ABSTRACT

DOING GENDER, AGE AND KINSHIP – SIMULTANEOUSLY

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Drawing upon a thesis on family law and the handling of violence from fathers (due to finish in 2003) the paper discusses how a group of Swedish Family Law Secretaries (word for word translation) ‘do’ gender, age and kinship when talking about children, parenthood, parenting and fathers who are violent to mothers. The practices of this specific group of professionals are crucial for the post-separation safety and well-being of both children and mothers. In legal cases concerning child custody, contact or residence Family Law Secretaries conduct the investigations which form a part of the basis for the court decision. Furthermore, they also lead so-called co-operation talks for separated parents who want to settle conflicts regarding children.

The point of departure is that gender, age and kinship are constituted in relation to each other and through the professionals’ social practices. Here, the social practices in question are talk about the professional everyday life, and the presentation of (a professional) self in an interview setting. The construction of children as ‘developing’ and ‘dependant’ dominates the interview accounts and ‘adult-ness’ is closely associated with a responsibility for children’s needs. This has gendered and gendering implications. Since mothers are constructed as (ultimately) responsible for children’s needs and well-being, while fathers tend to be constructed as less responsible, mothers stand out as more ‘adult’ than fathers. Furthermore, parenting by fathers is constructed as dependant upon mothers. This gendering and ageing of the kinship-position ‘parent’ constructs family relations, including the place of children, in a specific way. The paper concludes with a discussion of what the ‘doing’ of gendered, aged
kinship might mean for children with violent fathers, as well as for gendered, aged, generational kinship-relations more broadly.