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<p>Tiivistelmä-Referat-Abstract</p> <p>This doctoral dissertation sets out to answer the following question: How is a woman's maternal identity constructed when her child lives with the father? The answer is sought by examining the life stories recounted in oral interviews with 18 women and the memories recorded by three women in a group. As the dissertation is related to the discipline of social work and feminist research, it also has the emancipatory dimension of reconstructing women's socio-cultural status. From the theoretical perspective, the dissertation is based on the hermeneutic, phenomenological and narrative approaches. The hermeneutic-phenomenological approach connects the dissertation to an understanding and interpretative research paradigm which seeks the meanings of individual experiences, while narrativity is manifested in the effort to understand the nature of the corpus used in the dissertation.</p> <p>The technique of close reading is used to analyse the dissertation corpus. In close reading, new thematic contents and interpretations are sought and found by reading transcribed texts and listening to recordings several times. As a starting point for the analysis, the concept of identity is understood as constructed through social interaction. Underlying this view is the notion that human beings are holistic entities, in which corporeality, consciousness and situationality are simultaneously present. The concept of identity is seen as a social construct and, accordingly, humans are understood as active corporeal beings functioning in an extensive ecosystem. Interaction between humans and their living environment is manifested in three types of relations: relations that alter reality, that is, interaction with the material environment, relations that are based on symbolic communication, and power relations.</p> <p>The analysis and reporting are founded on the concept of space, which is manifested in the corpus as concrete, mental or abstract and metaphorical space. The construction of identity is perceived as taking place in spatial dimensions which are simultaneously present. These dimensions may be defined as cultural space which assumes mythical features, relational space based on human interaction, the home as an experiential and lived space, reflective space based on current and future definitions of the self, and the space of moral emotions.</p> <p>The maternal identity of women living apart from their children is constructed in a contradictory space. The women consider themselves as good mothers. They construct their maternal identity according to the ethics of concern, responsibility and care. However, the women are discredited in their own communities and stigmatised for abandoning their children. In reality, most of the mothers have had to accept (in some cases voluntarily) a solution they would rather have rejected. In the course of the research, the relationship with the children's father emerged as an important element in the construction of maternal identity. Most of the women have had a violent spouse, who has controlled the family home and limited the mother's space. However, a close connection with the child after the parents' separation aids in constructing a positive maternal identity despite the guilt felt by the women because they cannot look after their children's everyday needs. The mothers interviewed for this dissertation construct their identity in the paradoxical space of strength and fragility.</p>			
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