

Abstracts symposium Belonging in 21st Century Families

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Growing up in the city: young people about living and belonging in a deprived neighbourhood

Kirsten Visser, Department of Human Geography and Planning, Utrecht University

Abstract: 'Segregation of society makes children vulnerable' reads the title of a newspaper article about the results of the 'Kids count' (Kinderen in Tel) study in the Netherlands. The study shows that 225,700 children (0-22 years old) in the Netherlands live in poverty, and that differences between the neighbourhoods they grow up in are becoming larger. According to many policymakers and researchers, this is a worrisome development as living in a deprived neighbourhood can have a negative impact on young people's wellbeing and social outcomes. As a reaction to these growing concerns about the negative consequences of living in a deprived neighbourhood, Dutch municipalities have adopted a policy of urban restructuring: the demolition of inexpensive and often low quality social housing units and the construction of more expensive dwellings in order to achieve a 'better' social mix. One of the consequences of this policy is the displacement of large groups of often low-income households.

In this presentation I will focus on young people's (13-21 years old) experiences with growing up in a deprived neighbourhood and how young people perceive and deal with forced relocation as a result of urban restructuring. Do young people indeed experience their neighbourhood as hostile and unsafe? Do they really experience a lack of resources? Are they able to move to a better dwelling and neighbourhood after forced relocation? How do they experience the move? Based on qualitative studies in Rotterdam and Utrecht I will provide insight in the complex relationships between young people and the neighbourhoods they grow up in.

The law and growing up in multiple families or homes

Masha Antokolskaia, Faculty of Law, VU

Abstract: There are many situations in which children grow up in more than two families and more than two households. In such situations more than two adults with some kind of parental roles are likely to be involved. Dutch law however, does not (yet) provide for multiple legal parentage or multiple parental responsibility. After briefly addressing this issue, I will further focus on the most widespread situation of multiple families and multiple households - the post-divorce blended families. First, I will in some length address the ongoing evolution of the status of post-divorced parents towards legal and de-facto equality. Thereby the issues of joint parental responsibility, visitation/contact rights and shared residence will be discussed. Then I will shortly present the results of our research discerning the discrepancy between the legal status of stepparents and their factual roles in the lives of their stepchildren.

How do children define their family after a parental separation?

Kim Bastaits, Department of Social Work, PXL Hogeschool Hasselt

Abstract: Currently, children grow up in a large variety of family constellations, especially after a parental separation. So, old definitions of family like biological ties, location or time might not be sufficient anymore to define those separated families from a child's point of view. Previous research has indicated that parental separation and subsequent family transitions can lead to difficulties of defining family boundaries and feelings of boundary ambiguity with children.

With this study, we would like to investigate how children of separated parents define their family, given all family transitions they experienced following the separation of their parents. Therefore, we analyze qualitative data (in-depth interviews and children's drawings of their family) of 39 children between 8 and 18 years old of separated parents (16 girls, 23 boys). 21 children reside in joint physical custody, 15 with a residential mother and 3 with a residential father.

Preliminary analysis of the qualitative data show already interesting results. The drawings clearly indicate that children's views on their family go beyond the classic idea of family as biological

family. Next to drawing their biological parents and siblings, children also drew their stepparents, stepsiblings, halfsiblings, grandparents and even pets. Moreover, almost all children drew all family members as one group instead of different family groups in separate houses. This indicates that, although separated parents may consider themselves to be living in two families, children still perceive this as one family: a family that even goes beyond the borders of location, time and biological ties.

Family Belonging through Quotidian Activities and Interactions

Tamar Kremer-Sadlik, Department of Anthropology, UCLA

Abstract: In this talk I examine the notion of *family belonging* as it is experienced by family members in their everyday lives and manifested through their mundane interactions. I situate this work in (late) modernity, which is characterized by the profound uncertainty regarding what counts as an ethical way to raise a family, by the 'democratization' of family relationships, and by the ideology of treating children as free agents. I propose that belonging is achieved through family members' participation in, coordination of and connection through quotidian activities and talk that surround them. Drawing on ethnographic research of middle-class families in Los Angeles, CA, I focus on daily rituals as the loci where tensions between beliefs about how a family should be and act and the reality of family life unfold. I discuss the prevalence of reflexive talk in family interaction as evidence of an existential doubt that complicates parent-child relationship and running a household. And I explore contemporary pressures that parents experience as they negotiate the best ways to parent, raise happy children, and become virtuous families.

Children and Divorce, an Introduction

Inge van der Valk, Research Centre of Adolescent Development, Utrecht University, the Netherlands

Abstract: Each year, around 70.000 children in the Netherlands face a parental divorce or separation. This presentation will provide a brief overview of the current state of affairs regarding research into this topic. Firstly, the relevance of this subject will be illustrated, based on current figures on divorce, separation, and children. Then, the consequences of a parental divorce for children will be described, distinguishing between direct, general, and specific consequences. Next to this, the characteristics of high-conflict divorces and its specific consequences for children will briefly be explained. Though research consistently shows that children of divorced parents are at risk of various problems, these problems are not so much caused by the parental separation in itself, but more by various factors that often accompany it. Thus, these family factors playing a role in child adjustment after divorce will be described, such as parent-child relationship, quality of parenting, and interparental conflicts. Concomitant to the symposium's theme of "Where do I belong?", the focus of this presentation will be on the living situation of families after divorce, and possible linkages with child adjustment.