addition, the stress level of an experienced mother was considerably lower than that of an inexperienced mother.

Third step: A Laestadian family as part of the chain of generations

Liisa said that in her childhood she had a clear wish: to have a lot of children. Jaana reflected that as being born herself into a family with ten children, she could not have imagined any other family model. Having a large family was not only in accordance with the Laestadian values, but also a natural choice (cf. Harmainen and Ruoppila 1984). Of the women contributing to my study Maire and Ritva were the most critical of having large families. Maire had been born into a family with two children. She wrote that when she got married the concept of having a large family was “*behind a curtain*”. Ritva for her part said that she was not “*the motherly type*”. Ritva's own mother worked and that is the reason for her having both the model of a mother with numerous children and the model of a working mother. In the women's opinion, in their childhood there were not as many expectations for motherhood as

at present. Mothers were self-sacrificing and present. The inheritance of a mother with many children was partly conflicting. In the minds of the women I interviewed there was an imprinted *image of motherhood* requiring both strength and endurance (cf Apo 1995). Comparing their own helplessness with the recalled strength of their own mother could produce unnecessarily negative feelings.

The experience of being a Laestadian mother was a social inheritance, although the parental style does not typically transfer this directly from a family of origin to one's own family (cf. Korhonen 1994; Harmainen and Ruoppila 1984). Liisa suspected that having a large family confine the woman to the role of "just a mother". Thus, the housework skills passed on from one generation to the next built a clear model for being a wife and mother. The women in my study were either entrepreneurs, housewives or worked outside the home. If the women's hopes for their own children became a reality, their daughters would keep the Laestadian faith. Furthermore, the mothers hoped that the children would study further than their own generation had done.

The Laestadian family model has traditionally been family-centred and based on the Bible (cf. e.g. Jallinoja 2000). The women used both familistic and individualistic terms when describing their family life. The role of the first children was to contribute more to the family than the youngest children did. During the first family stages the family members were forced to give up their own hopes and dreams for the sake of the family. The resources of the parents dictated how much of the ambitions of their own and the children could be realised. It is fairly distinctive of our time that in families with teenage children it is a norm to be individualistic to some extent. At the stage of teenage children, in large families the older children of the family could direct their own activities outside the home. Along with the growing children *the family model became one that was family-centred, while making individual growth possible*. According to Auli, individual strengths of the children are supported as much as possible. Ritva said that adjusting to the rules of a large family teaches, however, to take into consideration that "*there are other individuals in this family, too*". Erja described the change of the family model during different stages as follows:

Playing music has been considered important in our family and the six youngest children have been taken to music lessons for over ten years now. We have had a piano since 1972 and we did try to take the older children to music lessons at folk high school, but it was a time in our lives when the father did not have the time to take them and I could not get away from the family, so it meant that the older children did not get taken to different hobbies as much. It felt like there was enough to do at home. Our oldest daughter is still grade B cantor. As an adult she went to music lessons and studied to be a cantor. And the sixth of our children acts as a substitute cantor in parishes nearby. She has also learned to play on her own. (Erja)

Fourth step: The mothers' experiences with marriage

The women in my study had left finding a husband in God's hands. Liisa wrote, still amazed, "*how two of them, both poor, had managed to have a family, a home and a job*". The mothers' descriptions of marriage corresponded to the view of Laestadius (1992, 224): "*Love forces them to get married and have weddings, although they have not got clothes to cover their bodies, except some rags that hang to their sides*". Auli said that if you planned having children sensibly, there would never be the right time. Pirjo Paajanen's (2002, 58) study of the ideals and the reality of having children in Finland points to the same direction. Of the women in my study Erja had been married the longest, nearly 40 years. Both Hanna's and Ritva's marriages had lasted over 20 years. Ritva and Jaana stated that their feelings had become deeper with the passage of time. The women called their spouses "*resource*", "*darling*" and "*helper*". A spouse was "*the first mean of release*" according to Hanna. Intimacy and commitment were strongly present in the mothers' conversations. Friendship and love were often mentioned and they would refer to the existence of passion. (see Weishaus and Fields 1988) In addition, the mothers needed their spouses as the nearest adult to fortify their Laestadian faith when the pressures of everyday life were tiring them out. The women referred to this as "*support*" and "*working as a team*". The women in my study called their husbands not only by their first names but also "*spouse*", "*man*" and "*father*". Erja called her spouse systematically "*father*" until she made the decision to go and study during the family stage of the complete family and changed that to "*my husband*".

The Laestadian set of values brought security to the marital relationships. The women who had been married the longest mentioned their husbands the most often. Similarly, for them the importance of their husbands in reference to the sense of control was the most emphasized. The families used confession, which is characteristic of Laestadianism, according to the model of forgiveness. Settling disagreements became a matter to be regarded as holy. None of the women said that they would stay married because they were forced due to a large family or because the Laestadian values prohibit divorce. When the children grew the spouses had more opportunities to spend time alone. Ritva said that the older children made sure the parents were able to go and relax. Auli said that she was alone with her husband a lot during the later stages of pregnancy. A pregnancy clearly brought the spouses closer together. The feeling of togetherness was increased by the fact that it was difficult to discuss the pressures of having a large family with "*the people of the world*". The women made reference to their husbands mainly when they spoke about their free time. This indicated the importance of the marital relationship: the studies showed that the happier wives consider their marriages, the more they want to spend time with their husbands (Tolkki-Nikkonen 1990, 47).

Multiple pregnancies had an effect on the lives of the fathers, too. Hanna's husband gave up his studies when Hanna became pregnant. Ritva said that her family moved to a new town for the duration of her studies. Negotiation, discussion and openness were typical means of life management in a marital relationship for mothers (cf. Perho and Korhonen 1999, 119; Vuorinen 1991). Maire described the significance of discussion as follows: "*Being faulty in everything, one has still been forgiven all sins in the name and blood of Jesus, one can respect one's spouse with all the faults and errors. After apologizing and forgiving it is possible to start afresh*". If a problem was too complicated to be solved by discussion at home, help was sought from friends. Hanna stated that, if a need arose, there was a possibility to seek counselling from Laestadian couples that were considered to have experience.

Pertti Lahtinen (2002) wrote in a publication of SRK called *Päivämies* that characteristic features of a good home are mutual respect, love, openness and trust. According to him these features are also found in many "*homes of non-believers*". The difference is that in a religious home and marital relationship everything is based on "*the forgiveness granted by God*" (ibid.). The same emphasis on being special was reflected in the conversations of the mothers in my study. The mothers seemed to think that there is some special element in Laestadianism protecting marital relationships. In my opinion, the element was the confidence in being in a marriage ordained by God.

Fifth step: The children and the family as resources

Erja wrote about her desire to be an authoritative parent who pays special attention to her children (see Pulkkinen 2002, 144–145). In practice this did not always work. The strain of different life situations forced her to be an authoritarian parent. These divergences in her parental style made Erja feel unsuccessful and inadequate as a mother. She said that on many occasions she had had to apologize to her children for her own behaviour using the model of forgiveness. According to the Laestadian set of values the children also had to encounter the person they had hurt irrespective of whether that person was Laestadian.

The mothers described how they had employed authoritarian child rearing practices more during the first family stages than later on. In a large family, the more tired the parents were, the more likely it was that orders were issued to children. During the later family stages the mother's increased activity, and the support of other children changed the child rearing practices. The practices focused more on the child and they became more authoritative. The model of forgiveness increased the significance of children, because the matter at hand was handled from the child's point of view, too (cf. Pulkkinen 2002, 145). The mothers were aware of

the importance of being a parent (see Korhonen 1994). This parenthood included a clear line between generations and a decisive authority concerning problem solving of children (ibid. 85–86). Without parents' clear authority and leadership the everyday life of a large family could not be organised.

The mothers said that showing affection is valued in Laestadian families. There were different channels for expressing emotions. An adolescent could show affection for a younger sibling and get a feeling of closeness at the same time. The first children in the family received the undivided attention of their parents, but compared to their younger siblings they had more responsibilities at home. The younger children seemed to have an especially advantageous environment to grow and develop. The noise and disorder that were tiring for the mothers were not unpleasant for the children. They seemed to take for granted that more babies would be born. In general, the intervals between the births had started to lengthen after the fifth or sixth child, but in Erja's family there were already nine other children when the first-born turned ten. Thus, Erja wrote: "*On many occasions when I sat down there were always three in my lap and one on my back. And of course the baby in my belly*". The values present in the homes were consistent with the values of the religious community. Clear rules gave the children a sense of security. In addition, the network formed by the family, relatives and friends gave the children enough possibilities to be close to adults. These factors make it possible to receive initial social capital (see Pulkkinen 2002, 44–46). Having a large family created informality. While playing the children formed peer groups based on age and sex. The playing reflected the Laestadian set of values. One of the games mentioned by the mothers was a game where the children made preparations to get ready for the Summer Meeting, a big annual event of the movement. Since the children were small they adopted not only the customs of the home, but also the customs of the revivalist movement.

Auli, Hanna and Jaana, who belonged to the same Association of Peace, explained that the African parenting principle of "the whole village raise the children" is applied to Laestadian adolescents. The lives of the Laestadian adolescents were affected by the unofficial social control of the religious community, which for instance Pulkkinen says is beneficial to their development (see Pulkkinen 2002, 19). The social identity of the Laestadian children was formed in accordance with the example set by the family and Laestadian friends. As a consequence of the values of the movement, the examples set by the entertainment industry and mass media stayed marginal. For instance television was not watched in these families. The lives of the adolescents with religious beliefs were secured, but "*the temptations of the world*" made the mothers act for the benefit of them with determination. Women living the family stage with grown children received support from the older children in regard to upbringing the younger ones. Older children might reassure the mother or promise to speak with an adolescent causing worry. One foundation for the mothers' sense

of control was the relationships with other family members (see Vuorinen 1998, 192–194). The large family functioned systematically as a unit. The family shared happiness, but also the work and responsibilities. The limited time of the mother generated models of interpersonal interaction where help was sought from other family members too. Siblings in different age groups had relationships where they felt attachment towards each other. Therefore, the family's own network was responsible for there being social support in the family. There is a danger in large families that the daughters spend all their time doing housework and they do not have a life of their own (see Kemppainen 2001, 152). That is why Ritva reminded that children require their own freedom and rights despite the needs of the family.

Sixth step: The support of friends and the religious community

Most of the mothers I interviewed mentioned their Laestadian friends as an important source of strength. The women missed friends in everyday situations, for instance when they needed help, required someone to share their worries or go out and join an activity with, and when they wanted to discuss religious matters. Ritva said that among other religious people she does not feel like a freak because of her large family. To a friend thinking alike you do not have to explain or make excuses. This is a means of life management that changes the significance of a stressful situation (see Lazarus and Folkman 1984). From the children's point of view this means that the friendships between a few adults with large families create a large social network for the children as well.

Conservative Laestadian movement organizes activities either on a temporary or regular basis in over half of the Lutheran parishes in Finland. At the end of the last century there were almost 31,000 members in the Associations of Peace. It is possible to become a member after attending a confirmation class. The biggest Associations of Peace are located in Oulu and Helsinki (Lohi 2003). As a consequence it is possible to seek like-minded people almost regardless of your place of residence. The most important function supporting the Laestadian belief is meetings, which are devotional services organized by Associations of Peace. At these events both the Bible and the sermons of Laestadius are studied. Religious beliefs are conserved due to this traditional practice. Jaana mentioned “a meeting of mothers”, which is held in her hometown on a weekly basis and is organized by the local Association of Peace. These meetings include lectures on various subjects. The other mothers referred to the Associations of Peace only as a forum for meetings. In addition to meetings Associations of Peace can organize Sunday school for children and evening activities for young people. Of other activities that supported the everyday life and their Laestadian faith the mothers considered Christian folk high schools significant. They were important places to make a pause and rest, since there, according to Maire, “*you can learn to be satisfied*”. At times Laestadian mothers would have

the possibility to limit their lives in such a way that all people close to them shared their religious beliefs. Ritva said, however, that in regard to hobbies and work it is not important if people are believers or not. Only some cases the Laestadian values were important, for instance the women expressed their wish to have classical music played in their exercise groups.

On top of the wall

The aim of my study has been to understand the basis of the sense of control of Laestadian mothers with large families. What do I see now from this figurative wall of mine? The most important factor in the mothers' sense of control is their personal faith. In addition, Laestadianism is an explanation for having a large family, and consequently it is the part of life that increases the requirements for resources most. Keeping their religious beliefs gives the mothers a demanding framework for life, but also a type of solution. This experience seems to be typical for religious families in general (Abbot, Berry and Meredith 1990). The factors that outside the movement could be seen as limitations mean security and consistency for these mothers. The public ideals of different family models cannot affect the women's lifestyle since they reject them as insignificant. Although according to this study one's own family is an important supporter in having faith, the clear values of the Laestadian revivalist movement and the sense of community are also important. Feeling right about their religious beliefs added to the mothers' sense of control as both an inner and communal factor. The optimistic attitude of the women could be called the life strategy of a religious person.

The women's stories describing the development of their families resemble one another. Common factors are getting married young to a man with the same faith and, especially during the first family stages, having the role of a housewife. Furthermore, children of these families were important to each other in the sense of having both peer and attachment relationships. It is also a common factor that the births of the children defer the realisation of the mother's own dreams to the future. In addition the practices of Laestadianism, for instance the model of forgiveness, are common to the families. The resources of Laestadian families consist of the relationships between family members and self-esteem, cohesion born from cultural identity, and the housekeeping and parenting skills passed down the generations. Furthermore, the resources are affected by openness of the families and the social support from one's family and friends. The values of Laestadianism prevent in advance difficulties within marital relationships and the family. When your marriage is a gift from God your commitment increases through experiencing it as something holy. In addition, the importance of Laestadian supporting sobriety is indisputable (see Larsen 1993).

The mothers' sense of control originates from two different sources. First of all, they place their lives in God's hands and accept His guidance. Secondly, the mothers have at their disposal the means of life management that they learned in their youth and that are strengthened in their own families. These means are similar to the means of any Finnish mother: negotiation and discussion, positive comparison, expression of emotions or just passive endurance (Korhonen 1994, 143–147; Pearlin and Schooler 1978). Social support also has a great significance to the mothers (Lazarus and Folkman 1984). External means of life management are similar to anybody else's: housekeeping skills, modern homes and housekeeping services (see Nurmi et al. 2001, 105–106). Not accepting birth control as a means of life management is an exception from the norm. Having experience, as a factor of the sense of control, also differentiates my study from other studies on motherhood. Motherhood skills are acquired from a large family of origin. This develops into active parenthood in one's own family. Not having education due to getting married early in life does not diminish the caring skills of Laestadian mothers (cf. Perho and Korhonen 1996).

The sense of control as a concept helps to understand mothers' ability to cope. The mothers in my study cope well, because they have their Laestadian faith, family, relatives and friends. Is this the case with any Laestadian mother? If a mother becomes exhausted, is she lacking one of the elements contributing to the sense of control mentioned in this study, or are these elements the same for any mother with a large family? Are the straightforwardness and clarity of the values significant – regardless of whether those values are Laestadian? Leo Tolstoi states that all happy families are happy in the same way, but all unhappy families are unhappy in their own way. Therefore, if I had wanted to find mothers for my study whose coping varied, without a doubt I would have received different answers. The Laestadian family model can give initial social capital: values, norms, social support and a network (Pulkkinen 2002). If the maladjustment of individuals and families is under consideration, should we examine the possible lack of these factors?

The mothers participating in my study were an example of typical Laestadian mothers in Finland. However, my data is exclusive, at least in regard to studying as an adult: one third of the women had studied during or after the births of their children. Therefore they are accustomed to reflecting on the elements of their lives. Eeva Jokinen (1996) has stated that one of the basic feelings of motherhood is tiredness. It is probably a particularly familiar feeling to mothers with large families. The mothers said that their happiness consists of their own health and healthy children. Mental and physical health was surely one of the most important factors that explained their coping. In this study, its importance is considered marginal and self-evident, since according to studies having a large family does not increase physical illness (Juntunen 1997).

Many questions are left unanswered. Firstly, when assessing motherhood, is the family stage taken into consideration sufficiently? When there are small children in the family, motherhood is tiring regardless of the number of children. The age of the mother and the amount of experience she has are also ignored when assessing motherhood. A case in point is having a baby at a more mature age, and this baby brings exceptionally great joy. Secondly, the mothers in my study have fulfilled their dreams despite having large families. So, has there been enough research into the different ways of combining work with family? Thirdly, I was left wondering about the importance of relationships between siblings in regard to the development of an individual. These three issues, ie deeper understanding of family stages, the possibility of combining housework and gainful employment, and the importance of siblings, are all interesting challenges for further research.

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