

Chapter 8

The SOHI: Operationalizing a New Model for Studying Teenagers' Sense of Home in Post-divorce Families



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Abstract This chapter explores the important question of whether, and under which conditions, children alternating between two distinct family dwellings can develop a sense of home that might nourish a sense of belonging to their sometimes, complex family configurations. We first present a theoretical framework to understand the various dimensions that influence children's sense of home in shared custody arrangements, building on Hashemnezhad et al. (2013)'s work. We then show how this framework can be operationalized in quantitative research. For this purpose, we introduce the Sense of Home Instrument (SOHI), a new instrument for measuring the impact of material and behavioral-relational dimensions on teenagers' sense of home at their mothers' and fathers'. We then illustrate its relevance and value with supporting analyses of data collected through a survey conducted with Belgian adolescents aged between 11 and 18. In doing so, we propose new avenues for research on the consequences of divorce and separations for children's identity construction and belonging, where the spatiality of family life is taken into-account.

Keywords Children · Divorce · Shared custody · Home · Family sociology

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8.1 Introduction

The sense of being ‘at home’ has been largely recognized as a key element to support processes of autonomisation, identity construction and belonging during adolescence. Within the nuclear family model that dominated Western societies until recently, this sense of home has traditionally been conceived in the context of a stable, single reference family dwelling. Post-divorce arrangements where children alternate between two distinct family dwellings challenge this vision, and raise the important question of whether they can develop a sense of home that might nourish a sense of belonging to their sometimes, complex family configurations. In this chapter we explore in particular adolescents’ sense of being ‘at home’ at their mother’s and father’s in the context of joint physical custody. Drawing on Hashemnezhad et al. (2013), we present a theoretical framework for the analysis of children’s sense of home in JPC, and propose a new instrument for measuring the impact of material and behavioral-relational dimensions on teenagers’ sense of home, named the Sense of Home Instrument (SOHI). We then illustrate its relevance through supporting analysis of data collected in a survey conducted with Belgian adolescents aged between 11 and 18, and suggest some research hypothesis that could be tested in the future.

8.2 Studying Teenagers’ Sense of Home in Post-divorce Families: Relevance and Key Dimensions

8.2.1 *Sense of Home and Identity Construction*

Living in a stable, single reference dwelling has been considered by some psychologists and lawyers as a necessary condition for children’s development, a lack of such “stability” exposing children to the risk of an “identity breakdown” (de Singly and Decup-Pannier 2000: 220). Actually, as Merla (2018) argued elsewhere, living within, and across two households – two ‘homes’ – challenges the normative model of sedentariness that characterizes Western societies, where the administration of populations has largely relied on the identification of people with one place of residence. This paradigm was reflected in the standard, institutional model of the family, that represents family members as bonded together by physical co-presence and bounded by the confines of the privately-owned land and house that contains them (Morgan 2011).

For social sciences scholars, the family dwelling crystallizes three dimensions of what Bonnin (1999: 23) calls a “house-domus”, that is, (a) the localized material capital of the housing, (b) the functionalized, habitable space, as a necessary instrument of domestic practices – which can be daily, festive, repetitive or exceptional, and (c) the symbolic (collective and individual) identity expressions it supports. The second and third dimensions highlight that, through their daily

interactions with– and within – the space of the house, people “do” family, that is, engage in practices that define them as family members and nurture their sense of belonging (Morgan 2011). By doing so, they also construct and negotiate their collective and individual identities. This process is particularly important during adolescence, a period defined by sociologists as the moment of autonomy learning (Galland 2010) where teenagers reflexively consider their familial attachments, and distance themselves from the “family-us” to construct their personal identity. By offering teenagers a sense of ontological security and a locus for their socialization with family and peers, the home represents a key resource for their identity building and belonging.

The processes through which teenagers develop a sense of home, and the role this sense plays in identity building, has been mainly studied through a focus on the bedroom, which, according to de Singly (1998) and Poittevin (2005), represents a complex universe supporting processes of autonomization, belonging, and relationships-building with parents, siblings and friends (see also Bovill and Livingstone 2001; Zaffran 2014; Ramos 2018).¹ The bedroom is often considered by adolescents as their “home”, a space of intimacy extracted from the common family life, and referring to personal territories (Ramos 2018). They tend to perceive it as a refuge, where they feel safe from an outside world, where they can be themselves, and where they can express their personality and lifestyle. The bedroom is thus a symbolic and meaningful space, where young people can define their identity (Augé 1992 cited by Zaffran 2014: 2). Identity expression manifests itself in the control exercised over space (by closing or not the door, arranging, organizing and decorating it in a certain way), the time and activities that take place in this room, and the persons who are allowed in – or excluded from it – at certain times, including friends (Zaffran 2014). This control appears as an essential condition for the construction of teenagers' identity (Renonciat 2014). According to Amphoux and Mondada (1989), home, symbolized here mainly by the bedroom, is not a place of retreat, totally closed to the other but a “place of the identity of the “I“ welcoming the other” (1989: 5). This meeting place allows the young person to welcome other people with whom he or she shares social references. “It then makes it possible to affirm one's belonging and to recognize oneself in those who circulate there” (Zaffran 2014: 2).

Teenagers develop a sense of home not only through the appropriation of a bedroom, but also of other spaces inside or outside the house by using, possessing and surrounding themselves with some objects rather than others, and by occupying and decorating these spaces (de Singly 1998; Poittevin 2005). In this process, they create a space of significant, meaningful symbols that allow them to maintain some form of continuity in their life course and that reflect their own identity (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; Gyger Gaspoz 2014). Teenagers' sense of being ‘at home’ under the family roof is thus rooted both in the

¹It is important to note that the importance of having one's own bedroom is a recent cultural and historical construct, and thus varies through space and time, including in Western Europe (see for instance Wentzel Winther 2017).

time-space of non-family practices (what the teenagers do in their room or on a certain household equipment), where adolescents are in ‘their world’ (de Singly 2007), and the time-spaces of common activities with family members, where what matters is ‘being together’ and/or “being in the presence” of one another (de Singly and Ramos 2010: 12).

But what happens when teenagers have “two” homes? How do they develop a sense of home that positively supports their identity construction and family belonging? This question is particularly crucial, as divorce and subsequent re-compositions blur family boundaries and put feelings of belonging under strain (Zartler 2011). If to date, only a limited number of research has looked into those issues through the lens of children’s home-making, the existing body of work further attests to the importance of feelings of being ‘at home’ in processes of identity construction and belonging. For instance, in their study of how Danish children in large sibling groups relate to bedrooms, Palludan and Winther (2016) put forth that it is by claiming the right to have their own room and belongings at each of their parents’ dwellings – thus making them both ‘their homes’ – that children in joint custody are recognized in their family relations. The “socio-material weight” (Palludan and Winther 2016: 40) they gain through this process determines in turn their status in the household, in particular whether they are considered as hosts, guests, or regular visitors in each house. In their study of joint custody arrangements in Belgium, Merla and Nobels (2019) similarly show that the materiality of space can influence, and be influenced by, the symbolic and physical place that is given to adolescents in the family house and that shapes their sense of being ‘at home’. On the one hand, teenagers leave a spatial imprint of their presence in the home through the personal belongings they permanently leave in the dwelling. These objects help them reaffirm that this house is “their house” each time they return home – thus reflecting the place they occupy in the family configuration. Their (recomposed) family members can also show them that they do belong to the house – and, by extension, the family group – by increasingly giving them a physical place through the materiality of the home’s space. Being assigned a specific, personal drawer in the “children’s” wardrobe or even a wardrobe of one’s own, receiving a personal bed, or a bedroom of one’s own . . . can give them the sense that they are placed on an equal footing with the “permanent” inhabitants of the house. This provides them with a sense of continuity, in spite of their regular absences, as they remain symbolically present for the rest of the family through the marks they leave in each dwelling.

This research is in line with de Singly and Decup-Pannier (2000)’s claim that the quality of the environment surrounding a relationship, that characterizes each dwelling, plays a key role in shaping teenagers’ sense of home. In addition, these scholars point out that young people in joint custody arrangements do not necessarily put each of their dwellings on an equal footing. Some of them indeed “prioritize one of their two bedrooms, recreating a “habitual” residence” (de Singly and Decup-Pannier 2000: 220). This duality does not necessarily lead to a fragmented sense of home, as teenagers engage in tactics to reinforce the feeling of having only one home, either in one room or in a larger territory” (de Singly and Decup-Pannier 2000: 227). Also, it is important to note that children who do not have their own

room at one, or both of their parents' dwellings, can put in place "homing" strategies, for instance by "delimiting their "corner" by the bed and what is within reach from this bed (personal element of "my corner")" (Ramos 2018: 58).

Repartnering and family re-compositions challenge pre-existing relationships, and raise spatial issues. The re-negotiation of children's and adults' respective position in these new family configurations involves, for instance, competition around the allocation of bedrooms and the delineation between shared and private spaces in the house, as well as other spatial-material strategies and practices that mark the acceptance, or rejection, of the "newcomers" (Marquet and Merla 2015, 2018; Merla and Nobels 2019). Repartnering and family re-compositions thus challenge teenagers' sense of home, reflecting, and participating in, the reconfiguration of their family identity.

By highlighting the agency of teenagers, these works also contribute to the claim that having multiple living spaces can potentially constitute a resource, rather than an impairment, for identity construction. As de Singly and Decup-Pannier note (2000: 220), "sociologists (including Erving Goffman) argue that having multiple living spaces is necessary for the individual. The possibility of independence arises from the multiplicity of spaces (...) Having several addresses is one of the processes implemented by an individual in order not to be reduced to a single identity". Having several places of residence where one feels 'at home', provides access to a heterogeneous repertoire that might thus open up the possibility to construct a single, original self at the intersection of these multiple identities.²

8.2.2 *Sense of Home: Material and Behavioral Dimensions*

The body of research that we mobilized this far highlighted both the materiality of spaces and the importance of relationships in defining adolescents' attachment to place and sense of home. This is in line with the multi-dimensional conceptualization of sense of home and attachment to place proposed by Hashemnezhad and his colleagues (2013), based on an interdisciplinary literature review.

The material dimension refers to the physicality and materiality of a place, including the ways in which a house is decorated, the configuration of the rooms, their number and size, the level of material comfort, smells and temperature, and so on. The walls' colors, the quantity and quality of household equipment and furniture, the number of rooms, their size, their luminosity, the fact that they are lightly – or over – loaded... together influence people's sense of home. This dimension thus refers to the cognitive and formal aspects of places that shape people's spatial perception of their dwelling, which in turn influences how they relate to it.

²For a discussion of children's socialization in heterogeneous, post-divorce family environments, see for instance Merla (2018).

The behavioral dimension covers the functional aspects of the living environment. This includes the types of activities and practices that are performed in the dwelling and its various spaces, and the relations that take place in those spaces. For instance, teenagers in joint custody arrangements might prefer to spend time in a lively house, where they share several activities with their family members (such as playing, watching tv, cooking, dinning together, etc.) and spend ‘quality time’ with them, rather than in a house where they feel lonely and isolated because their parents or other family members are less available to spend time with them, or where there is a high level of intra-familial conflict (see for instance Merla and Nobels 2019). This dimension strongly resonates with the relational approach in family sociology, represented by Morgan’s notion of ‘doing’ family, and could therefore be coined as a ‘relational’ dimension.

The third dimension of Hashemnezhad et al.’s model is the emotional one, and relates to the meaning of, satisfaction with, and attachment to, a given place (Hashemnezhad et al. 2013: 6). As Merla and Nobels (2019) show in their research, “the positive or negative emotions that are felt [in a place] can influence the child’s perception and attachment to a specific space, leading her/him to prefer to remain there, making her/him feeling more comfortable and safe or on the contrary, encouraging her/him to avoid a specific room” (2019: 13). By interpreting the physical setting, children convert a space into a place transforming it in “a center of meaning or field of care that emphasizes human emotions and relationships” (Jorgensen and Stedman 2001: 233). Adolescents thus develop a sense of home that is connected to their emotional links with the material place (e.g. the house) and the social unit that occupies this place (e.g. the family) (Winther 2009: 49).

8.3 The SOHI: A New Instrument for the Study of Children’s Sense of Home

In this paper we propose to operationalize this framework through the Sense of Home Instrument (SOHI).³ We focus here on the material and behavioral-relational dimensions of the sense of home.⁴

This instrument was conceived for surveys with teenagers in secondary schools, usually aged between 11–12 and 18–19. This broad age-range includes children with varied levels of literacy and concentration abilities, and this raises important challenges. Put simply, how participants will read and understand questions may vary greatly, and some of them may tire quickly. This is why we decided to work with a limited number of indicators, which can be measured from a relatively short survey

³The SOHI module (including its dimensions, indicators, and sample questions) is provided in the [Annex 1](#).

⁴At this stage, we indeed decided to leave the emotional dimension aside, for as sociologists we felt ill-equipped to approach this aspect through a survey questionnaire.

module. In addition, researchers willing to implement such module in their surveys will need to pay careful attention to the formulation of questions, and run a series of pre-tests to ensure understandability. The questions we are presenting in this section will therefore need to be adapted both to the specific socio-cultural environment and cognitive level of the surveyed populations.

8.3.1 *Measuring the Material Dimension*

In the SOHI we propose to approach the material dimension through the **level of comfort** that teenagers experience in each of their dwellings, with a particular emphasis on the question of the bedroom (having one's own), and having enough space in the dwelling. Similarly to France and Nordic countries (Winther 2017) having one's own room has become a normative standard in Belgium, leading teenagers to consider it both as a right and a need (de Singly and Decup-Pannier 2000). As we mentioned earlier, being able to "create a material environment that embodies what they consider significant" (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981: 123), where they feel at home, and on which they can have a certain amount of control (Ramos 2018), play a role in adolescents' identity building. In addition, Hashemnezhad et al.'s (2013) model also indicates that factors such as the size and number of rooms, and how much they are loaded are important indicators of the level of comfort afforded by an accommodation.

Here, the perceived level of comfort is evaluated through questions about the physical and material characteristics of the parents' dwellings. These focus, first, on children's perception of their dwelling and second, on teenagers' bedroom more specifically. Concretely, children are first asked to say if the following statements concerning their mothers'/fathers' place are correct (by yes or no): (1) there is enough room for everyone; (2) We are feeling a bit cramped. They are then questioned in a similar way on two statements concerning bedrooms at their mothers'/fathers' place (1) I have a bedroom of my own; (2) I share a bedroom with my siblings and/or other children; (3) I share a bedroom with my parent; (4) I have no bedroom at all. In the Belgian context, having a room of one's own, not sharing a room with one's parent, feeling there is enough space for everyone, and not feeling cramped are indicative of higher levels of comfort.

8.3.2 *Behavioral-Relational Dimension*

Here we first mobilize factors that have been to date located at the center-stage of scholarship on parent-child relations in post-divorce families, namely the **quality of parent-child relations**, the **level of intra-parental conflict**, and **repartnering**. One of the key entries has resided so far in exploring the link between the type of custody arrangement and the quality of parent-child and intra-parental relationships

(Cashmore et al. 2010; Spruijt and Duindam 2010; Vanassche et al. 2013; Nielsen 2018). Comparing children's wellbeing in shared versus sole custody arrangements, Bauserman for instance (2002) highlights that children in shared custody spend relatively more time with their fathers and express better parental relations. However, Drapeau et al. (2017) argue that, independent from the quantity of time spent with the child, the level of conflict between the parents is a better indicator of the quality of the parent-child relation as the former tends to reflect on the latter. Although the above-mentioned scholarship does not specifically analyze the respective link between, on the one hand, the quality of parent-child relations and levels of intra-parental conflict, and, on the other hand, children's sense of being 'at home' at their parents, they confirm that these two factors both strongly influence, and characterize, the relational context in which adolescents grow up. Finally, studies have also focused on the influence of remarriage/repartnering on parent-child relations but these have emphasized contrasting results leading to positive impacts as well as negative ones (Aquilino 2006). As we highlighted in the theoretical section, repartnering is an important component of children's relational environments.

In the SOHI, the quality of parent-child relations is approached through 10 questions.⁵ Children are invited to position themselves on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (at maximum) with regards to the following questions: how good is your relation with your [mother/father]?; does your [mother/father] admire you and respect you?; to what extent do you feel close and have fun with your [mother/father]?; do you share secrets and intimate feelings with your [mother/father]?; how much does your [mother/father] love you?; how much do you love your [mother/father]?; does your [mother/father] appreciate the things you do?; does your [mother/father] find it important to listen to you?; does your [mother/father] think you have good ideas?; does your [mother/father] consider that she can learn a lot from you?⁶

The conflict score between the parents (as perceived by children) is calculated based on the following questions⁷: how often do your parents argue over money?; how often do your parents argue over your education?; how often do your parents argue about the children?; how often do your parents totally disagree with each other?; do your parents sometimes have big conflicts? These questions are asked regarding the relationship between their parents before and after the separation.⁸

Finally, the quality of children's relation with their step-parent is measured through the following question: How is your relation with your [mother/father's] partner? (Very bad/bad/neither good nor bad/good/very good).

⁵These questions are drawn from the Leuven Adolescents and Family Survey (LAGO), which were also implemented in the Louvain/Leuven Adolescents Survey (see Sect. 8.4).

⁶In the Lads survey (see Sect. 8.4), these subscales showed a high reliability measurement in the four types of familial configuration (all $\alpha > .85$).

⁷Also drawn from the LAGO questionnaire.

⁸Indices of internal reliability of these questions in the LAdS survey are very good (all $\alpha > .84$), comforting us in the constitution of this score.

The next indicator innovatively and tentatively connects teenagers' sense of home with their **(digital) communication practices**. Indeed, we live in societies marked by the omnipresence of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). In this context, relationships among family members are no longer limited to physical, embodied spaces – they go beyond a house's walls via virtual means of co-presence. As Wellman (2018: P. Xix) notes, digital media 'have empowered family members with the ability to go their separate ways while at the same time keeping them more connected'. The development and democratization of ICTs have thus profoundly affected the ways in which family members "stay in touch", offering new forms of "virtual" co-presence that create opportunities to sustain family and social relations across space and time. Through ICT-based frequent and/or ritual contacts, parents and children can create family routines that transcend physical absence and nourish a sense of belonging (Duchêne-Lacroix 2013). Research on non-divorced families with members temporarily away (for professional reasons or in a migratory context) have highlighted the importance of ICTs in maintaining parent-child relations in this context (see for instance Thompson 2005; Yarosh and Abowd 2011; Madianou 2016). But the influence of such contact on the quality of relationships is not clear. For instance, Lee (2009)'s survey among 1300 students aged 12–18 highlights that virtual communication neither weakens nor strengthens the relationship between children and parents. Other studies also point at the potential of constant connectivity for enhancing tensions and conflicts as they offer increased possibilities of surveillance and control (Madianou 2016). Actually, this body of research rather indicates that it is the pre-existing quality of relationships (level of conflicts, stability and strength of ties) that tends to determine the extent to which online communication between parents and children can be satisfying and meaningful, and/or experienced as a form of surveillance and control (Chen et al. 2010; du Preez 2018: 88; Madianou 2016).

ICT affordances can be particularly critical to sustain parent-child relations in post-divorce families where children spend (sometimes long) periods of time without seeing one of their parents (see for instance Gollop and Taylor 2012; Saini et al. 2013; Wolman and Pomerance 2012; Yarosh et al. 2009).⁹ Yet, the question of how such practices can feed into children's sense of being 'at home' at each of their parents' remains unexplored. In addition, the question of how continued communication with other household members, such as the parents' new partner, can also contribute to sustaining children's sense of home, remains unexplored.

For this purpose, we propose to measure **the continuity of children's communication with their parents and step-parents** based on two sets of questions. The first set aims at capturing children's everyday uses of communicative platforms and tools with their parents, regardless of their physical location. So, children are asked to indicate, on a 5-Likert scale (1: Never, 2: Several Times a month, 3: Several times per week, 4: Everyday, 5: Several Times a day), how often they use Facebook

⁹For research on divorced parents' uses of ICT for co-parenting, see Dworkin et al. (2016) and Ganong et al. (2012).

Messenger, WhatsApp/iMessage, Skype, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, TikTok and online games to communicate with their mother/father. In the second set, we focus more specifically on cross-household communication with a parent/step-parent when the teenager is physically located at the other parents'. Here we try to capture the different forms of co-presence they engage in when interacting with their relatives from a distance (Baldassar et al. 2016; Merla and Papanikolaou [Forthcoming](#)). Here, children are asked to indicate on a similar 5-Likert scale, how often they communicate with their mother/father/step-mother/step-father, when staying at the other parent's house, through voice calls (without video, just audio), video calls, messaging (like texting or instant messages), written posts on social networks (like Facebook walls for instance), photo or video posts on social networks (like TikTok or FB or Snapchat) ((e.g. when you stay at your mother's house, how often do you communicate with your father through video calls?) The maximum score on one of these networks could for instance be retained as the "Cross-household digital communication" variable.

8.4 Illustrating the Relevance of This Instrument

The SOHI was initially conceived in the context of a survey conducted in Belgium with teenagers aged 11–18. Although we have subsequently refined some of our indicators, this survey allows us to test the usefulness of our proposed instrument. In this section we briefly contextualize divorce and joint custody in Belgium, then present the LAdS survey itself. We then propose a series of illustrative analysis to underline the relevance of our instrument.

8.4.1 *The Context: Divorce and Joint Custody in Belgium*

Belgium is an interesting case to study in relation with divorce and joint custody. First, Belgium has historically had a high crude divorce rate, above the EU average. The highest rate was reached in 2010 with a divorce rate of 2.7 (compared with the EU average of 2.0). It has however been slowly decreasing since then (with a rate of 2.2 in 2015) (Eurostat¹⁰).

Second, Belgium is one of the few EU countries that adopted joint physical custody as a preferential model in case of divorce or separation, as early as 2006. A reform that significantly impacted child custody arrangements. Following the 2006 law, this choice of custody is thus set as the referential type of custody which is examined in priority by the Court in case of parental separation and after the demand of at least one of the parents. In other words, this entails that the parent demanding an

¹⁰https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Marriage_and_divorce_statistics

egalitarian joint custody arrangement no longer has to demonstrate the pertinence of this choice. On the other side, if one of the parents opposes this choice of custody, it becomes his/her duty to present a convincing argument supporting a different custodial arrangement (Côté and Gaborean 2015). The adoption of this law comes after the recognition of the legal principal of “conjunct exercise of parental authority” (law of 1995) which is no longer solely held by the parent with whom the child resided, but also follows a societal debate which confronted arguments around parental equality, feasibilities of such custodial arrangements (Marquet 2008), and the best interest of the child (Casman et al. 2010). In parallel, it is also of interest to mention that it seems the 2006 law came as a legal concretization of an adopted social phenomenon, as an increase of the practice of egalitarian joint custody had been observed (without legal support) prior to the adoption of the law (Côté and Gaborean 2015; Van Houcke 2017).

Repercussions of this legal context are a continued increase of the practice of equally sharing custody of children (Van Houcke 2017). More specifically, according to the 2017 Family Barometer of the Belgian Family League (Hosdey-Radoux et al. 2017), as of today, more than four out of ten parents in Brussels and Wallonia experience a divorce or separation, and one out of three separated couples equally share custody of their children. This entails that, in a context where the “classical” nuclear family configuration is still dominating (57% of family configurations), in case of separation, there are roughly as many parents practicing sole custody of their children as there are parents practicing equal joint custody. As sole custody used to be the default mode, this highlights the societal shift towards a preference for egalitarian joint custody.

8.4.2 *The Survey*

The Leuven/Louvain Adolescents Survey (LAdS) was collaboratively designed in 2017 by researchers from the University of Louvain (UCLouvain)¹¹ and the University of Leuven (KULeuven), under the supervision of Leen D’Haenens, Koenraad Matthijs and Laura Merla. The survey builds on the KULeuven Adolescents and Families Survey (also known as LAGO) that was created in 2008 and gathered data on the family lives and behaviors of Flemish teenagers aged 12–18.¹² The last, sixth, wave dates from 2014. LAdS was born from a desire to expand the collection of data to the whole country, and enrich the survey with new themes designed collaboratively by the two research teams.¹³ Questions in the survey directly related to this

¹¹<https://uclouvain.be/fr/chercher/cirfase/leuven-louvain-adolescents-survey.html>

¹²<https://soc.kuleuven.be/ceso/fapos/ongoingprojects/lago>

¹³The BWF survey was indeed also designed to provide quantitative data to the ERC Starting Grant project “MobileKids: children in multi-local, post-separation families”. This research conducted at the UCLouvain under the supervision of Prof. Laura Merla seeks to understand how children living

chapter concern: (a) adolescents' socio-demographic characteristics; (b) overall quality of their relationships with their parents; (c) family arrangements and relations of adolescents, depending on whether their parents are living together, not living together, or if they only have one parent alive; and (d) adolescents' uses of digital technologies to communicate with their relatives.

In this chapter we build on data collected with French-speaking adolescents in Brussels and Wallonia from November 2017 to March 2018, as data from the Flemish side are not available yet. To ensure a good representativeness, this sample was collected across six provinces (Hainaut, Namur, Luxembourg, Liège, Brabant-Wallon and Région de Bruxelles-Capitale). For each province data was collected from three to five different schools among different educational tracks (general, technical, professional and artistic), with a total of 23 schools. In each school one class was selected per educational degree and type of secondary education, following the school schedule and student's availability. Participants were surveyed in their classrooms at school using a computerized questionnaire presented on a tablet using the SurveyCTO application (www.surveyccto.com), with the guidance of Masters student in Sociology from the UCLouvain.

A total of 1678 students answered the survey, but for the purpose of this chapter we focus on the 146 respondents living in joint custody arrangements and aged 11–18 who completed at least 70% of the questionnaire, answered the questions on their relationship with their parents, still had contact with both parents and answered the question on their sense of being at home at each parents'. This sample is varied in terms of gender (52.5% of girls), age (with a relatively even distribution across the age groups 11–13, 14–15 and 16–18, who each represent roughly 1/3rd of our sample),¹⁴ nationalities (94.3% of the children have the Belgian nationality, and the 5.7% remaining participants come from a variety of countries around the world), and distribution in the Belgian educational system (with 72.2% of respondents in the general education section, 19.6% in the technical section, and 8.2% in the vocational section). The majority of fathers and mothers in our sample have a higher education degree,¹⁵ while it is also important to note that nearly 20% of the children interviewed said they did not know the diploma of one of their parents.

in joint custody arrangements in Belgium, France and Italy accommodate to this situation, and places a specific emphasis on how children develop a sense of 'home' and appropriate their own mobility, as well as on their uses of ICT to maintain their family relations. See www.mobilekids.eu. This project has received funding from the *European Research Council (ERC)* under the *European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program* under grant agreement No 676868. This chapter reflects only the authors' view. The European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

¹⁴The 11–13 age groups represents 32.9% of our sample (0.6% 11 years, 7.6% 12 years, 24.7% 13 years), the 14–15 age group represents 34.8% of our sample (20.9% 14 years; 13.9% 15 years), and the 16–18 age group represents 32.3% of our sample (11.4% 16 years, 13.9% 17 years and 7.0% 18 years).

¹⁵Mother primary degree: 7.0%, Father primary degree 2.5%; Mother secondary degree 12.0%, Father secondary degree 19.0%; Mother higher education degree 54.4%, Father higher education degree 55.1%; Mother do not know or missing 30.5%, Father do not know or missing 23.4%.

With regards to the different types of post-divorce/separation familial configurations, we distinguished them using a residential calendar (Sodermans et al. 2014). Children who had previously declared that their parents were separated had to fill in a 4 weeks calendar. For each day of the week they were asked to indicate if they resided at their mother's or father's home, making a distinction between day and night. This technique allowed us to compute a percentage of time spent with each parent. This percentage of time was then used to classify children into various family configurations. "Joint Custody" refers to situations where the time of residence with each parent ranges between 30% and 50%.

8.4.3 Empirical Validation of the SOHI

First, it is important to mention that in our sample, teenagers report relatively high levels of feeling at home at their mothers' ($M: 4.50; SD: .98$), and at their fathers' ($M: 4.23; SD: 1.20$) (over 4 on a 5-levels scale). However, although the difference is small, this sense of home is significantly higher at the mother's place than the father's place ($t(145) = 2.178, p < .05$).

To illustrate the relevance of the SOHI instrument, we explored the correlations between children's sense of home, and four key indicators of our instrument, namely the level of comfort, the quality of parent-child relation, the continuity of communication with the parent, and the quality of relation with the cohabiting step-parent.¹⁶ We also include two variables, namely the age of the child, and parental repartnering (regardless of whether or not the new partner cohabits with the parent). In Table 8.1, the analysis is conducted separately for each parent.

Children's Sense of Home at the Mothers' seems positively correlated with four variables: the quality of relation with the mother, the quality of relation with the cohabiting step-parent, the level of comfort at the mothers' place, and the continuity of communication with the mother. This positive correlation is moderate in the first two cases, and weak in the next two cases. They tend to indicate that a higher sense of home is associated with a higher quality of relations with the mother, a higher quality of relation with her current cohabiting partner, and, to a lesser extent, a higher level of comfort and more continuous communication with the mother. In addition, adolescents' sense of home at the mothers' seems negatively (but weakly) correlated to the age of the children, suggesting that younger teenagers feel more at home at their mothers' than older ones.

Children's Sense of Being at Home at Their Fathers' appears to be correlated with 5 variables. The higher correlation concerns children's sense of home at the father's and the quality of relation with the father. This sense of home is also positively associated with the level of comfort at the father's place, the continuity

¹⁶A full correlation table between all those variables can be found in [Annex 2](#).

Table 8.1 Correlation between Sense of home at Mother or Father's place and the SOHI indicators

Sense of home		Comfort	Relation with the parent	Continuity of communication	Repartnering	Relation with cohabiting step-parent	Age	Level of conflict
At Mother's	<i>r</i>	.237**	.556**	.231**	.123	.479**	-.185*	-.156
	<i>N</i>	146	146	133	144	78	146	129
At Father's	<i>r</i>	.377**	.531**	.369**	.230**	.359**	-.103	-.209*
	<i>N</i>	147	147	141	145	90	147	129

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

of contact with the father, the quality of relation with the cohabiting step-parent, and fathers' repartnering.

We then explored the correlation between mothers' and fathers' variables (Table 8.2).

First, only one correlation between mothers' and fathers' variables is observed in relation with children's sense of home: the sense of home at the mother's is negatively correlated with fathers' repartnering. In other words, it is less good when the father is re-partnered. Second, the quality of relation with the mother is moderately and positively correlated with the quality of relation with the father, and moderately, but negatively, correlated with the fact that the father is re-partnered. Third, we can also observe that the level of comfort at both places is correlated: children who report a good level of comfort at one place, report a similar level of comfort at the other place. And finally, mothers' repartnering is positively associated to fathers' repartnering, reflecting the fact that parents in our survey tend to be in a similar situation.¹⁷

We then proceeded to a bi-variate analysis of each indicator by children's gender, children's age, and parental repartnering (Table 8.3).

Several effects can be highlighted here. First, children's sense of home at the father's is impacted by children's gender ($t(145) = 3.28, p < .001$) and the father's repartnering ($t(143) = -2.82, p = .05$). More precisely, girls feel more at home at the mother's ($p < .05$) than the father's, while boys report a higher sense of home at the father's place than girls, and the sense of home of both boys and girls is higher when the father is single. Second, girls have more contact with their mother than boys ($t(131) = -2.68, p < .05$), and the 14–15 years old children have more contacts with their mother when they stay at their father's place than the 16–18 years old ($F(2,130) = 2.84, p = .062$). Third, the 14–15 years old children have a better relationship with their step-father than the 16–18 years old ($F(2,75) = 3.97, p < .05$). And finally, the lowest level of parental conflict is observed when the mother is re-partnered ($t(126) = -2.89, p < .01$).

8.5 Discussion: Research Hypothesis and Directions

The illustrative, empirical validation of the SOHI is based on a small number of surveyed children, and only aimed at highlighting the potential of this instrument. However, based on this exercise, combined with our theoretical framework, we would like to suggest here some interesting hypothesis that might be tested with our instrument. These could be formulated as follows: the higher the level of comfort, the more children will feel at home at their parents'; the better the quality of relation with the parent/cohabiting step-parent, the more the teenager will feel at home at

¹⁷60.39% of the parents are in a similar situation, where 31.82% are both solo and 28.57% are both in re-partnered.

Table 8.2 Correlation between variables for the mother and the father

		Father						
Mother		Sense of home		Level of comfort		Quality of the relation		Quality of relation with cohabiting step-parent
		<i>r</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>N</i>	
	Sense of home	.038	146	.004	146	.09	146	Repartnering
	Level of comfort	.127	147	.175*	158	.056	158	Continuity of communication
	Quality of the relation	-.081	147	-.006	158	.168*	158	Quality of relation with cohabiting step-parent
	Continuity of communication	-.126	133	-.07	133	.087	133	
	Repartnering	.012	145	-.088	154	-.074	154	
	Quality of relation with cohabiting step-parent	.116	78	.131	78	.15	78	

p* < .05; *p* < .01

Table 8.3 Mean score and Standard deviation (in brackets) for each indicator by gender of the children, their age and parental repartnering

	Sense of home		Continuity of communication		Quality of relation with the cohabitating step-parent		Conflict score
	Mother	Father	Mother	Father	Mother	Father	
Gender							
Girls	4.46 (.93)	3.92 (1.31)	3.38 (1.08)	2.9 (.95)	3.81 (1.17)	3.63 (1.28)	2.24 (.93)
Boys	4.54 (1.03)	4.55 (.97)	2.85 (1.22)	3.16 (1.29)	3.74 (1.24)	3.67 (1.34)	2.18 (.91)
Age							
11–13	4.71 (.74)	4.47 (.92)	3.09 (1.29)	3.02 (1.34)	3.83 (1.38)	3.91 (1.31)	2.23 (.90)
14–15	4.52 (.98)	4.08 (1.34)	3.43 (1.04)	3.20 (1.00)	4.16 (.88)	3.56 (1.31)	2.14 (.96)
16–18	4.26 (1.14)	4.13 (1.28)	2.85 (1.13)	2.84 (1.01)	3.32 (1.19)	3.55 (1.28)	2.27 (.90)
Repartnering							
Solo	4.61 (.82)	4.52 (1.28)	3.15 (1.21)	2.98 (1.09)			2.41 (.97)
In couple	4.38 (1.11)	3.96 (1.03)	3.16 (1.10)	3.12 (1.16)			1.94 (.78)

his/her place; the higher the current level of conflict between parents, the less likely the teenager will feel at home; the more a teenager maintains continuous online communication with his or her parent, the more that teenager will feel at home at that parent's house. Measuring the relative weight of the material and the relational in shaping children's sense of home might also be done, for instance, through the hypothesis that a better quality of relationship with a parent reduces the negative effect of a low level of perceived comfort on teenager's sense of home at that parent's. As suggested in our tests, children's gender, their age, and parental repartnering might constitute interesting control variables, together with, for instance, the number of years after the divorce, and the age of the child at the time of this divorce. Exploring differences between determinants of children's sense of home at the mother's and the fathers, would be also seem particularly relevant – including in light of each parents' socio-economic situation.

In this paper we decided to propose an instrument with a limited number of indicators, but of course other relevant indicators might be added. Amongst these, we would like to stress the relevance of enriching the behavioral-relational dimension with indicators on children's relationships with their siblings, including half and quasi-siblings. At this stage we did not include this aspect in our instrument, because the complexity of siblings constellations and configurations in post-divorce, recomposed families poses important challenges in terms of survey design, especially in the case of self-administered questionnaires with children from varied ages and levels of cognitive development. However, sibling relationships play a key role in children's lives and there is a crucial need to develop knowledge on this under-researched aspect (Noller 2005; Wentzel Winther et al. 2005).

Finally, we believe it might be worth considering to use/adapt the SOHI instrument, which we have designed for shared custody arrangements, to explore children's sense of home in other post-divorce family configurations.

8.6 Conclusion

In a context of increased mobility, the concept of a single residential dwelling has been increasingly deconstructed with regards to adults, but this is seldom the case about children who are nevertheless experimenting a similar increase in mobility – due among others to parental separation. In particular, this chapter has demonstrated the pertinence and need for increased studies on how the sense of home is constructed by children in the context of multiple-residency. Here, we tried in particular to contribute to debates about the impact of living in two dwellings on adolescents growing in joint physical custody arrangements – a topic that has to date, and to our knowledge, only been studied by scholars mobilizing qualitative methods. Based on Hashemnezhad et al. (2013)'s typology, we did this by proposing a new instrument designed to explore the material and behavioral-relational dimensions that influence children's sense of being 'at home' at each of their parents'.

One originality of the SOHI lies in the attempt to measure the impact of "classical" indicators studied in the context of joint physical custody (quality of relationship, level of conflict) on the creation (or not) of a sense of home for teenagers. But we also go further by connecting "sense of home" in joint custody arrangements with the online communication practices of teenagers, that allow them to maintain a more continuous relationship with their parents, regardless of where they are physically located.

Our research endeavour has implications for scholarship, both on sense of home and place-attachment, and on children and divorce. Indeed, this chapter helps to design research on sense of home as constructed at the intersection between, and through a combination of, material and behavioral-relational dimensions. Family relations, and the practices ensuring a continuity of these relations across space and time, indeed confer a specific meaning to the material space of the dwelling that teenagers intermittently inhabit, allowing or hindering the possibility to feel 'at home' in those places (Forsberg et al. 2016). Our model brings to the fore the importance of considering the spatiality of the family and of childhood in the study of divorced families, by conceptualising "the home (. . .) not as a bounded space but as a porous one where children's agency needs to be considered alongside that of adults" (Holloway and Valentine 2000). Living in a divorced family, including in joint custody arrangements, has become increasingly common for children in Belgium, to the point that it has lost its extra-ordinary character (Marquet and Merla 2015), and this edited book confirms this is also happening in other countries. In this context, teenagers engage in daily practices, and develop certain views that give meaning to "their" family configurations. It is important to note in this context, that adolescents in joint custody arrangements who participated in the LAdS survey report relatively high levels of feeling 'at home' at both of their parents. This challenges in itself pre-conceptions about the impossibility to develop a sense of

home when one lives within, and across, two post-separation dwellings. But it also shows that, by considering each of their dwelling as their 'home', and by maintaining a rather continuous relationship with their parents beyond the walls of these homes, teenagers demonstrate plasticity and agency in how they deal with, define, and (re)appropriate post-divorce family life.

Qualitative research was, and still is necessary to capture those lived experiences of "home" and "family" in all its complexity and nuances. But our chapter also calls for the development of research drawing on quantitative methods in order to highlight wider trends in the population, and explore the interactions between specific factors, as we have done here. The new research avenues that we have drawn here will need to be further explored in the future, and we hope this chapter will inspire more work on this topic.

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Annexes

Annex 1: SOHI Module

Dimension	Indicators	Sample questions
Sense of home	Level of feeling at home at mothers'/fathers'	Do you feel at home when you are at your mothers'/fathers'? Yes, totally; yes, fairly; neither yes nor no; quite not; not at all
Material dimension	Level of comfort:	
	(a) General perception of the dwelling	Tell us if the following statements concerning your mothers'/ fathers' place are correct (by yes or no): (1) there is enough room for everyone; (2) we are feeling a bit cramped.
	(b) Bedroom	Tell us if the following statements concerning bedrooms at their mothers'/fathers' place are correct (1) I have a bedroom of my own; (2) I share a bedroom with my siblings and/or other children; (3) I share a bedroom with my parent; (4) I have no bedroom at all.
Behavioral-relational dimension	Quality of parent-child relations	How good is your relation with your [mother/father]?; does your [mother/father] admire you and respect you?; to what extend do you feel close and have fun with your [mother/father]?; do you share secrets and intimate feelings with your [mother/father]?; how much does your [mother/father] love you?; how much do you love your [mother/father]?; does your [mother/father] appreciate the things you do?; does your [mother/father] find it important to listen to you?; does your [mother/father] think you have good ideas?; does your [mother/father] consider that she can learn a lot from you?

(continued)

Dimension	Indicators	Sample questions
	Level of conflict between parents	How often do your parents argue over money?; how often do your parents argue over your education?; how often do your parents argue about the children?; how often do your parents totally disagree with each other?; do your parents sometimes have big conflicts?
	Quality of step-parent-child relations	Does your [mother/father] live with a new partner? If yes, how is your relation with your [mother/father's] partner? Very bad/bad/neither good nor bad/good/very good
	Continuity of communication with parents/step-parents	How often do you use the following items to communicate with your [mother/father]? Facebook Messenger,, WhatsApp/Imessage, Skype, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, online games, other (specify)? Never, once a week or less, 2 or 3 times a week, every day, several times a day When you stay at your mother's, how often do you have contacts with your father/father's partner? By contact, we mean seeing each other, talking to each from a distance, exchanging messages or online posts, etc. Never, once a week or less, 2 or 3 times a week, every day, several times a day If the answer is often/every day/several times a day: Think about a normal week at your mothers'. How do you usually communicate with your [father/father's partner]? You can choose several proposal: Voice calls (without video, just audio, like a phone call or WhatsApp audio call), video calls, messaging (like texting or instant messages), written posts on social networks (like Facebook walls for instance), photo or video posts on social networks (like TikTok or FB or Snapchat). When you stay at your father's, how often do you have contacts with your mother/mothers' partner? By contact, we mean seeing each other, talking to each from a distance, exchanging messages or online posts, etc. (Never, seldom (once a week or less), often (2 or 3 times a week), everyday, several times a day) If the answer is often/every day/several times a day: Think about a normal week at your fathers'. How do you usually communicate with your [mother/mother's partner]? You can choose several proposals: Voice calls (without video, just audio, like a phone call or WhatsApp audio call), video calls, messaging (like texting or instant messages), written posts on social networks (like Facebook walls for instance), photo or video posts on social networks (like TikTok or FB or Snapchat).

Annex 2: Correlation Table

		Mother						Father						Other	
		Sense of home	Comfort	Quality of relation	Communication continuity	Repartnering	Quality of relation with step-parent	Sense of home	Comfort	Quality of relation	Communication continuity	Repartnering	Quality of relation with step-parent	Age	Level of conflict
Mother	Sense of home	r	.237** (146)	.556** (146)	.123 (144)	.479** (78)	.038 (146)	.004 (146)	.09 (146)	-.166* (144)	.005 (90)	-.185* (146)	-.156 (129)		
		N													
	Comfort	r	1 (158)	.098 (158)	.092 (133)	-.065 (154)	0 (78)	.127 (147)	.175* (158)	.056 (158)	-.079 (141)	-.121 (154)	.093 (90)	-.035 (158)	-.037 (129)
	Quality of relation	r		1 (158)	.357** (133)	-.026 (154)	.334** (78)	-.081 (147)	-.006 (158)	.168* (158)	.035 (141)	-.207** (154)	.112 (90)	-.13 (158)	-.187* (129)
	Communication continuity	r			1 (133)	-.002 (131)	.206 (76)	-.126 (133)	-.07 (133)	.087 (133)	.373** (130)	-.091 (131)	.031 (87)	-.041 (133)	-.138 (125)
Father	Repartnering	r				1 (154)	-.077 (78)	.012 (145)	-.088 (154)	-.074 (154)	-.064 (139)	.222** (254)	-.067 (90)	.005 (154)	.249** (128)
	Quality of relation with step-parent	r				1 (78)	.116 (78)	.131 (78)	.15 (78)	.164 (76)	-.203 (78)	-.102 (60)	-.192 (78)	-.236* (75)	
	Sense of home	r					1 (147)	.377** (147)	.531** (147)	.369** (141)	.230** (145)	.359** (90)	-.103 (147)	-.209* (129)	
	Comfort	r						1 (158)	.210** (158)	.151 (141)	.032 (154)	.09 (90)	-.035 (158)	-.153 (129)	

(continued)

			Mother						Father				Other		
			Sense of home	Comfort	Quality of relation	Communication continuity	Repartnering	Quality of relation with step-parent	Sense of home	Comfort	Quality of relation	Communication continuity	Repartnering	Quality of relation with step-parent	Age
	Quality of relation	r								1	.330** (141)	-.033 (154)	.341** (90)	-.019 (158)	-.310** (129)
	Communication continuity	r									1	.14 (139)	.284** (87)	-.126 (141)	-.049 (125)
	Repartnering	r										1 (154)	0.1 (90)	.007 (154)	-.061 (128)
	Quality of relation with step-parent	r											1 (90)	-.105 (90)	-.082 (87)
	Age	r												1 (158)	-.028 (129)
Other	Level of conflict	r													1 (129)

p < .05, ** *p* < .01

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

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