Materiality and care in children’s post-divorce family life with two households

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In many ways, the iconic status of the traditional nuclear family is still a normative configuration of family life in the Western society. However, children are involved in approximately 2/3 of all divorces in Scandinavia and on this basis, novel ways of living family life emerge. Based on children’s perspectives, this paper explores aspects of materiality and care in context of children’s post-divorce family life across two households.

When children live in a shuttle between two households, their conduct of everyday life can be conceptualized as somehow 'double-looped’ since the children have to be attentive to two different cyclical home-arrangements of everyday life and balance out each parent’s different expectations, demands and values across the two households.

Through the presentation, care is explored as not merely a one-directional caregiving from parents to children but as a reciprocal process between children and their parents. It appears that particular ‘hooking up-practices’ are needed across the two households and it is analyzed how different objects and mediating caring artifacts work to support this – sometimes secretly arranged – endeavor. 'Hooking up’ when apart seems serve as means to children and parents as a way of being 'in line’ with each other and nurture their mutual relationship.

In that sense, simple artifacts as a shirt, a bicycle or cell phone seem to reach beyond the materiality and into family life. They seem to impact how the children’s trajectories of life emerge and to what extent the children experience coherence and consistency in their everyday life with parents living in separate households.

Theoretically, the paper draws on traditions from practice research and scientific critical psychology.

Data is drawn from a qualitative study investigating how Danish children aged 8-12 conduct their everyday lives with time-shared living arrangements as a result of parental divorce using methods as life-mappings and audio diaries.

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