Title	How do children and young people in Ireland experience the process of their parents' separation and divorce and subsequent changed family life? Giving recognition to children's experiences.
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Publication Date	2017-05
Item record	http://hdl.handle.net/10379/6498

How do children and young people in Ireland experience the process of their

parents' separation and divorce

and subsequent changed family life?

Giving recognition to children's experiences.

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

In

Political Science and Sociology,

National University of Ireland, Galway.

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Abstract

Traditionally, children and young people in Ireland have not been given the opportunity to have their views heard on matters that affect their lives. The conceptualisation of children and childhood has, however, changed in the last number of years, culminating in the constitutional change brought about as a result of the 2012 referendum on children's rights. The many changes in policy and practice relating to children's and young peoples lives have called for an increase in their participation about matters of concern to them. Changes in family life, particularly when parental separation has occurred, however, is one area in children's and young people's lives where involvement in decisions concerning them remains low. This study sought the views of fourteen children and young people of their lived experiences of parental separation, divorce and subsequent family change.

Underpinned by the new sociology of childhood, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and participatory methodology a qualitative, narrative enquiry into the subject was carried out. Following a narrative analysis of the data, the experiences were further analysed through the lens of Honneth's (1995) Theory of Recognition. The results showed that there is an minimisation and misrecognition of children's and young people's experiences at a number of levels across Irish society – within families, in schools, within the family justice system an in broader society.

The research concluded that the theory of recognition can provide a useful framework for children's and young people's participation in personal and family matters when combined with the principles of participation enshrined in the UNCRC.

Key words: *separation, divorce, family life, children, young people, participation, recognition theory.*

Acknowledgements

Very many people assisted me with this thesis, I am very happy to thank you all.

I begin by thanking Dr Jennifer McIntosh, who in 2011 gave me the privilege of working with her at Family Transitions, Melbourne, Australia. It was there that I first considered undertaking doctoral studies with her encouragement.

Professor Pat Dolan and Dr John Canavan of the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre at NUI Galway provided encouragement and support as well as financial assistance to me and to the entire research process for which I am extremely grateful. The research could not have been undertaken as it was without that assistance. Participating in the taught modules of Structured PhD in Child and Youth Research opened my eyes and mind to the importance of recognising the valuable role children and young people play in society.

I thank Professor Chris Curtin of the Department of Sociology and Politics for his comments and assistance during the early days of the research and Professor Caroline McGregor and Dr Jennifer Infanti as members of my Graduate Research Committee for their encouragement.

The administrative staff at the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre were always helpful, no matter what question was asked. Thank you, Gillian Browne, Emily O'Donnell, Iwona O'Donoghue and Eileen Flannery.

My thanks to Professor Anne Graham and Dr Robyn Fitzgerald of Southern Cross University, Lismore, New South Wales, Australia who hosted my visit there in 2013. My time there enabled me to hone my ideas and provided valuable learning about children's and young people's participation in research. Through my conversations with Robyn, I gained initial understanding of the theory of recognition. I also thank Professor Emeritus Ted Fleming of NUI, Maynooth for his reassurance that I had 'got it'!

My employer, The Legal Aid Board facilitated study leave for which I am very grateful. My colleagues at the Family Mediation Service, Galway have provided support beyond my expectations. Thank you, Colma, Martin, Noreen and Jim. To my PhD colleagues, my thanks for providing opportunities for discussion and debate and for the friendships we developed. Special

'When a seedling is transplanted from one place to another, the transplantation may be a stimulus or a shock. The careful gardener seeks to minimise shock so that the plant is re-established as easily as possible'

(Cleve, Jowett & Bate 1982, p. 195).

Statement of Originality

I, Ann O'Kelly, certify that all of the work described within this thesis is the original work of the author. Any published (or unpublished) ideas and/or techniques from the work of others are fully acknowledged in accordance with the standard referencing practices.

Signed:

Date:

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1   Background and Context

Connolly (2015) considers that there is evidence of both continuity and change in Ireland relating to the family, where '*Traditional forms of family life continue and are sustained alongside new family forms emerging in contemporary Ireland, suggesting that in reality a complex tension exists between tradition, modernity and post modernity*' (p.34). The '*complex tension*' referred to by Connolly is present in one aspect of modern family life, namely, parental separation and divorce, parental re-partnering and remarriage. The average European Union (EU) rate for divorce in 2011 is 1.8 per 1,000 of the population. The Central Statistics Office (CSO) 2011 figures for divorce in Ireland for that year gives the divorce rate at 0.8 per 1,000 giving Ireland the lowest rate of divorce within the EU. The experience of parental separation and or divorce in this country is a unique one, shaped by conservative social policies that were developed during the twentieth century and influenced of the Roman Catholic Church. The '*late arrival*' (Fahey, 2012) of Ireland to an acceptance of divorce coupled with a relatively low uptake of divorce in Ireland since its introduction in 1996 (CSO, 2011) means that marital breakdown in this country is still considered to be stigmatising. This view is borne out in Hogan et al (2002) in their study of children and young people and in Crosse's (2015) recent study of separated or divorced mothers in Ireland.

While the number of separations and divorces in Ireland remain below international trends, the separation and or divorce of his or her parents and the family re-ordering which follows is undoubtedly one of the most significant occurrences in a child's or young person's life. The conservatism of the twentieth century extended to the lives of children in Ireland and has meant that children and young people in this country have not traditionally been given

opportunities to participate in decisions relating to their lives. This situation is particularly notable in relation to children and young people having their views heard within the family and in relation to parental separation and divorce (Hayes, 2002).

My motivation for undertaking this research also stems from my extensive experience as a family mediator with the Family Mediation Service since 1999 which has indicated to me that parents struggle to communicate openly with their children during separation and divorce and, by and large, they find it difficult to discuss issues relating to their separation with their children. Through my work, which includes direct work with children and young people, I have formed the view that children and young people have a strong desire to be informed about what is happening in their families. It is this mismatch of views and perceptions between parents and their children that has led me to undertaking this research as children and young people can experience 'misrecognition' by not having a say in decisions concerning, for example, their living arrangements and by not having their concerns addressed when they do raise them. In my opinion, the reluctance of structural agencies who deal with parental separation and divorce (mediation services; family law practitioners; and the family law courts) to engage meaningfully with children and young people at this time is also an area of concern which has, in Ireland, led to a side-lining of children's and young people's needs when their parents separate. The impetus for this research, therefore, is driven by the many changes that have occurred in Ireland in relation to the lives of children, not least of which is the momentous insertion of Article 42.A.1 into the Constitution of Ireland.

The research was conducted between the passing of 'The Children's Rights' referendum in November 2012 (the result of which was challenged to the Supreme Court of Ireland) and the Court's decision to uphold the referendum result. Article 42A.1 is now inserted into the Irish Constitution. The main thrust of this article is that the standard of protection of all children will be improved under law. *The Child and Family Relationships Act 2015* has given effect to the Constitutional change, this law will ensure that the views of children capable of forming their own view will be heard in proceedings concerning them, including in relation custody and

access following parental separation. The changes in legislation and in policy that have occurred as a result of the constitutional and legislative changes have the potential to provide for greater inclusion of the voices of children and young people in this area of their lives.

1.2   Aims, Objectives and Rationale

The overall aim of this research is *to address the lived experiences of children and young people in Ireland in relation to parental separation and divorce and to identify situations where these experiences were given recognition or were misrecognised*.

The objectives of the research are to explore:

- How children and young people have experienced the process of parental separation and divorce and subsequent family re-ordering.
- Whether these experiences have been given recognition within their families and within the broader societal structures, including schools, support services and the family justice systems.
- The implications of the research for policy and practice in light of the legislative changes that have occurred in Ireland in relation to children's and young people's lives.

The research, therefore, is concerned with obtaining a detailed account of the lived experiences of children and young people of parental separation and divorce and the family re-ordering that followed. I will examine these experiences from the perspective of Honneth's (1995) Theory of Recognition in order to identify situations where participants' experiences received due recognition or were misrecognised according to Honneth's three structures of recognition: love, rights and solidarity. This theoretical perspective was chosen as it offered the framework from which to explore the insights I have gained through my mediation practice regarding children's and young people's views of their parents' separation and divorce and subsequent family re-ordering and to examine how structural support services respond to the needs of children and young people in this situation. Developments at legislative and policy level that have occurred

in Ireland over recent years provide an opportunity to explore how the research findings might feed into policy development.

In the most extensive research carried out with children in Ireland on this subject, Hogan et al (2002) noted that a number of children from their study were reluctant to discuss their family situation 'outside of the family', from which the researchers concluded that '*For these children parental separation was a private matter and this feeling may be attributable to the cultural context…'* (Hogan et al 2002). Research specifically focussing on children's and young people's experiences of this phenomenon has not been undertaken in the intervening fourteen years in Ireland. A review of international research relating to child involvement in family law matters (Department of Justice Canada, 2009) has concluded that the impetus for 'child inclusion' has arisen as a result of two coinciding developments: the recognition of children as rights-bearers following the almost universal ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) and the development, in social science, of the new sociology of childhood (James and Prout, 1998). This research will fill this obvious gap which has resulted in Ireland falling behind in relation to international research in this area and will draw upon recent theoretical developments in relation to this subject.

Published research into the effects of divorce on children has been available for almost sixty years (Nye, 1957). Early research, most of which was conducted through the lens of developmental psychology, highlighted negative outcomes for children of divorced parents, including behaviour problems, the likelihood of early school leaving, higher levels of alcohol and drug taking during adolescence poor relationships with parents, particularly the non-resident parent. Later research, particularly that undertaken since the 1990s, has taken a more nuanced view of the effects of divorce on children and suggests that children can experience this family transition *'without lasting harm'* (Smart 2003). This has resulted from the deployment of different conceptual categories; improved methods; and having the benefit of longitudinal studies. Research carried out *with* rather than *on* children has led to a greater understanding of children's perspectives on this subject. This more recent research indicates that '*it may not be*

the divorce per se that is problematic but the way in which it is handled by adults in their interactions with their children' (Smart, 2003, p. 125).

In light of the current rapid changes with regard to children's rights under the law, it is timely to conduct research to ascertain children's views of their lived experiences of parental separation and divorce and subsequent changed family life. The focus of this study is to explore these lived experiences with fourteen children and young people of differing ages who come from different parts of Ireland.

1.3   Theoretical Approaches

Research on the subject of children, separation and divorce has traditionally, and until relatively recently, been conducted from a developmental psychological viewpoint. It was not until the late 1880s and into the 1990s that sociologists changed their approach to childhood and recognised it as an area of study in its' own right, separate from the family (Morrow, 2011). A sociological approach was taken to this research as the discipline of sociology can contribute to '... *a clearer or more adequate understanding of a social situation than existed before'* (Giddens, 1990). Sociology also allows for '*consideration of things that are not immediately visible in our ordinary lives, and are often not neatly understandable'* (Bradley, 2013).

1.3.1   *The Sociological Approach to Research with Children and Young People*

Macionis & Plummer (2012) outline the benefits of taking a sociological perspective on everyday life, on social change and in research. A sociological perspective helps in challenging familiar understanding; assists in raising awareness of how society operates and allows for critical thinking about its' operation. This is particularly true in relation to class, gender, age, disability, sexuality and other variables present in society. C. Wright Mills (1959/2000) proposed the development of *The Sociological Imagination* as a way of distinguishing between '*the personal troubles of the milieu'* and *'the public issues of social structure'* (p.8). He uses an increase in divorce rates as an example of where the 'personal troubles' of an individual couple

become 'a structural issue' which society needs to be concerned about. Taking a sociological approach to the study of children's and young peoples' experiences of their parents' separation and divorce in Ireland allows for an exploration of not just the personal experience, but also for an examination of the structural forces that influence that experience, particularly given the historical and cultural context of this phenomenon in Ireland, where social change in this area lagged behind most western countries.

Wyness (2012) argues that ... '*the categorical status of "child" is relatively new and reflects the burgeoning field of childhood studies within sociology*' (p. 52). During the past thirty years a large number of sociologists have engaged with what is now recognised as the 'Sociology of Childhood' (James & Prout, 1990, 1997; Mayall, 1994; Thorne, 1990). The work of James et al. (1998) provides the following four perspectives for the study of the 'sociological child':

(i)   the socially constructed child is historically and structurally situated;

(ii)   the tribal child is different from adults and children are taken seriously in this context;

(iii)   the minority group child is in a marginalised position, similar to other excluded groups in society;

(iv)   and the social structural child is constant feature of all social worlds.

This fourfold theoretical challenge, according to Wyness (2012) '...*presupposes that childhood is a quintessentially social phenomenon, and in varying degrees are concerned to draw out the possibilities of seeing children as full and competent members of society*' (p. 53). Embracing these perspectives collectively in research allows for a nuanced approach to the examination of lived experiences.

The second aim of this research is to deploy Honneth's (1995) Theory of Recognition as a theoretical framework to examine children's and young people's experiences of parental

separation and divorce and subsequent family re-ordering. This theory, therefore, plays an important part in the theoretical under-pinning of this research and will now be introduced.

1.3.2   Axel Honneth's Theory of Recognition

'*Behind all theories and research findings are ideas and assumptions which shape them*' (Macionis & Plummer, p. 13). Philosophy provides the theoretical background to help us understand assumptions about the nature of the social world. Axel Honneth is a German philosopher of the Frankfort School who has drawn from the works of Hegel and Mead (1863-1931) the idea that full human flourishing is dependent upon the existence of well established 'ethical relations – in particular, relations of love, law and 'ethical' life' which can only be established through a conflict ridden developmental process, specifically through a struggle for recognition. Honneth (1995) views recognition as being linked to self-identity needing '*three inter-subjective conditions*' (Anderson, 1995): **self confidence** – capability to express one's needs and desires......with a high estimation of ability; **self-respect** – viewing oneself as entitled to the same status and treatment as every other person; and **self esteem**– what it is that makes one special, unique and particular**,** with valuable attributes which distinguishes one from others. In Honneth's view these inter-subjective conditions go beyond relationships of love and friendship to include legally institutionalised relations of universal respect for the autonomy and dignity of others. They can involve networks of solidarity and shared values within which the particular worth of individuals can be acknowledged.

Thomas (2012) has explored the challenges experienced by researchers to '*construct a more sophisticated theory of children's participation*' (p.453) and has proposed Axel Honneth's critical theory of recognition as a useful framework for children's participation in civil society including in research. I first encountered Honneth's (1995) *Theory of Recognition* through the work of Robyn Fitzgerald whose PhD Thesis also dealt with the subject of children's participation in family law matters that effect their lives (Fitzgerald, 2008). Further exploration of Honneth's

theory indicated to me that his theory has the potential to test the insights I had gained from my mediation practice that the difficulties encountered by parents in communicating changes in their families to their children amounted to misrecognition of their children's needs and rights. The situation that arises within families may be compounded by the absence of structural opportunities for children and young people to have their views heard. My view, therefore, is that an exploration of children's and young people's experiences of parental separation and divorce through the lens of Honneth's critical Theory of Recognition will provide additional insights into these experiences. The important inter-subjective relational element combined with its' focus on rights and solidarity make it a particularly useful theory to apply in this context, as parental separation impacts on all three elements of Honneth's '*structure of relations of recognition – love rights and solidarity*' (1995, p. 129). The potential for the application of this theoretical framework in a range of contexts for the improvement of children's participation, particularly in matters of a personal nature, will also be explored through this approach to the research.

Adopting this theoretical stance placed a responsibility on me to ensure the maximum possible participation in the research process for the participants, as it would not be possible either to ascertain the lived experiences or to identify situations of recognition or misrecognition without significant and engaged participation by children and young people in the entire research process. It was important to ensure that the methodological approach, research methods (specific techniques for collecting the data) and methodology (method of sampling, data collection and analysis) taken in the development of the research protocol reflected this responsibility. The research design and methods employed will now be discussed.

1.4 Research Design and Methods

1.4.1 Narrative Inquiry

Bryman (2008) remarks that qualitative research differs from quantitative research in a number of ways – the most obvious being that quantitative research is concerned with numbers while qualitative research is concerned with words. The qualitative research method used to undertake this research is **Narrative Inquiry** a method employed, according to Leiblich, et al*.* (1998) to *'learn about a social phenomenon'*(p.2). As with many methods of data gathering and data analysis used in qualitative research, narrative inquiry acknowledges that '*the data are influenced by the interaction of the interviewer and the interviewee as well as other contextual factors'* (ibid, p.9). Polkinghorne (2007) describes narrative research as '*the study of stories....stories told by people about themselves and about others as part of everyday conversations'* (p.417). Law (2006) refers to the messiness and complexity of lived experiences and challenges sociological methods *'to find ways to represent messiness without forcing a coherence and kind of logic on to lived experiences'* (cited in Smart, 2009).The stories that were told for this research were provided by a group of children and young people aged from seven to nineteen years. In order to engage these participants I needed to be cognisant of many issues. These included the possible sensitive nature of the research topic; the age and power differential between me and the young people; and I needed to be confident regarding the participants' understanding of the purpose of the research and how the research findings might be used. I considered that the use of participatory methods appropriate for research with children and young people would enable me to deal with these issues and would acknowledge the messiness that might accrue as a result.

The participatory methods employed in the conduct of the research will now be described.

1.4.2 Participatory Methods

In social science research, participatory methodologies, derived from qualitative methods, historically developed from the work of Paulo Freire in the 1970s. Feminist researchers, black researchers and those involved in the disability movement actively challenged the positivist approach which constructs the researcher as an objective observer of the social world. These approaches actively involve the research participants in the design and conduct of the research. O'Kane (2004) describes Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) as falling '*within a 'post-positivist' or 'constructivist' paradigm';* PRA is promoted for its '*qualitative exploratory power in providing depth, richness and realism of information and analysis'* (p.137). Because it does not exclude any approach to research, participatory methods of designing, gathering data, analysis, writing up and dissemination may all have the potential to create better theory. The narrative approach taken to data gathering was influenced by the work of Fraser (2004) while the narrative analysis also invoked the work of McCormack (2000a).

Being mindful of the power imbalances that inevitably exist between children and an adult researcher, I looked to the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989) for guidance to ensure that the research participants' rights would be upheld (Freeman, 2007; O'Kelly & Brady, 2014) and also explored models of good practice relating to the participation of children in research (Lansdown, 2010; Beazley et al. 2011). The participatory methods employed included the establishment of a young person consultation forum; on-going engagement, by letter and in person, with research participants throughout the lifetime of the project; two review days were held to allow participants to comment upon the research findings and to give their views on how the research findings should be disseminated. All steps in the process will be described in Chapter Four including participant recruitment; data gathering; data analysis; data review with participants; engagement with participants about dissemination; and the gathering of participants' views about their involvement in the research.

1.5   Presentation of the Thesis

The thesis is presented in the first person, for the following reasons.

'Personal storytelling is now seen as a valid means of knowledge production' (Fraser, 2004 p.180). Adopting a narrative approach to data gathering and data analysis acknowledges the social context of sociological research and provides '*a form of communication in which the individual can externalise his or her feelings and indicate which elements of these experiences are most significant...*[and]...*there has been a growing awareness of the role of the interviewer in helping construct, and not just collect biographical information...'* (Elliott, 2007, p.4) Deciding to undertake research of this nature, therefore, places a responsibility on me as the researcher to acknowledge that my role is not a neutral one and requires that I have an awareness of what Elliott (2007) describes as '*the identity, or self, or the researcher within the research process'* (p.153). This requires a reflexive approach to the conduct of the research and means '*the tendency critically to examine and critically reflect upon the nature of research and the role of the researcher in carrying out and writing up empirical work'* (ibid, p.153). According to Patton (2002) '*Writing in the first-person active voice communicates the inquirer's self-aware role in the enquiry'* (p.65).

Throughout the thesis, I use the term 'children and young people' in order to reflect the age range of the participants. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) refers to those up to eighteen years of age as 'children' and whilst the vast majority of the research participants were under age eighteen, I was conscious in my interactions that those over twelve years did not consider themselves 'children' and I want to respect their view of themselves.

1.6   Thesis Outline

Chapter One has provided an overview of the thesis, my motivation for undertaking this research; it has introduced the background and policy context; theoretical concepts; and methodological approach taken to conduct the study.

In **Chapter Two**, I set out the historical and cultural background of the research and provide the policy context within which the research is being undertaken. This includes the conceptualisation of children in Ireland during the twentieth century through the influence of the Catholic Church and the 1937 Constitution; family practices; and the educational system. The social and legislative changes that occurred in Ireland from the 1980s to the present and their impact on children's lives are explored. These changes included the introduction of divorce in Ireland in 1996, the evolution and impact of which is discussed.

Chapter Three explores, through a review of international literature, how separation and divorce impacts children's lives. Beginning with early research from the United States where research on this subject has been undertaken since the 1950s through to more recent research that has been undertaken *with* rather than *on* children, this review highlights the risk and protective factors of separation and divorce for children and young people. Research undertaken in Ireland in the past fifteen years relating to separation and divorce is also explored, with particular emphasis on research that included children's experiences.

In **Chapter Four** I focus on the theoretical concepts and methodological approaches used in the conduct of the research and also provide a detailed account of the research process. The sociological approach grounded in the New Sociology of Childhood perspective is discussed as is Honneth's (1995) Theory of Recognition, both of which provide the theoretical basis of the research. The rationale for the use of Narrative Inquiry to gather data and analyse data is provided as is the employment of participatory methods suitable for research with children and young people. This chapter concludes with a detailed description of the research process: the establishment of the research consultation group; participant recruitment; data gathering; data analysis; and the participatory process that resulted in a participant-led dissemination project.

Chapter Five introduces the fourteen research participants' in their social contexts and provides information on their interests, ages and their living arrangements following parental separation and divorce, including information provided by each of the participants' parents.

In **Chapters Six** and **Seven** the research results are presented.

Chapter Six provides a detailed analysis of the research data relating to participants' experiences and coping with parental separation or divorce and subsequent changed family life. In this chapter the themes that emerged through the narratives, are examined in relation to experience and coping. This analysis is critically discussed in relation to the international literature and the unique cultural context of separation and divorce in Ireland and comments upon whether the influences of significant social change, including the introduction of divorce almost twenty years ago, has impacted on children's and young peoples' experiences since this subject was researched during the early years of this century.

In Chapter Seven I present my further analysis of the data, including data gathered during group participation, in the context of Honneth's Theory of Recognition. Through this additional analysis I provide examples of situations experienced by the research participants where their concerns and needs were recognised, not just in their immediate family context, but also through available resources and structures in society. Examples are also provided of where needs and concerns were misrecognised. A detailed analysis of the participants' narratives indicates how such misrecognition within families, schools and within broader structures, such as the family justice system, led to feelings of isolation, confusion and depression. This chapter also provides an examination of the participatory process that led to the participants' engagement in a dissemination project for social media.

Chapter Eight, the final chapter of the thesis returns to the research objectives: (i) How children and young people have experienced and coped with the process of parental separation and divorce and subsequent changed family life and (ii) whether these experiences have been given recognition within families; and within broader social structures in order to address the overall research question '*How do children and young people in Ireland experience and cope with*

parental separation and divorce and subsequent changed family life? Giving recognition to children's experiences.' in light of the foregoing discussions. An examination of the significance of the research findings for policy and practice addresses the third research objective. It considers the significance of this research in relation to existing research, the quality of its contribution as well as its' limitations. The implications of this research for children and young people, separating parents, service providers and policy makers are also discussed. Recommendations for children's and young people's participation in research and their possible involvement in policy and practice development relating to the provision of services are made along with recommendations for further research.

In Chapter Two, I provide an overview of the historical, context and policy background to the research.

Chapter Two

Historical Background, Context and Policy

'The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there'

The Go-Between (1953) L.P. Hartley

2.1 Introduction

In order to address the research question of how children and young people in Ireland experience their parents' separation and divorce and the family re-ordering that follows, it is necessary to acknowledge that children and young people in this situation are not, in the main, given an opportunity to express their views. This has, I consider, resulted from traditional views of childhood in Ireland that did not encourage children and young people as active participants in their own lives, but considered that parents knew best and the view was held that children should be seen and not heard. While this view of childhood has been contested in the more recent past and evidence exists to indicate that children's participation, at least collectively (The National Children's Strategy 2000; DCYA, 2015) has improved, one area of personal and civil life where their participation remains minimal is the private family justice system (Hayes, 2002; Mahon & Moore, 2011).

This chapter provides a brief overview of how childhood and children have been conceptualised in Ireland, from the foundation of the state in 1922 to the present with reference to historical, cultural and societal influences and policy and legislative changes that have occurred during this period. The chapter is broadly divided into three sections the first of which covers the early years of the state when Ireland was considered to be influenced by the Catholic Church and the 1937 Constitution, with the second section dealing with the period from the 1980s onward when rapid change occurred in many areas of Irish life. The final section of the chapter provides an overview of the emergence of divorce in Ireland and the complexities associated with this in what continues to be recognised as a largely traditional society (Connolly 2015) and relates the

research question to how these complexities potentially influence the lives of children and young people of separated and divorced families now.

Through the lens of government reports, published periodicals and articles as well as a discussion of education policy, the conceptualisation of children and childhood in twentieth century Ireland will now be explored. I begin with a discussion of family life for twentieth century children, which sometimes included situations of neglect and abuse occurring both within and outside of families.

2.2 The Conceptualisation of Childhood in Ireland in the 20th Century

No definitive history of Irish childhood exists, nor was research been conducted on the lives of children during the early decades of the State. Nevertheless, it is possible to obtain a picture of how Irish childhood was conceptualised in the last century through an analysis of various reports, government documents and, most importantly, the 1937 Constitution, which most commentators agree (Curtin & Varley, 1984; Inglis, 2011 Murch & Keenan, 2003) was influenced by the dominant position of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland since the country gained independence from Great Britain in 1922. Analysis of the factors that have influenced the conceptualisation of children in Ireland during the twentieth century has been undertaken by a number of social commentators and academics which will now be explored.

2.2.1   Children in Families

Inglis (2011) in '*The Global and the Local: Mapping Changes in Irish Childhood'* has described Irish children during the 20th century as Catholic Children. The influence of the Catholic Church was conspicuous across all areas of Irish life including women's fertility and family lives as well as in health, education and welfare policies. Inglis (2011) describes the ways in which the lives of women and children were controlled – through forced adoptions of children born outside of wedlock, the incarceration of 'deviant' women into Magdalene homes and the removal of poor children from family settings into *'orphanages, homes and schools run by priests, nuns and*

brothers' (p.66). Inglis contends, however, that life within families could also be difficult for Irish children. The 1908 and the 1957 Children's Act upheld parents' right to physically punish their children resulting in the widespread use of corporal punishment in family homes. Maguire and O'Cinneide's (2009) review of documents relating to corporal punishment within families and in schools makes for harrowing reading. They contend that *'throughout Irish society a certain level of violence against children was accepted as both normal and necessary'* (p.636). They cite examples of the courts imposing corporal punishment as sentences on children and encouraging parents to do so in order to control their errant children, a practice that continued until the Criminal Law Act of 1997 abolished such sentences.

2.2.2   The Abuse of Children: In Families; in Institutions; and by Clerics

Abuse of children in its many guises was commonplace in Ireland during the twentieth century. Recently published enquiries and reports present the stark realities of children's lives and not only of those confined to institutions. Kilkelly (2008) divides these inquiries into three categories: abuse within the family setting*;* institutional abuse; and clerical child abuse. Two major inquiries were carried out into the abuse of children in families, namely the *'Kilkenny incest investigation'* (McGuinness, 1993) and the *'Roscommon child care case, report of the inquiry team to the Health Service Executive'* (Gibbons, 2010). Child abuse in institutions run by the religious orders for the state was investigated and reported upon in the *'Commission to inquire into child abuse'* (Ryan, 2009) and three inquiries were conducted into clerical abuse resulting in the publication of the *'Ferns Report'* (Murphy et al, 2005); the *'Report into the Catholic archdiocese of Dublin'* (Commission of Investigation, 2009) and the *'Report into the Catholic archdiocese of Cloyne'* (Commission of Investigation, 2010).   In 2001 the Health Services Research Centre at the Royal College of Surgeons of Ireland conducted research on behalf of the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre. The main aim of the study was *'to estimate the prevalence of various forms of sexual violence among Irish women and men across the life span from childhood through adulthood'.* The Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland (SAVI) Report (2002) reveals that one in five women and one in six men had experienced contact sexual abuse

as a child, with the majority being abused by family members – fathers or other male relatives (McGee, et al, 2002).

Such attitudes and behaviours towards children are reinforced in the dominant narratives of the time and in written documents. Curtin & Varley (1984) concluded from their review of a number of ethnographic studies (Arensberg and Kimball 1940; Brody, 1973; Curtin, 1978; Hannan, 1970; Kane, 1970; McNabb; Russell, 1979; Scheper-Hughes, 1979; Stone, 1981) conducted in various parts of rural Ireland between the 1930s and 1970s that, with the notable exception of Arensberg and Kimball's Co Clare study in the 1930s that *'families could hardly be described as child centred. Children were not wanted as an end in themselves, but always as a means of providing generational continuity on the farm, of supplying farm labour, or of acting as a hedge against old age' (*p.42). They observed a continuity between Arensberg & Kimball's 1930s findings and those of Schefer-Hughes in the 1970s that *'...silence and passivity continue to be the most desired qualities in young farm children'* (p43).

Memoir and fiction also contribute to an understanding of attitudes towards children during the last century. Memoirs written by a range of notable authors including: *Angela's Ashes* Frank McCourt (1999)*; Are You Somebody?* Nuala O'Faolain (1996); *Memoir;* John McGahern (2005); and *The Speckled People* Hugo Hamilton (2004) describe a range of childhood experiences and demonstrate how children in Ireland during the twentieth century were often miserable, neglected and abused. I provide the following extract from Frank Delaney's 1995 novel *A Stranger in their Midst* set in 1950s Ireland to illustrate what tended to happen when the silence and passivity expected by parents was challenged. Following his description of the eldest daughter Grace's first and only challenge to her abusive father, Delaney writes: *'Thus ended the first altercation in the Kane household which challenged the autocracy of the parental knowledge. Nobody had ever before dared. Complete control over the children's opinions had held sway. Every item of information, or thought, or learning that they brought to the house has been altered parentally in some way. Mainly by their father: he put their words through his filter; he changed challenged and reordered, until all things they ever knew or*

considered had been rinsed through his mind.' (p. 214). A review of the history of Ireland in the early 20th century contributes to a better understanding of why Irish society's conceptualisation of childhood and children developed as it did. The emphasis on becoming Irish in order to throw off the yoke of 'the oppressor' – the British Empire – enabled the Catholic Church to obtain a strong foothold in every area of life including the drafting of the 1937 Constitution of Ireland.

2.3 The Catholic Church's Influence on Irish Society

The influence of the Roman Catholic Church on the drafting of the 1937 Constitution of Ireland is widely acknowledged (Murch & Keenan, 2003; Ferriter (2008). As Ireland emerged from British rule to independence there existed the 1922 Constitution which gave '*some recognition to the notion of children as citizens with clear constitutional rights' (*Murch & Keenan, 2009, p.18). It is widely considered (Kiely, 1999) that it was the election to Government of Fianna Fail under the leadership of Eamon de Valera in 1932, combined with the influence of the Catholic Church on social policy that led to a withdrawal of earlier considerably liberal policies. Table 2.1 illustrates a number of Articles of the original 1937 Constitution of note.

Table 2.1 Relevant Articles of the 1937 Constitution Relating to Children

Article 41.1	*The State recognises the Family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group in Society, and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights antecedent and superior to all positive law.*
Article 42.1	*The State acknowledges that the primary and natural educator of the child is the Family and guarantees to respect the inalienable right and moral duty of parents to provide, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children.*
Article 42.2	*Parents shall be free to provide this education in their homes or in private schools or in schools recognised or established by the State.*
Article 42.4	*The State shall provide for free primary education and shall endeavour to supplement and give reasonable aid to private and corporate educational initiative, and, when the public good requires it, provide other educational facilities or institutions with due regard, however, for the rights of parents, especially in the matter of religious and moral formation.*

According to Shine Thompson (2003) the sole acknowledgement of children in the constitution is to empower parents to exercise their rights, in the matter of education and religion. Through its emphasis on the family, as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of society, articulated in Article 41.1.1, the Constitution seems to indicate that children's rights would be protected. However, the emphasis on the family as *'founded on the institution of marriage'* excluded some family units. These provisions within the 1937 Constitution of Ireland had wide ranging influence on attitudes towards children and on their place in society. When combined with the all-embracing influence of the Catholic Church, the Constitutional provisions led to a particular view of children and childhood which was manifest within the family and also in the main, perhaps only, social outlet for children in Ireland during the 20th century – the Primary Schools. Clancy (2005) has noted that *'...the most distinctive feature of the Irish educational system is the level of church involvement and control'* (p.86).

Between 1900 and 1999 three curricula were used consecutively in Primary Schools in Ireland: pre-independence 1900-1922 **The Revised Programme**; post-independence 1922-1970 – **The National Schools Programme**; and 1971-1999 – **The New Curriculum.** Walsh (2004) used these three school curricula to analyse the conceptualization of childhood in civil society through this period. Each of these curricula illustrates the changes in thinking, at policy level, about children as citizens.

The 1900-1922 curriculum known as The Revised Programme, introduced a wide curriculum and, more importantly, a change in methodology from didactic to child centred methods of teaching. This curriculum was considered to be revolutionary for its time, for its use of the environment, the variety of subjects available and the discovery-like method of teaching – *'a different concept of the child as an individual and as a learner was conceived'* (Coolahan, 1973, cited in Walsh, 2004).

Following the advent of Irish independence in 1922 a much altered political and social context emerged in Ireland which was now determining its own affairs in a depressed economy with

high unemployment and emigration, a stagnant situation which lasted for many decades. Little emphasis was placed during this time on social provisions for children. Ireland's need to establish itself culturally and independently influenced the development of the National School Programme (1922–1970) the main thrust of which was the Irish language, history and culture with a broad range of subjects, such as drawing, physical education, cookery and elementary science omitted. The education of children was a vehicle for the revival of the Irish language and for a cultural revival in general. During this period, as in families, the use of corporal punishment by teachers was allowed in schools throughout the country: *'…the view prevailed that 'a good beating never hurt anyone' and that some corporal punishment was necessary to instil respect for authority, to maintain discipline and to rear 'good citizens'* (Maguire & O'Cinneide, 2009, p.636).

Aside from the curriculum and corporal punishment, Shine Thompson (2003) highlights other key issues of access, equality and attendance relating to education in Ireland during this time. Equality of opportunity regarding school attendance was constrained, with attendance being only in the region of 70% in some rural schools, with long journeys to and from school and poor conditions within some schools prohibiting attendance for some children. Shine-Thompson (2003) concludes: *'The message is clear: education within the Irish state that fondly imagined itself a republic was the province of the favoured and served only to increase inequality and divisions rather than egalitarianism and fraternity'* (p.106).

The New Curriculum 1971–1999, which saw a return to child-centred education, came about as the result of social change, an improved economy and what could be termed the 'internationalization' of Ireland during the 1960s which was evidenced in increasing contact being made with organisations outside of Ireland, such as the United Nations and UNESCO thus removing the '*insularity that had characterized Irish educational policy since the 1920s'* (Walsh, 2004). The evolution of the education system over the 1990s characterised a shift in attitudes and beliefs that gradually came to be reflected in government policies, legislation and strategy documents.

The latter years of the twentieth century saw the beginnings of an awareness of the necessity to address children's needs at a policy and legislative level in Ireland. The changes initiated during these decades have focussed attention on children's needs and concerns in a manner that were possibly inconceivable during the first decades of the foundation of the State.

2.4   The Context of Change

The early 1960s are recognised as the era of the beginnings of change in Irish society and have been described by Ferriter (2004) as a time when:

'… a new generation was coming to the fore – in politics, the media, health services, sport, musical, cultural and legal life, and religion – who seemed to have little patience with or tolerance of conditions their elders had endured, and they refused to indulge in the sanctification of deprivation which had persisted in some quarters of Irish nationalist thinking' (p.537).

Mr de Valera had departed as head of the government in 1959 to be replaced by Seán Lemass *'… who was not only astute but broadminded enough to introduce new and younger blood…'* (ibid, p.537). The first *Programme for Economic Expansion* (1958) was considered to be surprisingly successful when introduced by the then Secretary of the Department of Finance, Mr T.K. Whittaker, and resulted in *'…. a rise in the value of the country's exports of 35 percent from mid-1959 to mid-1960 alone, while the worries of foreign debt and inflation seemed to be a thing of the past'* (ibid, p. 642).   1961 saw Ireland's first application for entry into the then European Economic Community (EEC), now the European Union (EU). The country's first television channel Radio Telefis Eireann (RTE) was launched in 1960 and during this decade Ireland became involved in United-Nations organisations, thus opening the country up to outside influences. Free secondary education was introduced into Ireland in 1967, a move that led to access to further education for young people. Ireland eventually became a member of the EEC in 1973 and with this membership came economic and social change not previously experienced in the country. One aspect of social change which emerged from the 1970s

onwards was the increased participation of women, including married women, in the workforce and the emergence of an Irish Women's Liberation Movement that challenged many aspects of social life, including the absence of access to control of fertility. It is in the context of these changes that policy and legislative changes pertaining to children were introduced. These will now be discussed.

2.4.1   Legislative and Policy Changes

Legislation which emerged during this time included the Guardianship of Infants Act 1964, the Status of Children Act, 1989 (which removed the status of illegitimacy) and the 1991 Child Care Act which has been described as the '*most significant piece of child care legislation since the foundation of the state'* (Department of Health and Children, 2003) and as '*a watershed in childcare policy in Ireland'* (Richardson, 2005) At a policy level, many policies and strategies were also introduced, particularly from the 1990s onwards. These included The Commission on the Family Report 1998, The National Childcare Strategy, 1999 and the very significant National Children's Strategy, 2000.

Table 2.2 provides a summary of the legislative changes and policy initiatives relating to children that have occurred in Ireland since the year 2000.

Table 2.2 Summary of Legislation and Policy on Children and Young People since 2000

Legislation & Policies: Children 2000-2016.
National Children's Strategy 2000 Our Children: Their Lives – A cross government approach to children with three national goals identified: give children a voice in matters that concern them; improve understanding of their lives; and provide quality support and services.
The Ombudsman for Children Act, 2002 – Established the statutory office of the Ombudsman for Children in Ireland. To promote the rights and welfare of children and investigate complaints from children and young people.
State of the Nation's Children Reports – provides biennial reports to Government on key indicators of children's wellbeing since 2006. Reports are produced by the special rapporteur for children.
Children's Act, 2001 – provides the legislative basis for dealing with children found in breach of the law. Children should only be detained as a last resort.
Children First National Guidance, 2011 – To promote the safety and well-being of children. To assist in identifying and reporting child abuse and neglect and deal effectively with concerns.
National Strategy for Research and Data on Children's Lives 2011-2016 – To coordinate and mobilise research and data across important bodies in order to achieve better outcomes for children.
Child and Family Agency Act, 2013 – Brings together a range of existing children's services into one key agency – The Child and Family Support Agency.
Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures – The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020 – to co-ordinate policy across government departments with five National Outcomes and identify areas where improvement is needed for children and young people up to age 24 years. This document has as its main guiding principle the UNCRC (1989).
Children First Bill, 2014 – Places the Children First Guidelines on a statutory footing.
The Child and Family Relationships Act 2015 – gives effect to the Constitutional change resulting from the 2012 Children's Referendum and includes a provision for children's views to be ascertained in private family law matters.
The National Strategy on Children's and Young People's Participation in Decision making 2015-2020 – the goal is to ensure that children and young people will have a voice in their individual and collective lives across the five national outcome areas specified in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures 2014-2020.*

The National Children's Strategy *Our Children, Their Lives* (2000) was heavily influenced by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) (UNCRC) which was ratified by Ireland in 1992 and has been described by Pinkerton (2006) as a '*high mark in central government policy making ... an innovative attempt to address the global agenda of the UNCRC*' (p.121). The National Children's Strategy sets as the first of its three National Goals that '*Children will have a voice in matters which affect them and their views will be given due weight*

in accordance with their age and maturity' (National Children's Strategy, 2000, p. 30). The implementation of this strategy has led a number of policy initiatives, notably the Children First Guidelines (2000), the Youth Justice Review (2006), the establishment of the Ombudsman for Children Office (2002) and the establishment of the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in 2004 which led, in 2011, to a full Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) with its own cabinet minister.

The National Children's Strategy also led to other initiatives which have seen an increase in the participation of children in the Republic. Three public spaces where children and young people may give voice to issues that affect them are Comhairle na nÓg; Dáil na nÓg and through the Students Council Working Group. Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg *'are the two principle national participatory structures for young people aged between 12and 18 years and operate under the DCYA through 34 Local Authorities throughout the country'* (DCYA, 2015 p. 3). Following the thirty-first Amendment of the constitution in November 2012 protracted legal challenges to its outcome ensued which delayed the insertion of Article 42A which *'provides, for the first time, a specific affirmation of rights and protections to be enjoyed by children as children'* (DCYA, 2015 p. 27). The Thirty-first Amendment of the Constitution (Children) Act 2015 was signed into Irish law on April 28th 2015, thus enshrining the rights of children into the constitution. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs has recently published a number of policy documents including *Better Outcomes: Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014-2020* (2014) and the *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision Making 2015-2020* (2015a)*.* These linked policy documents commits the Irish Government to the achievement of six transformational goals in order to achieve five inter-connected national outcomes for children and young people: healthy and happy; achieving in all areas of learning and development; safe and protected from harm; economic security and opportunity and connected, respected and contributing.

The recently published *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020* (2015b) identifies *'the importance of children and young people*

having a voice in decisions that affect their lives' as being *'integral to all five outcome areas'* (DCYA, 2015 p. 2). The strategy places an emphasis on the participation of children not just collectively, but as individuals and has four objectives two of which, Objectives 3 and 4 refer to individual participation in health and social service delivery and in the Courts and legal system. The commitment in this strategy to hearing the views of individual children in legal processes is to be welcomed as this is an area where children's views are seldom heard as identified by Hayes (2002) who points out that the *'ratification of the UNCRC in 1992 marks a turning point in policy approach regarding the role of the State'* (p.47). The recently enacted *Child and Family Relationships Act 2015* commits to hearing the voice of children in private family law court proceedings relating to Custody and Access issues.

2.4.2   Research into the Lives of Children and Young People in Ireland

Whereas in the past, little research was undertaken on children's lives, the National Children's Strategy (2000) has led to an increased focus on the need to understand the lives of children and young people. The early years of this century has seen two important research studies of Irish childhoods: the *Growing Up in Ireland* study and the *Write Now* millennium project. The *Growing Up in Ireland* is a national longitudinal study of children in Ireland, launched in 2006 (Department of Children and Youth Affairs) and is arguably the most significant research on children undertaken in this country and will undoubtedly influence policy into the future. Reporting on the results from the nine year old sample, Shore et al (2012) tell us that while the majority of nine year olds have positive outcomes in terms of child development, some differences were noted in terms of social class, with such differences being associated with mothers' educational levels. The vast majority of the children in this cohort live within a *'traditional family unit...in two-parent families* [and] *54% of mothers work outside the home'* (ibid, p.190).

For the *Write Now* millennium project all children in 5th class at primary school and those in transition year at secondary school were invited to *'write a page describing themselves and the*

Ireland they inhabit so as to provide a national data base and an invaluable archive' (O'Connor, 2008, p.36). Inglis (2009) considers that the analysis of the *Write Now* texts *'showed clearly how the everyday lives of the children...revolved around the local, but that this disposition ...was permeated by identifications, pleasures and experiences that came through the global entertainment industry'* (p.5). Inglis (2009) further explored the concept of the integration of global influences into local everyday life for Irish children in 'The Ballivor Study'. For this study twenty eight children aged twelve years from the rural town of Ballivor, Co Meath were invited to write a short essay about 'My World'. Inglis' analysis of these essays highlighted that *'the lives of most of the children revolved around sport, entertainment, family and school life'* there was evidence of *'the centrality of village life and the way in which elements of global culture fused with local and national culture'* (p.74). Inglis (2009) concluded that:

'what made Irish children different in the past was the centrality of the Catholic church and Catholic culture....There was no evidence from this Ballivor study of the type of modestly, piety, and humility that was characteristic of self-presentation in previous generations' (p.79).

Economic transformation has combined with the inflow of cultural influences through media, entertainment, travel and migration, as well as the dismantling of a number of institutions through revelation of scandals, to a country in which childhoods are lived with a *'strong sense of local belonging'* (Inglis 2009, p.81) while embracing the influences of the global.

O'Connor (2008) and Share et al (2012) have discussed the implications of the *'period of rapid economic, social and cultural change'* (O'Connor, 2008 p.5) on Irish society. Traditional religious practices have also changed in Ireland in the past twenty years with a reduction in mass going among members of the Catholic Church, changes in family types, with *'Seventy-five percent of children living in families with two parents,*[married] *18 per cent living with lone parents and 6 per cent with* [unmarried] *cohabiting parents* (Shore, et al 2008, p.190). Diversity of family types now exists in Ireland. The 2011 census figures show that 18.26% of families are now one-parent families (CSO, 2011, p.44). 86.5% of these families are headed by mothers, 40% of whom have never married; 20% of whom are widowed and 30% of whom are either separated or

divorced (CSO, 2011, p.22). The number of cohabiting families has also increased with many couples opting not to marry, some of whom may have been married and are now in second relationships. A number of second marriage families now exist in Ireland also, a phenomenon that did not exist in Ireland prior to the introduction of divorce in 1996. The next section will discuss the evolution of separation and divorce in Ireland.

2.5 The Evolution of Separation and Divorce in Ireland

In western society, Ireland is unique with regard to marital breakdown, separation and divorce. Lunn et al (2009) describe Ireland's eventual lifting of the ban on divorce in 1995 as a '*late and hesitant entrant into the club of countries with liberal divorce laws'* (p.39). Prior to the change in legislation, however, the constitutional ban on divorce did not prevent couples separating. Hug (1999) describes a range of remedies available to couples '*who wanted to put a more or less formal end to their marriage'* (p. 19). The 'opening up' of Irish society already mentioned led to the introduction of legislation to deal with the consequences of marriage breakdown during the 1960s and 1970s, including the Guardianship of Infants Act 1964 and The Family Law (Maintenance of Spouses and Children) Act 1976. However, the Social Welfare Bill of 1970 that introduced the Deserted Wives Allowance was recognised as the '*first formal recognition that marriages break down in Ireland* (Nora Owen, cited in Hug, 1999). This was a very significant piece of legislation as it recognised the state's responsibility to support women whose husbands had ended their marriage through desertion of the family, which was one of the ways that marriages were ended in this country. The desertion usually took the form of a husband leaving the country.

The history in Ireland of votes and divorce through referenda punctuates the legislative framework in this area. A referendum to lift the constitutional ban on divorce was heavily defeated in 1986. Family Law legislation continued to be introduced following this, and a range of legislative measures to deal with marital breakdown was enacted culminating in the introduction of the Judicial Separation and Family Law Reform Act, 1989. This Act allowed for a

no fault regime of legal separation, echoing liberal no fault divorce laws in most European countries, but not allowing for re-marriage. Between the 1986 and 1995 referenda, eighteen pieces of family law legislation were enacted in an effort to deal with issues relating to marital breakdown (Hug, 1999). Despite the reassurances offered by these legislative changes, the second referendum in 1995, to remove the constitutional ban on divorce was passed by the narrowest of margins – the majority in favour being 50.28% a majority of just 9,114 out of 1.63 million voters.

Following the passing of the referendum, the Family Law (Divorce) Act of 1996 was introduced and became law in February 1997 allowing people whose marriages had broken down in Ireland the option to re-marry. While the no fault criteria was included in this legislation, Irish divorce law is considered to be less liberal than in most European countries as couples must be separated for a period of four years prior to obtaining a divorce – a device used to try to persuade a reluctant electorate, according to Lunn et al. (2009). These authors, based on their analysis of the family types in Ireland from 1986-2006, point out that the low rate of divorce in Ireland up to 2006 is an echo of '*the unenthusiastic manner'* in which Irish voters adopted it *'by such a narrow margin of the vote 'indicated a continuing hesitancy about divorce that may help to explain the low take up of divorce after new legislation came into effect'* (p.40). The 2011 Census figures gives a total number of divorced persons in Ireland as 87,770 an increase of 28,236 on the 2006 figures while there is a smaller increase in the number of separated persons, from 107, 263 to 116,194 an increase of 8,931. These figures indicate that couples in Ireland may be opting to divorce once the four year separation period has passed (CSO, 2012). The number of re-marriages also increased during this period, from 31,795 to 42,960.

The CSO figures do not indicate the numbers of children affected by these statistics and it is difficult to speculate. It is probably reasonable to suggest, however, that a relatively large number of children are affected by the rise in divorce and remarriage where either separation or divorce occurs. Undoubtedly, this is one of the most significant happenings in a child's or young person's life as is the family re-ordering which follows. The purpose of this research is to

obtain the views of children and young people on their experience of this family transition and to ascertain if the uniqueness of the Irish context described above influences children in Ireland in their adjustment. This seemed to be indicated in the only previous research carried out with children in Ireland on this subject (Hogan et al. 2002). It was noted that a number of children in this situation were reluctant to discuss their family situation 'outside of the family', from which the researchers concluded that '*For these children parental separation was a private matter and this feeling may be attributable to the cultural context…*' (Hogan, et al.2002). While separation and divorce have been accepted as perhaps an unwelcome, but not catastrophic, life transitions for many individuals in western society the same may not be true yet for Ireland. Fahey (2015) comments on the relatively low uptake of divorce in Ireland and sees this as a possible '*lingering Catholic heritage in Ireland… '* (p.64). He concludes that this does not provide a full answer to this question and identifies that the limited uptake of divorce among those who separate as being associated with the cost and slowness of divorce proceedings and to the lengthy four year period of separation required prior to obtaining a divorce. A Private Member's Bill has been recently introduced into the Dáil *The thirty-fifth Amendment of the Constitution (Divorce) Bill 2016* which, if enacted, will provide for a reduction of time that spouses have lived separate and apart to two years. It is in the context of these policies and legislative conundrums and social change in relation to families and family law and its' impact on the lives of children in this country that this research is being undertaken. This current research will seek to find out whether the historical and cultural influences of the twentieth century persist and whether such matters impact upon children's and young people's experiences.

2.6   Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has, through reference to historical and cultural influences, provided an overview of the conceptualisation of children in twentieth century Ireland and has charted the changes that have occurred across a range of areas of Irish life since the 1970s. The effect of the 1937 Constitution of Ireland combined with the influence of the Roman Catholic Church has been

shown to have played a significant part in a particular conceptualisation of children in this country. A review of government reports, periodicals and published articles has indicated that these influences largely had a negative impact on the lives of children for most of the twentieth century. Social change, which commenced in the 1970s, however, has impacted social policy relating to children and young people, leading to improvements in their lives through changes in policies which have resulted in important legislation relating to children and young people. Changes in Irish society associated with modernisation, including changes in family formations, have also been discussed along with their attendant impact on government policy and on civil society. The evolution of divorce in Ireland has been described and the question posed as to whether lingering twentieth century attitudes to family life, separation and divorce impact parents'; children's; and young people's ability to deal with the reality of this family transition. Chapter Three will provide a review of international and Irish literature relating to this subject.

Chapter Three

Literature Review

3.1   Introduction

This chapter will provide an introduction to the literature relating to the effects of separation, divorce and family re-ordering on children, beginning with a review of international literature. This discussion will show that early research relating to parental separation and divorce was carried out for the most part from a developmental psychological perspective and focused on the deficits, from a developmental, educational and social viewpoint, that might accrue for children as a result of divorce. Later research on the subject indicated a growing awareness of the risk factors associated with divorce and also identified protective factors that would assist children in their adjustment. Research that has been conducted directly with children and young people on this subject will then be discussed. An exploration of the Irish research conducted in the past fifteen years will also be provided. Literature relating to children's participation in research and in practice will also be explored. While this review of literature will concentrate on published work over the past 10-15 years, it is necessary to place research relating to children and divorce in context as early research provided data that gave largely negative predictions for children of divorce. This, in turn, may have influenced western society in its attitude to divorce and may, indeed, have influenced the debate in Ireland prior to the divorce referenda. The literature review concludes with a review of published literature relating to the use of Honneth's (1995) Theory of Recognition as applied to research with children and young people.

3.2   Early Research

Published research into the effects of divorce on children has been available since 1957. Nye, (1957) carried out a comparative study of children living in intact unhappy homes and those from families where divorce or the death of a parent had occurred. Both his research and that

of Burgess (1970) concluded that *'children are measurably better off living with one parent than the children of unhappy homes characterised by bitterness, fighting and physical and mental cruelty* (Burgess, 1970). In 1991, Amato and Keith carried out a meta-analysis of 92 research studies undertaken from the 1950s to the 1980s *'that compared children living in divorced single-parent families with children living in continuously intact families on measures of well-being'* (p.26). From this analysis they concluded that for children *'parental divorce (or factors associated with it) appears to lower the well-being of children'* (p.40). They point out, however, that the effect sizes are *'g*enerally weak*'* (p.40) and also showed that parental conflict in intact families can have an equally detrimental effect on children's wellbeing (Amato & Keith, 1991). These early research studies certainly highlighted negative outcomes for children of divorced parents, including behaviour problems, the likelihood of early school leaving, higher levels of alcohol and drug taking during adolescence and poor relationships with parents, particularly the non-resident parent. These effects remain in certain instances. However, Amato's (2001) update of this earlier meta-analysis – for which he analysed 67 research studies conducted during the 1990s, concluded that the *'effect sizes in the scientific literature on children and divorce may be declining'* (Amato, p.356). He attributes this change in effect size to several factors: better and more sophisticated research methodologies, the use of data from national longitudinal studies, increase in therapeutic interventions for divorcing families and a greater acceptance of divorce in society. A number of areas where there was an increase in effect size were highlighted: low discord marriages that end in divorce cause considerable distress for children and an increasing gap in the economic well-being of intact versus single-parent households (Amato, 2001).

The theme of a change relating to the acceptance of divorce is developed by Neale & Flowerdew (2007) who point out that as divorce has become more widespread in most western countries that the *'pathological models of family change ...(marriage as social good, divorce as social ill) has begun to give way to a new mode of social enquiry that acknowledges the diversity and fluidity of family patterns...'* (Neale & Flowerdew, 2007, p.25). They describe developments in divorce research which are, in part at least, informed by new understandings of children – a

way of seeing them as 'young citizens' rather than as 'welfare dependents' needing care and protection, thus leading to shift from researching children's lives from an adult perspective, via parents, teachers and other professionals to one which places children and young people at the centre of the analysis.

Kelly (2003) discusses the changing perspectives on divorce in the United States during the latter decades of the twentieth century. Early research highlighting negative outcomes of divorce for children and for teenagers in particular such as delinquent behaviours, school absences and proneness to illnesses were widely reported in the media. Studies, however, that highlighted that the possible ill effects '*of being raised in strife-ridden, unhappy married families may place adolescents at greater risk than divorce'* (Kelly, 2003, p. 238) were often ignored. Kelly contends that *'these early studies used simple measures and statistics, dichotomous father present/father absent samples and were conducted in a social and legal context in which divorce was difficult to obtain, generally stigmatized by society and presumably the result of very troubled marital circumstances and abandonment'* (ibid, 238).While the divorce rate in the United States increased by 113% between 1966 and 1976, research on its impact lagged behind this social change and when empirical data began to appear it described '*children's distress, anxiety, sadness, sense of loss, anger and behavioural problems and disturbances in parent-child relationships following separation and divorce'* (ibid, p.238). Kelly points out, however, that most of these studies during the 1970s used non-representative, small samples and lacked comparisons with children from intact families and used limited measures of adjustment. This, Kelly considers, limited the possibility of generalizing to the general population as difficulties encountered by children of divorce presumed that divorce was the cause of children's adjustment difficulties rather than problems within marriages. Reports of children's adjustment and social problems following divorce were, according to Kelly (2003) *'influential in shaping the views of mental health professionals dealing with families'* (p.238). She also highlights that the fact that the results of longitudinal studies were not available at this time meant that distinctions were not made between short and long term effects of divorce.

The focussed attention of a range of social scientists from psychology, sociology and child development on divorce and child adjustment in the 1980s, along with a body of knowledge relating to how children's adjustment is affected by marital conflict within marriages (Cummings and Davies, 1994), contributed to a more nuanced view and increased understanding of a range of possible outcomes for children. Kelly's view is that the newer data was rarely reported upon in the media leaving the public perception of the impacts of divorce on children as '*starkly negative*' (Kelly, 2003, p. 240). It wasn't until the early 1990s that a joint longitudinal study conducted in the United States and Great Britain (Cherlin, et al, 1991) reported that divorce alone was not the cause of children's poorer wellbeing and that other factors needed to be considered, such as marital dysfunction in intact families. Cherlin et al point out that the '*effects of divorce on children can be predicated by conditions that existed well before the separation occurred'*. As such they recommended that '*At least as much attention needs to be paid to the processes that occur in troubled, intact families as to the trauma that children suffer after their parents separate'* (Cherlin, *et al,* 1991, p. 1388*).* The publication of this study, which was widely reported in the media, made what Kelly (2003) describes as '*a significant contribution to altering the debate about the negative effects of divorce, and generated considerable social and scientific interest in understanding and improving families'* (p. 240). Examples of a more nuanced view being taken in research of the effects of separation and divorce on children in the short and long term are now available (Amato, et al 1996; Cherlin, et al 1998; Hanson, et al 1998 Kelly & Emery, 2003 and Strohschein, 2005). Taken as a whole, this work contributed to an acknowledgement that there is diversity relating to children's experiences; that where risk factors do exist which are associated with divorce protective factors might be introduced that could reduce these risks. These will now be briefly described.

3.3   The Risk and Protective Factors of Divorce for Children

Fitzgerald & Graham (2011) point to the fact that '*a complex array of factors interact to contribute to impact on children's wellbeing during this time of change'* (p.11*).* They consider

that the interplay of risk and protective factors may influence whether the outcome for children and young people is increased or limited in terms of negative social or psychological effects. It is widely acknowledged that evidence from various studies points to risks for children associated with divorce. Pryor and Rodgers (2001) have stated *'those children whose parents separate are at significantly greater risk than those whose parents remain together, for a wide range of adverse outcomes in social, psychological and physical development'* (p.73). The risk and protective factors for children have been identified in numerous reviews of research on this subject (Amato & Kieth, 1991; Amato, 2001; Cherlin, et al 1991; Morrison & Cherlin, 1995; Burke, et al 2009; Mooney, et al 2009). In this literature the risk factors are identified as the initial separation period; the quality of parent-child relationships post separation; parental conflict; socio-economic factors; parental mental health and multiple transitions for children. The protective factors include competent, warm, authorative parenting; parental well-being; economic security for parents; low parental conflict and co-operative parenting; the involvement of children in decision making; and the level and quality of social support available to parents and children. Each of these will now be discussed.

3.3.1 The Initial Separation Period

Apart from those who were party to their parents' highly conflictual or violent relationships, the majority of children experience sadness, anxiety, distress and disbelief on the separation of their parents (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Kelly, 2003; Pryor & Rodgers, 2001). Separation and divorce is a process rather than an event (Mooney et al, 2009) and as such, it must take account of the pre-divorce experiences; these are likely to be as influential as the actual separation or divorce with children's reactions depending upon the family conditions prior to the actual separation (Furstenburg and Kiernan, 2001). Stress and worry for children can be intensified in situations where one parent, usually their father, departs from their life, perhaps for a period of time without adequate explanation, as parents fail to explain the situation and do not discuss future arrangements with them (Kelly, 2003). When parenting arrangements are made, children must cope with transitions between homes and become accustomed to being away from each

parent for a period of time – a fact that may be particularly distressing for young children (Lamb & Kelly, 2000). It is generally considered that this initial stressful period, which has been likened to a crisis period (Kelly, 2003) diminishes over a one-two year period. However, it should be noted that a one-to-two year period is a considerably long time in the life of a six, eight or twelve year old child and might also have consequences for adolescents. During this pre-separation and early separation period the environment is essential as Highet and Jamieson (2007) found in a Scottish study of family change for children and young people who indicated that the continuity provided by having a home base was beneficial to them *'particularly when that home is the 'family home'* (it) *means that there is considerable continuity in their parenting arrangements as well as change'* (p.13).

3.3.2 The Quality of Parenting and Parent-child Relationships

Hetherington (1999) and Emery (1982) identified deterioration in parenting capacity for the first several years following separation or divorce and sometimes prior to separation. Poorer outcomes are likely for children whose parents are preoccupied with their own concerns which might include: coping emotionally with the loss of their relationship, single parenthood, concerns regarding finances, work and social needs. All of these can manifest as a lack of warmth and support, reduced involvement, inconsistency and harsh discipline (Pryor & Rodgers, 2001). Added to these concerns, separating parents may be prone to depression, addictions and psychosomatic complaints (Kelly, 2003). In these scenarios, children can become their parents' only source of emotional support. The quality of parenting post separation, combined with good parent child relationships, is crucial for children's wellbeing and has been described (Amato, 2005) as one of the best predictors of child wellbeing regardless of family structure (cited in Fitzgerald & Graham, 2011). Amato and Gilbreth (1999) provide evidence that the quality of children's relationship with their non-resident parent is also very important and is of greater significance that the actual contact itself. Children's academic performance is improved and their adjustment to the separation is made easier through the involvement and engagement with their non-resident father (Amato & Fowler, 2002). In this regard, Wade and

Smart (2002) found that once the parental relationship is relatively conflict free children express a desire to maintain a close relationship with both parents.

3.3.3 Parental Conflict

'The degree of parental conflict is a major risk factor associated with children's adjustment to divorce, and the association between intense marital conflict and children's poor adjustment has been repeatedly demonstrated' (Burke et al, 2009). The subject of conflict within marriages and post separation has been extensively researched (Grych & Fincham, 1995, Cummings & Davies, 1994, Kelly & Emery, 2003). Children who are exposed to parental conflict within marriages and post separation and divorce have been shown to have psychological difficulties including higher levels of anxiety, depression and disruptive behaviours (Grych, 1995). In many instances the research suggests that parental conflict diminishes post separation implying that it can be more problematic for children to remain in conflict ridden homes than for their parents to separate or divorce (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). However, the expectation that parental conflict will abate following separation does not always materialize.

Children whose parents divorce and who subsequently have the conflict removed from their lives have been found to benefit by demonstrating fewer behaviour problems than those who remain in intact high conflict homes (Hetherington and Stanley-Hagen, 1999). Similarly, Kitzmann and Emery (1999) have pointed out that children's adjustment improves when conflict declines following separation or divorce. While parents frequently manage to develop post-divorce cooperative parenting, that is of benefit to their children, with a reduction in conflict, a significant number of parents are unable to achieve this outcome. A number of studies (Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992; Emery 1994, Johnston, 1994, Booth & Amato, 2001; Smart & May 2004; Cashmore & Parkinson, 2011) have shown that between one quarter and one third of all divorcing couples continue to have on-going conflict for up to four years. Johnston et al. (2009) in their work concluded that up to ten per cent of children from divorced families will have their childhoods and adolescence marred by on-going unresolved parental conflict. Other

researchers (Smart & May, 2004; Cashmore & Parkinson, 2011) have also investigated why some couples' conflict continues beyond the time period considered to be 'normal'.

In circumstances where conflict does occur and continues, legislation may be helpful in terms of guiding decision making which is mindful of the needs of children. Smart and May (2004) investigated, through court records, the impact of the United Kingdom's Children Act 1989 which '*was designed with the aspiration that conflict could be diffused by establishing that a parent's legal relationship with a child could be unaffected by divorce, and by abolishing the concepts of custody and access* (p.347). The Act also legislated for shared parental responsibility and encouraged a '*sense of shared parenting among separated and divorced parents*' (ibid, p. 347). Combined with the United Kingdom 1991 Child Support Act this was seen as a way of defusing disagreements regarding parenting. Both Acts were intended to reduce issues around custody and access and to enable the formulation of child support levels. However, it is argued that these Acts focused predominately on practical issues resulting in the neglect of emotional issues such as fear, anger and jealousy associated with separation and divorce. According to Smart and May (2004) these legislative changes were made in the interests of the welfare of children, but they failed to take account of the nuances inherent in post separation or divorced relationships that keep a number of parents in on-going conflict. Smart and May identified that from cases presenting initially as '*simple*' there emerged '*a much more complex picture of animosity and anger*' (p.350). These complexities generally centred on two identifiable themes – disputes relating to finances and disputes relating to relationships. In the case of the former there were disputes related to financial settlements or child support; with regards to the latter three categories emerge namely, blame and recriminations, new relationships and normative expectations of family life.

The literature in this area has also considered the range and effectiveness of interventions which are offered to families experiencing separation and divorce. Cashmore and Parkinson (2011) have concluded that the '*traditional modes of dispute resolution, such as mediation, conciliation and negotiation between lawyers are unlikely to help high conflict families*' (p.200)

Through their research of parents who had been court ordered to attend a *Keeping Contact* programme in Sydney, Australia a number of issues were identified by the parents as the reasons for their on-going conflict relating to parenting and the other parent's contact with the children. These included concerns relating to parenting style and parental capacity, allegations of abuse and neglect, the unsettling effect on the children who did not have a relationship with the other parent and the presence of new partners. A number of parents also considered that the on-going dispute was a way for the other parent to exercise control, was related to finance and in some cases was attributed to perceived personality disorders. Parents reported that their concerns regarding their children's safety was not always taken seriously by the authorities, which kept them then in on-going dispute. A number of parents in this study indicated that their stance in the dispute was influenced by their children's wishes either for more or less contact with their other parent.

Cashmore and Parkinson (2011) recommend that different types of interventions might be beneficial for these families, including thorough investigation of allegations of neglect or abuse and early therapeutic interventions with a focus on behavioural change rather than agreement. Smart and May (2004) conclude that '*it is important for policy to grasp that divorce is a more traumatic and complex process than current practices often allow*' (p. 358). These complexities obviously have an impact on children's wellbeing as they often result in parents not being able to enter into a co-parenting arrangement following the break-up of their relationship thus compromising their own and their children's wellbeing.

In the context of parental conflict relating to separation and divorce it is necessary to draw attention to the issue of domestic violence, including the abuse of children. McIntosh (2009) has identified the types of conflict that can cause damage to children's wellbeing at a time of separation. These include significant levels of anger and distrust, covert and overt hostility, poor communication and conflict around parenting and lack of support for children's relationship with the other parent. According to McIntosh (2009), children can be affected by parental conflict in two ways – by directly witnessing it and by bearing the brunt of how conflict

impacts on their parents' emotional availability. McIntosh also points out that a single exposure to domestic violence can cause trauma of diagnostic proportions. Given how challenging domestic violence is as a subject it deserves particular attention in this review. Fotheringham (2013) point out that *'children exposed to their parents' high conflict custody and access disputes involving domestic abuse experience significant trauma including stress, depression, social isolation, academic challenges, suicidal tendencies, aggressive behaviour and self harm'* (p.311). Despite these well documented negative effects of family violence on children, Fitzgerald and Graham (2011) point out that children will routinely be required to spend time with an abusive parent following access and custody disputes.

Holt et al. (2008) have conducted a comprehensive review of the literature in relation to the impact of exposure to domestic violence on children and young people. This review has been conducted over four domains: the co-occurrence of domestic violence and child abuse; the impact of abuse on parental capacity; the impact on child development and exposure to additional adversities (Holt, et al. 2008, p.799). The review concluded that there is an unequivocal connection between men's abuse of women and child abuse across a number of studies. It showed that witnessing violence against their mother has negative effects on children and can be considered a form of emotional abuse. Of relevance to parental separation in this context is that children can bear witness to domestic violence by overhearing arguments and observing bruising or seeing broken furniture (Cunningham and Baker, 2004 cited in Holt et al 2008). The evidence from the Holt et al. (2008) review is that the quality of parenting is compromised in families where domestic violence occurs and that for mothers, on-going abuse affects their relationship with their children (McIntosh 2002, Buchbinder 2004 and Mullender et al., 2002, cited in Holt, et al., 2008). It also impacts on their parenting capacity (Stephens 1999). The parenting capacity of fathers who abuse is also highlighted in this review. Mullender et al (2002) and Hearn (1998) have shown that such fathers fail to recognise the impact of violence on their children or to see violence towards women as child abuse (cited in Holt et al, 2008).

The effects of domestic violence on child development have been well documented by many researchers (McIntosh 2002; Martin, 2002). Such effects vary according to stages of development (Cunningham and Baker, 2004). Prolonged exposure to such adversity during early development in relati, during the first three years of a child's life, has been shown to potentially create severe problems for children on to their attachment needs. Daniel, Wassell and Giilligan (2010) point out that school going children, those between the ages of five to eleven years, become aware of the effect of abuse on their mothers and may take on the role of trying to prevent the abuse in their family, while also trying to hide their secret from peers outside the home (Daniel et al, 2010). Furthermore, due to ego-centric thinking by young children of this age, they may blame themselves or their mother for their father's behaviour (Cunningham & Baker, 2004). Children in this age group may also be at increased risk of bullying (Bueur, et al 2006; Cunningham & Baker, 2004, cited in Holt, 2008) as a result of the presence of violence in their homes.

For adolescents in these circumstances there are also developmental risks associated with exposure to domestic violence. These include difficulty forming relationships and avoidant attachment style (Levendosky, *et al,* 2002) while Wekerle & Wolfe (1999, cited in Holt, et al 2008) found that exposure to violence in the home predicted adolescent male abusive behaviour and the possibility of victimisation of both males and females in future intimate relationships. The coping strategies employed by adolescents include tuning out through physically distancing themselves, experimentation with alcohol or other substances (Cunningham & Baker, 2004, Mullender et al., 2002), becoming active in trying to prevent violence and the adaptation of care-taking of their mother and siblings (Hester, et al, 2002, cited in Holt, et al, 2008).

3.3.4 Parental Mental Health and Socio-economic Factors

'Persistent and unresolved parental conflict is likely to have a negative impact on maternal mental health, often leading to depression ... financial hardship can also function as an

exacerbating factor...which independently impacts negatively on mental health' (Mooney, *et al,* 2009).

The literature points to a 'chicken and egg' situation with regard to these two factors (Rodgers & Pryor, 1998). Indeed, Coleman & Glenn (2010) point to an interrelationship between a number of factors that influence child outcomes being mediated by maternal mental health such as, parental relations, conflict, parent child relationships and financial hardship. It is also observed that *'maternal mental health is both a risk factor of divorce and a consequence of marriage breakdown'* (Mooney et al. 2009). While Lucas (2005) highlights an association between maternal mental health and relationship breakdown, there is also evidence suggesting that the mental health of the mother is *'more predictive of child outcomes than family structure'* (Smith, 2004a – cited in Mooney, 2009).   While Coleman & Glenn (2010) acknowledge the relationship between maternal mental health and relationship breakdown, citing Lucas (2005) and Gardner and Oswald (2006) they do, however, draw attention to the fact that this can act as both a cause and effect (Coleman and Glenn, 2010).

A number of studies have identified evidence showing that separation and divorce leads to a reduction in income and the probability of living in poverty, especially for women who have children (Aassve, et al, 2006, Rodgers & Pryor, 2001; Jarvis and Jenkins, 1999). Mooney, et al (2009) point out that the relationship between poverty and child outcomes is well established – children from poorer backgrounds *'generally do less well on a number of measures* (including) *health and educational attainment'.* They suggest, however, that poverty rather than family breakdown might explain the negative outcomes; they point out that when income is controlled for the negative impact of parental separation is reduced or disappears. Wilcox, et al (2005) and Bradshaw (2007) point to the need for a degree of financial support from governments to be made available as a protective factor for families and children following parental separation (cited in Coleman & Glenn, 2010).

3.3.5 Multiple Transitions for Children/Multiple Changes in Family Structure

Ferri & Smith (2003) have described stepfamilies as the fastest growing family type in the United Kingdom. Anderson et al (2013), following a review of research relating to re-partnered and re-married families, concluded that the formal re-partnering and re-marriage transitions involving cohabitation and re-marriage are not the only transitions that affect children. Children may also experience less formal transitions such as parents dating, spending the night with new partners and parents' serious relationships that do not involve marriage or cohabitation. It is widely agreed that multiple family transitions and household instability are associated with adjustment problems for children (Amato, 2010; Cavanagh & Huston, 2008; Pasley & Garneau, 2012) a process identified by Sweeney (2010) as 'cumulative family instability' (cited in Anderson et al, 2013). The reasons identified for this are many: changes in family structure involve the re-organisation of roles, routines and relationships; transitions in couple relationships are associated with declines in parenting quality – even though re-partnering is associated with improved well-being for mothers (Wang & Amato, 2000, cited in Anderson et al, 2013).Transitions in fathers' and mothers' re-partnering was associated with reduction in fathers' time spent with his children (Jube, et al. 2007, cited in Anderson, et al. 2013).

Children's relationships with step-parents have also been the subject of research. The role of stepparent is considered to be an ambiguous one, lacking clear roles and expectations (Ganong & Coleman, 2004). This situation, according to Brown & Manning (2009) is especially true of co-habiting families. Mahoney (2006) points out that step-parents legal status is also ambiguous. The majority of the research in this area has been conducted with custodial biological mother and stepfather families, with mothers serving as gatekeepers to the children's contact with their biological father – a situation that might add to the ambiguity of the step-parent role, particularly if there is conflict within families (Coleman, et al. 2001). Many children and young people must, through their childhood and adolescence, negotiate multiple households that might involve step-siblings and new half-siblings. This can lead to a number of new

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relationships and responsibilities involving parenting time, new partners and new extended families – what Pasley & Garneau (2012) has termed 'interested outsiders' in step-family life. All of these new relationships may present challenges for children and young people due to the need to continuously negotiate aspects of family life. Family relationships that span multiple households may lead to a lack of clarity about family composition (Brown & Manning, 2009). Hetherington & Kelly (2002, cited in Anderson et al, 2013) report longer periods of instability for complex step-families while Mooney (2009) points to evidence that shows that family breakdown might be transmitted inter-generationally (Mueller & Pope 1997; Teachman 2002; Amato & Keith 1991).

Ahrons (2006) presents data gathered from the longitudinal Binuclear Family Study that followed the lives of divorced families for twenty years. Her data is from interviews with 173 adults whose parents had divorced when they were children – the aim of the interviews being to *'gather information about family processes over time' 'with particular attention being paid to the time of parental divorce and if relevant, subsequent re-marriages'* (p.57). Ahrons concludes that no single factor contributed more to children's well-being than the continuing relationship between their parents – co-operative parents resulted in better relationships between children and their parents while those whose parents did not have a co-operative relationship continued to be *'plagued by loyalty conflicts'* (p.59) into their adult lives. The participants in this study also reported that the relationship between their parents influenced the on-going involvement of their fathers in their lives. In situations where mothers remained angry or were dissatisfied with child support, for example, their father's involvement diminished.

Ahrons (2006) research also reports on the impact of parental re-partnering and parental re-marriage following divorce. 95% of the participants in her study had experienced the remarriage of at least one parent. More fathers than mothers remarried within five years of the divorce. More than half the respondents identified their parents' divorce as being more traumatic than their remarriage, while one third remembered the re-marriage of one or both parents as being more distressing than the divorce. Some reported that their father's re-

marriage changed the quality of their relationship with him; for some an improvement occurred. Those who reported deterioration in their relationship with their father following his re-marriage noted that the event had occurred within one year of the parental divorce. At the time of the study, the majority of participants enjoyed good relationships with one or both step-parents with many noting that this was not always the case. Twenty years following their parents' divorce, many of the participants reported spending periods of time with step-siblings. A number of them also had half-siblings with whom they reported having closer bonds with than with step-siblings. Twenty-five percent of participants had experienced a second divorce of both their mothers and fathers who were either cohabiting or in a third marriage twenty years after their initial divorce. These second divorces represented another difficult transition for children and young people. While a small number reported being relieved to lose a step-parent, many continued their involvement, such involvement depending upon length of the second marriage and the quality of the step-parent/child relationship.

From this extensive research Ahrons (2006) concluded that '*bi-nuclear families are not tidy families; they are made up of a combination of blood and non-blood relationships that defy clear role definitions and often lack appropriate kinship terms*' (p.63). She emphasises the importance of listening to children who have experienced parental divorce and points out that:'...*children's voices become muted in our research when we use only objective measures to determine adjustment and rely solely on numbers to describe their responses. Wellbeing is a social construct and how children perceive the effects of their parents' divorce and the resulting changes in their lives is central to understanding the personal experience of divorce and its impact*' (p.64).

The past twenty years has seen an increase in research conducted with rather than on children. This aspect of research relating to parental separation and divorce will now be discussed.

3.3.6 Direct Research with Children Relating to Parental Separation

The review of the literature relating to children, young people, separation and divorce clearly shows that they are depicted as what Smart (2006) has described as '*victims of the divorce*' (p. 156). Research on this subject has traditionally been undertaken without much reference to children and young people themselves, particularly up until the mid-1990s. From then a number of factors began to influence researcher approaches to researching children's lives which resulted in a shift in emphasis from research *about* children to research *with* children. These factors have been identified as firstly, the emergence of the New Sociology of Childhood (James & Prout, 2008) recognising children as agents in their own lives who can influence outcomes for themselves and secondly, the almost universal ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) which recognises children as rights holders (Freeman, 1996; Lansdown, 2001) and places an obligation under Article 12 for decision makers to consult with children on issues affecting their lives.

While it is widely recognised that it is important to directly hear the voice of the child during parental separation and divorce (Cashmore, 2003; Emery, 2003; Cashmore & Parkinson, 2008; Graham & Fitzgerald 2010; Birnbaum, Bala & Cyr, 2011) the fact remains that children's views are either not heard at all or are filtered through social work or psychological assessments, legal representations, through their parents or via letters written by the child (Birnbaum & Saini, 2012). Birnbaum & Sanni consider that *'tensions remain with respect to allowing children to participate in separation and divorce related matters';* these tensions are *'created by attempts to balance the vulnerability of children and their need for protection ...and their rights as individuals on the other'* (p.400).

Birnbaum & Sanni, (2012) reviewed forty four qualitative studies from fourteen countries involving research with more than 1,500 children who had experienced the separation or divorce of their parents. The reviewed studies had explored a range of issues relating to children's experiences of parental separation and divorce. These included learning of the

decision to separate (Butler et al, 2002; Bagshaw, 2007; Birnbaum, et al, 2011), children's feelings about the separation (Neale, 2002; Highet & Jamieson, 2007; Campbell, 2008), children's concerns and adjustment (Sutten-Brown, 1998; Bagshaw, 2007; Campbell, 2008; Clarke, 1999; Kaltenborn, 2001); and sources of support (Fawcett, 2000; Neale & Smart, 1998; Hogan et al 2002; Highet & Jamieson, 2007). Children's experiences of parenting plans were also explored in a number of studies (Neale & Flowerdew, 2007; Parkinson, et al, 2005; Sopp, 2003) as were their views on participation in decision making (Kaltenborn, 2001; Graham, et al, 2007; Reeves, 2008; Cashmore & Parkinson, 2008, 2009; Graham & Fitzgerald, 2010a; Haugen, 2010). Their views were also sought on their experiences of having professionals help them give their views in mediation and through legal representatives (Hill, et al, 2002; Douglas, et al, 2006; Birnbaum, et al, 2011). Children were also asked what they would consider to be helpful to other children (Clarke, 1999; Parkinson, et al, 2005; Bagshaw, 2007) and to professionals (Bagshaw, 2007; Birnbaum, 2007; Highet & Jamieson, 2007; Birmbaum, et al, 2011; Cashmore, 2011).

Birnbaum & Sanni (2012) concluded following this review that regardless of where in the world the research was conducted, the vast majority of children want to be informed about the separation process and some children want more participation in decision making, with many recognising the difference between having a voice and making a choice. In reality, children's participation is dependent upon service provision within countries and whether parents and professionals allow their voices to be heard. Birnbaum & Sanni (2012) suggest that the '*symmetry of findings across the globe speaks to the need by practitioners, researchers and policy makers to reflect on this body of social science evidence to allow children time, space and voice to choose the manner of their participation rather than being the gatekeepers of their participation'* (Birnbaum & Sanni, 2012, p. 279).

Mooney's (2009) review of literature relating in general to parental separation included a review of children's perspectives and identified a number of themes. While Prichard (1998) and Dunn et al (2001) reported distress, anger and sadness, these feelings were not universal with

Smith, et al (1997) reporting from a New Zealand study that 44% of children had neutral or mildly positive reactions to parental separation. Individual difference, such as age, gender, temperament, and family issues such as the level of parental conflict all influenced children's reactions. Hogan et al, (2002) in their Irish study identified within-family differences. Significant agreement emerges from Mooney's (2009) review relating to what children find helpful through the separation process. Children want to be informed and be given an opportunity to discuss the situation with someone; they are left confused when no explanation is given (Hogan et al 2002; Hawthorn, 2003; Dunn & Deater-Deckard, 2001; Dunn, 2002). Some children reported a need to be consulted about decisions relating to their living arrangements (Hawthorne, 2003) while Butler et al. (2003) concluded that those who had been consulted were doing better following the divorce.

3.3.7 Irish Research on Separation and Divorce

It is fair to say that the subject of separation and divorce from both parents' and children's perspective is under-researched in Ireland. However, in recent years a number of researchers have undertaken work in the area of separation and divorce in Ireland and have published their results (Hogan et al, 2002; Egan 2011; Mahon & Moore 2011; Moore 2012a and 2012b Holt 2011 & 2012). These research studies fall into three categories: those undertaken with parents (Egan 2011; Moore 2012a and 2012b); those undertaken with children and young people (Hogan et al 2002; Holt 2011; Nixon 2012; Healy 2014); with mothers (Crosse 2015) and an observational study of the family law courts (Mahon & Moore 2011). Research has also been undertaken with grandparents on the subject of their adult children's separation and/or divorce (Timonen, et al 2011).

The most significant research study undertaken with children in Ireland relating to separation and divorce was conducted by Hogan, Halpenny & Greene from the Children's Research Centre at Trinity College in Dublin in 2002. This study was undertaken with the support of the then

Department of Social and Family Affairs (now the Department of Social Protection). The study had three aims:

- *To gain an understanding from children's own perspective of the impact of parental separation on their family lives, relationships and lifestyles*

- *To gain insight into children's experiences of the separation process, and those factors which contribute, positively or negatively, to children's adjustment to the process of parental separation*

- *To explore children's experiences of formal and informal support and to examine implications for child centred approach to family policy.*

<div align="right">(Hogan et al, 2002, pp 3–4).</div>

For this qualitative research sixty children, mainly from the greater Dublin area, were interviewed with the aim of gaining '*an understanding, from children's own perspective, of the impact of parental separation on their lives, and the support needs that arise from these experiences*' (p.3). Participants, aged between 8 and 17 years were recruited through service agencies, schools and through direct contact with parents. The researchers concluded that children's descriptions of how their lives had been affected by parental separation were '*sophisticated, reflecting a heightened awareness of family life...showing an ability to reflect upon and review their expectations for the future as well as their role or part they had played or potentially could play in actively affecting relationships and arrangements in the family*' (Halpenny, et al, 2008 p.19). As well as giving their views on how their parents' separation had impacted on their lives, participants in this study also outlined which sources of support which best suited their needs with many finding support from both formal and informal sources. As the research was supported by a government department a number of recommendations for future policy were made across four areas: service provision; information; research and evaluation; and overall family policy approach in respect of parental separation.

Two research studies (Holt 2011, 2013 and Nixon, et al 2011) have reported on children's relationships with their non-resident fathers following parental separation. Holt (2011, 2013) has reported on phase two of her mixed-method two-phased research undertaken with

children, mothers, fathers and legal, health and social care professionals. Phase one, the quantitative element of the research was undertaken with 219 separated mothers regarding their 449 children who were '*accessed through a national network of services providing refuge, outreach and support to women and children experiencing domestic abuse*' (Holt, 2011, p.333). Phase two involved the gathering of qualitative data from sixteen children and young people whose parents had separated because of domestic violence; nine mothers and six fathers – all separated because of domestic violence and from thirty legal, health and social care professionals. Focus groups research was the main method of choice with some individual interviews also undertaken; the interviews focussed on the children's and young people's experiences of '*contact with their fathers after their parents have separated and where there has been prior history of domestic abuse perpetrated by their father against their mother* (Holt, 2011, p.328). Children described post-separation fathering as reflecting their '*father's need for control with a marked absence of reciprocity in the parent-child relationships and an absence of nurturance*' (Holt, 2013). Holt also reports that the research:

'*…. reveals more serious concerns about the protection and welfare of both children and mothers arising from the contact experience...with children's continuing exposure to the verbal abuse and derogation of their mother, when contact was being arranged, at handover points and during contact*' (Holt, 2011, p.336).

Her verbatim accounts of the children's narrative illustrate the distress experienced by children as a result of these and other behaviours of their fathers. '*He shouts and curses and curses and calls my Mum really, really bad names....*' (Rachel, aged 11). '*We were afraid of him, so you can't talk back to him....he'd probably hit us, he's done it before*' (Eva, age 16 years – cited in Holt, 2011, p.336).

Nixon, et al, (2012) carried out research with twenty-seven children aged from 8 to 17 years whose '*fathers had been non-resident from early in the child's life and mothers had not entered into a cohabiting relationship with subsequent partners*' (p.383). Thirteen of these children had never lived with their fathers while fourteen of them had; five couples had divorced, eight had co-habited together and eleven had not co-habited together. This study used qualitative

interviews and completion of a closeness map with the aim of studying, from the perspective of children, how '*closeness in non-resident father-child relationships is characterised*' (ibid, p.382). The findings from this research show that it is fathers' connectedness and atunement to the child's everyday life coupled with good communication that influenced participants' feelings of closeness to their fathers rather than the amount of contact they had with them.

The most recent research in Ireland to be undertaken relating to children, separation and divorce is Healy's doctoral research in 2014 (unpublished) in which she explored the engagement in Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) for parental separation and divorce with legal professionals and parents. She also sought the views, through interviews with fifteen third level students aged from 19 -30 years of how their childhood experience of parental separation has impacted on their lives and whether they had been given an opportunity to participate in the decision making process. Her results show that these young people did not think that their parents appreciated the impact of their separation on them, but were not surprised that parents held a different view, it being that '*the children are fine*' (Healy, Thesis, p.328). A number of young people in this study also referred to the stigma they felt was attached to their parents' separation with some referring to being '*the only children in school whose parents were separated.....and that they were teased about this by other children*' (ibid, p. 332). The long term implications of their parents' separation and divorce were also discussed with these young people. A number of them have a continuing awareness of long term and inter-generational consequences of parental separation, particularly where acrimony existed between their parents many years later. This on-going acrimony had the potential to cause tension for the young people, particularly during family events and celebrations throughout their lives.

Egan (2011) has addressed whether fathers are discriminated against in the Family Law Courts in Ireland. Her research involved interviews with legal professionals and family mediators, attendance at court proceedings in District and Circuit Family Law Courts as well as interviews with twenty-four parents attending the court. She concluded that the primary concern of the

courts was focussed on *'the best interests of the child'* and where there were no concerns regarding child safety that *'for the most part, the courts were willing to grant guardianship, joint custody and access rights to fathers....'* (p.13). Mahon and Moore's (2011) study on behalf of the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (later to become the Department of Children and Youth Affairs) indicated that '*joint custody and access rights for fathers'* inevitably meant weekend overnights and some time mid-week with children for fathers. Mahon and Moore's (2011) court-based study was undertaken to *'investigate post-separation and divorce agreements made in the Family Law Circuit Courts of Ireland and their implications for parent-child contact and family lives'* (Report Introduction). The research was undertaken in 2007 and involved the researchers' attendance at the Family Law Circuit Court sittings in three locations in Ireland where they observed '*134 cases relating to separation, divorce, maintenance, custody and access heard in these courts* (p.36). The researchers acknowledge that '*there was a lack of children's voices in this study. Children were rarely present in court and were not asked for their responses to parental arrangements...there was also a lack of children's perspectives in a direct way since the needs of children were articulated under the aegis of the family and are discussed in relation to the roles of parents to the children after separation and divorce'* (p.39).

Moore (2012a and 2012b) has explored through qualitative research with 27 parents, 15 mothers and 12 fathers, how they have negotiated their parenting roles post separation and the links between father's payment of child support; maternal gate-keeping and the effect this might have on post-divorce parenting. Through her research Moore identified three categories of parents post separation. The first category of parent are referred to as 'egalitarians' - those parents with equal high incomes who '*organised paid child care for their children during their marriages ...and shared the primary care of their children 50/50 post separation ...decisions about the children's welfare are made jointly'* (Moore 2012a pp.409-410).These parents shared the costs associated with their children equally. The second category of parents is what Moore (2012b) describes as 'involved but strained'. In these households pre-separation, all fathers worked full time, while mothers worked part time. The third are described category described by Moore as 'aggrieved mothers and excluded fathers' are mainly single income households,

the wage earners being the fathers while mothers stayed at home to care for children. In the second and third these categories of parents *'there was evidence of paternal banking and maternal gate-closing practices'.* This resulted in difficulties around the financial support of children which, in some cases, was linked to fathers' time with their children.

More recently Crosse (2015) explored the impact of separation and divorce on low income mothers in Ireland. This study (PhD Thesis, unpublished) explored *Irish mothers' experiences of marital dissolution and considered how Irish social policy and services respond to the needs of the participants'* (p.250)*.* This research indicates that *'mothers' experiences of marital dissolution…are linked to differences and inequalities between genders….* [and are] *more pronounced for mothers who are of lower socio economic status'* (ibid, p. 227).

A further Irish study carried out by Timonen, et al, (2011) explored the relationships and levels of support offered to separated and divorced daughters and sons by their parents. This qualitative research involved interviews with thirty one grandparents and included an exploration with participants' of how *'divorce and separation affected grandparents' contact and involvement with their grandchildren...outlines the impact of parental divorce or separation on the grandchildren as seen and understood by the grandparents...and discusses the manner in which grandparents responded to their grandchildren's needs following divorce or separation'* (Timonen, et al, 2011, p. 115). This research has underscored the importance of relationships between grandchildren and their grandparents following parental separation and has highlighted the support provided by grandparents which spans the spectrum of emotional, care-giving and financial. The report of this research has also highlighted the level of commitment provided by grandparents, sometimes at great emotional and financial costs to themselves.

3.4 Chapter Conclusion and Reflections following the Review of the Literature

What is striking about the literature review is that, particularly for early research, conclusions regarding the effects of separation and divorce on children and their subsequent adjustment have mainly been obtained from adults' accounts (Amato & Keith, 2001) court reports (Mahon & Moore, 2011) or through psychological assessments (Gyrch, 2005). Direct accounts from children gleaned since the 1990s have shown that children and young people are able to articulate their feelings and needs (Cashmore & Parkinson, 2003) and indeed, use their agency (Fitzgerald & Graham, 2010) in ways that help them to cope when parental separation occurs. The overview of the context of divorce and separation in Ireland has shown that there are unique aspects to this phenomenon relating to Irish history and culture (Hogan, et al, 2002). It is also clear that this subject is under researched in Ireland, both from adults and children's viewpoint with just one study exploring parents' experiences (Moore 2011, 2012) and one study exploring children's broad experiences (Hogan, et al, 2002). Two research projects have explored specific aspects of children's experiences, namely contact with non-resident fathers who had not lived with them from early childhood (Nixon, et al, 2009) and children's experience of contact post separation with fathers who had been abusive to their mothers (Holt, 2011, 2012). These studies are significant and add to our knowledge of how children and young people in Ireland are coping and adjusting and it is certainly positive to see direct research with children and young people being undertaken (Hogan, et al, 2002; Nixon et al, 2012; Healy 2014).

The review of the literature shows that the gaps that exist in relation to children's and young people's experience of separation and divorce in Ireland, the most recent research on this subject having been undertaken in the early years of this century. Since then, the rapid economic and cultural changes in Irish society have impacted on children and their lives. Ireland is now on the cusp of changes in policy relating to family law and other influences on children's lives as the result of the outcome of the 2012 Children's Rights Referendum.

Therefore, I conclude that the earlier focus on psychological adjustments, while important, did not fully do justice to children's and young people's experiences. Equally, conclusions drawn about the experiences of parental separation and divorce from the perspective of adults about children limit the knowledge gained. The evidence provided following direct research with children and young people, while assisting in providing a more nuanced view of the experiences, has also shown that children and young people are not always given the opportunity to comment on the research findings, nor are they informed of the conclusions drawn by the researchers. My reflections following the completion of this literature review have, therefore, reinforced my view that the methodology employed for purpose of this research must take account of these deficits.

The approach must, therefore, ensure that the children and young people who participate in this research be active participants throughout the entire process. This indicates that a qualitative, narrative and participatory methodology is the most appropriate method to utilise for this research followed by analysis of the data to identify experiences and coping mechanisms. Further analysis of the data from the viewpoint of Honneth's Theory of Recognition will provide an innovative and hitherto unexplored theoretical framework from which to examine this subject. The participatory methodology will ensure the involvement of the participants in the research process from the data gathering phase through to dissemination of the research findings.

Chapter Four will fully describe the theoretical context, methodology employed and the research process.

Chapter Four

Theoretical Context, Methodology and Research Process

4.1   Introduction

Chapter Two of this thesis provided an historical and social context for this research and highlighted the rapid social change that has occurred in Ireland in the past twenty years with emphasis on the impact of change on children's and young people's lives. Chapter Three provided an overview of international and Irish research literature relating to the subject of the impact of separation, divorce and family re-ordering on children and young people. Each of these discussions pointed towards a gap in research on the subject of children's and young people's experiences of separation and divorce in Ireland thus confirming the need for this research project.

The overall aims of this research are twofold: to address the lived experiences of children and young people in relation to the separation and divorce of their parents and their experiences of subsequent changed family life; and to explore if these experiences have been given recognition as identified in Honneth's (1995) Theory of Recognition as love, rights and solidarity within families, schools, support services and the family justice system. This chapter sets out the theoretical concepts underpinning the research, the methodology employed to conduct it and describes the research process.

The chapter has four sections. The first section focuses on the theoretical perspectives underpinning the research: Honneth's Theory of Recognition within the context of the New Sociology of Childhood. Section two details the methods employed to conduct the research: Narrative Inquiry using Participatory Methods ethically guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). The importance of researcher reflexivity is discussed in section three. In section four a detailed description of the research process is

provided including participant recruitment; the data gathering processes employed; and data analysis. The participatory methods used will be described as will the consultations with participants that resulted in a participant-led dissemination project.

I begin by providing a synopsis of my personal motivation for undertaking this research which influenced my choice of methodology.

4.2.   Personal Motivation

Clandinin and Conneely (2000) informs us that '*narrative inquiry characteristically begins with the researchers' autobiographically oriented narrative associated with the <u>research puzzle</u> *(p.41, emphasis in text). So I now take the opportunity to fill in a small part of this puzzle by explaining why I, a woman, divorced with grown up and (almost) settled adult children, coming close to the end of her working life felt compelled to undertake this research. While acknowledging my personal interest in the outcomes for children and young people of separation and divorce, my main motivation at this time stems from my experience since 1999 as a family mediator with the Family Mediation Service. For almost seventeen years I have had the privilege of working with couples who are separating or divorcing, work which has allowed me to gain insights into the complexity of the process of separation for many people. It has also reinforced my view that families need a great deal of support to enable them to come through this process. My experience has shown me that parents struggle to communicate openly with their children during separation and divorce and find it difficult to discuss issues relating to their separation with their children. Parents are sometimes of the view that <u>not</u> discussing issues with their children provides protection. International research has indicated that professionals involved with families at this crucial time of family transition needed to be cognisant of children's and young peoples' needs for support (Goldson, 2006; Moloney 2006; McIntosh 2007; Kelly and Emery 2003). The early years of this century saw increased calls for child focussed or child inclusive mediation practices. This shift in thinking has arisen as a result of the recognition of children as rights bearers following the almost universal ratification of the United Nations

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Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the emergence in social sciences of the 'new sociology of childhood' (James & Prout 1998). Historically, within family mediation services, there is a culture of not engaging directly with children and young people during their parents' separation process, a fact borne out in research conducted within the Irish Family Mediation Service by Foley-Friel (2011) who found that *'there was a marked reluctance to engage with children other than in suitable circumstances'* Mediators were, however, unwilling *'to define what constituted suitable circumstances'* and Foley-Friel noted that *'The incidence of such suitable circumstances as evidenced in the findings was low'* (p.59). Mediators did identify that they did not feel sufficiently skilled to undertake this work, however. My personal lack of skill led me to obtaining specialist training from Dr Jennifer McIntosh who had developed a model of child inclusive family dispute resolution to assist parents in their conflict resolution process by targeting *'the factors that protect children's development from parental conflict and its ramifications'* (McIntosh, 2009). Having spent time with McIntosh at her clinic in Melbourne, Australia in 2011, where I had observed her work with children and their parents, I returned to Ireland much enthused about the potential for incorporating this work into the practice of the Family Mediation Service in Ireland (O'Kelly, 2011; Parkes, 2014). The Structured PhD in Child and Youth Research offered by the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre provided me with the appropriate vehicle through which I could fulfil, monitor and legitimise my work.

A second motivation evolved as a result of the direct work with children and young people I now undertake in my mediation practice. I have come to realise that children and young people have a strong desire to be informed about what is happening in their families. I am aware that children and young people can experience misrecognition by not having a say in decisions concerning, for example, their living arrangements and by not having their concerns addressed when they do raise them. Research on children's and young people's experiences of parental separation has not been undertaken in Ireland since the Hogan et al 2002 study. My research, I considered, would provide an opportunity to explore if the findings and recommendations made in 2002 had led to change for children and young people in terms of supports available; and in terms of how parental separation and divorce is viewed and experienced more than ten

years later. The children and young people who participated in the 2002 study considered parental separation '*to be a private, family matter*' with children tending to feel that their '*families were different from other families and to feel embarrassed*' (Hogan, et al 2002 p.99). It was within these parameters that I developed my research strategy: the theoretical context being Honneth's Theory of Recognition in the context of the New Sociology of Childhood. The methodology employed for data gathering and data analysis was Narrative Inquiry (Fraser, 2004) and the analysis was undertaken using Fraser's Seven-phase framework for narrative analysis. My overall framework is provided in Table 4.1.

An approach that offered a high level of engagement in the research process pointed to participatory methods of gathering data and offered the potential for participants' engagement at all stages of the research. The theoretical approaches will now be described. I begin with a discussion of the New Sociology of Childhood as this theoretical perspective underpins my approach and forms the basis for the engagement of Honneth's Theory of Recognition as the main theoretical perspective of this research in the context of children's and young people's lives.

4.3   The New Sociology of Childhood

As demonstrated in Chapter Three, research on the subject of children, separation and divorce has traditionally, and until relatively recently, been undertaken using the lens of developmental psychology. This approach, according to Morrow (2011) '*has assumed a dominant voice when claims are made* (by professionals) *about children and childhood and has heavily influenced social constructions*' (Morrow, 2011, p. 11). Morrow informs us that it was through the work of anthropologists, particularly Mead (1928); Hardman (1973); and Schildkrout (1978) that children '*as people in their own right*' were initially studied. It was not until the late 1980s and 1990s that sociologists began to change their approach to childhood from seeing it as '*a phase in the life course that simply involved socialisation; that is, the process whereby children became civilised, functioning adults*' (Morrow, 2011, p.15) to one that deserved study in its' own right.

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Morrow draws comparisons between feminists' views of male stream sociology that brought attention to the structural position of women as described by Oakley (1974) and the work of early childhood studies scholars such as Qvortrup (1987) and James and Prout (1990). Qvortrup (1985) was, according to Morrow (2011), the first sociologist to '*break from the sociology of the family*' and to begin the study of children as a separate social group, '*grounded in children's experiences of their daily lives*' (Qvortrup, 1987, cited in Morrow, 2011).

Gaining an understanding of James et al. (1998) four-fold perspective of the 'sociological child' was particularly helpful to me in the context of this research. These perspectives for the study of children and childhood are:

- The socially constructed child is historically and structurally situated with diverse constructions.
- The tribal child is different from adults and children are taken seriously in this context.
- The minority group child is in a marginalised position, similar to other excluded groups in society.
- The social structural child is a constant feature of all social worlds.

According to James and Prout (1997) these theoretical positions '*...reflect not only different models and approaches to childhood studies –some emphasising childhood as a conceptual space, while others engage with children as social actors – but they also represent differing positions with respect to the broader sociological questions of universalism/particularism and structure/agency*'. Emond (2000, unpublished thesis) argues that '*each of the approaches fails to address key elements of children's experiences as children*' Used collectively, however, Emond is of the view that '*these approaches have served to produce an ever-growing body of knowledge, which has at its centre the perspective and lived experience of those it seeks to study*' (ibid, p. 58).This is important for this research, as to approach it from just one position, for example the minority group child perspective, might negate the institutional structures that are at play in relation to the subject under research.

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Taking a children's rights-based approach in the context of the New Sociology of Childhood provided an additional area of consideration in the conduct of this research, one which ensured a thorough and fully ethically informed approach. This was done through adherence to the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989). Moloney (2008) has commented that the UNCRC '*represents an enormous shift in thinking – from the perception of a child as a sort of potential adult – as someone less than fully human and less able than an adult to lay claim to human rights – to the perception of a child as possessing the full range of human rights*' (p.47). The intersection of the New Sociology of Childhood and the UNCRC, 1989 will now be discussed.

4.3.1 The Intersection of the New Sociology of Childhood and the UNCRC

'*… the Convention on the Rights of the Child, that luminous, living document that enshrines the rights of every child, without exception, to a life of dignity and self-fulfilment*' (Mandela, 2000).

The UNCRC (1989) '*has adopted an integrated and holistic approach to the rights of children*' (Children's Rights Alliance, p.2). This has been done through the adoption by the UN General Assembly of the CRC which was ratified by 193 countries throughout the world, making it '*most universally ratified international human rights instrument*' (Doek, 2011, p.99). Ireland ratified the UNCRC in 1992. As described in the UNCRC General Comment (2009) the Convention is a unique instrument as it '*addresses the legal and social status of children, who, on the one hand lack full autonomy with adults, but, on the other are subjects of rights*'

Freeman (2007) gives three reasons why he considers that rights for children as detailed in the UNCRC are important: (i) *Rights are important because those who have them can exercise agency*'; (ii) *Rights are also an important advocacy tool, a weapon which can be employed in the battle to secure recognition*'; (iii) *Rights offer legitimacy to pressure groups, lobbies, campaigns, to both direct and indirect action, in particular to those who are disadvantaged or excluded*' (p.8). Freeman goes on to describe what each of these mean. The exercise of agency leads to

decision making, negotiating with others, shifting assumptions, participating and challenging orthodoxies. Advocacy means having access to expert representation while legitimacy, as well as opening doors and offering '*the capacity to be elements of emancipation'* (ibid p8-9) ensures that those who are excluded have legal rights and processes to fall back on. A number of childhood studies scholars (Hill, 2005; Bell, 2008; Beazley, *et al,* 2011) and Freeman's reasoning situate the UNCRC as a framework which might be employed for ethical research with children. For this work, the application of Article 12 is integral – the right of children to have their views heard and for their views to be given due weight in accordance with their age. Full adherence to Article 12 of the UNCRC, however, requires that a number of other relevant Articles, namely 3, 5, 13 and 36, are taken into account (O'Kelly & Brady, 2014; Lundy, 2007). Discussions about participatory research with children and young people inevitably include a reference to the UNCRC (1989); in particular to Article 12 of the UN Convention which provides for children to be consulted in matters that affect their lives (Hogan et al. 2002; Hill et al. 2004; Warming, 2006; Graham and Fitzgerald 2010). A number of researchers (Petrie et al., 2006; Lundy, 2007; O'Kelly & Brady, 2014) draw attention to the need for additional articles of the UNCRC to be taken into account when involving children and young people in research. Lundy (2007) has identified barriers to the implementation of Article 12 within the educational environment and considered that adult concerns fall into three categories: scepticism about children's capacity to have meaningful input into decision making; worry that giving more control to children will undermine authority, and concern that compliance will require too much effort and take time away from education itself (see Lundy, 2007, pp.929-930). Sutherland (2014) has highlighted similar concerns regarding the implementation of Article 12 in the family settings. '*It is sometimes considered that requiring parents and other caretakers to listen to the child poses a threat to parental authority and the ability of parents to discharge their crucial role in protecting children'* (p.159). Both Lundy (2007) and Sutherland (2014) draw attention to the fact that these concerns by adults do not fully take account of the full content of Article 12 or indeed of the UNCRC in its entirety.

Lundy (2007) has expressed concern that the use of abbreviations of Article 12 such as "the voice of the child"; "the right to be heard"; "the right to be consulted"; and "the right to participate" *'have the potential to diminish its* [Article 12] *potential as they convey an imperfect summary of what is required'* (p. 930). Lundy has pointed out that there is a need to give consideration to four separate factors as a means of *'communicating the legal and human rights imperative of Article 12'* (ibid, p. 932). The four separate factors are Space, Voice, Audience and Influence, each of which is related to the two strands of the UNCRC and to other relevant provisions of the convention (Figure 4.1).

- *Space:* A prerequisite for meaningful engagement of children and young people in decision making is the creation of an opportunity for involvement – a space in which children are encouraged to express their views. This space must be a safe space (Article 19). Children and young people should be given a choice regarding their participation – Article 12 is a right, not a duty.

- *Voice:* Article 12 gives children a right to express their views. This right is afforded to all people and is present in a range of human rights instruments. Within Article 12, however, it is stipulated that this right is afforded to a child who is "capable of forming his or her own views". A major difficulty with this phrase is that it has been replaced with an assumption of "capacity", leading to the misconception that the right to express a view is dependent upon "the age and maturity of the child". This phrase only applies to the second part of Article 12, the obligation to give due weight to the child's views. Children's right to express their views is not dependent on their capacity, but on their ability to form a view. Children may need assistance in order to form a view. This is where the guidance of adults as articulated in Article 5 of the convention may be useful as will the application of Article 13 which accords the right to freedom of expression in imparting information "either orally, in writing or print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice".

- *Audience:* Article 12 requires that children's views be afforded "due weight". Implicit in this provision is the fact that children have a right to have their views listened to by

those involved in the decision-making process. For this to happen it is necessary for adults to receive training in the skills of active listening. It is acknowledged that children may express their views in a variety of ways, not all of which are verbal requiring adults to show patience and creativity by adapting their expectations to children's interests, level of understanding and preferred ways of communicating, particularly for younger children up to the age of eight years.

- *Influence:* Article 12 requires that children's views are given "due weight in accordance with their age and capacity". While "listening" may be easy and unchallenging; giving due weight will require real change. The link between "due weight" and "age and maturity" makes this aspect of Article 12 complex, as adults perceptions of capacity may differ. There is a danger that adults may decide that a child does not have sufficient maturity to express a view. According to Lundy (2007) research has indicated that children are more capable than adults give them credit for and their capacity for decision making increases with being given opportunities to do so. Article 5 can provide support for children in this regard in line with their evolving capacities as can Article 3 which requires that decisions be made in children's "best interests". There exists potential for tension between the operation of Article 3 and Article 12 of the convention. While "best interests" must be a primary consideration, the right for children to have their views heard and to give these views due weight cannot be abandoned merely because adults consider that they know what is best for them. When children's and young people's views are sought and given due weight, it is then incumbent upon adults to ensure that these views are taken seriously, even when the decision may not correspond with the children's views, they must be assured that the views have been taken into account. Tokenistic participation is a breach of Article 12 and can be counter-productive, leaving children un-interested in further involvement in issues that concern them. (See Lundy, 2007, pp 933-939).
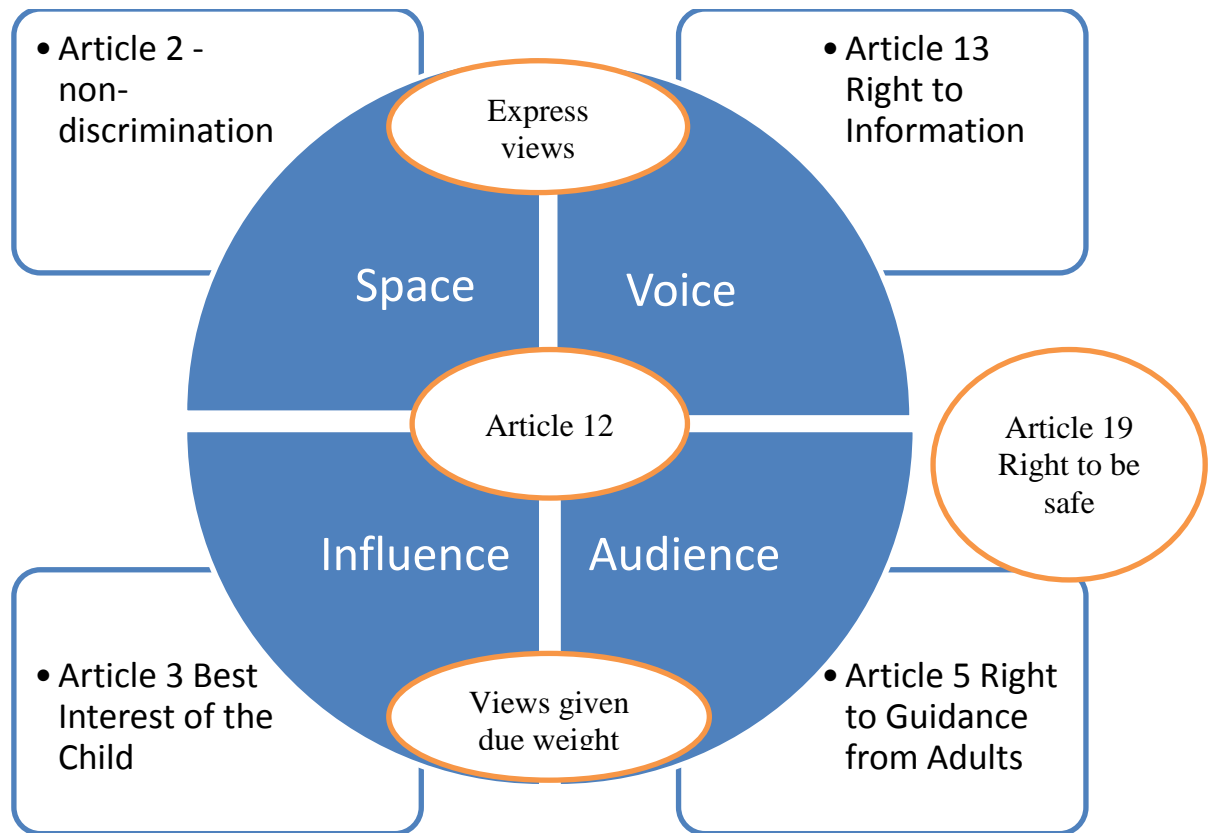
Figure 4.1 Conceptualising Article 12 for Children's Participation (Lundy, 2007)

Lundy's (2007) conceptualisation of Article 12 guided the research to ensure it was conducted in the best interest of each participant and children in general (Articles 3 & 12); was conducted to a high professional standard (Article 5); used methods that ensured that participants could express themselves freely (Article 13); and avoided exploitation of any sort (Article 36). For the purpose of exploring the subject of children's and young people's experiences of parental separation and divorce I add Article 9 – the right for children to maintain personal relations and direct contact with both parents, unless it is contrary to the child's best interests and Article 18 – both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child. While these latter Articles of the UNCRC do not directly affect the research process, they are important aspects of children's and young people's lives when parents separate or divorce and are particularly important when considering participants' experiences.

The use of the UNCRC as a research guide has the capacity to ensure an ethical approach, but also to embed research with children and young people within a framework that potentially challenges traditional and cultural views of children as passive and in need of protection. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2009) defined 'participation' in the context of the UNCRC as an '… *ongoing process, which includes information sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect, and in which children can learn how their views and those of adults are taken into account and shape the outcome of such processes'* (p.3).

It is clear from the discussion of the New Sociology of Childhood and the UNCRC that the issue of recognition of children and young people, as rights-bearers; as people who contribute to society; and as '*social actors not beings in the process of becoming'* (James & Prout 2008 ix) permeate both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the philosophical underpinnings of the sociology of childhood. The application of Honneth's critical theory of recognition to this research is therefore appropriate. This view is supported by the review of literature that has shown that children and young people struggle for recognition in this context. The next section introduces Honneth's (1995) Theory of Recognition.

4.4   Honneth's Theory of Recognition

Axel Honneth (b. 1949) is professor of philosophy at the Goethe University of Frankfurt, Germany and Columbia University, New York and is the Director of the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. His work focuses on social-political and moral philosophy, especially relations of power, recognition and respect and prioritises the inter-subjective relationships of recognition in understanding social relations and includes non- and mis-recognition as a basis of social and interpersonal conflict.

Anderson (1995) who translated Axel Honneth's seminal work *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (1995) informs us that '*It is perhaps useful for understanding*

Honneth's claim that love, respect and esteem are three types of recognition to note that, in German, to 'recognise' individuals or groups is to ascribe to them some positive status' (Translator's Note, 1995). In his introduction Anderson usefully explains Honneth's approach to the development of his theory through a further development of the work of Hegel (1770-1831) who posited the view *'that full human flourishing is dependent on the existence of well established 'ethical' relations, in particular relations of love, law and 'ethical life' which can only be established through a conflict-ridden developmental process, specifically through a struggle for recognition'* (ibid p.xi). To avoid the purely speculative, metaphysical character of Hegel, Honneth also turned to the work of George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) to incorporate psychology, sociology and history. Honneth, however, went further than this through his exploration of the work of psychoanalysts Donald Winnicot (1896-1971) and Jessica Benjamin (b.1946) who *'developed a first attempt at a psychoanalytic interpretation of the love relationship* [between the infant and his/her primary carer, usually its mother] *as a process of mutual recognition'* (Honneth, 1995, p. 98). From the inter-subjective or affective recognition granted through close relationships, two additional types of recognition emerge – those of legal recognition (rights) and status recognition or social solidarity (esteem). Legal recognition comes about *'as an expression of the universaliable interests of all members of society, so that...exceptions and privileges are no longer admissible'* (ibid, p.109). As the result of this a *'... a new and highly demanding form of reciprocity enters the relationship of recognition based on rights'* (ibid, p. 110). In Honneth's view, just as the child will, through love, acquire self confidence, legal recognition provides the *'... form of consciousness in which one is able to respect oneself because one deserves the respect of everyone else'* (Honneth, 1995, pp. 118-119). Solidarity and social esteem is aimed at recognition of persons *'in their personal differences'* (ibid. p.122). It is the interaction of these latter two aspects of recognition that combine to provide *'a framework of orientation in which these ethical values and goals are formulated, that, taken together, comprise the cultural understanding of a society....This form of mutual recognition is thus also tied to the presupposition of a context of social life, whose members, through the orientation towards shared conceptions of their goals, form a community of value* (ibid, p.122). Thus, Anderson (1995) summarises that *'These inter-subjective conditions*

for identity-formation provide the basis for Honneth's "formal conception of ethical life" [allowing] *individuals to acquire the self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem necessary for the full development of their identities'* (p. Xviii). Honneth himself identifies the inter-relationship of all three concepts as providing the structure in which '*every member of a society is in a position to esteem himself or herself, one can speak of a state of social solidarity'.* (Honneth, p.129) used Table 4.2 to illustrate the structure of relations of recognition and misrecognition.

Table 4.1 Honneth's Structure of Relations of Recognition (Honneth, 1995, p.129)

Mode of Recognition	emotional support	cognitive respect	social esteem
Dimension of personality	needs and emotions	moral responsibility	traits and abilities
Forms of recognition	Primary relationships (love, friendships)	legal relations (rights)	community of value (solidarity)
Developmental potential		generalisation, de-formalisation	individualisation, equalisation
Practical relation to self	basic self-confidence	self-respect	self-esteem
Forms of dis-respect	abuse and rape	denial of rights, exclusion	denigration, insult
Threatened component of personality	physical integrity	social integrity	'honour', dignity

As is illustrated in this table, Honneth also addressed what he has described as '*denial of recognition'* (p.131). These present in '...*the self-descriptions of those who see themselves as having been wrongly treated by others, the moral categories that play to forms of disrespect are those such as "insult" or "humiliation"* [and] *designate behaviour that represents an injustice...'* (ibid.).

It is the placing of Honneth's theory of recognition in social reality that has stimulated practitioners and researchers from a variety of disciplines within the social sciences to engage with his work. The three elements of recognition necessary for self-actualisation have been described as '*love, rights and solidarity'* (Honneth 1995, p. 95; Thomas, 2012); *self-respect; self-*

confidence and self-esteem' (Houston, 2016; Fleming, 2011; Zurn, 2005); *'love, social esteem (solidarity) and equal treatment with regard to law'* (Nierling, 2012); *'love ... for the development of self-confidence; autonomous rights as a basis of self-respect and* [to be] *socially valued ... to build self-esteem'* (Fleming & Finnegan, 2010); and, *'recognition in the form of caring appreciation, recognition as a means of bestowing rights to the person and recognition as a way of acknowledging achievement by a community of interest'* (Houston, 2009). These interpretations provide the basis for the exploration of recognition theory in practice and in research.

The counter-side of recognition is described by Honneth as *'forms of dis-respect'* (1995, p.129). As with forms of recognition, Honneth proposes a tripartite typology of forms of mis-recognition or dis-respect. The first of these involves loss of control of one's bodily integrity, such as might occur through rape or torture. The second involves a denial of one's rights, which can lead to a down-grading of one's ability to relate to others as an equal. The third involves an undermining of one's status within a community, thus undermining one's self-esteem (see Honneth 1995 pp 131–139). The '*modes of recognition'* and '*forms of dis-respect'* are illustrated in Table 4.2. Hooper and Gunn (2013) consider that Honneth's:

 'three forms of recognition require an active "stance" to be credible, and must be a primary purpose rather than an assumed side-effect of actions geared to other goals' (p.4). Hooper and Gunn further remind us that Honneth's work is concerned with '...*the fundamental importance of relationship, interdependence and inter-subjectivity to human development, and of non-instrumental social relations involving recognition by a circle of partners in all phases and spheres of life to the development of an autonomous self, individuation, moral subjectivity and agency'* (p.4).

Engaging children and young people as active participants in the research process requires, therefore, a level of commitment to ensuring that their involvement will, as advocated by Petrie et al. (2006) '...*establish relationships with them and also give them something back, with a view to achieving positive change'* (pp 35–36). Such aspirations for research participation are in line with Honneth's three identified areas of recognition. Thomas (2012, 2016) while advocating Honneth's Theory of Recognition as a framework for children's participation in

research, acknowledges that Honneth follows '*the default position of much social and political theory, which is either to disregard children entirely or to regard them as merely adults-in-waiting*' (p.3, 2016). Thomas, however takes the view that:

> '*Children do belong to the class of morally responsible persons, are therefore rights-bearers and entitled to respect; and children are people with talents and capabilities, who contribute in a variety of ways to society and culture, and so are worthy of esteem* (2012, p.458).

Honneth (1992) does, however, in his essay '*Integrity and Disrespect*' acknowledge the universality of human beings' need for recognition '*The language of everyday life is still invested in the knowledge- which we take for granted – that we owe our integrity, in a subliminal way, to the receipt of approval or recognition from other persons*' (p. 188). He goes on, in his discussion of disrespect to say:

> '*I am referring to those forms of personal disrespect which a person undergoes by being structurally excluded from the possession of certain rights within a given society. We can construe the term 'rights' to signify those individual claims that a person can legitimately expect society to fulfil, since as a fully-fledged member of a community, he has an equal right to participate in its institutional order*' (pp. 190-191).

While Honneth does not explicitly mention children and young people, he does not explicitly mention any particular group in society. However his use of '*fully-fledged member of a community*' could indicate that he is referring only to adults. Aranda et al (2012) explain that:

> '*Primary recognition is achieved in the love, affection and care normally found within the family, friendship and other intimate or erotic relationships ... and form the basis for stable subjectivity. Legal and social or status recognition is found in the mutual recognition of rights and equality before the law, and solidarity or self-esteem, from the valuing of self by others ....All three forms of recognition are argued to be essential for a positive self-identity*' (p. 10).

Honneth's structure of relations of recognition calls for '*attempts to identify the societal causes responsible for the systemic violation of the conditions of recognition*' (cited in Warming (2006) translated from German). Thomas (2012) has proposed recognition theory as an appropriate

theoretical framework for the participation of children. This, combined with the work of a number of theorists and researchers including Warming 2006; Houston and Dolan, 2008; Fitzgerald, 2008; Fitzgerald et al. 2010; Thomas 2012; Hooper and Gunn, 2013; and Thomas et al 2016 led me to consider this as an appropriate theory when combined with the New Sociology of Childhood with which to explore and examine whether children and young people are afforded appropriate recognition at the time of parental separation, divorce and subsequent family reordering.

4.4.1 Recognition Theory in Research and Practice

'*Behind all theories and research findings are ideas and assumptions which shape them*' (Macionis & Plummer, p. 13).

In the introduction to his co-edited (with O'Neill) book *Recognition Theory as Social Research* Smith (2012) summarises the core assumptions of a recognition-theoretical research programme as (1) an observational claim about the nature of social conflicts, (2) a claim about the explanatory framework required to make sense of this observation, and (3) a claim about the prescription for action yielded by (1) and (2) – the relation of theory to practice. He goes on to argue that '…*social conflicts emerge in response to feelings of disrespect, contempt or humiliation suffered by members of the same group*' (p.5) and cites a range of social conflicts – gender inequality; rights of minorities; and racial discrimination that are motivated by a '*demand for due and proper recognition* (ibid, p.5) and concludes that '*clearly recognition matters to a lot of people*' (ibid, p.5). Thompson (2006) considers Recognition Theory, as developed by Honneth, as an appropriate theory from which to '*judge the justice of social orders'*. This view is supported by the work of a number of theorists, including those engaged in developing a critical theory and theoretical framework for social work practice (Houston, 2016; Turney, 2012; Juul, 2007); family support practice (Houston & Dolan, 2008) and as a framework for children's participation (Thomas, 2012, 2014; Hooper & Gunn, 2013; Graham & Fitzgerald, 2007; Warming, 2006). Researchers have engaged with Honneth's (1995) Theory of

Recognition in research analysis in adult education (West et al. 2013; Fleming, 2011; Fleming & Finnegan, 2008); refugees and social work practitioners and welfare authorities in Finland (Turtiainen 2009); and social work practice in Denmark (Juul, 2009).

Warming (2006); Thomas (2012); Hooper and Gunn (2013); and Thomas et al (2016) have each applied Honneth's Theory of Recognition to their respective research endeavours with children and young people. Additionally, a number of research and practice projects have identified Honneth's Theory of Recognition as a useful framework in a variety of contexts. These include multicultural communities (Howarth 2002); adult learners (Fleming & Finnegan 2009); social inclusion (Morrison 2010); heroin users (O'Brien 2013); dignity in health care (Aranda & Jones 2010); children in foster care (Warming (2006); looked after young people (Hooper & Gunn 2013); children's 'having a say' (Graham & Fitzgerald 2010); children's participation (Fitzgerald et al. 2010) and as a theory of children's participation (Thomas 2012, 2014). A selection of these studies will now be reviewed with an emphasis on those pertaining to children's and young people's lives.

4.4.2   Application of Honneth's Theory of Recognition to Research

Howarth (2002), through focus group research with teenagers and with teachers from Brixton in South London, an area that is considered to be 'marginalised and stigmatised', sought to explore the social psychological consequences of being part of a community that is considered to be 'violent', 'criminal' and 'unruly'. Howarth (2002) explored with the research participants 'struggle for recognition and esteem' in this context. This study examined the personal cost to self-image and self-esteem of living in such an environment and concluded that some adolescents '*collaboratively develop the social and psychological resources to protect themselves*' and revealed '*how social relationships and institutional cultures empower/disempower adolescents in their collaborative struggle for recognition*' (p.1). Hooper & Gunn (2013) describe a practice based project undertaken with young people in the care of a local authority in the United Kingdom. The academic researchers were invited to act as research

consultants in a project that involved the participation of looked after young people as co-researchers along with Children's Rights Officers. They concluded that by building the research around the young people's existing relationships; respecting the working group's decisions and honouring the views expressed that the research *'broadly reflected a stance of recognition, as described by Honneth and that his critical theory of recognition may offer a useful framework for other researchers working with children and young people'* (p.3). Thomas (2012) explores the relevance of Honneth's Theory of Recognition to children's participation as he considers that it is a *'particular social theory that appears to offer something to this wider project [of constructing a theory of children's participation'* (pp.453-454). Thomas uses as an example ethnographic research conducted in Wales from 2004-2007 to illustrate the application of recognition theory. He concludes from his observations of the group over a period of time that *'Honneth's categories of recognition were relevant at each stage'* (p.461). Love and friendship offered within the group by leaders and participants was evident in all interactions; and while the young people did not *'bang on' about their rights; it is possible that they simply take it for granted that these are understood and recognised'* (p.461). Thomas recognises, however, that the place of rights in this project was ambiguous with the issue of esteem being very evident with the *'young people being particularly proud of the contributions they had been able to make to their local communities'* (p.463). More recently, Thomas et al (2016) have applied recognition theory to a study of children's wellbeing in school in Australia.

Houston & Dolan (2008) have explored recognition theory in the context of family support and have concluded that by adapting and extending Honneth's original framework and linking it to theories of social support it provides social workers (and other professionals, I would contend) with a lens through which they can *'look reflexively at episodes of both recognition and misrecognition in their day-to-day dealings with children and families'* (p.466). Houston (2009) further develops this thesis by exploring Honneth's theory in conjunction with Habermas' Discourse Theory. He posits the view that by aligning recognition with egalitarian communication that *'discourse ethics can regulate communication between the social worker researcher and the citizen participants'* (p.1287). Fleming & Finnegan (2009) also recognise the

contribution of Habermas to Honneth's thinking, but point out that for Honneth '*the need and desire for recognition precedes communication....Recognition rather than communication is at the centre of his model*' (p.1).

As outlined above, I have examined the data in the context of Honneth's (1995) Theory of Recognition in order to connect with the discourse relating to recognition and mis-recognition as identified in the children's and young people's accounts of their experiences. These accounts span Honneth's (1995) identification of recognition as being '*culturally institutionalised into three distinctive spheres of love,* [primary relationships constituted by strong emotional attachments] *rights* [individual rights are granted to all people as free beings] *and solidarity* [being socially esteemed and recognised as valuable by other members of society]' (See Honneth, 1995, Chapter 5 pp.92-130). Research relating to the experiences associated with parental separation, divorce and family re-ordering incorporates all three of these concepts and required a methodological approach that would ensure that recognition was given to participants' experiences.

4.4.3 Critical review of Honneth's Theory of Recognition as the theory of choice for this research

Thomas et al (2016) points out that '*Theories of recognition are associated principally with the work of Honneth (1995), Taylor (1994) and Fraser (1995)*' (p.2). Each of these theorists take a different view of recognition: Taylor emphasises identity, Fraser status recognition while Honneth's project is, according to Thomas (2012):

> '… *more ambitious: to build a theory of social progress that is founded on the concept of recognition as a fundamental element in human interaction and individual and group identity…..It is this articulation, perhaps even more than the over-arching theory that makes his model interesting as a way of thinking about children's participation*' (pp.454-455).

Honneth and Fraser have debated their respective theories of recognition in detail with each other (Fraser and Honneth, 2003) and many theorists have given critical appraisals of each of their approaches (McNay, 2008; Van der Brink and Owen, 2007). Here, however, I want to indicate, following my examination of each standpoint why I considered Honneth's Theory of Recognition (1995) to be a suitable theoretical approach to this particular research.

Thompson (2009) has argued that despite the fact that while both Fraser and Honneth '… *claim to make it central to their theories of justice, their conceptions of recognition do not just diverge but appear to stand starkly opposed to one another'* (p.57). He provides details of each theorist's approach: Fraser considers that there are '*three distinct and mutually irreducible principles of justice….status order; redistribution; and representation'* while for Honneth if an individual '*is shown love, respect and esteem by others, then they can acquire the self-confidence, self respect and self-esteem necessary for self realisation'* (p.58). From this, Thompson goes on to argue, however, that '*… participatory parity and self-realisation are two highly complementary goals'* (ibid). The theme of the complementary factors evident in the debates about recognition between Fraser and Honneth led Fitzgerald et al (2010) to posit the view that each of their approaches to recognition:

> '*… attest to the potential of recognition as an appropriate lens through which to examine and conceptualise participation, because it allows for a focus on identity (children's understanding of who they are) as well as on status (the ways in which they are able to participate in society)'* (p. 297).

Honneth's approach, with its emphasis on interpersonal relationships, rights and esteem led me to consider it the most appropriate theory from which to examine recognition and misrecognition in the context of parental separation, divorce and subsequent family re-ordering.

The following section of this chapter introduces the Narrative Inquiry methodological approach used for data gathering and analysis of this research.

4.5   Research Methodology

4.5.1   Introduction

Broadly speaking, in social science research there exists two distinct epistemological approaches: positivist/objective and subjective/constructionist. Brannick and Coughlan ((2007) inform us that each of these paradigms '… *are differentiated in terms of their ontology, epistemology, and methodology'* (p. 62). Each can be respectively described as quantitative or qualitative research. Bryman (2008) tells us that qualitative research differs from quantitative research in a number of ways – the most obvious being that quantitative research is concerned with numbers while qualitative research is concerned with words.

Bryman (2008) has identified three distinguishing features that make qualitative research methods suitable for research of this kind: the first of these is the inductive relationship between theory and research with theory being generated by the actual research; the second is that the epistemological position is interpretivist – qualitative research involves understanding the social world through the interpretation of it by research participants; and thirdly, the ontological position is constructionist – social properties are the outcomes of interactions between individuals (Bryman, 2008, p.366). Within qualitative research methods a number of options are available for data gathering and for data analysis. Wertz, et al (2011) informs us that '*qualitative research typically requires diversity and variability of data'* (p.39) and involves:

> '… *studying in detail the complexity of lived experience and human practice, thick descriptions are often sought or elicited through reports of personal life events, stories, biographical accounts, or other types of original expressions collected in writing, in interviews, and in focus groups'* (ibid, p.39).

According to Bryman (2008) qualitative research methods include the following: **ethnography/participant observation** – in each of these methods the researcher '*is immersed in a social setting for some time in order to observe and listen with a view to gaining an appreciation of the culture of a social group'* (ibid, p.369); **qualitative interviewing** *'describes a*

wide range of interviewing styles' (ibid, p.369); **focus groups** '*a form of group interview in which there are several participants on a specific topic.....the accent is upon the interaction within the group and the joint construction of meaning'* (ibid, p.474). **Grounded Theory** offers the opportunity for the researcher '*to generate or discover a theory';* while **Case Study** research the inquirer '*has clearly identifiable cases with boundaries and seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the cases'* (Creswell, 2007, p. 74). A **phenomenological study** *'describes the meaning for several individuals of their "lived experiences" of a concept or phenomenon'* (ibid, p. 57). A number of these approaches to this research were considered.

As this research aimed to capture the lived experiences of children and young people and endeavoured to identify where these experiences had been recognised or misrecognised, Narrative Inquiry became the method of choice as it would ensure a dialogical rather than a monological approach for both data gathering and for analysis of the data. Additionally, Narrative Inquiry allowed for qualitative interviewing and ensured a dialogical approach to *'learn about a social phenomenon'* (Leiblich, *et al,* 1998, p. 2) while acknowledging that '*the data are influenced by the interaction of the interviewer and the interviewee as well as other contextual factors'* (ibid, p.9). This method further allows the researcher *'to "re-story"* [the narratives] *into a framework which makes sense'* (ibid, p.9) and is a method of both data gathering and analysis so allowing for the participatory techniques I wished to employ. This method will now be described more fully.

4.5.2   Narrative Inquiry in Social Science

'Part of being human involves narrating stories to ourselves and to others' (Plummer, 1995).

Webster's English dictionary defined the word 'narrative' as a '*discourse, or an example of it, designed to represent a connected succession of happenings'* (1966, p. 1503). The word 'narrative' has its roots in the Latin word '*narrare'* to tell or to know. A 'narrative' is an account of or a telling'. Lieblich et al (1998) define 'narrative research' as '*any study that uses or*

analyses narrative materials [including] *literary works, diaries and written autobiographies, conversations, or oral life stories obtained in interviews'* (p.2-3). Elliott (2007) informs us that sociology's interest in narrative can be traced back to the 1980s and draws our attention to the publication in 1986 of Elliot Mishler's book '*Research Interviewing: Context and Narrative'* in which he '*emphasised the need to listen to individuals' stories in the context of qualitative interviewing and cautioned researchers to take care not to suppress such stories'* (Elliott, 2007, p.5). Following this, through various publications such as the journal *Narrative and Life Histories* (now *Narrative Inquiry*); the publication of Josselson & Lieblich's (1993) series on *The Narrative Study of Lives* and the Sage publication of Riessman's short text on narrative analysis, narrative has been established as '*part of the methodological toolkit for qualitative researchers'* (ibid, p.5).

Fraser (2004) describes her conceptualisation of narrative research through the use of metaphors (pp.182-183). These particular metaphors of cooking without recipes, sewing, knitting and travelling contrast with those used to describe research as neutral, objective and factual, and, in her view, properly describe narrative researchers who sew '*fragments of conversations together, or knitters who spin a yarn in order to weave the threads of different stories or travellers who embark on journeys and try to use maps or compasses'* (p.183). While recognising that such metaphors run the risk of romanticising narrative research, Fraser gives reasons for their utility: they shake off the scientific illusion of objectivity and foreground researcher subjectivity; they refer to ordinary activities that can be understood by ordinary people and, in addition to demystifying practices associated with masculinity they signpost the practical doing of concrete tasks. Narrative researchers in her view '*do not use the language of certainty but instead present ideas in way that are tentative, circular and multiple…..employing methods that allow for thick or rich descriptions ……and accept that research is frequently a muddled, piratical affair'* (p.183). By qualifying the interpretations made, narrative researchers, especially those influenced by feminism, critical theory and post-modernism accept that '*research is a reading of the world, and the task is always on persuasion rather than proving'* (Kellehear, 1993, cited in Fraser, 2004). She notes that it is necessary for narrative researchers

to examine the nexus between power, knowledge and the individual and society by looking to the work of philosophers and mentions the work of Foucault (1978, 1984), Nietzsche (1997) and Derrida (1991) '…..*in order to explain to outsiders what practices, places or symbols mean to the people who hold them*' (Young, 1997, cited in Fraser, 2004).

Stephens (2011) has described narrative analysis as '*not a method as such, but rather a theoretical approach to interpreting talk*' (p.63). While the retelling of stories derived from narrative interviews may be interesting, engaging and accessible, it is necessary, according to Stephens and Brehony (2013) to take a systemic approach to the analysis of stories so that we can look at how the experiences are constructed at the '*intersection of personal, interpersonal and cultural narratives*' (p.15). They cite Bruner's (1991) argument that '*the stories people tell provide specific cultural rules for how we should interact and react and who we can be…….*' the narrative being '*the organising principle of these cultural meanings with which we interpret our experience, knowledge and interactions in the social world*'. Somers (1994) has linked the study of identity formation to narrative analysis and posits the theory that through narratives we come to know, understand and make sense of the social world and through this we constitute our social identity; social life is storied and narrative is the ontological condition of social life. Experience, according to Somers (1994), is constituted through narrative and people make sense of what has happened by integrating these experiences within one or more stories. As such they are guided to act in certain ways and not others based on available public, social and cultural narratives. Murray (2000) has conceptualised narrative analysis into four levels of understanding in relation to the psychology of health, incorporating Somers (1994) features of narrative analysis. These are: the personal level (ontological stories used to make sense of and act in life); the interpersonal level (co-construction of the interviewer and participant, ontological narratives are intra and interpersonal) the positional level (broader social, public conceptual, as explained by social scientists) and the ideological (meta-narratives embedded in culture), not created by individuals but shared unconsciously. Following analysis of stories of family life, Brehony and Stephens (2010) identified three inter-twined analytic levels they describe as the personal story; the interpersonal story and the public narrative. The utilisation

of narrative analysis of research data gathering and analysis allows for a thorough examination of these three concepts as according to Josselson (2011) '...*a narrative analysis may both re-present the participant's narrative and also take interpretive authority for going beyond, in carefully documented ways, its literal and conscious meaning'* (p.226).

Interestingly, without reference to Fraser's (2004) metaphors, Smart (2006) describes the analysis of research she conducted with children and young people who had experienced parental separation and divorce thus: '….*it became clear that they were weaving together a number of different elements of their lives into an intricate, and sometimes contradictory pattern'* (pp.157-158) and refers to Mason's (2004) 'interwoven layers' of narratives. The interwoven layers identified by Smart (2006) were: *participants' emotions and feelings; emotions and feelings of other family members; actual events; clear and less clear recollections; gaps in knowledge and understanding; current uncertainties and future hopes and expectations'* (p.158). She describes her analysis of the accounts as falling into two broad conceptual axes: the structure of their families as imposed upon the young people and the emotional content of the stories told.

It can be seen from this introduction that Narrative Inquiry offers a good fit in terms of the methodological approach to data gathering *and* data analysis for this research as it is congruent with the philosophical and theoretical concepts of the New Sociology of Childhood; Honneth's Theory of Recognition; and the use of participatory methods; the Principles of the UNCRC (1989); and the need for researcher reflexivity as summarised in Table 4.1. Following an examination of the options available to me, particularly with regard to the analysis of the research data, I decided to work with Fraser's (2004) Seven-phase Guidelines for '*Analysising Personal Stories Line by Line'* as she applied it to social work research. This approach offered a combined approach to data gathering and data analysis, the former ensuring a dialogical engagement with the research participants and the latter providing a very useful framework for analysis as illustrated in Table 4.2. A more detailed description of Fraser's approach to Narrative Inquiry will be offered later in the chapter, but firstly, I will discuss participatory research

methods, particularly relating to research with children and young people with an emphasis on its contribution to ethical practices of such research.

Table 4.1 Research Framework

Research Aims	Theoretical Perspective	Methodology	Analysis
To find out:	***The New Sociology of Childhood***	*Qualitative individual narrative interviews involving*	*Narrative Analysis* *(Fraser 2004)*

How do children and young people in Ireland experience parental separation, divorce and subsequent changes in family life?	As a context for the exploration of the experiences and from which to test Honneth's Theory of Recognition
	
	Children and Young People as agents
	
	Children and Young People as rights holders
	
	The Social Construction of Childhood.
	
	   (James & Prout, 1998)
		Careful preparation; Awareness of varied communication styles; Sensitivity; Build trust; No cross examination; Respond to questions; Reveal personal investment in research; Share interpretations.
		      (Fraser 2004)
		
		Use of participatory methodology
		
		Right to be heard; Recognise expertise of participants; Build relationship; Share information; Partners in research; Ethical approach.
		   (Lansdown, 2010)
			Hear the stories *- experience emotions of participant and researcher.*
			Transcribe the material *– achieve closeness to the stories and accurate record of the interviews.*
			Interpret individual transcripts *– identify main points, gain awareness of inflections, contradictions, silences*
			Scan different domains of experiences: *helps to prevent fixation on one dimension of the story; allows for the unearthing of specific insights; stories may be analysed across 4 levels: intrapersonal; interpersonal; cultural; and structural.*
			Linking the personal with the political: *the researcher deliberates on popular or dominant discourses; attendant social conventions; influence of these on understanding stories. Attention is paid to the use of metaphors; humour; irony and sarcasm.*
			Looking for commonalities and differences: *compare and contrast transcripts for commonalities and differences in content, style, tone.*
			Writing academic narratives about personal stories: *the researcher hones the analysis; translating the talk of others into written analysis ensuring it*

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			corresponds with the stories and research objectives. Arguments need to be coherent and true to the philosophy of the method
To find out: *Have these experiences been given recognition within their families and within broader societal structure: schools; services and the family justice system?*	*Honneth's Theory of Recognition* *Recognition:* Structures of relations of recognition: love; rights; solidarity	*As for Research Aim (1)* *plus the participatory methods ensured opportunities for recognition of rights and for development of solidarity.*	The analysed stories were further examined through the lens of Honneth's *Structures of Relations of Recognition* to identify where recognition had been accorded across the realms of - *Love: Self-confidence gained through relationships of love and friendship with parents, family; and friends.* *Rights: Self-respect gained through being recognised as a person with legal rights achieved in civil society.* *Solidarity: Self-esteem gained from being a valued person within one's community, group and society.*
	Misrecognition: forms of abuse that threatens physical/emotional integrity; denial of rights; threat to dignity amongst peers.		*The analysed stories and data from group conversations were examined through the lens of Honneth's Structures of Relations of Misrecognition/disrespect* to identify where recognition had been denied leading to *Negative self-concept: through the withdrawal of emotional support.* *Isolation or Stigma: through the denial of civil, social or political rights.* *Undermining of Dignity or Integrity: through undervaluing of contribution to community, group or society.*

Researcher Reflexivity: *A process of personal reflection was employed throughout the entire research process to ensure acknowledgement of the researcher's role; biases; possible power imbalances in order to ensure that attention was paid to cultural, social and ideological values from my perspective. Self-critique and appraisal was undertaken and acknowledgement was given to the need to critically examine my overall role in the process.*

Ethical Approach: Framed by the Principles of the UNCRC (1989). Children and young people as rights holders; children and young people as social actors; children and young people have the right to give their views and have these views taken into account; embodied in Articles 5, and 12-17 of the UNCRC.

4.6 Participatory Research

4.6.1 Introduction to Participatory Research Methods

'As we attempt to analyse dialogue as a human phenomenon, we discover something which is the essence of dialogue itself: the word. But the word is more than just an instrument which makes dialogue possible; accordingly, we must seek its constitutive elements... reflection and action' (Paulo Freire, 1973, p. 68).

In social science research, participatory methodologies, derived from qualitative methods, historically developed from the work of Paulo Freire in the 1970s. Activist participatory research is the term used *'to refer to a family of approaches and methods which use dialogue and participatory research to enhance people's awareness and confidence and to empower their action'* (Chambers, 1994, p. 954). The use of participatory methods became established within rural development work, particularly in the global south, where it is known as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). Chambers (1994) provides a useful discussion of the development of PRA since the 1980s and identifies five streams that *'…stand out as sources and parallels of PRA'* as (i) activist participatory research; (ii) agro ecosystems analysis; (iii) applied anthropology; (iv) field research on farming systems; and (v) rapid rural appraisal. O'Kane (2004) describes PRA as falling *'within a 'post-positivist' or 'constructivist' paradigm'*.

Reason & Heron (1986) have put forward the view that *'A crucial tenet of participatory research is that it is research* with *rather than* on *people'* (Cited in French & Swain, 2010 p.412). Participatory research has been described as being *'about establishing equality in research relationships* (ibid, p. 412). O'Kane (2000) has suggested that *'… qualitative work with children should be regarded as a process of narrative inquiry as children are both living their stories in the experiential text but also telling their stories as they talk about their own selves and explain themselves to others'* (p. 126). Engaging in qualitative participatory research, therefore, requires a commitment on the part of the researcher to engage reflectively and reflexively upon the process of the research as the researcher is required to 'share power' with the participants in order to work together in the co-creation of knowledge.

Participatory methods have become the choice of many social science researchers over the past twenty to thirty years. Patton (2002) summarises the many approaches to participatory research now undertaken by social scientists (Table 4.3).

Table 4.3 Types of Participatory Research, from Patton (2002)

Participatory Method	Developed by	Requirements
Humanistic Research and Hueristic Inquiry	Douglas and Moustakas (1985)	Collaboration with research participants
Co-operative Inquiry	Heron (1996)	Collaboration with research participants
Participatory Action Research	Wadsworth (1993a; 1993b) King & Lonnquist (1994a; 1994b)	Joint collaboration within a mutually acceptable ethical programme
Feminist Methods	Reinharz (1992)	Members of the research setting invited to help create study
Empowerment Evaluations	Fetterman, Kaftarian&Wandersman (1996) Fetterman (2000a)	Fosters self-determination of participants
Empowerment Partnerships	Weiss & Greene (1992)	Partnerships formed between researchers and participants
Participants as Researchers	Wadsworth (1984)	Participants are taught to become researchers and carry out the research themselves

It is worth noting that a number of researchers have taken a participatory approach to research with children and young people. Examples include work undertaken by Kellett et al (2004); Bucknall (2010); Kellett (2005a and 2010a). Kellet (2005) has pointed out that ' *The early years of developmental psychology bequeathed a dominant legacy of children as "objects" of research…'* and advocates that children become '*active researchers'* and considers that '*Such involvement has considerable potential for children's self-development and political agency'.*

4.6.2 Participatory Research with Children and Young People

Recognising children as competent but different from adults, means '*allowing children to engage more productively in the research questions using the talents they, as children possess*' (James 1995, p15). These talents may include drawings, storytelling, play, drama, photography as well as the more traditional methods such as interviews and focus groups, presented in a child focussed format. This range of techniques has the capacity to reduce the power imbalances between the adult researcher, the children and young people. It also has the potential to enable children to set the agenda by giving them a choice in the methodology used. O'Kane (2004) points out that: '*...the successful use of participatory techniques lies in the process, rather than simply the techniques used....*[and] *requires commitment to an ongoing process of information sharing, dialogue, reflection and action*' (p.138).

It is widely recognised that relationships between adults and children contain a degree of power imbalance. Negotiating the implicit power imbalance is a challenge. Not only are adults physically bigger than children, they can exercise a degree of authority as parents, teachers, in neighbourhoods and in society in general. The power that adults can exert over children extends to influencing their '*ideas, beliefs, world-views and activities*' (Waksler, 1991, p.71). Hill (2005) has pointed out that such '*power and status differentials raise the possibility that children may find it difficult to dissent, disagree or say things that adults may not like*' (p.63). In deciding on my research methods (specific techniques for collecting the data) and methodology (method of sampling, data collection and analysis), I was mindful of the range of factors at play and therefore I approached the work in a way that, firstly, recognises the power imbalances that might exist between me, an adult researcher, and the participants. In an effort to overcome these power differentials, I followed, as best I could, the guidelines described by Mandell (1991) to adopt '*the least adult role*' (p.40). Mandell describes how she, in her research with young children, utilised George Herbert Mead's (1938) three methodological principles: firstly, acceptance of research subjects as they come, regardless of age, race, class or gender; secondly, suspension of judgements on children's immaturities and focused on how

children fit together lines of action; and thirdly, engagement in joint action with children, thus creating mutual understanding.

By adapting principles of openness, respect, curiosity, humility and rigour to my engagement with the research participants, I considered I would be able to deal with imbalances. Furthermore, I kept the following in mind:

- A recognition that the participants in this research had something to offer in relation to knowledge and expertise in this area
- A recognition of the research participants as rights' bearers, thus ensuring that a rights-based approach was employed
- The employment of participatory methods to the greatest extent that I could
- An adherence to the principles of a theoretical perspectives that addresses how participants' experiences have been given recognition or conversely how these experiences have been misrecognised
- My analysis and presentation of the data must do justice to the stories told to me by the research participants

Despite this, however, participation presents challenges for adults, not least because it involves the necessity to share power with children. Too often the participation versus protection debate errs in favour of protection, even though participation can be seen as a catalyst for children to learn to protect themselves. Likewise, the principle of participation by children is also resisted as it may be seen as undermining adult authority. Bellamy (2003), however, points out that listening to children does not necessarily mean an endorsement of their views: rather it allows children to learn '...*constructive ways of influencing the world around them. The social give and take of participation encourages children to assume increasing responsibility as active, tolerant and democratic citizens in formation'* (p.4). This is an important point in relation to children and family law decision making, as children's participation in this forum is sometimes framed around children being asked to make decisions and even to make choices between their

parents in relation to living arrangements, for example. Fitzgerald (2010) in my view makes a really important point about children and young people and participation when she says that *'participation was not about choice or voice, but rather holding out possibilities for both, depending on the circumstances for each child'* (p. ?). Keeping this in mind can provide researchers with the freedom to explore with them what possibilities they see as being present in their participation and how it might shape their worlds.

Lansdown (2013) answered the question 'What is Participation?' thus:

- *participation is the right to be heard;*
- *it's an entitlement, not a privilege;*
- *it is both a substantive right and a general principle to inform the realisation of other rights – a means to an end;*
- *a concept embodied in a cluster of articles* [of the UNCRC, 1989] *recognising the child as social actor – Articles 5, 12-17;*
- *a right both for children individually and as a constituency;*
- *a challenge to traditional power bases* (Conference presentation, Galway, June 2013).

Lansdown (2010, 2013) suggests that it is necessary to measure the '*extent, quality and impact'* (2010, p. 20) across what she identifies as the three degrees of children's participation:

1. <u>Consultative participation</u> – adults seek children's views in order to build knowledge and understanding of their lives. This does not involve sharing decision making, but recognises the value of children's perspectives
2. <u>Collaborative participation</u> – provides for a greater degree of partnership with the opportunity for active engagement at any stage and empowers children to influence both the process and the outcomes
3. <u>Child led participation</u> – allows children to identify issues of concern and to initiate action with adults acting as facilitators, not as leaders.

It can be said that at the beginning of this research its approach fell between Lansdown's (2010, 2013) Degree 1 – *consultative participation* and Degree 2 *collaborative participation*. I developed the idea for the research and the research question, but the question emerged from a conviction that children's experiences needed to be heard on the subject of parental separation and divorce. However, as the participatory processes progressed, there was an exciting shift to Degree 3 – *child led participation* as the participants engaged in the dissemination project where they took control of the process, decided on messages they wanted to disseminate; and developed a method to do so through social media. This process will be fully described in Chapter Seven; suffice to mention here that this development occurred as the result of a combination of their participation in the research process which highlighted their need through collective activity to gain recognition as described by Honneth (1995).

The 'participatory' steps engaged in for this research included: the establishment of a consultative group of two young people who acted as my advisors for the duration of the research. These two young people, who chose to be identified as Liam, aged eighteen years and Megan aged 13 years, were recruited through personal contact. Each of them had experienced the separation of their parents. My initial interviews with the research participants was followed by on-going engagement through regular updates on the progress of the research by letter; consultation with participants about the research findings through a research review days; further consultation by letter and final consultation with participants about dissemination of the research findings. As stated above this on-going engagement with the research participants led to unexpected developments in the research process when the children and young people developed their own ideas regarding dissemination of the research findings.

The instruments used during the data gathering phase of the research were child-centred and ensured that participants could freely express their views and feelings in a safe manner. Informed and on-going consent was received for all stages of the research process: at initial

contact; prior to participating in the interview; during the interview and for participation in the research review days and for their participation in the dissemination project.

4.6.3 Ethical Consideration for Participatory Research with Children and Young People

The subject of ethics in relation to participatory research with children has been addressed by a number of authors (Morrow & Richards, 1996; Thomas & O'Kane, 1998; Hill 2005). Issues relevant to research with children are salient to all research that engages with human subjects – these include giving full information so that informed consent can be obtained, that sensitive subjects need to be approached in a sensitive manner, participants need to be protected from added harm or where it occurs it must be dealt with appropriately, that confidentiality is relevant to all research and that exploitation of research participants in any way is prohibited. These ethical issues were attended to in this research by ensuring that participants were made aware of potential risk factors associated with the research, in particular the possibility of emotional distress and that any benefits arising from the research would, most likely, be reaped by other children and young people rather than themselves. Fully informed consent was obtained from a parent for all participants under 18 years of age and from the participants themselves for all stages of the research process. Additionally, confidentiality and anonymity were assured and the young people were made aware that they could refuse to participate or stop their participation at any time without consequences, including for a period of time following data gathering. In the event that a participant would become distressed during the research process, a detailed protocol was put in place to ensure that he or she was responded to sensitively, including follow up, where necessary.

Kirk (2006), following her review of the literature relating to the methodological and ethical issues associated with research with children, identified the three main ethical issues, namely power imbalances, informed consent and confidentiality and disclosure. Kirk identified two methodological concerns – the different cultures of childhood and the heterogeneous nature of childhood. Kirk's (2006) review also discussed the use of participatory methods in research with

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children – an issue that has received some attention from other researchers in recent years (Gallagher & Gallagher 2008; Holland, *et al,* 2010) while Darbyshire, et al, (2005) have reflected upon the use of multi-methods in research with children. Beazley et al*,* (2011) identify five key characteristics of the ethical research with children and note that for research with children to be considered ethical the following criteria should be followed:

1. *It is genuinely respectful of children as partners in the research. Children's participation in the research must be meaningful in their own terms, rather than those dictated by researchers*
2. *This approach places ethics at the heart of research in practical and meaningful ways*
3. *Research must be scientifically valid; data must be collected systematically using methods that can be justified and replicated*
4. *Analysis must be robust where possible combining both statistical and descriptive techniques*
5. *Rights-based research prioritises local knowledge and expertise to produce insightful information on children's own experiences and opinions* (p.161).

Engaging in qualitative, participatory research, particularly with a group of people who might be considered to be vulnerable and where power differentials might exist between the researcher and research participants, places an onus on the researcher to engage reflexively in the work being undertaken. The next section discusses researcher reflexivity.

4.6.4   Researcher Reflexivity

'Reflexivity is a dynamic process of interaction within <u>and</u> between ourselves and our participants <u>and</u> the data that informs decisions, actions and interpretations at all stages'

(Etherington, 2004).

Reflexivity, according to Dowling, requires an engagement by the researcher in '*continuous self-critique and self-appraisal to explain how his or her experience has or has not influenced the stage of the research process* (Koch, et al, 1998, cited in Dowling, 2006 p.2). Ethrington (2004) states that for researchers to be truly reflexive they must:

'*… operate on multiple levels by being aware in the moment of what is influencing the researcher's internal and external responses while simultaneously being aware of the researcher's relationship to the research topic and the participants'*

while Patton (2002) reminds us that:

'*Reflexivity reminds the qualitative inquirer to be attentive to and conscious of the cultural, political, social, linguistic and ideological origins of one's own perspective and voice as well as the perspective and voices of those one interviews and those to whom one reports'* (p.65).

As a person who could to some extent be described as an 'insider' in the research process, given my personal and professional backgrounds I needed to be particularly conscious of my own perspective. Brannick and Coghlan (2007) describes '*inquiry from the inside'* as that which '*… involves researchers as actors immersed in local situations generating contextually embedded knowledge that emerges from experience'* (p. 60). I consider, however, that my position in this research was not that of an insider as I was not carrying out research either within my workplace or specifically on the Family Mediation Service's inclusion or non-inclusion of children and young people in the mediation process. I acknowledge that my professional experience of family mediation, and indeed my personal experience as a person who is divorced, albeit for more than twenty years, needed to be taken into account as part of my reflexive process as a researcher. This enabled me to consciously separate my on-going professional practice from the research process.

Through the entire process of this research project I reflected upon my role, kept detailed notes of critical events throughout the process; had discussions with peers; colleagues at work; and with my academic supervisor and entered into discussions with the research participants. I noted how the research was influencing my interactions with parents in my practice; and

became aware of an increase in my interest in meeting with children and young people during their parents' mediation process. I obviously needed to distinguish between my professional practice roles and my role as researcher with an increasing awareness that one was influencing the other. My training as a family mediator was particularly helpful to me as a novice researcher as mediation is, to a large extent, a process-led endeavour where creative solutions to problems and difficulties sometimes emerge through the process. I found this approach to be helpful during the analysis phase of the research where I experienced the emergence of new insights whilst reading and re-reading the data and also whilst facilitating the research review meetings and the participants' dissemination project.

It was, however, my interaction with the research participants throughout the process of the research that honed my reflexive skills and led to considerable learning for me about children and young people. I realised that my contact with children and young people had diminished as my own children had grown into adulthood and I realised the limitations of my contact with children and young people in my professional capacity as their parents' mediator, as a consultation with children and young people in this context normally involves just one meeting. From both a professional and personal point of view, I came to realise that I really enjoyed and have been energised by this work. Reflexivity in the context of narrative research has been described by Elliott (2007) as *'the tendency critically to examine and analytically to reflect upon the nature of research and the role of the researcher in carrying out and writing up empirical work'* (p. 153). Through critical reflection at each stage of this process, I have done my best to ensure that my role in the research process is reflected on throughout.

I will now describe the process of the research, including my engagement with the young person consultative group; the challenges of the recruitment phase; the data gathering phase; and my on-going engagement with the participants, including the Research Review Days. As the process of data analysis has already been discussed under methodology, I will not re-visit this phase. I will however discuss the themes that emerged from the analysis.

4.7   The Research Process: From Ethical Approval to Data Analysis and Beyond

The ethical approval received from the ethics committee at the National University of Ireland, Galway included approval to engage with an advisory/consultation group of young people for assistance in carrying out this research. While there are many examples of the engagement of research participants and social service user groups (del Campo, et al, 2013; Nierse et al, 2011; Abma et al, 2010; Jones, et al, 2008; Strambler & McKown, 2013) it is not so common, however, to find examples of consultative groups of young people being embedded in the work of research centres concentrating on research with children. Fitzgerald and Graham (2008) observed that prior to the establishment in 2004 of their youth advisory (Young People Big Voice) group at Southern Cross University in New South Wales that *'At that time, we could find no precedent whereby a university centre – such as ours, with its emphasis on applied research pertaining to children and young people – had successfully integrated and sustained a youth advisory group to assist its endeavours'* (Fitzgerald & Graham, 2008 p.65). As already stated, the idea for and preliminary work of this research project was undertaken by me, without consultation with children and young people. The establishment of the consultative group was the first step in the participatory aspect of this work.

4.7.1   Research Consultation Group

Two young people, both of whom had experienced their parents' separation in recent years, were recruited through personal contact. Megan was then aged 13 years and Liam was aged 18 years. Both of them, along with Megan's parents, were given detailed information about the research, all questions relating to their involvement were answered and written consent was given by everyone. Our first meeting was held at the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre in August 2013. As noted by Fitzgerald & Graham (2008) my initial meeting with Megan and Liam provided an opportunity for me to begin a process of what they described as 'scaffolding' the young people for their participation as the efforts made by 'skilled adult partners' to build trust and develop reciprocal relationships have enhanced the participation of young people in

their Young People Big Voice consultative group. Following rapport building, introductions and discussion of the project, that included an outline of the processes I had followed so far, Megan and Liam reviewed the recruitment material I had prepared for children and young people, including letters, information sheets and samples of the Information Posters I intended to use. Interestingly, Megan and Liam both suggested highlighting particular wording for inclusion on the research poster and suggested changes to the information sheets and draft interview schedules. They both also suggested that direct contact be made with children, particularly older children as they felt that this age group *should be allowed to make their own mind up about being in the research'* (Megan). Megan agreed for me to conduct a pilot interview with her, after which she made useful suggestions, particularly in relation to rapport building with the younger people. This led to me sourcing the '*Talking Cards Game'* (Appendix 1) (Moore et al. 2008) that I used, with permission, during the data-gathering phase.

Throughout the data gathering phase of the project, I kept in touch with Megan and Liam by letter, informing them of how my work was progressing. My next meeting with them occurred following data-gathering and initial analysis when we planned the first research review day to which all participants were invited. Their empathy towards the research participants was evident, as they articulated understanding of the findings I presented to them. Their level of understanding and engagement in the planning influenced the 'shape of the day'. Together we prioritised findings, found interesting ways of presenting data and agreed what food we should serve for lunch! Discussions with both of them about their participation offered additional insight, with both of them saying they felt they were contributing and hoped that their input would be helpful to others. This again concurs with the Fitzgerald & Graham (2008) report of the Young Person Big Voice involvement where participants reported that '*members pointed to the critical importance they place on their participation 'making a difference'* (p.69). Further discussion of the consultative group's involvement in the research will follow later in the thesis, but for now, I will now discuss the recruitment process.

4.7.2 Participant Recruitment

Patton (2002) informs us that qualitative inquiry typically concentrates on in depth, relatively small sample sizes that have been purposefully selected. A number of strategies were employed in order to '*purposefully select'* participants for this research. Bryman (2008) points out that '*Most sampling in qualitative research entails purposive sampling of some kind'* (p.414) to ensure that *'those sampled are relevant to the research question being posed'* (ibid p.415). Initially, the recruitment plan for this research was to source participants through a range of organisations providing services for families who are separating: The Family Mediation Service; Counselling Services for Couples; Community-based Family Support Centres; Services for Young People; The Legal Aid Board; Private Practice Family Solicitors; Counsellors; and direct services for children and young people whose parents are separating, namely, Rainbows and Teen-Between. To this end, an Information Pack was prepared that included: A Letter for Service Providers (Appendix 2); Information for Parents (Appendix 3); Information for Children (Appendix 4); Information for Young People (Appendix 5) and a number of Research Posters (Appendix 6). This information, that included my contact details and an offer to meet with anyone who desired, was sent by post to a very large number of service providers over a geographic area from Co Donegal in the north of Ireland to Co Kerry in the south. Additionally, the Press and Information Office of the National University of Ireland, Galway circulated a Press Release (Appendix 7) to local newspapers and radio stations in the western region. This resulted in publications in three local newspapers in Galway City, Co Mayo and in two radio interviews. Two national newspapers, the Irish Times and the Irish Independent also published brief information and my contact details.

Despite the large number of service provider organisations contacted, the biggest response came through the press publicity, the main source of contact being from mothers who were interested in their children's participation in the research. These mothers were concerned that they did not know '*how my children were coping'* and that it '*would be good for them (children) to talk to someone'* (personal contact, October 2013). Their expectation was that I would be

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able to give feedback on how their children were coping. Upon explaining to these parents the confidential nature of the research, within the limits of child protection guidelines, a number of mothers decided not to 'go any further' with the research. This, of course, raises the issue of 'gate-keeper' power in relation to children's participation and also contravenes children's rights under the UNCRC (1989). Under Articles 3 and 36, gatekeepers (who may include service providers as well as parents) have to be fully informed of the research aims and process and agree to the participation of children to ensure that children would not be hurt or exploited in any way. While gatekeepers play an important role, concern has been expressed regarding their ability to allow or refuse access to young people by researchers (Thomas & O'Kane 1998; Fitzgerald, 2010), which can contravene their rights under Article 12. This research aimed to be vigilant in relation to ensuring that expressions of interest from children and young people regarding participating were respected. This was achieved through engaging in open dialogue with parents and gatekeepers and listening to their views and opinions, thus leading to their co-operation with the researcher and enhancement of the research process. Despite this, however, there was one situation where a child might have been prevented from participating as his parent did not wish it, with the comment '*oh gosh, no, I don't think any of us want to go back on all that (parental separation) now'* (personal communication, April 2014). This could be seen as an example of how one child's agency had '*been handed over to parents'* (Beasley, *et al* 2011: 164). Direct contact was received from one young person who had read about the research in the newspaper and was keen to participate, she had discussed it with her mother and written permission was given. So, following this enlightening process, my initial expected cohort was reduced from eighteen to five – that number increased to six during the data collection when the brother of one of the participants had agreed, prior to my arrival at their home, to participate also as, as he put it '*you have travelled a long way and this might help someone else'* (personal communication, December 2013). My final recruitment occurred in April 2014 when a colleague contacted me asking that I send information to a mother with whom she had discussed the research. Once again, while expecting to meet just one child of that family, his brother had also decided to participate when I arrived at their home. Each of the young people who made these last minute decisions to participate said that they were

doing so in the hope of their input might be helpful to other young people. Table 4.4 provides a summary of interest shown; the sources of information; reasons for non-participation; and subsequent numbers who participated.

Table 4.4 Summary of Recruitment Process

Contacted by	Location	Heard of the research through	Participated in research	Reason for non-participation
Mother	Galway City	Local newspaper	No	Mother requested feedback
Family Resource Centre	Co Galway	Information from researcher	Yes (1)	
Galway Youth Service	Galway City	Radio interview with researcher	No	Parent not interested
Mother	Galway City	Local newspaper	No	Mother requested feedback
Mother	Tipperary	National newspaper	Yes (1)	
Family Resource Centre	Limerick	Information from researcher	No	Children did not wish to
Family Resource Centre	Co Galway	Information from researcher	No	Children dealing with traumatic issues, considered by their mother and the researcher that participation might put extra strain on them
Mother	Galway City	Radio interview and local newspaper	No	Mother did not follow up following initial enquiry and receipt of information
Family Mediator	Co Clare	Information from researcher	Yes (3)	
Young person	Dublin	National newspaper	Yes (2)	
Family Mediator	Cavan	Information from researcher	Yes (2)	
Father	Galway City	Personal contact with another parent	Yes (1)	One child in family considered by her father to be too young; one child did not wish to participate
Family Resource Centre	Co Galway	Information from researcher	Yes (2)	
Mother/step-mother	Galway City	Poster at doctor's clinic	Yes (2)	
Father	Galway City	Through contact with another parent	No	Father did not follow up following receipt of information
Contact Centre Manager	Galway City	Through information from researcher	No	Parents did not wish children to participate

At that stage, upon review of the participants with my supervisor, we realised that the fourteen young people I had met with had a very wide range of experiences and had provided me with varied and rich data relating to their parents' separation and subsequent changed family life. These included experiencing separation at a very young age or at an older age, having memories of high conflict, including domestic violence, parental re-partnering, parental re-marriage, the arrival of half-siblings and living with step-siblings. The participants ranged in age from seven to nineteen years and came from different parts of Ireland and included a rural and urban mix. We acknowledged at this stage that we did not have a gender balance with nine female participants and five male participants. As the research was concentrating on the experiences of the young people and not on gender differences relating to the experiences, we did not consider this aspect important. We also acknowledged that some particular experiences might be missing; for example, while two of the children had parents who were British, both of whom had lived in Ireland for a long time, the remainder of the families were Irish, leaving the research without input from children of families who had recently immigrated into Ireland. We, therefore, left open the possibility of engaging with young people in this situation should the opportunity occur. I was also, at this time, hopeful of recruiting a family through a Parent Contact Centre, but this did not materialise. Recruitment thus ceased.

4.7.3 Data Gathering

In the end, the participants numbered fourteen in total and came from eight families. There was some geographical spread: two families lived in Galway City; two families lived in Co Galway; one lived in Co Tipperary; one in Co Dublin; one in Co Monaghan. Once participation had been agreed, I sent a Parental Survey (Appendix 8) to the contact parent or parents. Parents were asked to complete this survey giving demographic information regarding their ages, nationality, earnings, length of their marriage, if married, or length of their co-habiting relationship, length of time since their separation, whether divorced, details of new relationships, whether re-married, whether they had other children and if sibling relationships existed. As stated above and, very importantly, parents were asked to give me some details

about the child or children who had agreed to participate in the research. The information requested included the child's age, his/her interests, friendships and other information considered relevant by the parent. The idea of gathering this information was to give me a sense of the child prior to meeting him or her. Although I included a stamped-addressed envelope for the return of this information, it did not always arrive and sometimes was completed upon my arrival for the interview! On reflection, I might have been better to conduct a telephone survey with parents. However, thirteen parents did complete these surveys, providing me with valuable information.

Prior to the commencement of each interview, and in the parents' presence, I ensured that the purpose of the research was understood by each participant; I answered questions and gave some information about myself, about the University and about the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre. Time was then taken to contract with the young people regarding their involvement, how the data would be used and their option to withdraw. I also outlined the limits of confidentiality as they related to child protection policies and ensured that these were understood, particularly by the younger children. The parent who was present and each participant signed consent forms (Appendix 9 and Appendix 10). When signing the consent form each participant decided upon a pseudonym or 'nick-name' for themselves and it was interesting to note the thought and care some children put into this, with one child asking me 'can I pick any name I want'? Following the introductory card game, each interview commenced with an invitation to each participant to 'tell me about your family' and from there covered a series of topics, some of which emerged from the participants' stories and some of which were included in the interview schedule (Appendix 11) I had prepared. All interviews were audio recorded and participants were told they could turn off the audio recorder at any stage; they were also given the option not to answer a question should they wish. Interview lengths varied from twenty-five to forty seven minutes. To assist participants in identifying feelings associated with events that had occurred relating to their parents' separation the St Louis Bear Cards (Appendix 12) were used as visual aids and the Family Sculpture Figures (Appendix 13) were used to elicit feelings of closeness to parents, siblings, extended family, friends and pets. The

use of each of these instruments with all participants provided consistency between each interview. When participants chose a particular Bear Card to illustrate a feeling, I always asked that they name the emotion evoked, such as confusion, frustration, anger or happiness, thus ensuring that I did not interpret their feelings. All young people were also invited to 'draw their family'. Ten participants decided to do this, while four did not wish to do so. All of this resulted in my having a data set of thirteen completed Parental Surveys, that included parents' information about each participant; fourteen recorded interviews; fourteen 'closeness to' graphs; identified feelings through Bear Cards from fourteen participants and ten family drawings.

The approach taken to data gathering followed guidelines identified by Fraser (2004) for narrative interviewing. She recommends that researchers:

- Prepare for the interview by studying the socio-historical context of participants' lives – In this research I did this by obtaining information about each child or young person from parents, including their interests, friendships, whether they had dealt with other adversities and any information parents considered relevant. This allowed me to have a sense of each child prior to the research interview and this was of assistance in rapport building when we met.

- Respond to different communication styles. This is obviously very important when interviewing young people. During the interview dialogue, I was aware of varying communication styles with some participants speaking quickly, others slowly and others needing time to think through their answers. During two of the interviews the participants and I agreed to turn off the audio recorder in order to deal with a sensitive issue. On both occasions follow up support was provided to the young people. As well as having a conversation with each participant, I used two visual instruments, The St Louis Bear Cards and Family Sculpture Figures and each participant was invited to draw a picture of their family.

- Facilitate a climate of trust and avoid 'mining' or 'cross examination' of interviewees. This was done through initial rapport building, giving information, ensuring that participants were aware that they could withdraw from the research at any time, and/or could decide not to answer my questions. I answered questions openly and honestly and ensured that participants were aware of my *'investment in the research'* (Fraser, 2004, p.184).

- Share the interpretations made – the participatory methods employed ensured that I did this, by providing regular written updates and by inviting participants to review my initial findings and to make a plan for dissemination.

- Appreciate the politics involved with making knowledge. This aspect of data gathering is vitally important, particularly in light of the historical status of children and young people in Ireland, and in light of a level of stigma that still associated with separation and divorce in this country.

These recommendations, which are congruent with participatory methods of gathering data, ensured that a dialogue was entered into with each participant, allowing for conversations to happen that ensure the emergence of stories. As with all conversations between two people, each of us, researcher and participant, is involved in the production of the story or stories. Thus, a narrative approach to data gathering has '...*the capacity to attend to context as well as idiosyncrasy, they subdue the inclination to posture as an expert and may be used to stimulate different kinds of discussions'* and thus *'may aid those who seek to democratise professional relationships'* (Fraser, 2004, p.181).

4.7.4 Data Analysis

In carrying out the narrative analysis of this research, I turned to the work of Fraser (2004) thus ensuring a thoroughly comprehensive narrative analysis. The work of McCormack (2000a) also influenced my approach to data analysis. McCormack (2000a) recommends that narrative

analysis should be undertaken through multiple lenses: active listening, narrative processes, language, context and moments. She recommends that the researcher then:

'uses the views highlighted by these lenses to write interpretive stories' as '*These lenses are the dimensions people use to construct and reconstruct their identity and give meaning to their lives. Thus, they highlight both the individuality and the complexity of a life'* (p. 282).

She describes elements of her research framework as including concepts relating to the nature of research, the nature of knowledge, the purpose of research, the nature of the research design and the nature of the research process (ibid, p.285). Fraser (2004) provides a non-sequential and overlapping seven phase guideline for analysis as illustrated in Table 4.5 (1) (Phases 1–3) and Table 4.5 (2) (Phases 4–7).

Table 4.5 (1) Data Analysis Framework, Fraser, 2004 (Phases 1–3)

Fraser's 7-phase guidelines	Tasks (Fraser)	Applications to current research
Phase 1: hearing the stories, experiencing the emotions	Active listening, tuning in to the emotional effect of the story being told on the teller and the listener, reflection on body language and silences.	During the interview stage rapport was built and active listening employed. Note was taken of body language, tone of voice. Tapes were listened to with attention, initial reactions noted, notes taken.
Phase 2: Transcribing the material	Transcripts offer an accurate record of the interview. Although time-consuming, it is recommended that the researcher carry out this task as it will familiarise him/her with the stories, thus bringing one close to them.	Confidential files were created for each participant and the data was transcribed in QSR NVivo 8. Each file was named using the participants' pseudonyms or nick-names. All transcribing was done by me soon after the completion of each interview. This helped to familiarise me with the content of each and to begin reflection on differences and similarities. There was overlap in content, but also accounts of different experiences.
Phase 3: Interpreting individual transcripts	Are there main points, vocal inflections, are there contradictions, if so, what are they, are there silences, why? Which words are emphasised?	I read, re-read and re-listened to the audio tapes during this phase. Some obvious contradictions in some narratives were noted, such as participants' beginning their story by giving the impression that they had not been hugely affected by the family change, but later to reveal vulnerabilities about certain aspects of their experiences. It was sometimes necessary to re-visit the stories to clarify the threads of thought and check my understanding. Other texts, such as the Bear Cards and Sculpture Figure exercises for each participant were examined in relation to their narrative at this phase and contradictions were noted.

Table 4.5 (2) Data Analysis Framework, Fraser, 2004 (Phases 4–7)

Phase 4: Scanning different domains of experience	This task helps to prevent fixation on one dimension of the story. Which parts of the stories refer to relationships, interactions? Are cultural conventions evident? How? Are social structures present?	As some of the stories told by participants were quite poignant with some revealing courage and resilience, it would have been easy to concentrate on individual narratives and run the risk of not attending to the broader pictures. Here, referring to Smart's (2006) work was particularly helpful as was the knowledge gained through my earlier review of literature and my knowledge of social policy and practices and the traditional cultural view of children and young people in Ireland. Paying attention to cultural context and responses to specific questions, the length of answers and voice tone was illuminating in a number of situations and allowed for deeper analysis.
Phase 5: Linking the personal with the political	The task for the researcher here is to 'deliberate on how dominant discourses and their attendant social conventions constitute an interpretive framework for understanding the stories'. Questions must be asked of the relationship of the stories to particular discourses.	At times, the dominant discourse relating to separation, divorce and children jumped out of the narratives at me, such as when Lily spoke of how, when she asked her mother if she could attend the Family Law Court, her mother's response was 'I don't want you to get involved'. At other times, I needed to delve more deeply to uncover the discourse, such as was revealed in siblings, Michael and Amy's narrative relating to their parents. A number of participants illustrated the use of personal agency and used humour when referring to particularly difficult experiences, while Hardy Buck at times had a tough guy persona, a characteristic common in twelve-year old boys. It was also necessary in this context to link with Phase 4 of the Framework.
Phase 6: Looking for commonalities and differences among participants	Throughout the process, researchers are likely to be giving attention to this phase by examining transcripts for commonalities and differences. It is done by comparing and contrasting the content, style and tone.	Some commonalities were easy to identify, such as how participants revealed their initial reaction to their parents' decision to separate, while others provided different insights. It was also interesting to note significant differences and some similarities between siblings. Varying degrees of alienation from one or other parent was also noted, as was participant involvement in informal or formal support services. Three story titles emerged from the overall analysis of the experiences: Initial Reactions; Adjustments and Struggles; and Coming Through.
Phase 7: Writing academic narratives about personal stories	The task here is to hone the analysis and to realise that by doing so, the researcher is translating the talk of others into a form of written analysis. Many drafts may be needed, arguments need to be coherent true to the philosophy of the method.	The three main stories that emerged from the analysis of the individual interviews contained a number of elements and have been written up with reference to the international literature on this subject. New findings have been highlighted and account has been taken of the social and cultural context of this research.

A full account of these findings is provided in Chapter Six.

Following the narrative analysis of the interview data described, further analysis was carried out through an examination of those research results using the lens of Honneth's Theory of Recognition (1995). My initial task here was to configure Honneth's *structures of relations of recognition* in the context of parental separation, divorce and subsequent family re-ordering. Table 4.6 illustrates this re-configuration.

Table 4.6 Structures of Relations of Recognition in the Context of Parental Separation, Divorce and Family Re-ordering

Forms of Relating to Self (Honneth, 1995)	Provided to Children & Young People (CYP) through	Disrespect associated with Separation & Changed Family Life	Impact on Self Identity
Self-Confidence – Love	Secure relationships of Love and Care	Undermining of secure relationships with each parent Lack of communication leading to confusion Inter-parental conflict Criticism of other parent Exposure to domestic violence Expectation of parent for CYP to 'take sides' Non-consultation about decisions relating to family changes	Emotional Damage Physical Integrity Undermining of self-confidence
Self-respect – Rights	Recognition as an individual with equal rights	Non-recognition of CYP as rights bearers No access to legal advice	Social Integrity Stigma and Shame Individual personhood
Self-esteem - Solidarity	Respect and Solidarity within community Provision of opportunity to engage with others	Decision making without consultation Societal structures non-acknowledgement of CYP	Personal honour, dignity and integrity

The analysis of the data in this context involved an examination of the findings from the interview data and an examination of the data gathered during the research review days and will be presented in Chapter Seven under the themes of recognition and misrecognition.

4.7.5 Note on Ethical Issues

Prior to presenting the research findings I will now discuss two aspect of note relating to the data-gathering phase of the research process upon which I have reflected. Each of these fall into the category of minor ethical concerns. The first relates to the locations for the interviews;

the second refers to the provision of incentives to participants. All participants were offered options about where they would like to meet for the actual data gathering: in their home, in a local family service facility such as a Family Resource Centre or, if located close to the university, at the Child and Family Research Centre. Six families decided that we meet their homes; one family chose a foyer of a local hotel and one selected to meet at a local Family Resource Centre. It was a privilege and a pleasure to meet participants in their homes where participants were very relaxed, making it easy to build rapport with parents and children, meet other members of the families, including at times the family dog or cat! It also helped me to place people in their environments and enabled me to discuss distances from schools, sports activities and proximity to extended family. The hospitality I was shown was always gracious, with refreshments being offered, particularly welcome when I had travelled some distance. Being a guest in the young person's home also had the potential to reduce the power imbalance between us; for example, in most situations the young person and his or her parent decided where the meeting should take place creating a situation where they were hosting me for the duration of the interview. Challenges did arise for me, however, that are worth mentioning. As a guest in the child's and his/her parents' home and having 'family space' allotted to me to carry out the interview while other family members moved to different rooms I became conscious of the amount of time that was being taken to conduct the interview. On one occasion a child's stepfather had arrived home from work and we were using the kitchen, so I felt it necessary to finish the interview and return the space to the family. On two occasions, I was aware that the children's mother had gone to her bedroom whilst the interview was taking place as their home had an open-plan living area which was 'taken over' for the interview. On another occasion, the child and I had to move to a bedroom mid-interview as a work-man came to the home to carry out repairs, leaving me with the feeling that I had intruded, perhaps too far into their home.

I am aware, from the literature, of researchers carrying out their fieldwork in participants' homes (Smart, 2004; Sawodoski, 2011) but I have not encountered discussion of the sometimes unexpected implications of this for the researcher and the family involved, although Fitzgerald

(2010) did discuss some reservations she had regarding the risk of parents listening in on the interview while Lyons (2013) expressed a preference for meeting child participants in their homes rather than is schools or at clinics. My supervisor and I had been very careful prior to the commencement of the fieldwork to ensure I had protocols in place to ensure the safety of the participants because of the sensitive nature of the research. We had also discussed my suitability to carry out this research given my background as a family mediator and my experience of working directly with children whose parents had separated. These discussions were, rightly, to ensure that any emotional risk to the participants would be minimized. They were not concerned about any risk to me as a researcher and I had not considered that as a researcher I was at any risk. Our regular supervision sessions, opportunities for reflection and de-briefing did, however, provide an appropriate level of support.

Bahn (2012) has written about the risks that fieldwork might present for researchers, particularly when working with what might be consider 'high risk' groups, such as drug users/dealers but also points to Lee (1995) who described '*risk for field researchers as ambient or situational*' (cited in Bahn, 2012, p. 86). Ambient risk might occur through exposure to disease or risky undertakings, while situational risk includes '*any fieldwork in people's homes is a situational risk*' (ibid, p.86). Bahn (2012) acknowledges that universities take considerable steps to protect fieldworkers in situations that are considered very risky, such as working in areas of conflict or in situations with obvious risks but points out that '*there is latent risk that lies within all qualitative data collections, particularly when this occurs in people's homes*' (p.87). She is speaking there of the risk to researchers of absorbing the psychological and emotional distress of participants that qualitative researchers might be exposed to because of the risk of '*participant vulnerability while they tell their stories and relive traumatic events*' (p.87). She recommends that university ethics boards should follow the lead of some review boards for qualitative research proposals that '*require researchers to develop strategies to deal with these issues prior to commencement of the data collection*' (cited in Bahn, 2008, p.88).

As mentioned, the issue of incentives was another small issue of concern. Hill (2005) has pointed out that the provision of incentives may be problematic when researching with children. However, one of the recommendations of the Ethics Committee of the University was that I should do so as it was considered that I was *'asking a lot'* of the participants. I therefore let each participant know, prior to their participation that they would receive a '*token of appreciation'* from the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre. Participants were unaware, at this stage, of what that token of what this would be. Following completion of the interviews, each participant received a ONE4ALL gift voucher, valued at €15 along with a letter of appreciation from myself and the Child and Family Research Centre. I was aware on two occasions that, perhaps, the children involved had been encouraged by a parent to participate because of that promised '*token of appreciation'*. While this did not influence the data gathered, I reflected upon whether I ought to have waited until the interview was completed prior to mentioning the incentive, but then it wouldn't be an incentive!

The Child and Family Research Centre (CFRC) provided funding to cover the cost of the three research review group meetings to which all participants and the research consultation group were invited. This funding was used solely to provide transport costs and refreshments for those who attended, participants were not offered any incentive to continue their engagement in the research. Ten of the original interviewees were involved in this aspect of the research at various times along with the members of the research consultation group. The group meetings were held on June 28th 2014; March 28th 2015; and November 4th 2015 at the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre (CFRC) at NUI Galway. When the children and young people indicated that they were interested in involving themselves in a Dissemination Project, I prepared a separate protocol for approval by the CFRC Youth as Researchers programme under which the project was carried out. This work was undertaken between January and April 2016 in association with Foróige, Ireland's youth development organisation and a Creative Youth Education Programme TechSpace. An analysis and discussion of this element of the research project is provided in Chapter Seven.

Finally, it is worth mentioning here the dilemma that is faced by researchers when deciding on how to present the authentic voices of the research participants. Lyons (2013) has pointed out that presenting the analysis in narrative research is challenging because *'the researcher seeks to present the analysis in a way that is coherent but does not fragment peoples' voices'* (p.103). Researchers have overcome this dilemma (McCance *et al,* 2001) by presenting detailed stories from two or three participants. Like Lyons (2013) I was tempted to do so, but on full reading and analysis of the full data set, I became aware that each participant had significant experiences to share which needed to be recorded and included and therefore have analysed and presented the experiences of all fourteen participants.

4.8 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has outlined in detail the theoretical underpinnings of this research: The New Sociology of Childhood and Honneth's Theory of Recognition and has provided insight into my motivation for undertaking this research in the manner in which I have. The methodology and methods employed have been discussed along with the importance of being consciously reflexive regarding my influence on the research process as the researcher. The chapter concluded with a detailed description of the research process. This review has also indicated that Honneth's Theory of Recognition is an established framework from which to explore children's and young people's experiences of recognition and misrecognition in the context of this study. Prior to presenting these findings in Chapters Six and Seven, Chapter Five will introduce the fourteen research participants in their family and social contexts, using their self-selected nick-names. The two-person research consultation group will also be introduced.

Chapter Five

The Research Participants

5.1 Introduction

Introducing those who participated in the research is considered the first step of the evaluation and analytic process in narrative inquiry. Two of Runyan's (1984) seven criteria for evaluation provide a useful guideline in this regard: (i) *'providing a feel for the person, conveying the experience of having known or met him or her';* and (ii) *'effectively portraying the social and historical world that the person is living in'* (p.152).

This chapter provides these introductions providing *'a feel for each person'* through their self-descriptions and through my sense of each person following my meetings with the. In order to provide an insight into each participants' *'social and historical world'* I have included additional information, such as whether they live in rural or urban areas, their interests and ambitions. Information regarding participants' family situations is provided in Table 5.1 much of which was garnered from the Parental Survey (Appendix 8) while some was obtained from the participants themselves. Each person is introduced in the order in which I met them using their self-selected nick-name or pseudonym.

Interviews with the fourteen (nine female and five males) participants aged from seven to nineteen years were conducted. All participants choose their own 'nick-names' for the research and names of others referred to by participants, such as parents or siblings have either been abbreviated or changed to preserve anonymity.

Demographic data obtained from thirteen parents indicates the breath of experiences of the young people who participated in this research:

- Parents had been separated for between two and seventeen years.
- Ten parents had been married to their child's other parent, while three had not.

- Four parents reported income levels of under €15,000; six had incomes of between €15,000-30,000, two had incomes of €30,000-50,000 and one had an income in excess of €75,000.

- Three parents had informally resolved issues relating to their separation without professional help, two had done so through their solicitors, six had attended family mediation, four had attended the family law courts and one did not indicate how issues were resolved. A number of parents indicated that they had used multiple methods to resolve their separation issues, family mediation, through their solicitors and the family law courts.

- Eight of these parents are in new relationships, with two being married to new partners, two have children with their new partners and five new partners have children from previous relationships.

- Participants came from various parts of Ireland: Co. Clare, Co. Galway, Galway City, Co. Tipperary, Co. Dublin and Co. Monaghan.

- Nine participants live in rural areas, while five live in urban areas.

- The two-person (one male aged 18 years, one female, aged 13 years) consultative group came from Galway city.

A Semi-structured Interview (Appendix 11) format was followed with the fourteen participants lasting between thirty-five and sixty-five minutes and all were audio recorded. The research instruments employed included the St Luke's Bear Cards (Appendix 12); Family Sculpture Figures (Appendix 12); and the Talking Cards Game (Appendix 1). Family Drawings were completed by ten participants. As not all participants provided a family drawing, these were not used in the analysis of the data. All interviews were conducted between October 2013 and March 2014.

Table 5.1 provides a summary of the research participants in their family contexts and will be followed by fuller introductions to each of the fourteen children and young people.

Table 5.1 Summary of Participants in Their Family Contexts

Participant	Age	Age at separation	Living Arrangements	Parents' marital status at separation	Parents' current status And Income Range per year	Lives in Rural/Urban area Consent signed
Rose	15.5 years	3 years	Lives with her mother, spends four days per month at her fathers' home	Married	Mother: divorced Under €15,000 Father: remarried (one child) €30-€50,000	Rural town Consent signed by both parents
Awesome Bartman	7 years	1 year	Lives with his mother, stepfather and two step-brothers. Spends one afternoon per week and every other weekend with his father and his partner	Single	Mother: Married (two children) €15-€30,000 Father: in new relationship (Income details not provided)	Rural village Consent signed by mother
Lily*	15 years	7 years	Lives with her mother and her brother No contact with her father	Married	Mother: Single Under €15,000 Father: In new relationship (income details not provided)	Suburban town close to city Consent signed by mother
Spaceman*	14 years	6 years	Lives with his mother and his sister No contact with his father	Married	Sibling of Lily*	
Sharon*	9 years	7 years	week on/week off with each parent, along with her sister	Married	Mother: In new relationship €15,000-€30,000 Father: Single	Rural town Consent signed by mother and self
Bullett*	11 years	9 years	Week on/week off with each parent along with her sister	Married	Sibling of Sharon*	
Amy*	14 years	12 years	Equal time with each patent with her brother and sister	Married	Father: Single €30-50,000 Mother: in new relationship €15-30,000	Rural village Consent signed by both parents and self
Michael*	17 years	15 years	Equal time with each parent with his sisters	Married	Siblings of Amy & Kate*	

Kate*	18 years	16 years	Equal time with each parent with her brother and sister	Married	Sibling of Michael and Amy*	Consent signed by self
Jennifer	10 years	6 years	Lives with her mother and her two sisters Spends every other weekend with her father and sometime during each week	Married	Father: in new relationship €75-€100,000 Mother: Single (income details not available)	Rural village with mother Suburb of city with father Consent signed by father and self
Harry-Henry*	12 years	9 years	Lives with his mother and spends every other weekend with his father	Married	Mother: in new relationship €30-50,000 Father: in new relationship (income details not available)	Rural area adjacent to small town Consent signed by mother and self
Hardy-Buck	19 years	16 years	Lives away from home at college, spends weekends with his mother and his brother. Does not see his father, is in telephone contact with him.	Married	Sibling of Harry-Henry*	Self
Charlotte	16 years	5 years	Lives with her mother, her mother's partner (her step-father) and his daughter (her step-sister). Spends an occasional weekend with her father, his wife and her half-brother	Married	Father: re-married, one child €15-€30,000 Mother: co-habits with new partner and his daughter (Lottie) Under €15,000	Suburb of city Consent signed by both parents
Lottie	16 years	1 year	Lives with her father, his partner (her step-mother) and her daughter (her step-sister). See her mother occasionally	Single	Mother: Single Under €15,000 Father: co-habits with new partner and her daughter (Charlotte) Under €15,000	Suburb of city Consent signed by both parents

5.2 The Research Participants

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1. Rose

Rose described herself as being fifteen and a half years when I met her in October 2013. She saw the poster about the research in her local Family Resource Centre where her mother works and told her mother she would like to participate.

She is lively and out-going and in Transition Year at school. She did very well in her Junior Certificate, despite the fact that her grandmother, to whom she was very close, was very ill at the time. Rose now refers to her Gran as her guardian angel and wears the beautiful locket her grandmother gave her. Rose loves to dance and is involved in a hip-hop dance group. Her mother described her as 'friendly, out-going, very helpful, with loads of friends'. Her father referred to her recent loss of her grandmother and described her as being strong and loving dancing.

Rose's parents separated when she was three years of age, they subsequently divorced and her father has re-married. He and Rose's step-mother have a son, now aged one year whom Rose 'adores'. Her relationship with her step-mother is not close. She lives with her mother and spends four day per month at her father's home, but does not stay over.

Rose is hard working at school and at the time of the research interview said she intends to study psychology at University.

Rose has been actively involved in all aspects of the research, has attended all of the research review days and has participated in the project to disseminate the research findings.

Bear Card Number	Four	Six	Eleven	
Emotion Identified	Confusion	Sad and Scared	Angry	
Feels closest to (1-4)	Grandmother	Mother	Father	[half] Brother

2. Awesome Bartman

Aged 7 years when I met him in October 2013, Awesome Bartman is an athlete and plays soccer and Gaelic football. He showed me some of his taekwondo trophies when I met him at his home in a small village. He has lots of friends, but no best friend. One of his friends died tragically following an accident. He is also keen on music – his father plays in a traditional Irish music band. His is a very friendly boy, likes drawing and doing art work.

His parents have not been married to each other but did live together for one and a half years and separated when Awesome Bartman was very young. He now lives with his mother, his step-father and his two (half) brothers who are aged three years and one year. He likes having younger brothers. He spends time with his father and his partner each week and every other weekend. There are three dogs in his life, one at his home and two at his father's home. His mother described him being a kind, sensitive and intelligent child. She contacted me having read about the research in a national newspaper because she felt Awesome Bartman would have much to offer to the research.

Awesome Bartman attended the 2nd Research Review Day in March 2015 and was subsequently actively involved in the project to disseminate the research findings.

Bear Card number	Four	Six	Seven	Nine		
Emotion identified	Confused	Worried	Confused/Sad (don't know what happened)	Sad		
Feels closest to (1-6)	Mother	Little brother (half brother)	Baby brother (half brother)	Step-father	Birth father	Pet dog

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3. Lily

Lily contacted me when she read about the research in one of the national newspapers. She had, by then, discussed participating with her mother who gave her written consent. Lily was 15 years when I met her. She was in Transition Year at school and has a large number of friends. She lives in a suburban town with her mother and her brother. For almost a year, she has not had any contact with her father.

Lily was hospitalised on numerous occasions because of infections and has attended a dietician in the past because of problems controlling her weight. She plays the piano and as a younger child was very involved in horse-riding - a hobby that she now misses. Her mother describes her as being a good student, very bright and has big ambitions. She decided to participate in the research because she felt it might help other people.

Lily's mother was ill and having treatment at the time of the interview.
Lily attended the Research Review day in March 2015. She was unable to continue her involvement in the project for personal reasons.

Bear Card number	Thirteen	Two				
Emotion identified	Anger	Happy now				
Feels closest to (1-4)	Mother	Brother	Nana	Pet Dog		

4. Spaceman

Spaceman is Lily's brother and was aged 14 years when I met him. I had travelled to his home expecting to meet and interview his sister only. However, Spaceman had decided that I should also meet him as "I heard my sister was doing it and it would be easier for you 'cos you travelled a long way and I though what you were doing is a very good idea".

He lives with his mother and sister and, like Lily, has not seen his father for some time. He likes mountain-biking with his friends, enjoys watching television and playing his X-Box.

He also plays football and plays with his local club. He is dyslexic and was diagnosed as having 'mild ADD' (attention deficit disorder). His mother describes him as being bright and funny. Like Lily, Spaceman was also dealing with his mother's illness when I met him.

Spaceman attended the Research Review day in March 2015, He was unable to continue his involvement for personal reasons.

Bear Card number	Six	Nine	Eight	Seven	Eleven	Twelve
Emotion identified	Alone	Sad	Scared	Isolated	Angry	Angry
Feels closest to (1-2)	Mother	Sister	Nanny			

5. Sharon

Sharon was aged 9 years when I met her in November 2013 in her mother's home in a rural town, Sharon has one sister, Bullet, whom I also met. She describes herself as the 'baby of the family'. If she had a 'super-power' she would choose invisibility, because it would be good for playing hide and seek. Her father makes her laugh when he tickles her. She has a couple of friends that she trusts and an imaginary friend called 'Ally'. She texts Ally every day from her fake phone and Ally answers. She has two Grand-dads and one Nana, as her other Nana died. There are lots of dogs at her Nana's house and she would like a Huskie puppy that will grow up big.

Sharon had recently joined the local GAA club when I met her.
Her mother is in a new relationship. Her partner does not have children. Sharon's mother describes her as being happy in her own little world, even though she can mix fairly well.

Sharon's involvement in the research was through the interviews only; she did not participate further.

Bear Card number	Eight	Two				
Emotion identified	Scared	Happy (because parents happy now)				
Feels closest to (1-6)	Sister	Imaginary friend	Mother	Father	Friend	Friend

6. Bullet

Bullet is Sharon's older sister and was aged 11 years when I met her. She picked the nick-name Bullet because she is fast runner and her father calls her Bullet. She is involved in competitive athletics and is a member of the local GAA club. She has lots of friends and is particularly close to a girl whose parents have also separated. She likes playing games with her friends. Like Sharon she alternates a week at each of her parents' homes. Bullet loves Jedward and has been to see them in concert, she told me they appear on children's television a lot.

Her mother described her as doing very well at school and expressed concern that she might not express her emotions and stated that Bullet 'obviously wishes we could get back together'.

Like her sister, Bullet's involvement in the research was through the interviews only.

Bear Card number	Nine	Four	Three	Four		
Emotion identified	Sad	Confused	Happy	Confused (a different kind)		
Feels closest to (1-5)	Sister	Friend	Dad's neighbour	Mother	Father	

7. Michael

Aged 17 years, Michael was studying for his Leaving Certificate when I met him in February 2014. He plans to study architecture. He is sociable and gets on well with others. His mother described him as being more comfortable with adults than with younger people. He is an Irish set-dancing champion and has appeared on television. He plays traditional Irish music also. Michael has two sisters, Amy and Kate whom I also met. His parents had been married for eighteen years prior to their separation two years ago. Their mother is in a new relationship. The family lives in a rural village in the west of Ireland. His parent's live in close proximity to each other and Michael and his siblings share time with both of them, spending time each day after school and every other weekend at his mother's home and the rest of his time at his father's home.

Michael attended the research review days and was involved in the project to disseminate the research findings.

Bear Card number	Eight	Four				
Emotion identified	Sad	Confusion				
Feels closest to (1-4)	Older Sister	Mother	Father and Younger sister	Dog		

8. Amy						

8. Amy

Amy is Michael's and Kate's younger sister. At age thirteen, she was in her second year of secondary school when I met her initially. She plays football, enjoys dance and plays the tin whistle. She enjoys reading and watching television. Amy is a quiet girl and has lots of friends. Her father said she is working hard at school.

She goes for walks with the family pet. Like her siblings she divides her time between her parents' homes.

Amy has participated in all of the research review days and has been consistently involved in the project to disseminate the research findings.

Bear Card number	Four	Eight				
Emotion identified	Confusion	Very sad				
Feels closest to (1-3)	Mother and Sister	Father and Brother	Pet Dog			

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9. Kate

At age 18 years, Kate is the oldest of the three siblings. She, like Michael was studying for the Leaving Certificate when I met her. She would like to study law at university. She enjoys sport, both as a supporter and as a participant; she is an avid reader, likes cooking and plays the flute.

Kate is confident and articulate; she divides her time between her parents' homes.

Kate attended the second Research Review day and had involvement in the project to disseminate the research findings.

Bear Card number	Fifteen	Eight	Thirteen	Ten		
Emotion identified	Really shocked	Isolated	Disbelief	Angry and isolated		
Feels closest to (1-4)	Brother	Sister	Father	Mother	Pet Dog	

10. Hardy-Buck

I met hardy-Buck at his home in the north east of the country where he lives with his mother. He was aged 12 years when I met him in February 2014. He is 'big into sport' a passion he shares with his older brother and his father. He also loves singing and drama, he plays the x-box with his friends and likes watching TV.

His parents had been married for 17 years prior to their separation in 2010, when Hardy-Buck was aged 8 years. Both parents are now in new relationships but do not live with their partners. His father lives about one hour' s drive from him and he sees him during each week and he spends every other weekend at his father's home.   Hardy-Buck is doing very well at school, according to his mother and is a sociable boy with lots of friends. He loves the United States of America which he has visited on a number of occasions and intends to live there in the future.

Hardy-Buck participated in the research through the interviews and did not attend the research review days.

Bear Card number	Eight					
Emotion identified	Sad					
Feels closest to (1-6)	Mother and Father	Brother	Grandmother	Grandfather	Cousin	Pet Dog

11. Harry-Henry

Harry-Henry is Hardy-Buck's older brother and is aged 19 years. He lives away from home as he is attending college in another town. When I travelled to meet his brother, Harry-Henry has also decided to participate in the research. He is in the final year of a degree programme at an Institute of Technology and plans to study physiotherapy in the United Kingdom when he completes his degree.

Like his brother, he is very keen on sport, plays hurling, football, handball and squash. He comes back to his home every few weeks but does not now see his father when he does, although he is in touch with him by telephone and text.

He spends time with his friends when at home and works very hard in college, achieving high grades. His participation the research was confined to the interview.

Bear Card number	Six	Ten				
Emotion identified	Helpless	Frustrated				
Feels closest to (1-6)	Mother	Brother	Grandmother /grandfather	Cousin	Father	

12. Jennifer

Jennifer, who was ten when I met her in March 2014, has two sisters, one older and one younger, and also has a 24-year old step sister whom she misses since she left home for university a few years ago. She lives outside a small village with her mother and sisters and spends time in a large town with her father every week. Jennifer is the only member of her family whom I met.

Jennifer likes reading, plays soccer and hockey and is a member of the school orchestra where she plays the tin whistle.

Jennifer's parents had been married for 10 years and separated in 2009 when Jennifer was aged five. Both of her parents are in new relationships but do not live with their respective partners.   Her father described her as being kind and sensitive with an awareness of her feelings and an ability to express them. Jennifer is articulate and assured and her best friend is a girl she met on her first day at pre-school.

Jennifer attended the Research Review days and subsequently became involved in the project to disseminate the research findings.

Bear Card number	Four	Ten	Eight			
Emotion identified	Confused	Annoyed	Upset			
Feels closest to (1-6)	Mother	Older (half) Sister	Older Sister	Father	Best Friend	Younger sister

13. Charlotte

Charlotte was aged sixteen when I met her in April 2014. She lives with her mother and step-father and step-sister in a city suburb. Her father, his partner and their son live in the same city. She spends occasional weekends there with them. She loves kick-boxing, is artistic and loves music and baking also. Her mother describes her as being loyal and trusting with an army of friends. Her father said that she has had problems in the past with 'worrying and bullying'. She had an eating disorder when younger which she has overcome and now has a very healthy appetite. Her mother said that Charlotte still worries about lots of things, including her looks and examination results. She described her as a hard worker both in and out of school. Charlotte and her step-sister Lottie, who also participated in the research, have a close relationship with each other.

Charlotte attended two Research Review days. She was unable to continue her involvement in the subsequent project due to study and work commitments.

Bear Card number	Nine	Seven	Three			
Emotion identified	Upset	Isolated	Relaxed			
Feels closest to (1-6)	Mother	Step-father	Step-sister	Friend	Half-brother	Step-mother and Birth Father

14. Lottie

Lottie is Charlotte's step-sister and is also aged sixteen years. She lives with her father, her step-mother and step-sister. Her mother lives in a nearby town and her older half-brother lives close to where she lives. She sees her mother every week when she works in town and occasionally, her mother stays at Lottie's home. Her parents are not married to each other and have lived separately since 1997, when Lottie was very young. Her mother describes her as being beautiful, smart and funny while her father described her as a great young girl and very talented. Both parents mentioned that Lottie has had depression in the past and has overcome this.

She is involved in the arts, is a great mimic and performs when called upon to do so. She is doing well in school and has ambitions to either go to art college or to work in the culinary arts, as she loves cooking. Lottie attended a number of the Research Review days and has been involved in the project to disseminate the research findings.

Bear Card number	Four	Seven	Nine	Eight	Ten	Three
Emotion identified	Confused	Isolated	Sad	Guilty/Ashamed	Angry	Calm
Feels closest to (1-5)	Father	Step-sister and Friend	Half-brother	Birth mother and Step-mother	Boyfriend	

5.2 The Research Consultation Group

The research consultation group formed an important aspect of the participatory process of the research. I considered it important that, from the outset, I would have some young people available with whom I could discuss and develop my ideas, listen to their feedback and, most importantly, give a perspective that I, as an adult could not provide. I was very lucky to meet Liam and Megan each of whom provided what was needed, and, because of differing ages, they were able to engage with the process from both a younger child's viewpoint and provide the perspective of older young people. I now briefly introduce Liam and Megan.

Liam

Liam is the youngest of a family of four. He was aged 18 years when he agreed, through my contact with his mother, to become involved as part of a consultation group for the research. At that time he was preparing for his leaving Certificate.
Liam's parents separated when he was aged 15 years.
Liam is a keen musician and now plays professionally while also studying music.

Despite transitioning to third level education, Liam continued his involvement as a member of the consultation group throughout the research, including the dissemination project. As a member of the consultation group his input was always useful.

Megan

I first met Megan when she was aged thirteen years. Her parents had separated and she lives with her mother and older brother and keeps in contact with her father by telephone and spends time with him occasionally.

Megan is friendly and outgoing, she works hard at school. Megan involved herself thoroughly as a member of the research consultation group, had lots of ideas and mixed well with other participants during the research review days which she and Liam helped to plan.
Megan involved herself thoroughly in the research dissemination project as an active member, while retaining her role as a member of the research consultation group.

5.3 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has provided an introduction to the research participants at the time I first encountered them to conduct the initial interviews for this research. It has given an account of the children's and young people's family contexts as well as giving information regarding their interests and has identified, for the reader, those who continued their involvement in the research review days and subsequent project to disseminate the research findings. For this project, this group of participants were joined by Megan, one of the members of the research consultation group.

Chapter Six will provide a detailed analysis of the research, beginning with the narrative analysis of the experiences of parental separation, divorce and subsequent changed family life from the interview data. The discussion of these findings will refer to the review of international literature as detailed in Chapter Four.

Chapter Seven will further examine and analyse the data through the lens of Honneth's (1995) Theory of Recognition using data from the participants' narratives and from data obtained during the research review days. This analysis will provide detail of how the involvement in participatory methods provided the impetus for the children and young people to engage further with the research findings and subsequently involve themselves in their own *struggle for recognition* as described by Honneth (1995).

Chapter Six

Separation, Divorce and Family Re-ordering:

The Experiences

6.1   Introduction to Findings

The nature of the research topic and particularly the methodology employed to conduct it necessitated a two-phased approach to gathering data and to data analysis. The two-phased approach began with a qualitative interview with each participant. This was followed by a series of what I refer to in these chapters as 'group consultation days' during which participants were invited to review and comment upon the results of initial analysis of the research; discuss their participation in the research process; and to give their views upon how best to disseminate the research findings. The findings are presented in the following two chapters:

Chapter Six presents the findings in relation to first research objective and concentrates upon a narrative analysis of the individual research interviews, in order to capture the stories of how parental separation and its consequences were experienced by the children and young people. In Chapter Seven these experiences along with data gathered during the 'group consultation days' are examined through the lens of Honneth's (1995) *'structures of relations of recognition'* (p.129) in order to identify situations of recognition/respect and misrecognition/disrespect in the participants' experiences.

In Chapter Six, the analysis and interpretation of the data has concentrated upon the data generated through the interviews conducted with the research participants during Phase One of the research process. From this analysis, three broad and inter-related themes emerged: *Initial Reaction; Adjustment and Struggles associated with Altered Family Life;* and *Coming Through – what helped or hindered?* The analysis of the data involved transcribing the recorded interviews in QSR NVivo 8. Through the analysis that followed using Fraser's (2004) Data Analysis Framework, these three common themes emerged. Thorough reading of the

transcribed scripts enabled me to identify and categories the experiences under these three themes. In the overall analysis of the narratives it was evident that almost all of the participants had memories of either initially hearing from their parents of their decision to separate or, if parents did not actually tell of their intention to separate the children and young people could recall when they became aware that their parents had separated. For a small number of participants it was the impact of their parents' decision that they recalled. Again, the theme relating to altered family life and the associated adjustments and struggles became clear to me through my analysis of the data. Additional attention was paid to the data presented through the Bear card and Family Sculpture exercise, each of which was then linked to the identified themes.

The narrative analysis is presented under these themes.

6.2   Narrative Analysis

As described in Chapter Four, the analysis and interpretation of the data was carried out within Fraser's (2004) seven-phase guidelines for Narrative Analysis. Interpretation, according to Patton (2002) goes beyond the descriptive data and involves '*attaching meaning to what was found, making sense of findings, offering explanations, drawing conclusions, extrapolating lessons, making inferences, considering meanings, and otherwise imposing order on an unruly and surely patterned world*' (p. 480). Smart et al (2001) describes this process as an examination of the data for both descriptive and conceptual themes and involves '*moving back and forth between everyday meanings, interpretations, motives and intentions of the research participants and the theoretical concepts that guided the original research design*' (p.183). The conversations between me and the young participants in this study have travelled '*across their lifetimes*' (McCormack, 2002), stopping at several points to allow for greater detail to emerge. Raw emotions have been present for some parts of some stories, and for two participants, an issue never spoken about before has emerged. Interpreting the resulting data is both an exciting opportunity and a daunting one as the children and young people in this study were

living and experiencing the *'pointy end'* (Fitzgerald, 2008 p.182) of parental separation and divorce in Ireland.

Josselson (2011) emphasises that narrative inquiry '*works with detailed stories drawn in some way from participants, stories that reveal how people view and understand their lives'* (p.225). My objective in this chapter, therefore, is to guide the reader through the lived experiences of the research participants: their stories of parental separation, divorce and family re-ordering. By following a *'trail of evidence that originate*(d) *in the text'* (Rogers, et al 1999, p.5), my aim has been to build a picture of each participants' experience in a nuanced manner, whilst remaining faithful to the lived experiences through the use of the exact words of the children and young people. This has provided '*thick, rich descriptions'* which, according to Patton (2002) provides '*the foundation for qualitative analysis* [and] *takes the reader into the setting being described'* (p.437).

The chapter begins with the narratives relating to children's and young people's experiences of their awareness of discord in their parents' relationship and of hearing the news of the separation.

6.3   Initial Reactions

How parents manage the initial separation period for their children can have far-reaching effects on their children's adjustment to life in a separated family. Thomson et al (2002) have described parents' decision to separate or divorce as a *'critical moment'* (p.338) over which the child or young person does not have control. The children and young people identified a wide range of emotions when describing their reactions to the news of their parents' decision and in relation to the adjustments they needed to make as result of these decisions. The emotions were identified through the use of the St Luke's Bear Cards (Appendix 12). The frequency of each identified emotion is illustrated in Table 6.1 (1) and Table 6.1 (2).

Tables 6.1 (1) and 6.1 (2): Emotions Identified through the Bear Cards:

Bear Card	4	8	7
Emotions identified	Confusion	Sad; Upset; Isolated; Scared	Confusion; Sadness; Isolation
Chosen by	8 people	7 people	8 people

Bear Card	9	10	11 & 12	13 & 14	15
Emotions Identified	Sadness; Scared; Upset	Frustration; Annoyance; Helplessness	Anger	Disbelief	Denial; Shock
Chosen by	8 people	5 people	4 people	3 people	1 person

As can be seen from this table, the highest single category of identified emotion was confusion followed by feelings of sadness, upset and isolation. A smaller number of participants indicated that they were annoyed, angry or frustrated at the news while some participants spoke of feeling frightened, shocked or worried. The confusion, surprise and shock experienced by the children and young people is expressed in the following narratives.

Amy: '*I didn't have any idea it was happening, it was a <u>big surprise</u> I'd say I was very confused, I was upset, yea'.*

Bullet: '*I just, well, my Mum pulled up in a car and I asked her what was wrong and she said they were splitting up and me and my sister went with her, it was a big change…….I was sad and very confused.'*

Lily: '*I was really upset, I don't really remember, I was confused. My dad wouldn't be at the house and he's come to see us, my Mum would take us upstairs, shouting at my Mum to see his kids'.*

Harry Henry: *The day they told me, yea, I knew, I knew, em, that was a bad day, I was out there like and eh I knew it was going to happen.*

A number of participants indicated an awareness of overt and ongoing dis-harmony and conflict in their parents' relationships and had developed strategies around coping with this.

Hardy Buck: *They were just fighting …. I used to be worried. I used to have butterflies in my tummy. I relaxed when the fighting was over, the tension was gone.*

Harry Henry: *Yea, there used to be a few fights, I tried not to listen at all. I'd go up to my room and try not to listen.* He also revealed a feeling of helplessness and frustration at not being able to do anything about what was occurring between his parents: *I felt frustrated and helpless then. I got involved in a lot of sport that year and it kept my head away from it.*

Spaceman's narrative paints a somewhat different picture and needs to be fully re-produced to get the full sense of his experience:

'I was about six or seven, probably six. My memory of it is not very good, I don't remember, well I do but it wasn't very positive, em well, there was a lot of shouting, well not very good. I was scared. I lived in the country then so I'd just go out in the middle of the field and just go there and sit quietly by myself, I wouldn't go into the house, I'd just stay outside. Em, well, I didn't really talk much at all, like I didn't say much to anyone, no I never really mentioned it to anyone, I never really spoke about it at all, no even up to now I only started to talk about it in the last year'.

Smart (2007) has written about how children and young people in difficult situations find ways of reducing or ignoring the impact of negative parental relationships. The narratives of Hardy-Buck, Harry-Henry and Spaceman serve to highlight how their *'emotional responses speak volumes about their powerlessness in their families: they could not leave physically, so they leave emotionally, perhaps finding other ways of consoling themselves...'* (Smart 2007 p.147). These three young boys employed a dual strategy of attempting to both physically and emotionally remove themselves from their respective situations. It is interesting to note that brothers Hardy-Buck and Harry Henry did not speak to or support each other at this time, with Hardy-Buck saying *'No, we did not speak about it, we don't have that kind of bond, we just talk about football and stuff'.* The level of trauma being experienced by Spaceman may have made

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it very difficult for him to share his feelings with anyone, including his sister Lily, who was obviously trying to cope in her own way *'I couldn't talk to my friends because they had no idea, I went to the junk cupboard, I had to go to a dietician, it was getting bad'*.

Kate also indicated that coming to terms with her parents' decision to separate was difficult for her, even though she was aware that their relationship was not good

> *'Yes, I definitely though it was going to happen sometime, I assumed it wasn't going to be until we left the house and it wouldn't really affect us, well it would, but maybe not as much as if we were living there….I didn't want it to happen'.*

Kate spoke of trying to protect her sister from the effects of the separation

> *'I kinda felt I had to be the strong one for my sister, it's probably harder cos she's younger, she's going to be there for longer and she's the one who's going to live with the whole completely separate thing. I think I couldn't really get upset in front of her cos then she would be upset, I tried to avoid talking about it'*

The children and young people whose parents had separated when they were very young, relied upon explanations from others, most likely their parents. This is the case for Awesome Bartman who gave me the following explanation: *'They didn't have enough room in the house cos my Nana and Grandad were living there. I think that's what happened and then my Mam had to come here, I'm still a bit confused….I don't really know what happened'.* Rose was also very young when her parents separated, but could recall some incidents associated with this time in her life *'There was a lot of shouting and I remember my Dad asking me to go with him, but I was afraid'.*

There are definite similarities present in the reaction of virtually all of the participants to the news of their parents' separation; such similarities may be observed even for the people who were aware of discord in their parents' relationship. This finding concurs with that of Kelly & Kisthardt (2009) who report similar findings from a review of studies (Wallerstein & Kelly 1980; Kelly & Emery, 2003) conducted in the United States where children reacted to hearing this news with *'shock, disbelief, distress, anxiety and anger'* (p.317). Kelly & Kisthardt (2009) reporting on research in the 1970s *'found that very few parents had provided any useful*

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explanation to their children in advance about their separation'; they further remark that, according to Emery's (1999) study *'three decades later, the problem of parental failure to talk to children and adolescents about parental separation has apparently not diminished'* (pp.317-318). Bagshaw (2007) reported similar reactions from children in South Australia who reported that they *'were never told why* [the separation] *had occurred, all saying they wanted more information...preferably from their parents'* (p.456). Hogan et al. (2002) reported that *'One of the most common reactions to learning that their parents would separate initially was surprise or shock, even when children were aware that their parents had inter-personal difficulties'* (p.40). Twelve years on from that initial research in Ireland it appears that this situation has not changed. The inability or reluctance of parents to communicate openly with their children about their separation is evident. Alongside this, however, there runs a concurrent theme that some young people employ strategies that enable them to avoid discussions with their parents or with other family members. Such practices by parents and their children can be interpreted in a number of ways. Firstly, it can be interpreted as poor communication on the part of parents who according to Robinson (1993) are, at this time, dealing with the complexity of a six phase model of *'family dislocation'* (p.67) during the process of separation and divorce. Secondly, it can be seen as a strategic use of agency by the child or young person to enable him or her to come to terms with the news. The narratives of siblings Kate, Michael and Amy relating to communication within their family illustrate this point as it illustrates how each person in the family have different memories of the same event. Protecting her sister is an important aspect of Kate's narrative, while also indicating that she was in some way denying the reality; Michael reported having lots of talk with his parents while Amy clearly came to terms with the situation alone, and may have benefited from some conversations with her parents and siblings.

Michael: *For me, it wasn't that surprising, they did live together, but they were never that affectionate, I was sad. Mam and Dad did talk to us a lot about what we felt about it.*
Amy: *After a while I sorta dealt with it, at the start I was, just felt upset…I just thought then, I just thought of if it's better. I didn't talk to anyone about it, no I just decided that myself'*

Kate: *We only had one talk as a family, I tried to avoid talking about it to my younger sister, I didn't want to upset her. Also, I didn't really want to know.*

Kelly & Kisthardt (2009) recommend that parents return to their children and initiate on-going discussions in order to enable them to process the news and have their questions dealt with. In this family's situation, this is evidently important, but also important that each member of the family be provided with individual opportunities and perhaps with individual support to come to terms with the news.

From the evidence provided in this research it is clear that the potential effects of hearing of parents' intention to separate on children's and young people's lives can be minimised by parents, resulting in poor information giving and communication which resulted in feelings of confusion and worry about the future for the majority of the participants. For a number of young people the apparent suddenness of their parents' decision was impactful, which added to the level of confusion. This was accompanied by unsettled living conditions for some participants. The impact of pre-separation conflict was downplayed in a number of participants' narratives, while still expressing relief associated with the actual separation which led to a sense of relaxation with the removal of family tension. Where parental conflict was acute children and young people found ways of coping by endeavouring to remove themselves both physically and emotionally and it appears from their narratives that their emotional needs were not met. The children and young people were able to recall aspects of events in their families very clearly many years later. The failure by parents to openly communicate from the outset of their separation with their children and the nature of the actual event of separation upon them has impacted upon the many adjustments and struggles associated with subsequent altered family lives for the children and young people as will be now be discussed.

6.4   Adjustments and Struggles Associated with Altered Family Life

It is recognised that the adjustment to separation, divorce and subsequent family re-ordering presents challenges for all family members and that within each family there will be variations in reactions and coping. When embarking on this research project, I had not expected to encounter the wide range and sometimes complex adjustments that the research participants had experienced. These included adjustments to inter-personal relationships with parents; challenges of living between two homes; maintaining contact and relationships with non-resident parents; adjusting to parental re-partnering or re-marriage; dealing with on-going parental conflict; adjusting to step-family relationships; and dealing with personal embarrassment in relation to this issue. Additionally, a number of participants discussed struggles associated with personal anxiety and depression associated with the changes in their families. These findings are presented under a number of subheadings, namely, *Living Arrangements; Moving Homes and Living between two Homes; Involvement in Decision Making; Impact of Family Court Decisions on Participants' Experiences; Parental Re-partnering, Parental Re-marriage and Step-family Life;* that encapsulate the adjustments made by the research participants.

6.4.1   Living Arrangements

The reality of parental separation for most children involves them spending time with each of their parents in different homes. Mahon & Moore's (2011) review of family law court decisions in Ireland found that court orders concerning access and contact with non-resident parents were described as 'liberal' or 'flexible', except in situations where access was disputed or controversial. They point out that this 'flexible' or 'liberal' arrangement usually means that children live with their mothers and spend time with their fathers during each week and at weekends. While a number of participants had such arrangements in place, other parenting and living arrangements were also practiced (Table 5.1). Whatever the arrangements, however,

they impacted upon the lives of the children and young people with few being involved in any way in the decisions that were made.

Jennifer: *I was just told, I was small and just told 'you are going here today and there tomorrow' I can't imagine it being different. I'd like it to suit my sport, but I know the world does not revolve around me.* While Jennifer acknowledges the efforts made by her parents to ensure she can attend her activities, sometimes she misses out: *I sometimes have sports at the weekend so we have to go over and back from Dad's house every second weekend, cos I'm on the team where my Mum lives. I miss sport sometimes when I'm at Dad's house.*

Awesome Bartman also explained the arrangements he follows to spend time with his father, including the reasons for them being as they are. '*Every Tuesday and Thursday the first week, then I go to his house at half-four and stay there for two and a half hours. And then I go to his house on Fridays at half-four, every second week, because I stay with him on Saturday and Sunday and I come back on Sunday night. It was planned that way cos my Dad is not home until half-four, that's how it was planned. He drives in there* [to the shop] *and we drive in and I get out of my Mam's car and get into his car'*

Bullet and Sharon spend every other week at each of their parents' homes and while they have have a degree of flexibility, they at times find it challenging.

Sharon: *We go one week to Dad's and one week to Mum's, well, they don't mind if its Dad's week and Mummy wants to take us for a day. Sometimes I don't remember which house I'm in but my sister does and she tells me. At my Dad's house we go out playing, but here we just watch telly, cos we've no friends here.*

Bullet: *I love it when I stay at Dad's. One day I could stay here and I could go back and I'd be excited to go to Mum's again and then I'd be excited to go back to Dad's. Some Fridays I can*

stay with my Mum when it's Dad's week. It is interesting to note that each of these young girls describe parenting arrangements in terms of '*Dad's week'* or '*Mummy's time'.*

As with hearing about their parents' decision to separate, the majority of the research participants did not participate in discussions with parents about their living arrangements and parenting plans, thus compounding the difficulties

6.4.2   Moving Homes and Living between Two Homes

Bullet and Sharon experienced their mother moving house on a number of occasions since their parents separated. Bullet described the confusion she has felt associated with this: *We moved to one house and were there for a while and we've been here for about three months, it's hard, it's confusing, but a different kind. We're moving again soon, I think Mum has to be out of this house next week.*

Rose also recalled periods of being unsettled following her parents' separation: *Dad left the house; Mam didn't want to stay in the house so we moved to lots of different houses. We went from the flat to the big house, back to the flat, out to L. And <u>finally</u> to our settled place, about 6 or 7 years ago'* Rose also pointed out that she does not spend time overnight at her father's home, but visits there for a day every other week.

Like Rose, Sharon and Bullet, Lottie recalled a number of house moves during her early childhood: *When I was younger, my Dad moved around all over the country. I saw him about once a month. Me and my Mum and my brother moved around a lot, we lived in different places, one time we lived in a hostel; I was like what is this place? It was very confusing.*

During the interviews, Michael and Amy reported that they each settled easily into sharing their time between two homes and were happy that their parents lived in close proximity to each other and they could move easily between them. Their sister Kate, however, struggled with this

aspect of family re-ordering *'I found it really hard to call Mam's house my home because it wasn't, where I lived is where my stuff is, where my room is…I hate having to pack a bag every time I go…I really should divide my stuff, I haven't done that yet'*

The reactions of the research participants to these changes of residences concurs with Moxes' (2003) study of children in Norway who reported similar struggles leading her to conclude that: *'Changing residence at the time of divorce is considered a major risk factor for children's well-being…'* Moxes reports however *'there were striking differences in the stories of children who belonged to a family where they had taken part in the negotiations...and those who did not participate in such processes'* (p.138) Highet and Jamieson (2007) found in their Scottish study of family change for children that they valued having the 'family home' remain in place, with one parent living there, providing *'continuity in parenting arrangements as well as change'* (p.13). A significant number of children and young people experienced long periods of unsettled living arrangements following their parents' separation, this appears to be the case in particular where mothers moved from the family home.

While for the most part, the decisions made about participants' living arrangements were made without reference to them, a small number of children and young people did recall situations where they had an input into decisions.

6.4.3   Involvement in Decision Making

Amy and Michael recalled their satisfaction at being able to discuss her concerns about an aspect of the parenting arrangements. This came about as a result of a consultation with the mediator during their parents' family mediation process. For Amy, even though the change she desired did not occur, her involvement in the mediation process re-assured her that her concerns were taken seriously: *I wanted to spend more time at my Mam's house. My Mam tried to sort it out, but I'd have to get up extra early for the school bus. It helped me though that I'd be listened to if I needed to change anything.* Amy's acceptance that her desired change could

not be made illustrates the point, found in Cashmore and Parkinson's (2009) research, that what is important for children and young people is having their voices heard rather than the decision made.

Michael was concerned about how his family, following the separation, were going to spend Christmas and found meeting the mediator very helpful as a way to get this message to his parents:

'I met the mediator, it was helpful talking to someone outside the family. And they took note of my message; the one thing I really wanted was to have them both together at Christmas time which did happen. This was a <u>huge relief</u> cos that would have been one thing I'd have missed a lot' (Michael's emphasis).

Kate, who also met with the family mediator, indicated that this meeting clarified matters for her:

'It was a lot better afterwards, I was clearer on what I thought, I don't think I realised what was bothering me until I said it out loud…..and I was able to talk to them [parents] *and it made it easier than just accepting things….*[the meeting] *made Mam and Dad more conscious of how we were feeling and to include us….I think it helped everyone'.*

Later in her narrative, Kate indicated that the one-off meeting with the mediator was not enough and that she would have liked an opportunity for further engagement when other issues arose for her, particularly in relation to becoming aware of her mother's new partner:

'That's what I mean, you need a professional person who could talk you through things and help you understand why this is happening and how to deal with it, just meeting someone once is not enough, see that would be one of the times I'd have liked someone to talk to just to clear everything and have my thoughts out there'.

Hardy Buck spoke of the confidence he gained through his involvement with a counsellor which enabled him to talk to his father about needing to spend more time with him:

'I went to a counsellor, it was great. I could get everything out and it was private, so no one else would know, it was just perfect. She helped me to get ready to talk to Dad. I was giving out to him cos he wasn't coming down to see me, so after [talking to the counsellor] *I got a bit more sturdy with him. I gave out to him and now he comes down to see me. I'm number 1 and I tried to get that into his head'.*

Hardy Buck went on to express real satisfaction in his present parenting arrangements:

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'At first I used to go to Dad's for one night and then last year I started to go for two nights, it gives more time and we can do things. Dad's girlfriend doesn't stay when I'm there she gives us our privacy; that's important for me. It's good now'.

Participants clearly reported satisfaction at being offered opportunities to have a say in and influence decisions about their lives. The opportunities offered, however, might not be sufficient to meet needs. The child consultation service offered by the Family Mediation Service, while obviously useful, is generally a one-off meeting and may need to be supported by on-going support perhaps from an ancillary service. One such ancillary service accessed by a number of participants was Rainbows ([www.rainbowsireland.ie)](www.rainbowsireland.ie). Rose's narrative indicated a distance between her and her father as a result her parents' separation when she was very young. She described feeling anxious and fearful:

'I was just anxiety, so afraid of being left.... even if he left me down in the sitting room and he didn't come back, I'd have to go upstairs and check he was still there. It was built up in my mind. I used to get so scared if Mam was five minutes late picking me up, oh God, she's been in a car accident.'

Her involvement with Rainbows helped her to understand why these anxieties existed for her:

'It kinda changed that I wasn't afraid of him but of him leaving me. When I stayed at his house when I was little I wouldn't be able to sleep, Mam helped me...I think Mam started seeing a change in me, I used to like to colour in black, black would be my favourite colour and Mam knew that was <u>not normal</u>. She got me into a Rainbows group.... I found it brilliant, oh; it totally changed that changed everything. <u>I just loved it</u>. Well, you didn't think you were the only one going through it, there were other kids and they were so nice. It was brilliant. There were seven of us in the group' (Rose's emphasis).

Through this involvement Rose has been able to gain insights into her relationship with her father and acknowledged '*Well, he didn't leave totally, he came back and has helped me a lot and has tried to get me settled with him as well, so …*' Rose is also of the opinion that the confidence she gained from her participation in the Rainbows programme has helped her to deal with an on-going difficulty in her relationship with her step-mother. Similarly, Bullet reported that her engagement in Rainbows was helpful '*It was very good at making me feel a*

lot better as well…I was able to talk about things at rainbows [like] *my Mum's boyfriend and things like that'.*

Another structural service that impacted on participants' adjustment to altered family life is the Family Law Court and decisions made therein. Parental engagement in court proceedings usually resulted from on-going, unresolved conflict which led, in one situation, to many years of protracted engagement with subsequent negative consequences for the children. In other situations, the young people themselves initiated change in what they considered to be difficulties for them.

6.4.4   Impact of Family Court Decisions on Participants' Experiences

The parenting arrangement that Charlotte's parents adhered to when she was very young had been ordered by the Family Law Court and specified that she spend every second weekend with her father. This arrangement put a great deal of pressure on Charlotte and led to particular difficulties for her.

> '*It was very strange going over there and not having Mum there and there were lots of times I didn't want to go over without Mum. I'm the kind of person who likes to stay in one house and when my Dad got a new partner, I was going to her house, then to his house and then back here. Yea, I'd say it was difficult, it was, during my primary school years things were difficult. I felt pressure to go to Dad's; he wouldn't want me to prioritise my friend. I liked it better when he had a partner; it took the pressure off me. I always had a good relationship with Mum, I didn't really have friends, I got shier and I struggled a lot and I changed my eating habits, controlling my food amounts.*

Charlotte is critical both of her parents: of her mother whom she felt '*pressured me to go to Dad's'* but particularly of her father whom she considered did not take her concerns into

account: *'He could have asked how I was feeling, that would have helped but Dad, he was always about him, self-centred straight away, poor me'.*

Smart (2001) and her colleagues have reported that children and young people who experienced similar situations where '*one parent is systematically undermining or disrupting relations of care and respect'* (p.62) target their energies towards '*developing and sustaining good relationships with their remaining kin'* (ibid). Charlotte had the support of her mother and her step-family when she made what was for her a difficult decision: '*I stopped going over to see him. It was a big decision not to go there for a few months, but it gave me a break, I relaxed. We did afterwards* [talk about it] *he said he was sorry, that was important, yea. My closeness to my step-family helped me a lot with all that'.*

Lottie, who is Charlotte's step-sister also found herself in a position where she had to make a difficult decision. Lottie recalled that despite her father seeking custody of her through the Family Law Court, she and her half-brother continued to live with her mother. She considers that the court needs to '*do what's right for the child, not always the Mum. Dad fought for me in Court, but I was sent to Mum'.* She recalled conflict between her and her mother which she attributed to her mother:

> '*working long hours and when she came home she was tired, there were lots of arguments and fights, and as I got older the fights got worse and my Mum was always saying "just go and live with your Dad" and I did'.*

This decision had consequences for Lottie, however, and led to a period of depression.

> *I went through a bad patch, I was very down for ages, so sad, all the time crying, I didn't have any friends, no one outside the family was aware. I didn't want to talk to anyone; there was just emptiness, void.'*

Lottie attributes the start of her recovery to her father's and step-mother's awareness of and response to her struggles.

'My Dad and step-Mum recognised it was bad and we went to the doctor and then I met a counsellor; that brought me back, talking to the counsellor. My Dad, my step-mother V and my step-sister were great; V in particular had a great grasp of things'

It worth noting that neither of them was given an opportunity to state their views on this matter and it was their actions, albeit supported by some members of their families that led to communication between parents on the issue. Charlotte and Lottie with the help and support , particularly from their mother/step-mother were able to reach a satisfactory solution to the difficulties they were encountering with each of them being personally pro-active in finding a solution to their individual dilemmas, exhibiting a high degree of personal agency. A key finding of Dooley & Fitzgerald's (2012) National Study of Youth Mental Health in Ireland was that having 'one good adult' in a young person's life can influence their ability to cope with adversity, particularly if that person provides the level of emotional support needed and can guide the young person towards seeking appropriate help.

The situation for Lily and Spaceman and their parents' involvement with the Family Law Courts was different, however. A satisfactory outcome did not emerge for them for many years leading to worry and distress as described by Spaceman:

'When I was smaller, I didn't know [about the Court] *but nowadays for the past 4 or 5 years I was, most of the time. If I'd be at school, it would be on my mind a little bit, wondering how it went, that was distracting wondering what happened, it used to be a worry. Half the time I'd just forget and when I got home I'd just remember and well sometimes, I would worry if my Da won, basically cos he can do a lot of damage if he did, he can basically do a lot, but I don't really want to go into it'.*

Both siblings acknowledged, however, that it was the eventual intervention of the Family Law Court that made a difference to their lives and relieved them of the stress associated with their parents' separation. Lily described how eventually the decision was made by the Court '*My Mum was worried because he wasn't giving his address to the courts so she didn't know where we were, so access was stopped last January'*. Spaceman described his personal relief at the Court's decision:

'Well I stopped seeing my Da like after Christmas last year, about that time and after I stopped seeing him it felt a lot better. It was a lot better. He gave the wrong address to the court and they figured he was not living there at that house and then we didn't have to see him, it's a lot better'.

Not surprisingly and in line with Mahon and Moore's (2011) report on decisions made in the Circuit Family Law Courts in Ireland, Lily and Spaceman were not given the opportunity to give their views of their family situation to the courts. Lily was critical of the decisions made at the Family Law Courts:

'Basically my Mum and Dad have been through the courts since I was eight and even though they know everything that's going on, he [Dad] *seems to be coming out on top. I think the courts need to be more fair to the situation'.*

Lily is of the view that she should have been given an opportunity to attend the court *'If I was in the court, I'd make a huge difference'.* Lily also had some ideas of how the court should:*'*

'make it safe for children' by having *'someone you can trust speak to the children, not do it in the court room, so you wouldn't be self-conscious…I asked my Mum one time if I could go, but she said "no, you shouldn't be involved", but I was involved'.*

Spaceman indicated that for him going to the court would be *'a big decision'* he would, however, if asked let it be known that he did not wish to have contact with his father *'I'd just say I don't want to see him'.*

From their dialogue, it is clear that Lily's and Spaceman's experiences of parental separation did not relieve them of on-going conflict between their parents, the consequences of which placed Lily and Spaceman into what Johnston et al (2009) have termed *'the most at risk group of the divorcing population'* for whom *'...the major benefit of the divorce, the cessation of parental hostilities, does not accrue'* (pp5-6). Their narratives indicate that their parents' conflict continued for a number of years. They each described how they were affected by the discord, which, from their narratives, caused them to have ambiguous relationships with both parents. Spaceman recounted how:

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'When my parents separated, I always blamed my Mum, but it was never really her fault…when I was down there with my Dad, I didn't really feel bad, but when I came home here I got really angry at all that was going on, I don't know how to explain it. I used to lash out at anything, break things and box stuff. It was tough'

Lily indicated that '*I used to think it was my Mum's fault, my Dad used to get angry at my Mum a lot and say things to me that he shouldn't have and that would make me angry at my Mum'* Lily also spoke of how she became aware of how her father interacted with her and her brother *'He had a thing like he would play favourites, he would ignore my brother for one weekend and then he's ignore me the next weekend'* While acknowledging that the siblings did not speak of overt domestic violence in their relationship with their father or between their parents, Spaceman did indicate that some memories were difficult for him to recall '*there are things I'd rather not talk about'* and also said that what has particularly helped him is '*just not seeing him* [his father] *any more'.* Holt's (2011) research with children whose mothers had been in abusive relationships with their fathers pre-separation noted that post separation father-child relationships were '*notable by a marked absence of reciprocity reflecting a discernible lack of prioritising of children's needs'* (pp.335-336).

Lily and Spaceman also spoke about their mother's attempts to obtain appropriate support for them during this time. They both indicated that they were unable to engage with or take advantage of the services offered. Lily recalls:

'When it happened, I took it really hard. I went to the junk cupboard, and I'd have food. I had to go to the dietician for it cos it was getting really bad. I didn't really see the impact, but my Mum did and she took me and my brother to Rainbows and to a psychiatrist. I think I benefited more from Rainbows than my brother. I didn't find the psychiatrist helpful and my brother didn't find it helpful either, we went for about half a year. I coped by not talking and my brother coped through anger'.

Spaceman was unable to recall these interventions saying:

'I never really spoke about it at all, no, I never really mentioned it to anyone even up to now, I only started to talk about it in the past year'.

There is evidence from these narratives that, for some of the children and young people, when appropriate support was made available, they were enabled to use their agency to bring about improvements in their lives. This was not the case for all, as it is also clear that on-going parental conflict and protracted involvement in family law court processes were detrimental to participants' lives, leaving them in vulnerable situations. This evidence highlights the need for specialist and targeted services to be put in place to enable children and young people deal with protracted parental conflict in a safe and supportive environment that will enable children and young people give their views on what they consider to be in their best interests.

Inter-personal difficulties with parents did not occur only in the context of decisions made by the Family Law Court as will be seen from Harry Henry's narrative. He had awareness that his father had been violent towards his mother. He indicated that his memory of this provokes anger in him which prevents him having a relationship with his father:

'No, no, I don't miss my Dad, probably knowing what he did – have an affair and the abuse as well. I've never talked to him about this. I can't, it would be an impossible thing to do, but I couldn't talk to Daddy, I couldn't, I just couldn't. Whenever I have anger in me it just clicks off and I just don't know what I could do, cos it builds up like'.

 Harry-Henry had not sought help with this issue up to the time of the interview even though his mother had encouraged him to do so. Further exploration of these narratives will come later in the chapter when I discuss the impact of participants' relationships with their parents, under the theme of *Coming Through – What helped? What hindered?*

I will conclude this section with a discussion of the participants' narratives relating to the adjustments they needed to make in relation to what is commonly considered as their parents' 'moving on with their lives' – parental re-partnering; parental re-marriage; and step-family life.

6.4.5 Parental Re-partnering, Parental Re-marriage, and Step-family Life

The fourteen children and young people who participated in this research came from nine families. In all of these families at least one parent had re-partnered while in four families both parents had either re-partnered or married and two had children from their new relationships, while two of the participants are in step-family relationship with each other. Although not all participants discussed their parents' new relationships a number of those who did found these relationships satisfactory ones which they considered enhanced their parents' lives and sometimes their own lives as well.

Awesome Bartman speaking of his step-father and his younger brothers:

'I met him,I can't remember, I think I was three when they had their wedding and they got married two years after that. When I was little it used to be just me and then C was born when I was four and a half; it was nice having a brother and then he got older and I got another brother J when I was six and I'm seven now. I like it; it's nice having another brother'.

For Hardy Buck, his mother's new relationship relieved him of worry about her:

'Like my Mum was really sad at the start, I used to try to help, but I couldn't really. I'd say it's alright, it's alright, it's not your fault and things like will be alright to cheer her up. I couldn't do anything about it, I couldn't do anything and I <u>did</u> want to help her. She's great now like, she goes away places with her boyfriend and everything now to relax and stuff. He's really nice, he's great craic, and yea it's made a difference' (Hardy-Buck's emphasis). Highet and Jamieson (2007) found that it was common for children and young people to take on the role of providing emotional support for a parent following parental separation *'….being the only parent available ….creates shifts in children's relationships with that parent. Some take on the role of attempting to provide comfort and support…. '*(p.13).

Jennifer's views on her parents' partners were refreshing:

'yea, my Dad has a girlfriend, at the start I didn't really know that and then I started to cop on. My Mum, well she did have a boyfriend but I'm not sure if they are still together, he lives in another country, he's really nice. To be honest, I don't really mind cos it's

good for them to get on with their lives and just because you've been married and divorced doesn't mean your life has stopped'.

Not all of the children and young people have such a benign view of parental re-partnering, however, and in a small number of situations complexities are added to their lives as a result. Such is the situation for Rose whose father, following his divorce from her mother re-married *'There was an affair, so Dad kinda left me and Mam'*. He and his wife have a baby boy, J. with whom she has a very close and loving relationship; an important relationship that she does not wish to compromise, despite the fact that her relationship with her step-mother is not a good one.

> *'My step-mum knew my family since I was three and stuff went down and she ended up marrying my Dad. My step-mother does not like me at all, so I only go* [to her father's house] *for the day every weekend, I never stay over. She doesn't talk to me so I could never sleep in his house. I <u>adore</u> him* [brother J.] *he's so cute and I love him so much, he's adorable. I see him four days of the month. She* [step-mother] *lets me have time with him or whatever. That's why I'd be afraid to stand up to her in case she's try to take the time off me'.*

Kate identified her mother's new relationship as being very significant to her life:

> *'I think the biggest thing for me was when Mam got into a new relationship; that was <u>a huge thing for me</u>. It happened quite soon after they split up and you know, you're like 'hey, that's not my Dad', it's kind of you know, it was strange'* (Kate's emphasis).

Kate's difficulty with this new situation in her family was compounded by the fact that other members of her family, particularly her brother, whom she had previously relied upon for support, does not seem to understand her feelings on the matter:

> *'I've tried talking to people about it. I mentioned it to my mother and I don't think she wants to talk about it. I tried talking to my brother and he say's I'm over reacting. I found that really hard that he couldn't just see how it was hurting me'.*

Harry Henry's decision not to meet his father's partner is connected with his view that she was instrumental in the break-up of his parents' marriage:

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'His partner, no I haven't met her. My brother has and Dad mentioned that "you should meet her" well there's a part of me that does want to meet her and there's a part of me that doesn't because of what she did in the past – that's the reason I've left it and I don't see him now anyway'.

Kelly and Emery (2003) have pointed out that children of divorce potentially experience *'a continuing series of changes and disruption in family and emotional relationships when one or both parents introduce new social and sexual partners, cohabitate, remarry and/or re-divorce'* (p.355). Robinson (1993) considers that anxieties can arise for adolescents in relation to an acknowledgement of their parent as sexual beings, *'something that is likely to be reawakened in a new marriage* [or relationship]...' (p.176). The absence of support from her brother on this issue obviously added to Kate's anxiety, causing distress and leaving her feeling isolated within her family.

The experiences recounted by the research participants relating to the adjustments to their family lives largely concur with international research in this area. Robinson (1993) cites research by Kaslow and Schwartz (1987) and Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1989) that indicated that children of separation and divorce have a number of tasks to undertake in order to resolve issues relating to parental separation. These include acknowledgment of the reality of the separation; disengagement from parental conflict; resumption of their customary pursuits; resolution of the loss, anger and self-blame; acceptance of the permanence of the change; and achievement of a realistic hope for their own future relationships. Robinson (1993) considers that many aspects of this process may *'need reworking several times...in the light of their* [children's] *increased understanding'* (p.172)*.*

The narrative relating to this aspect of adjustment to changed family life indicates that it is a complex process for children and young people compounded by the absence of open discussions between parents and their children on the subject and the absence of appropriate support being offered to assist adjustment. Clearly many children and young people indicated an ability to adjust to changes in their family's composition and their ability to do so may be

influenced by their experience of family life prior to parental separation and their desire for their parents' contentment and happiness.

The final section of this chapter will discuss what the participants' indicated assisted or hindered them in their individual search for this increased understanding.

6.5   Coming Through: What Helped or Hindered?

Johnston et al (2009) term *'a successful divorce'* as one in which:

> *'the adults are able to work through their anger, disappointment and loss in a timely manner and terminate their spousal relationship with one another – legally and emotionally – while at the same time retaining or rebuilding their parental alliance and commitment to their children'* (p.3).

Jennifer put this view more succinctly when describing how she considered her parents had dealt with their separation: *'They handled it very well cos they kept us in their sights and didn't really do what was best for them; they did what was best for us'*.

The fact that the fourteen people in this research opted to participate indicates that each of them had to some extent 'come through' the disruption to their lives caused by their parents' separation and were motivated to participate because of their desire to help others who might have similar experiences in the future. Just as separation and divorce is a process rather than a one-off event for the couple involved, the same can be said for children of the relationship. The *Seasons of Growth* programme (a group programme aimed at helping children deal with loss through death, separation or divorce) developed by Graham (2004) identifies the four main tasks of grief and of dealing with loss as being: acceptance of the reality of the loss; working through pain and grief; adjustment to a new environment; and relocation of the lost person or thing emotionally in order to move on with life (p.319). It is generally considered that this initial stressful period, which has been likened to a crisis period (Kelly, 2003) diminishes over a one-two year period. Highet and Jamieson (2007) however, found that children and young people

had encountered additional challenges in their lives in the two years between the interviews they conducted resulting in a longer period of unsettled family life. There is evidence of similar experiences from this research.

As well as shedding light on the ambiguities and complexities of 'coming through' for children and young people, this section will also highlight the factors that helped them in this process. Informal support for the children and young people came from a variety of sources, most of which were situated within their immediate environments: through sibling relationships; friendships; relationships with extended families, particularly grandparents; and from pets. Formal support was available through a small number of services, notably Rainbows; Jigsaw; and counselling services. Relationships with parents post separation can be described as being both supportive and challenging for some of the research participants. The complexity of relationships within families following parental separation is illustrated through the analysis of the Family Sculpture Figure exercise which was undertaken by each participant during their initial interview when participants were asked to indicate whom they felt closest to in their family and friendship circles. These were then numbered 1-6, 1 indicating the person to whom each person felt closest to, as illustrated in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2 Closeness of Relationships with Family Members, Friends and Pets

No	Mum	Dad	Mum & Dad	Sibling	Mum & Sibling	Dad & Sibling	Grand Parent	Step Parent/ Sibling	Friend	Pet	Total
1	6	1	1	4	1	0	1	0	0	0	14
2	0	0	1	7	0	1	0	1	2	0	14
3	2	2	0	2	0	1	3	2	1	1	14
4	2	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	3	2	11
5	0	3	0	1	0	0	1	0	3	2	10
6	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	5

While mothers were identified as a first choice by six participants, the surprise comes when we look at the top three choices which reveal closeness to siblings ahead of closeness to mothers

with closeness to fathers being identified by only four people in the top three choices. This is despite the fact that four of the participants, Rose, Awesome Bartman, Lottie and Charlotte, are from one child biological families leaving four groups of siblings in the research cohort: Bullet and Sharon; Michael, Amy and Kate; Lily and Spaceman; and Hardy-Buck and Harry Henry. The following section will discuss the support provided through these relationships and will show that while not all sibling relationships offered the same level of support, such relationships did not hinder adjustment to the new family situation.

6.5.1 Sibling Relationships

Jennifer spoke of how she became aware that her relationship with her older sister differed to that of her friend's relationship with her sister:

> *'We're sometimes close, sometimes far apart – not like my best friend O. and her sister get on really, really well and I was kind of surprised that they got on so well cos I thought all sisters were like me and my sister, but well, we really don't like each other that much…but we both get on with my younger sister and keep her in mind….when we're in Dad's house, if she's awake when I'm going to bed, I go into her room and give her a hug'.*

Research on sibling relationships (McGuire, et al 1996) has identified four types of sibling relationships: harmonious relationships are characterised by high positive-low negative feelings; affect intense relationships are characterised by high positive-high negative feelings; hostile relationships are characterised by low positive-high negative feelings; and uninvolved relationships are characterised by low positive-low negative feelings. This typology of sibling relationships revealed *'that relationships high in warmth and hostility were rated more positively by children than those characterised by high levels of hostility but low levels of warmth'* (p.237). Sheehan et al. (2004) have pointed out that:

> *'the co-existence of high levels of hostility and high levels of affection and support in sibling relationships …is consistent with what is known about sibling relationships...not least because children grow up in close proximity and compete with each other for parental resources'* (p.72).

Sheehan et al. (2004) used McGuire et al.'s (1998) typology in research with children from separated or divorced families to test if '[such children]*would be over-represented in the affect intense group'* (p.74).   Their study compared children from intact and separated families and found that: '*sibling hostility and warmth are not at opposite ends of the continuum; rather they co-exist* [and] *are not specific to particular family relationship type'* (p.88).

The qualitative element of the research by Sheehan and her colleagues showed that:

> *'...parental conflict is an aspect of the separation and divorce transition that prompts siblings to support one another. During parental conflict, siblings find themselves having to turn to one another for mutual support and consolation'* (p.81).

For a number of the sibling groups in this research there existed high levels of mutual support *'these relationships were characterised by a definite sense of reciprocity, with the siblings helping each other, particularly in relation to parental conflict'* (p.86). This is illustrated in the following narratives.

The joint narratives of Sharon and Bullet speak of the closeness of their sibling relationship and of the level of support they provide for each other.

Bullet: *Having my sister helps a lot. We talk about it and say to each other 'are you alright?' and we hug each other. She's the person who makes me laugh the most as well*

Sharon: *If I'm worried about anything, I talk to my sister. I never know what day I'm going to Mummy's or Daddy's but my sister does.*

Both Kate and Michael spoke of the mutual support they obtained from each other during the time of their parents' separation.

Kate: '*I did talk to my brother a lot, though; My brother was the only one I felt comfortable enough with to talk to because he was living through it too, so I felt comfortable talking to him. I didn't like talking to anyone else'*.

Michael: *Yes, I spoke to my sister, you see it was good to have someone who was going through <u>exactly</u> the same thing, at the same time* (Michael's emphasis).

They considered their role within the family as one of protecting their younger sibling, Amy, and so did not discuss issues relating to the separation with her: *I tried to avoid talking about it to C* [younger sister]*, I didn't want to upset C. I wanted to protect her.*

Such was not the case for all sibling groups in this research. It is not clear from the narratives why this is so and a number of reasons can be considered. The age difference of seven years between Hardy-Buck and Harry-Henry might account for this. It is also true that the marital discord they were exposed to was acute, described by Harry-Henry as domestic abuse. He considered that his parents' separation '*….more so better for my brother, cos he's younger and doesn't need to know what went on',* thus revealing concern for his brother that he was not able to express more directly. While Lily and Spaceman were close in age to each other, they too were dealing with high levels of conflict between their parents which was unresolved for most of their childhoods, perhaps making it difficult for them to provide support for each other. It can be concluded from this that overt parental conflict seems to impact on siblings' interpersonal relationships. However, as illustrated by the Family Sculpture Exercise (Table 6.2) the majority of siblings indicated they felt close to each other. Participants did not in any way through their narratives indicate that that their relationships with their brothers or sisters hindered their adjustment to their parents' separation or to new living arrangements and, for many, support was provided through these relationships

There was, however, an indication that relationships with parents did for some participants hinder their adjustment. It is perhaps telling that just four participants identified their fathers in their first three choices of close relationships through the Family Sculpture Figures, while a

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small number highlighted challenges in their relationships with their mothers and for some the relationship between their parents post separation posed problems for them. This aspect of participants' adjustment will now be discussed.

6.5.2   Relationships with Parents

The role of parents in children's lives is an extremely important one. Daniel et al (2010) discuss this pivotal role and emphasise the importance of secure early attachment. This involves the provision of a secure base through understanding the young child's need for '*proximity, attention and responsiveness*' (p.46) and:

> '*a coherent story about early attachment experiences in order to feel secure*' (p.47) as well as '*… predictability of care as uncertainty about the secure base is powerfully undermining of a fundamental sense of security*' (p.47)*.*

These authors emphasise the role of both mothers and fathers (and other care-givers) in providing for children's and young people's needs, emphasising that '*the child's needs must be held as the central focus, whoever is undertaking the care-giving tasks*' (p.47). Relationship breakdown, separation and divorce have the potential to undermine the security that is available in the intact family and can alter the relationship between children and parents. '*Parenting after divorce, whether in sole or joint custody, differs significantly from parenting that occurs in the married family*' (Wallerstein et al. 2013). We have seen evidence earlier in this chapter of the challenges that separation poses for the parent-child relationship. While this is particularly true for the parents, usually fathers, who no longer live with their children, but have contact with them on specific days or weekends it is also evident that parental separation and subsequent family changes, impact on mother-child relationships also. This section will explore in more detail how inter-parental relationships and parent-child relationships have helped or hindered adjustment for the research participants.

Wilson (2008) list the conditions most conductive for ideal post-separation fathering as follows: positive relationships between fathers and mothers; high socio-economic status; proximity and residency with one or some of their children; neither parent will have a new partner; children will stay at their father's home regularly; children will also have a good relationship with their mother; parents will talk regularly with each other without conflict; and both parents will be content with the parenting arrangements and with their separation agreement. The reality, according to Wilson (2008) is, however, that:

'… any one father is unlikely to fulfil all these criteria...and non-resident fathers describe having to come to terms with unfamiliar and unsettling duties, requirements, environments and feelings in order to maintain relationships with their children after separation' (p.610).

Ungar (2004) has pointed to the importance of fathers in the lives of adolescent young people:

'The presence of a male parent appears to offer a child a positive influence that buffers the potentially negative influences of peers by offering the child a powerful role model upon which to base an identity construction' (Ungar, 2004, p.27).

Similarly, Dolan (2008) identifies fathers as *'a key source of help to their children in terms of practical and emotional support'* and suggests that *'resilience building in a child may in part come down to practical...mundane activities'* (p.87). Parental separation can, however, place barriers to fathers' involvement on a day to day basis with their children. Mahon and Moore's (2011) review of decisions made in the Family Courts in Ireland revealed that, in a large number of their reviewed cases, joint custody was awarded to the couple.

'Joint custody of children does not necessarily mean shared residential care....In the present study, in the majority of cases where joint custody was awarded "liberal access" was agreed as well. However, in the majority of cases, it was noted that the dependent children would reside with their mothers' (Mahon & Moore, 2011, p.62).

The meaning of 'liberal access' has not been defined, however, and a reading of Mahon and Moore's (2011) report would indicate that, in general, it means that fathers spend time with

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their children during each week and that the children spend every other weekend at his home. Research undertaken by Trinder (2008) in the United Kingdom sought to '*explore the ways in which mothers influence fathers' involvement in care-giving following separation and divorce*' (p. 1319). This research identified that mothers employ five '*Approaches to Gate Work*' (ibid. 1307) – proactive gate-opening; contingent gate opening; passive gatekeeping; and justifiable and proactive gate closing. Moore (2011) linked gatekeeping following separation with the payment of financial support for children and mothers by fathers, what she terms 'Paternal Banking', in her research with Irish couples who had separated and concluded that '*maternal gatekeeping and paternal banking appear to be effective gendered methods of exerting control and power over a former spouse, which reflect the division of labour during the intact marriage*' (p. 768). Just as the effects of decisions made by the courts on children's and young people's lives is largely unknown in Ireland, so too are the effects of parents' decisions about fathers' financial support and mothers' role in facilitating or inhibiting fathers' involvement in their children's lives. The children and young people in this research did indicate that ambiguities exist in their relationships with their fathers post parental separation.

I use Jennifer's narrative to highlight these ambiguities of father-child relationships following separation '*I always talk to my Mum, I can always talk to my Mum, she's always there for me, she's great she sorts things out'.* Jennifer revealed that her relationship with her father is not so close '*yea, my Dad, I've never been as close to my Dad as I am to my Mum ….me and my Dad, since we are so far apart, we don't really talk to each other except when I see him'.* Jennifer has rationalised this for herself as being a feature of them being [living] *'so far apart'.* Her parents, however, live in relative proximity to each other and she spends time with her father at least twice per week.

The dialogues with Spaceman, Lily and Harry-Henry as described earlier in this chapter reveal difficult aspects of their relationships with their fathers. These have resulted for Lily and Spaceman in their not having any contact with their father and for Harry-Henry in intense

emotional and conflicted feelings about his father. While he considers that his father's behaviour was '*bad*' he is able to identify good aspects of him as a father:

> '*…but Dad rings me a lot, I usually don't ring him, only when I need him, like this week, I had a problem with my bank card and he sorted it out and he helps me if I have a problem with my English. He's always very loving and caring towards that, so he has a really good side and a bad side as well*'.

At the time of the interviews Lily and Spaceman were completely estranged from their father. We have already seen from their recounting of events in their family that each of them felt frightened or scared and sought ways to deal with these feelings. Lily talked about going to the junk cupboard, while Spaceman kept his feelings locked inside and describes that time of his life as:

> '*It wasn't really, well you know, not jolly or happy because there was always stuff on my mind. Well, I don't really know how to explain, to be honest, but there were distractions, so I'd try to think of other things …It was normal, it didn't really feel bad, but when I came home here I got really angry…*'

Smart (2007) in her analysis of stories told to her by children and young people in similar situations identified elements of the stories as being '*clear and less clear recollections* [some containing] *…contradictory emotions and recollections*' (p.158). Such was the situation with Spaceman, who, like the participants in Smart's (2007) research was '... *not either willing or able to provide full accounts of their family relationships*' (p.166). Like Smart (2007), I did not press Spaceman to say any more than he was comfortable with, and was given the impression by him that the emotional experiences he had been through were '*immediate and raw*' (ibid)and that he would need some time, more information, and possibly some help, to enable him to properly reflect on events. What did emerge very clearly from my dialogue with him, however, was that he attributed the positive change in his life to the fact that he no longer spent time with his father, and for him, for now, that is enough.

Gardener (1987) introduced the concept of Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS) which he considered to be a diagnosable disorder brought about through the influence of an alienating parent, usually the mother that led to a child's refusal to see the other parent, usually the father, following separation and divorce. Kelly and Johnston (2001) have challenged this view, pointing out that Gardner's thesis is not supported by the:

'considerable clinical research that shows that in high-conflict divorce, many parents engage in indoctrinating behaviours, but only a small proportion of children become alienated [and] some children develop unjustified animosity, negative beliefs, and fears of parents in the absence of alienating behaviours by a parent' (p.249).

Instead, Kelly and Johnston (2001) have developed a new formulation to explain why some children and adolescents, in particular, refuse to have contact with one or other of their parents following separation or divorce. This they refer to as The Alienated Child and consider that it is important to:

'differentiate the alienated child who persistently refuses or rejects visitation because of unreasonable negative views and feelings from other children who also resist contact with a parent ...for a variety of normal, realistic, and/or developmentally expectable reasons' (p.251).

Kelly and Johnston (2011) describe a continuum of child-parent relationships following separation and divorce that span from positive relationships with both parents, through affinity with one parent, allied relationship with one parent, realistic estrangement to pathological alienation.

At the time I met Harry Henry he was in the category of realistic estrangement, but was having some contact with his father, albeit through initiation by his father or when Harry Henry needed his assistance. It is the fear that his anger will *click off* that prevents him having a conversation with his father. His narrative also points to his feeling that, in the past, he has lacked courage in relation to confronting his father and might consider that he did not protect

his mother as he should have '*There used to be a few fights…I was frustrated that I couldn't do anything about it….frustrated and helpless.'* Grych (2000) posits the view that:

'*Children who feel helpless when aggression occurs are likely to experience it as even more stressful, whereas children who believe they can do something to cope with the situation experience less stress'* (pp105-106).

Despite this, Harry Henry recognises his father's '*good side*' and was able to describe his father's behaviour towards him as '*loving and caring'.* At the time of the interview, however, he was unable to talk to his father about events that occurred in their family and his fear of how he might behave was keeping him estranged from his father.

Spaceman description of '*going into the middle of the field until it* [shouting] *was over'* and Lily's narrative relating to her father's behaviour '*one weekend he would be nice to me and ignore my brother…'* places them in the category of what Kelly and Johnston (2001) refer to as children who are '*realistically estranged …as a consequence of their parent's history of family violence, abuse or neglect;*[such children] *need to be distinguished from alienated children'* (p.253). Such children may not have actually witnessed or been the victims themselves of violent behaviour, but may be conscious of the aftermath of such actions or have been left in the care of the victim parent. Children may also become estranged from a parent:

'*in response to severe parental deficiencies...immature and self-centred behaviours; chronic emotional abuse of the child or preferred parent; physical abuse that goes undetected...angry, rigid and restrictive parenting styles; psychiatric disturbances or substance abuse that interferes with parenting capacities and family functioning'* (ibid, p. 353).
It is considered a healthy response when children distance themselves from such corrosive behaviours and make choices as such estrangement is:

'*a reasoned, adaptive, self-distancing, and protective stance...*[such] *children wish to severely limit their contact with this deficient or frightening parent, but it is less common to refuse visits altogether'* (ibid, p. 354).

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It was ultimately, however, the intervention of the Family Law Court that relieved Lily and Spaceman of their distressing situation and each of them indicated that they did not want to have contact with their father.

Parental behaviours pre and post separation potentially add to the struggles encountered in parent child relationships post separation. Such struggles need to be acknowledged and appropriate support need to be provided for children and young people in order to limit the effects on their lives.

The complexity of being parented by each parent separately in the aftermath of separation is demonstrated by Hardy Buck's experience, which also provides insight into how, with support from his counsellor, he was enabled to resolve some issues relating to his father. His narrative provides insight into two different aspects of family life following separation. Hardy Buck indicated that he has a close relationship with both parents, placing them both as joint number one in his Family Sculpture Exercise. He lives mostly with his mother and spends time each week and every other weekend with his father. The break-up of their relationship was a stressful time for him, as there had been fighting in the household which left him feeling tense and '*with butterflies in my tummy, like'.* Following the departure of his father, Hardy Buck had some concerns for his mother: '*Mum was like really sad at the start, she was sad, like, I'd say, it's alright, it's not your fault and things like that, it will be alright to cheer her up. Em, I really couldn't do anything about it, I was kind of sad, that I couldn't do anything and I did want to help her'.* Kelly and Emery (2003) have identified the risks to children of parents who might be prone to '*emotional lability and depression'* (p.354). Children and young people in such situations may become '*the sole emotional support for their distraught and needy parents'* (ibid). The fact that Hardy Buck and his brother did not have what he described as '*that kind of bond'* meant that he was dealing with this situation alone. At this time his brother was busy with study, examinations and sport so it is likely that Hardy Buck was at home with his mother alone for long periods of time. His narrative also indicated that he was not having enough time with his father, which may have increased his mother's reliance on him. It was his engagement

with a counsellor that helped him deal positively with the situation and which gave him the confidence to provide the following advice to parents and to children:

> *'Ask children if they have a problem with it, and for the parent who has moved out of the house more, see your child more because they're important to you and your child wants to see you, but they wouldn't say it cos they'd be embarrassed'.*

His advice for children is:

> *'Don't store everything at the back of your head, like at school, be yourself at school, be happy, tell your closest friends that you think you can trust and if you have a problem, go and see someone and talk about it...'*

Hardy Buck's narrative about his experiences with each of his parents displays elements of agency and vulnerability. His concern for his mother and the role he played in providing emotional support for her has influenced his views about how such difficulties might be resolved. He attributes her recovery to her involvement with her new partner and obviously sees *'getting back out there'* as a strategy for parents post separation. His ability to invoke his personal agency regarding his view that his father was not spending enough time with him was assisted through his involvement with a counsellor and demonstrates that providing such support for children and young people has the potential to empower their agency.

As shown through the Family Sculpture Figures exercise, the majority of the children and young people indicated that they had a good, close relationship with their mothers, with just a small number indicating that this relationship was problematic for them. Harry Henry's account of his concern about his mother is one of the mother-child relationship difficulties encountered by the research participants. Lottie's conflictual relationship with her mother led to her decision to live with her father and it took some time, including engagement in counselling and the support of her father and step-family for her to resolve these issues. '*I stayed here* [at her Dad's home], *but I started feeling guilty and ashamed and kind of, oh my God, what have I done, but I was also angry with my Mum, angry that she wouldn't listen'* Following her engagement with a

counsellor, Lottie re-engaged with her mother '*I don't regret coming here to live with Dad and now like I love my Mum to bits, I see her every week and when she works in town sometimes she stays over here, I'm glad I got back to seeing her'.* Following these experiences, Lottie has the following advice for parents:

'*The most important thing, let your child decide where she wants to be, you shouldn't be jealous or angry or blame the child. It's not a matter of the child loving either of you more, it's just where they are more comfortable'.*

Rose has a very loving and close relationship with her mother. Her narrative, like Harry-Henry's provides an example of how she was able, through her engagement with the Rainbows group, to identify issues she needed to have addressed '*We had a folder with all the worksheets and Mam used to go through them with me, so I was able to show her the one "Don't say bad things about my Daddy" because that hurt my feelings'.* Rose also provided advice for parents:

'*just don't be fighting in front of the kids, cos you don't know what that's doing to them, just reassure them, cos some kids, well I did anyway, you feel like it's all your fault….if you weren't born they wouldn't have to see each other…'* and '*…if your child is young, like four or five, don't talk to them like they are babies, it hurts, not to be told the truth when you are that age, they know what is going on and they* [parents] *are trying to get around you and not making it as bad as it is'.*

It is clear that parents' ability to seek out and offer appropriate support for their children and their ability to listen and respond to their children's concerns assist them in their adjustment to changed family life.

Parental re-partnering and step-family life was yet another adjustment that a number of participants were faced with – for some this resulted in enhanced relationships, whilst for others it presented challenges.

6.5.3 Relationships with Step-families and Parents' New Partners

Gibson (2013) provides us with the variety of descriptive words that are now used to *'accommodate the changing family landscape',* these include *'step'; 'blended'; non-traditional'* (p.793). According to Gibson, the Canadian Government has defined varied family structures more specifically:

- **the intact family** – biological and/or adopted children who live with their parents in the same house
- **the step family** – children who are either biological or adopted from one of the spouses or common-law partners living in the home
- **the blended family** – has at least one child that is biological or adopted to the parents in the home and at least one child that is biological or adopted to only one spouse or partner

(Gibson, 2013, pp793-4).

Some of the research participants had experienced a variety of family formations: Lottie had lived with her mother and half-brother for a period of time; now, along with Charlotte she lives with her father and his partner who is Charlotte's mother. Lottie and Charlotte describe each other as step-sisters. Charlotte's father and his partner have married, so Charlotte now has a step-mother. She and Charlotte's father have a son, Charlotte's half-brother, whom she describes as her brother. Similarly, Rose describes her father's and step-mother's son as her brother, not her half-brother. Awesome Bartman's main residence is with his mother, his step-father and their two sons whom he refers to as his brothers. He also spends time with his father and his partner. These describe formalised and committed relationships.

Sharon and Bullet described a less formal situation for their mother and her boyfriend, which has led to confusion for each of them. Sharon was uncomfortable about her mother's boyfriend: *'Mummy changed to another house…and then she found a new boyfriend and he stayed here…I didn't like him, I told Mummy so she broke up with him, he comes up here sometimes to visit….I just don't like him, I don't know why'* while for Bullet her mother's partner

did not pose any problem '*It's ok, yea, it doesn't make me sad or anything'.* Despite the knowledge of her mother being in a new relationship Bullet harbours a strong desire for her parents to reconcile and considered that it might happen '*I'd love my Mum and Dad to get back together….I feel very happy when they are together and it might happen'* and her advice to other children is '*don't be sad, you never know what might happen, their Mum and Dad could get back together'.* According to Dowling and Gorrell-Barnes (2000) a significant number of children '*find it very difficult to give up the hope of an eventual reconciliation between the parents'* (p.96). This can occur even when children are aware of one or both parents being involved with new partners. Dowling and Gorrell-Barnes consider that '*Having an explanation will help children move on from the idea that they are responsible for the break-up, or that if they try hard enough they might bring the parents back together'* (ibid, p.37). Bullet's advice to parents indicated that she may be endeavouring to do just that '*Make your child feel comfortable, watch movies together and go out to dinner together'* thus highlighting another complexity for young children in their adjustment to this family transition, possibly stemming from a lack of clear communication from her parents.

It is from the narratives of Rose and Awesome Bartman that I draw for more detailed discussion of step-parent experiences.

Rose is the only child of her parents' marriage to each other. She lives with her mother. Her father and her step-mother and their son live '*just ten minutes away...things are good between Mam and Dad, they are good, they can sort things out without fighting, they can talk to each other now'.* Rose, however, does not have a good relationship with her step-mother and for that reason does not stay over at her father's home.

'*My step mum knew my family since I was three and stuff went down and she <u>hates me with a passion.</u> She ended up marrying my Dad. He tried to get me to stay at his house with him and that, but my stepmother does not like me at all, so I only go for the day every weekend. I never stay over, I just go for the day and go back home. I could never sleep in his house…. but I'm older now so I'm able to handle it'.* (Rose's emphasis)

Rose described the very close relationship she has with her step-brother

'Oh, I <u>adore</u> him, he's he's a year and a bit now and he's so cute and I love him so much, he's adorable. I see him every second weekend, four days of the month….I'd be so afraid to stand up to her [step-mother] *in case she's try to take that time off me…..I'd never risk it for anything. I don't know how I feel really, just, I'm so happy to get time with him, I'm so happy.* (Rose's emphasis).

Rose's story was not told as *'a succession of chronological events'* (Elliott, 2007). Narratives, according to Elliott have a configurational as well as episodic dimensions that *'allows the narrative to be comprehended as a unified whole, and it is this that makes coherent narrative intuitively satisfying'* (Elloitt, 2007, p.48). Careful analysis of Rose's story uncovered the coherent narrative about her relationship with her stepmother. Rose revealed that her parents' separation occurred as the result of her father having 'an affair': *'there was an affair, so Dad kinda left me and Mam'.* This, combined with her statement that '*stuff went down*' can be interpreted to mean that her father's affair may have been with her step-mother, although she did not explicitly state this. Her narrative also indicated that high conflict existed between her parents for some time and the impression was given that her father may have been absent from her life for some time – '*well, he didn't leave totally, he came back and has helped me a lot and he has tried to get me settled with him as well, so..'.* Rose's story highlights the major role parents must play in ensuring that the integration of new partners is achieved in a manner that ensures the security of children into new family forms through age-appropriate communication and where necessary the provision of support outside the family to assist children and young people with this new transition.

Ahrons (2006) has identified two important factors, the co-parental relationship and parental remarriage *'as salient variables that mediate the impact of divorce on children'* (p.56). Ahrons' longitudinal study followed the lives of ninety eight divorced families in the United States for twenty years and found that ninety-five of these families had experienced at least one re-marriage during that time, while in sixty four per cent of the families both parents had remarried. Ahrons points out that when parents remarry they might believe that their

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happiness will be shared by the children they bring to the union, followed by *'the ideal that their separate units will blend together easily'* (ibid, p. 63). Stoll et al. (2005) found that adolescents identified a number of challenges associated with parental re-marriage. Participants in their research expressed feelings of powerlessness, confusion and exclusion as they were not included in decisions about living arrangements. Stoll, et al (2005) report that young people *'felt resentment, jealousy and pain about the reduced intimacy* [with a parent]....*and carried the burden of divided loyalties between their parents and their stepparent'* (p.186-7). Rose's narrative can be interpreted as having elements of these conflicting feelings as well as indicating her ability to engage her agency as indicated by her decision to only spend time during the day at her father's home, an action that, while providing her with protection, also means that integration into step family life is not possible for her, but does ensure her continuing relationship with her brother.

Awesome Bartman provided a picture of co-operative co-parenting and a level of contentment for him between his two homes. This contentment extended to his desire that both his families might be able to live together, a proposal that he had clearly given some thought to, even though he had not discussed it with anyone. *'We have a pretty big house, we'd have to clean out the office and I'd put B. and J.* [brothers] *in there and I'd put me, no wait, me on the bottom bunk and Dad's girlfriend on the top bunk and B. and Mammy in their own bed and I might move another bed there for my Dad, maybe not. He might sleep on the couch and V* [the dog] *would sleep in the same room as him.... the other dogs would go outside, see that kennel there,* [points out the window] *they'd go there…. No, not really, I don't really talk about it much'*

It is clear from Awesome Bartman's narrative that he enjoys very good relationships with all of the adults in his life. This was clearly demonstrated in the Family Sculpture Figure exercise and in his family drawings. He also enjoys being part of his family with his young brothers and his count of ten to fifteen grandparents indicate that he is part of a wide extended family, possibly including four sets of 'grandparents'. Despite the fact that Awesome Bartman had figured out how everyone could live in the same home, he was also aware that it was unlikely to happen

'but I'd say that's the way it is now'. It is common for young children of Awesome Bartman's whose parents have separated *'to entertain fantasies of reconciliation'* (Robinson, 1993, p.164). Awesome Bartman's fantasy is of all of his family living together. Interpretation of his full narrative may explain this. The story he had been told about the reason for his parents' separation related to *'my nana and granddad were going living with me in my Dad's house and we didn't have enough space...'.*This story has led to confusion for him *'I'm still a bit confused because of what happened, I don't really know what happened'.* While, from his narrative, it is clear that he is unaware of tension or conflict between his biological parents, it also seems that there is very little contact between them as indicated by their handover arrangement, which takes place just a few metres from his mother's home at a local car-park. Awesome Bartman's parents have managed to shield him from any tension and conflict. This has enabled him to establish good relationships with both of them, their partners, his brothers and their extended families. The fact, however, that his relationships with everyone in his 'families' is so good leads him to believe that they should all live together and this belief may be compounded by the fact that confusion still exists for him relating to why his families live apart because he has not been privy to the real reason about why his parents do not live with each other.

6.5.4   Relationships with Grandparents

Relationships with grandparents were also included in the children's and young people's narratives. A number of participants indicated being able to discuss their family's situation with their grandparents, while others benefited from the presence of grandparents in their lives in practical ways, such as taking them to and from school and from the provision of child care. Timonen et al (2009) following their research with grandparents in Ireland refer to the *'diversity of supports provided by grandparents to their adult children'* (p.69) in the context of separation and divorce. These supports included: financial support; provision of accommodation; child care; legal and advisory; and emotional support. It is clear from the number of participants who mentioned their grandparents that the emotional and practical support provided by them to their grand-children is significant.

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Hardy Buck: *Em, my nanny, she's a good person to talk to, she lives over the hill, it's literally a minute walk. I go there after school and would have talked to her, I don't need to now, not any more. And my Granddad as well, he's great as well. I go for walks with him with the dogs and he collects me after school.*

Bullet: *Yes, I talk to my Granny, and my neighbour's Mum*

Sharon: *I have one Granddad, cos one died and two Grannies. My dad's Dad died and my Mum's Dad is still alive and brings us to school.*

Spaceman: *The next person I feel closest to is probably my Nanny, Mum's mother. My Grand-dad on my mother's side died in 2009, it was a big loss.*

Lily: *I see a lot of my Mum's Mum, my grandmother, I saw her yesterday, I feel close to her.*

Harry Henry: *Yea, my grandparents were great, and my cousin, he's like a brother to me. I chat to him about everything. I would talk to my grandparents, but I don't go into detail like I have with you.*

Rose: *My granny and I was very close to my cousins, I was very close to them. She* [Grandmother] *died a few months ago. She was always there, she left me her locket....* Rose acknowledged that her close relationship with her grandmother compromised her relationship with her father's family *'They didn't get on and there used to be fights, so I don't see them much anymore'.* It can be seen that the continuation of non-conflicted relationships with extended families, particularly with grandparents, is of benefit to children and young people following parental separation and divorce.

As these narratives moved along, many of the participants were, to borrow Smart's (2006) phrase, *'weaving more relationships into their accounts'* and, for most of the children and young people the quality of these relationships had enhanced their lives or provided them with support during difficult times. These stories also highlight the complexity of different

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relationships and the challenges to taken for granted family norms that come into play when parents separate.

Bridges et al. (2007) studied children's perceptions of their relationships with grandparents following parental separation over time in a longitudinal study. They found links between child-grandparent closeness and child adjustment and further found that *'grandparents were important confidants for many young children'* (p. 550). Bengston (2001) has proposed that families have adapted to change through the provision of inter-generational support: *'In the context of marital instability, the breakup of the nuclear family and remarriage of parents, it is clear that grand-parents and step-grandparents are becoming increasingly important family connections* (p.7). Jennifer spoke of the good and close relationship that existed between her, her grandfather and her step-grandmother *'We call my granddad, Poppy and he divorced my Nana and married again and she's really nice and she has grandchildren too, they are going to sell their house and move close to us'.*

6.5.6   Relationships with Peers

Friendships and relationships with peers are an important aspect of children's and young people's development. According to Daniel et al (2010) *'Friendships in childhood has six functions: companionship; stimulation; physical support; ego support; and social comparison'* (p. 192). They further point out that peer relationships *'…often help young people negotiate adolescence and can ease the transition away from childish behaviour'.* (ibid. p. 207). The importance of friendships and peer relationships is recognised in the Department of Children's and Youth Affairs (DCYA) national policy framework document *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* (DCYA, 2014) which states that:

'Friendships are essential for the psychological, emotional and social development of children and young people, allowing them to learn how to relate to others and also about reciprocity, social standing and power' (p.101).

Parental separation resulted in feelings of isolation felt within their communities, particularly their school communities for a small number of participants. Rose in particular found it difficult to discuss her home situation '*I was embarrassed, it was very raw and I was always afraid I'd burst out crying I was embarrassed and ashamed'*. She attributes a turning point in this regard to her engagement with Rainbows '*it was brilliant to meet other kids, and we were all in the same boat'.* Lily spoke of she and her brother being the only children in a small rural school whose parents had separated and '*I couldn't talk to my friends about it cos they had no idea'.* She compared this situation to her present school close to a city where '*a lot more people just live with one parent, and it is normal'.* Jennifer prefers that her friends do not discuss her situation with her '*They know my parents are divorced, they don't really talk about it, I guess I don't get the whole sympathy thing just cos my parents are divorced, I don't really want that, cos it's ok'.* Although they also live in a small community, Michael, Amy and Kate did not have any sense of stigma associated with their parents' separation. Michael said that '*most of my friends in school know at this stage – they'd be fairly accepting of this, there's more than one person going through this, so it's good talking to people about it'*. Kate, while being aware that her parents' relationship was not close, found the news of their separation to be upsetting and reacted with shock and disappointment, and admitted that it was something that she *'didn't want it to happen'.* She found it hard to discuss her changed family situation with friends and relied on her brother for support:

'*Well, it took me a long time to tell my friends actually. I told one of my friends, my best friend early enough, I told her early enough, but I didn't really talk about it much, but her parents are separated as well so it was easier to tell her'.*

Kate was not alone in obtaining support from a friend whose parents had also separated. Sharon: '*there's one friend, it happened the same to her and I talk to her,* Bullet: '*My best friend, she's in my class, well, she's going through the same problem as well, so she knows'* and Amy: '*There was another friend as well…and her family separated and she helped me as well and knew exactly what I was going through'* also found support from friends in a similar situation.

The complexities of parental separation, particularly within small rural communities point to the need for community-based services and awareness-raising initiatives among peers as clearly some children and young people struggle with and experience some level of stigma associated with peer and friendship relationships when change occurs in their families. Accessing support from friends appears to be a complex issue for children and young people that might need targeted interventions. *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* (DCYA, 2014) highlights '*The importance of recognising the life consequences of trauma experienced by children, for example, when their parents relationship breaks down…*' (p.77) and further considers that '*Children and young people may experience difficulties maintaining friendships due to social exclusion,* [and] *rural isolation…*' (p.101). The consequence of feeling different from one's peers because of family change, coupled with rural isolation points to the need for support on this issue.

6.5.5 Relationships with Pets

Family pets were also identified by a number of the research participants as offering support. Amy found support through the family pet *She,* [the dog] *was a great help earlier with the confusion, sometimes I would go out and rub her and she'd calm me down...I also used to take her for walks.* Like Amy, Lily found contact with her dog helpful '*I talk to her and I cuddle her'.* Lily also spoke of the loss of contact with horses and horse-riding a hobby she had enjoyed prior to her parents' separation '*I really missed that*, *I always had horse-riding with my Dad and I really miss that'.* Her contact with horses had other benefits for Lily, through her friendship with a woman who housed her horse for some time '*I used to talk about things to the woman in the yard with the horses, but not any more'.*

McNicholas and Collins' (2001) study of how children represent their pets as part of their social networks showed that:

'pets can assume significant relationships in children's social networks [in particular] *cats and dogs. Cats were especially seen as comforting when a child was ill, whereas dogs were regarded as supportive if a child was scared'* (pp.292-293).

In an Irish study of school children's perceptions of their well-being conducted by NicGabhainn and Sixsmith (2005) 12.8% of the children identified a range of animals (dogs, cats, mice, gerbil, horses, hens, hamsters, guinea-pigs, pups, birds, baby lamb) as being significant to their well-being. When asked to pair categories during the analysis of the photographic data, children agreed that *'animals/pets should be added to 'family' and people I love most (friends)'* (p.255).

6.5.7 Formal Support Systems

In her Foreword to the publication of the research study *Children's Experiences of Parental Separation,* supported by the Department of Social and Family Affairs and conducted by The Children's Research Centre at Trinity College Dublin, the then Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Ms Mary Coughlan stated that the findings from Hogan et al, (2002) important study *'…will make a major contribution to the debate about separation of couples, the consequences for their children and how their lives can best be supported and enhanced'* (p. vii).

Hogan et al (2002) report made wide-ranging recommendations for policy makers in this regard. These included the need for improved services for children and their families. It was recommended that services for children should include access:

'to individual and/or group counselling for children of all ages; peer support; incorporate a variety of settings, including school and non-school; offer age appropriate information about parental separation by trained professionals' (p.112).

The children and young people who participated in the 2002 study were located mainly in the Dublin area and, at that time, had access to more services than are now available in other parts of Ireland. These included Rainbows groups; Teen-Between counselling; Teen Counselling; Guidance Counsellors; support of Family Centres; Counsellors and through Women's Aid.

The formal supports that were accessed by participants in this study included Rainbows; Jigsaw; Counselling Services; and the Family Mediation Service. Here I briefly describe the services offered by each of these services

Rainbows (www.rainbows.ie accessed on May 9th 2016) is a National Children's Voluntary Service which provides *'a listening service for children and young people struggling to come to terms with significant loss and change in their lives'* It delivers a 12-week programme through a network of schools or community based services, usually once per year, but may not be available in all locations every year. The programme is facilitated by voluntary, trained facilitators and is free to those who access it. The Rainbows programme is funded by TUSLA the Child and Family Agency. This service was accessed by a number of research participants – Rose; Sharon and Bullet; Lily and Spaceman.

Jigsaw (www.jigsawheadstrong.ie sourced on May 9th 2016) is a programme of Headstrong, Ireland's National Centre for Youth Mental Health. It provides a range of services to young people aged from 15-25 years. People may self-refer, be referred by a parent or through other referral such as a health professional. The service provides individual consultations; goal focussed brief interventions; and consultations for parents and teachers. JigsawHeadstrong is *'striving to ensure that every young person has access to One Good Adult'.* Jigsaw services are available in twelve centres throughout the country. The organisation is funded by TUSLA the Child and Family Agency and through fund-raising activities. Jigsaw's service was accessed by Charlotte.

The Family Mediation Service (www.thelegalaidboard.ie) is a government funded service (through the Legal Aid Board) to help couples who have decided to separate or divorce to negotiate their own agreement, with the help of a mediator, taking into account the needs and interests of all involved. Trained mediators also offer couples attending mediation the option of meeting their children for a once-off consultation in order to give the child/ren an opportunity

to have their views made known and to take into account the needs and interests of the whole family in agreements reached. The FMS is available throughout the country in sixteen locations. Kate, Michael and Amy were consulted during the parents' mediation process.

Counselling Services were used by Harry-Henry and Lottie. It is unclear from their narratives if the services were provided through the public or private counselling services.

For the most part, the research participants found the formal supports they received helpful and empowering, enabling them, with support, to tackle issues they were finding difficult. This was not the universal experience, however. This may be due to the fact that the supports being offered did not meet their specific needs for specialist intervention, given the nature of their experiences.

Support did not seem to be available to children and young people in their school environments, particularly in rural primary schools where they believed themselves to be the only children in the school having this experience. While the Irish National Teacher's Organisation (www.into.ie accessed on May 9th 2016) provides guidelines for dealing with parents of separation or divorce, they do not provide guidelines for dealing with the children when parents separate – an issue that clearly needs to be given some attention.

There is evidence from this research that the children and young people experienced a series of continuous changes in their lives as a result of their parents' decision to separate. In the final section of this chapter I will discuss and draw conclusions from the evidence presented.

 6.6   Discussion of the Findings from Children's and Young People's Experiences

6.6.1 Initial Reactions

It is well recognised that marital separation is a process rather than a one-off event (Pryor &
Rodgers, 2001). This is true, particularly for the couple involved, who most likely come to their
decision following a period of unrest and turmoil in their relationship. Children may also be
aware of turmoil and particularly of conflict in their parents' relationship; they might even hope
that a decision to separate be made. However, for the majority of the children and young
people involved in this study, the 'event' of hearing of this decision stuck in their memories as a
'critical moment' (Thompson, et al, 2002) or as a 'fateful moment' (Giddens, 1991). According
to Giddens (1991) a 'fateful moment' can '*be within the control of the individual ……or arise
from the intervention of events beyond the individual's control*' (p. 114). Thomson et al. posit
the view that:

 '*children and young people may be understood as being particularly vulnerable to the decisions
of others, having limited autonomy, and depending on others for both their ontological security
as well as more practical matters such as housing, care and practical support*' (Thompson et al,
2002, p.338).

They propose that such a decision by parents may compromise the young persons' 'ontological
security'. Giddens (1991/1997) considers that '*All individuals develop a framework of
ontological security of some sort, based on routines of various forms*' (p.44). Ontological
security is a stable mental state derived from a sense of continuity in regard to events in one's
life. Such security is reliant upon people's ability to give meaning to their lives and is found in
expression of positive and stable emotions and in avoiding chaos and anxiety. One's ontological
security may be threatened by an event or events not consistent with the meaning of an
individual's life. In the opening chapter of his book *Modernity and Self Identity* Giddens
(1991/1997) cites from a longitudinal sociological study carried out by Wallerstein and
Blakeslee (1989) which investigated '*the impact of marriage breakdown, over a period of ten
years on sixty sets of parents and children*' (p.10) to illustrate how separation, divorce and re-
marriage may undermine the self-identity of parents and children. More than twenty-five years
later this 'critical moment' and its effects on participants' self-identity continued to undermine
their ontological security for many years.

What strikes me most forcibly, in relation to each child or young person's narrative about their critical or fateful moment, is the individuality of each experience. These stories illustrate levels of confusion, sadness and upset, combined with the ability of the participants, through personal reflection, to make sense of their experiences and to develop strategies for dealing with challenging situations. For the most part during the initial separation period they were left to figure out for themselves, or with the support of their siblings, exactly what was happening or was about to happen in their family. Even in situations where conversations about the parental separation occurred, these seemed to be one-off, brief dialogues that left the young people with high degrees of confusion and also with feelings of sadness, worry, isolation and, occasionally, relief. The pre-dominance of feeling of confusion seems to indicate that parents had not prepared their children for this event in their lives or for the ensuing changes. A number of narratives also indicate that the actual event, in some children's memories happened very quickly: '... *my Mum pulled up in the car...and she said they were splitting up'* (Bullet) *'...one day, my Mum just like, we're leaving like, you know...'* (Charlotte). Thomson et al (2002) have referred to the vulnerability of children and young people in relation to their critical or fateful moment being as the result of '...*the consequences of the decisions, or lack of decisions, of others (such as the decision of parents to split up)'* (p.338). Relationship breakdown and marriage separation is an extremely complex time for parents. Johnston et al. (2009) point to the fact that it is unusual for both parents to '*want out of the marriage* [at the same time]' (p.7); their view is that separation can be experienced as both *'loss and rejection'* (ibid). Loss, of a loved one, of hopes and dreams, of a marriage or the threatened loss of one's children *'evokes powerful feelings of anxiety, sadness and fear...'* while rejection *'evokes feelings of inadequacy, of having failed, and of shame and humiliation'* (ibid, p. 7). Such feelings are to be expected with separating couples differing '*in their capacity to manage and integrate these separation-engendered feelings'* (ibid). With the presence of such highly charged personal emotions, it is hardly surprising that parents find it hard to communicate with their children, particularly if they do not receive support at this time.

As discussed in Chapter Two, in comparison to most western countries, parental separation and divorce is a social reality that Ireland has been dealing with for a relatively short period of time, with divorce being on the statute books in this country for fewer than twenty years. This, combined with the fact that children in Ireland have not traditionally been party to family discussions may compound the difficulties associated with communication about this subject. Hogan et al (2002) found that children were reluctant to discuss their changed family situation outside of their immediate family. This research provides some evidence of similar reluctance being present along with evidence of children and young people finding their home situation embarrassing. This is an issue that was explored by the participants during the research consultation days and will be further discussed in Chapter Seven. There is evidence from research by Crosse (2015) that children and young people are not alone regarding feelings of embarrassment about marriage separation. Mothers in her study reported having similar feelings. This leads one to conclude that Hart's (1976) description which:

'considered marital breakdown and divorce as an unstructured and unscheduled status passage in which an important aspect of social identity is being changed, and that this is one for which the individual is ill prepared, lacks role support, and transgressed social norms' (cited in Robinson 1993 p.65)

remains relevant in Ireland in 2016. This conclusion supports the view that while it is currently acknowledged in most western countries that marital separation and divorce is no longer considered a *'transgression of social norms'*, this may not yet be the situation in Ireland, thus making it difficult for all concerned. This is clearly an issue that needs to be tackled at a societal level in order to ensure that children, young people and their parents who experience the phenomenon of transition from intact to separated family can emerge with their social identity and ontological security restored.

6.6.2 Adjustments to Changed Family Life and Coming Through

International research on this subject has acknowledged and almost definitely concluded that the initial disruption to family life associated with parental separation and divorce diminishes

within a two to three year period (Pryor & Rodgers, 2001; Kelly & Emery, 2003) and that following this period of disruption families settle into a new ways of managing their lives. For the majority of children and young people in this research this has not been the case. A significant number of participants reported disruption to their living arrangement and home changes for a number of years following parental separation. This was particularly the case in those examples where mothers and their children did not continue to live the original family home, indicating that structures are not in place to provide secure housing for families post-separation and is an area that warrants further research and attention from policy makers. Security regarding one's living arrangements is an important aspect of self-identity and ontological security. The participants who lacked this security described situations of anxiety and depression while those participants who considered that their views about parenting arrangements were not taken into account also experienced struggles that potentially could undermine their sense of security, leading to the need for specialist support. Engagement in family mediation services might provide parents with an opportunity to explore options regarding their living arrangements and should be encouraged by all involved in assisting families through the process of separation.

Virtually all of the research participants recalled periods of discord and conflict in their parents' relationships, some of which were resolved through separation. On-going adjustment challenges were evident, however, in the narratives of those who had knowledge or experience of domestic violence and for those participants for whom parental separation did not result in an easing of parental conflict. Emery (1994) in his Foreword to Cummings and Davies (1994) tells us that '*All marital disputes affect children….Conflict distresses children even though the disputes are not directed towards them. It makes them mad, sad and scared'* (p vii). The descriptions of parental conflict that were narrated to me bear witness to this. For some, separation removed or at least alleviated this issue in participants' lives. For a small number, however, parental conflict remained unresolved for many years while for one person the knowledge of parental conflict has influenced his relationship with his father into his adult life. Cummings and Davies (1994) consider that '*The impact of marital and family conflict on children*

is of more than academic concern….family conflict is of societal concern and constitutes a significant social problem' (p.131). My practice as a family mediator has indicated to me that parents tend to under-estimate the level of conflict in their home in the period prior to their separation and also under-estimate their children's knowledge of this issue. On the other hand, when consulting with children during their parents' mediation I learn from them of their keen awareness of parental conflict. The most common request I receive from children and young people is that I ask their parents that they stop fighting with each other.

There is, undoubtedly, a role for support services to raise parents' awareness of the impact of on-going conflict on their children's self-identity and security at this time. Allowing children and young people to have their voices heard on the issue of parental conflict in family dispute resolution processes, including the family law courts, would also help to alleviate children's and young people's distress on this issue.

Children and young people in Hogan et al's (2002) study did, for the most part, express satisfaction with their relationships with each of their parents post-separation, with a few exceptions. The fact that participants in this study did not indicate close relationships with their fathers is an area of concern. The role played by fathers in their children's lives following separation and divorce has been the subject of extensive research internationally since the 1970s when concern existed '*regarding the disengagement of non-resident fathers* …(whose) *involvement with their children declined over time'* (Parkinson, 2011, p.7).   Parkinson (2011) points out that:

> '… *cultural change in attitudes of fathers towards contact with their children following separation has led to a redefinition of the "problem" of fatherhood. No longer …a problem of absence rather… a problem of insistent presence'* (p.8).

Research in Ireland on the subject of fathers' involvement has concentrated on fathers who had, during their relationship, been abusive to their wives or partners (Holt, 2011) and indicated that particular supports need to be available to fathers, mothers and to children and

young people in such situations to ensure that exposure to abusive behaviours did not continue. It is clear, however, that research on fathers' role post separation and divorce in Ireland warrants attention at a policy level to ensure the on-going supportive involvement of fathers in their children's lives.

Parental re-partnering, re-marriage and step-family life were reported in this research as presenting additional challenges for a significant number of participants. Very often, the difficulties encountered by the children and young people stem from parents reluctance to communicate with their children on this matter. While a number of participants welcomed their parents' involvement with new partners, seeing it as relieving them of the need to provide support, others were critical of parents because of how new partners were introduced into their lives. A relatively small number of participants (less than 10%) in Hogan et al's (2002) study discussed parental re-partnering, indicating that there has been an increase in children's and young people's exposure to this additional change in family life in the intervening years. This current research can therefore offer new insights for parents, children and young people in terms of how best to deal with this issue to the satisfaction of all involved, as the children and young people in this study indicated that their challenges arose from how parents handled this matter, rather than the fact of their re-partnering, which most participants saw as positive for their parents.

This research has shown that relationships with parents are of paramount importance to children and young people, with poor relationships hindering adjustment and leading to challenges for participants. However, where relationships with parents present difficulties, children and young people indicate that good relationships with their siblings and extended families (especially grandparents) are helpful in their adjustment, as are relationships with friends (particularly those who had had similar experiences) and with pets. Formal support outside of the family was used by a number of participants. These supports were availed of individually through counselling or through peer support services. For the most part, children and young people found such supports helpful and empowering in helping them tackle

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difficulties in relation to other challenges, for example in dealing with issues with their parents. This indicates that targeted and varied support for children and young people should be accessible and freely available to all children and young people in their adjustment to changed family life as was recommended by Hogan et al in their 2002 study.

6.7 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has provided a detailed account of the children's and young people's narratives of their experiences of parental separation and divorce from their initial reactions; through the ups and downs of altered family life and the associated adjustments made; to a discussion of what helped or hindered them in their adjustment. Throughout the chapter, I have linked the participants' experiences to findings from international studies and noted the similarities and differences in accounts and have discussed my conclusions from this aspect of the research findings.

According to Houston and Dolan (2008)

'… identity formation hinges irrevocably on social relations that acknowledge and validate personal existence; and that respect and understanding should be at the forefront of our relationships with others' (p.459).

It has become clear from the experiences described above that the personal identities of the research participants were fractured, some more than others, through the process of parental separation, divorce and subsequent family re-ordering. In Chapter Seven, I will re-examine these experiences through the lens of Honneth's (1995) Theory of Recognition in order to ascertain impact of parental separation on children's and young people's self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem – the three tenets of Honneth's theory which, we have seen, may be undermined by parental separation and may impact ontological security and self-identity.

Chapter Seven will also detail how, through the participatory process used in this research the participants engaged in their collective *'struggle-for recognition'* (Honneth, 1995) and will discuss this theory as an appropriate framework for children's and young people's participation, particularly in issues that affect their family and private lives.

Chapter Seven

Separation, Divorce and Family Re-ordering:

Recognition and Misrecognition

7.1 Introduction

'The story is well known and compelling: when individuals begin to understand their own negative experiences of misrecognition – abuse, disrespect, denigration, and so on – as structurally related to their membership in various social groups, the normative and motivational grounds are laid for engaging in struggles for adequate, appropriate, proper recognition for members of the group'. Zurn, 2012, p. 64.

This chapter continues the analysis of the research, focussing on an exploration of the research data from the individual interviews and on the data generated through the group consultation meetings. Careful examination of the data provided in the individual interviews and the data from the group discussions indicated that each represented different meanings in the context of recognition and misrecognition. The interviews provided insight into the *private* aspects of the experiences of recognition and misrecognition, which are felt at an individual level, while the data gathered in the group context shifted that experience to a *public* or *political* forum. For this reason I present the analysis of each data set, in the context of recognition and misrecognition, separately.

The chapter begins by explaining the rationale for my engagement with Honneth's Theory of Recognition in this research. This is followed by an exploration of the application of Honneth's theory to social science research in general and to this research in particular. In Section 3, I provide examples of recognition and misrecognition from the personal narratives of the participants' experiences.

In Section 4 data gathered during the research consultation meetings provides an example of how the participatory research methods employed in the conduct of this research enabled the participants' struggle-for recognition to emerge, resulting in their collective engagement in a dissemination project, which will also be described and discussed.

7.2. Rationale for the Use of Honneth's Theory of Recognition

In Yar's (2012 view '*…for Honneth, recognition is a substantive and descriptive rather than a pure or an abstract concept … recognition refers to a specific phenomenon or class of phenomena, specifically the properties of social relations as experienced by social subjects; recognition refers to both a form or a type of relation and the subjective experience of that relation by those inter-subjectively engaged with it'* (pp.111-112).

My initial motivation for undertaking this research stemmed from my experience as a family mediator who regularly consults with children and young people during their parents' mediation process. Through this work I became aware of what I perceived to be a mismatch between parents' and their children's perceptions of the effects of family change on children's and young people's lives. My engagement during May 2013 with Dr Robyn Fitzgerald at Southern Cross University, Lismore, New South Wales, Australia led to my exploration of Honneth's Theory of Recognition (1995). I realised that this theory offered a useful framework with which to explore this perspective as it emphasises three inter-related concepts for human flourishing: primary relationships of love and trust, obtained through responsive engagement with parents and other significant persons – emotional recognition; legal rights as a member of society – cognitive recognition; and solidarity, through recognition by one's community as a contributing member – providing emotional and cognitive recognition of one's worth. Parental separation, divorce and family re-ordering has the potential to fracture or damage each of these concepts for children and young people, leading to experiences of disrespect in the form of loss of trust in parents and significant others; undermining of one's rights in family and social life; and a disruption to a child's or young person's self-esteem through exposure to stigma within his or her community.

7.3   Recognition and Misrecognition: Individual Experiences

My objective in this analysis, borrowing from Thomas' (2012) work relating to children's participation and Warming's (2006) work with foster children, is to explore the utility of

Honneth's theory of recognition for understanding children's and young people's experiences of parental separation and divorce and family re-ordering in 21st century Ireland.

It is worth while here to remind readers of Honneth's (1995) *structures of relations of recognition* which also includes *forms of disrespect* (p.129). The key components of recognition theory are self-confidence (love); self-respect (rights) and self-esteem (solidarity). These three types of recognition are central to the development of autonomous identity and are obtained through reciprocal relationships with others.

Self-confidence is gained through relationships of love and friendship with family and friends, which creates the trust that allows individuals to express themselves without fear of abandonment; the self emerges and recognises the right to exist in a unique way. **Misrecognition** in the form of a withdrawal of emotional support potentially affects individual integrity and leads to **negative self-concept.**

Self-respect is gained through the individual being recognised as an autonomous citizen and member of society with legal rights to shape the world around him or her. Self-respect is achieved in civil society which offers wider possibility of selfrealisation than within a person's close family and other close relationships. **Misrecognition** resulting from the denial of civil, social and political rights leads to an absence of self-respect resulting in the risk of **isolation or stigma**.

Self-esteem for individuals comes from being recognised as a valued person within his or her community; shared esteem creates social solidarity and occurs for individuals through their relationship to a group, community of society. **Misrecognition** of one's value to a community of solidarity results an undermining of one's **dignity.** Honneth's (1995, p.21) Structures of relations of recognition illustrates both *modes of recognition* and *forms of dis-respect* (Table 7.1) that impact on identity.

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Houston and Dolan (2008) have provided a re-worked model of recognition linked to aspects of social support (p.463) and have argued that '…*social support constitutes a practical means of expressing the re-worked Honneth model in concrete situations involving vulnerable children and families.* [and] *'When one marries these core elements of social support theory to the re-worked Honneth model, praxis materialises from moral intention'* (p.462). This re-working of Honneth's model provided a good starting point for me from which to apply the model to the analysis of the research data. To do this, I applied Houston and Dolan's (2007) 're-worked' model of recognition theory and social support in the context of parental separation and divorce and subsequent changes to family life (Table 7. 2) and used this model to conduct my analysis.

Table 7.1 Recognition Theory in the Context of Parental Separation and Divorce (after Honneth, 1995, and Houston & Dolan, 2008)

Forms of recognition	Primary relationships of love; friendship; positive regard	Legal Rights	Acknowledgement by the community
Mode of recognition (for CYP when parental separation occurs)	Secure relationships of love and care maintained by parents and other family members	Recognition as an individual with legal rights; access to information; opportunity to give views; involvement in decisions.	Validation of status within person's community; opportunity provided to contribute
Potential Outcomes	Enhanced **self-confidence**	Enhanced **self respect**	Enhanced **self-esteem**
Forms of misrecognition (for CYP when parental separation occurs)	Damage to secure relationships with parents; With-holding by parents of information; exposure to inter-parental conflict and /or domestic violence	Not recognised as a person with equal rights e.g to information; to legal advice; opportunity to give views	Lack of validation by community; opportunity not available to contribute
Threat to self	Threat to emotional, physical and ontological integrity	Threat to social integrity	Threat to social standing among peers; threat to honour and dignity
Potential outcomes	**Reduced self-confidence;** fracturing of relationships with parents; threat of anxiety, depression	**Denial of rights, exclusion**	**Shame and stigma**

Chapter Six has illustrated the impact of parental separation, divorce and family re-ordering on participants' lives. Here these experiences are examined with the view to identifying situations where recognition, as understood through Honneth's theory, was provided to the children and

young people as they undertook the tasks of adjusting to their changed situation in their social world (Table 7.2). Likewise situations of misrecognition will also be identified (Table 7.3). The implications of both will then be discussed. In order to avoid undue repetition of the narratives already presented in detail in Chapter Six, I have selected examples of the three modes of recognition/respect and misrecognition/disrespect as described by Honneth from the participants' narratives and present these in Table 7.2 and Table 7.3. The analysis of the data through the lens of Honneth's Theory of Recognition was carried out by selecting examples from the participants' narratives that represented modes of recognition and modes of misrecognition and further categorised in relation to their overall impact on participants' self-identity.

Table 7.2 Examples of Recognition from Participants' Narratives

Forms of Relating to Self Modes of Recognition	Examples from Participants' Narratives
Impact on Self-Confidence: Through primary relationships of love and positive regard	***Primary Relationships of Love and Care:*** • All participants indicated closeness to and good relationships with members of their families, particularly with their mothers and siblings. ***Emotional Needs Recognised:*** • *Rose* through her mother's recognition of her need for support following '*colouring in black*'. • *Harry-Henry* through being able to discuss his need for more time with his father, with the support of his counsellor • *Charlotte* through her decision to '*take a break*' from spending time at her father's home; • *Lottie* when her father and step-mother supported her decision to live with her father; • *Michael* in on-going communication with his parents. • *Lily's* mother's recognition of her having a problem and seeking assistance for her. ***Improved non-conflicted communication between parents*** • *Rose* – mother's decision not to '*say bad things about my Dad*' allowed her to establish a better relationship with her father. • *Sharon & Bullet* – parents' ability to communicate and be flexible about parenting issues.
Impact on Self-Respect: Through recognition of Legal Rights	***Recognition of rights and needs as individuals*** • *Hardy-Buck* – opportunity to let his father know he wanted to see him more often, and his parents' response to this • *Sharon & Bullet* – parents' flexible approach regarding time spent with each of them. • *Lottie, Charlotte & Rose* – parents' ability to allow them to use their agency regarding time with each of them. • *Michael & Amy* – parents' agreement to their requests following their engagement with the mediation service. • *Lily & Spaceman* – their mother's efforts to obtain support for them in their difficult circumstances. • *Lily & Spaceman* – the intervention of the Family Law Court to uphold their rights
Impact on Self-esteem: Through solidarity with and acknowledgement by the Community	***Recognition by parents of need for Support Services:*** • *Rose, Sharon & Bullet* – through engagement with the Rainbows programme. • *Hardy-Buck* – through psychological counselling services. • *Charlotte* – through engagement with Jigsaw to help her overcome difficulties that arose from her home situation. • *Kate, Michael and Amy* – through engagement with a mediation service • *Lottie* – recognition of her need for support by her father, step-mother and her doctor and eventual engagement with a counsellor ***Engagement in Current Research*** • Encouragement and support from parents to participate in research

Table 7.3 Examples of Misrecognition from Participant's Narratives

Forms of Dis-respect (Honneth, 1995)	Examples from Participants' Narratives
Impact on Self-Confidence: Through primary relationships of love and positive regard	***Primary Relationships of Love*** • *Harry-Henry, Spaceman & Lily, Charlotte:* Difficult relationships with their fathers. • The majority of participants did not have close relationships with their fathers following parental separation. • *Kate, Lottie:* Difficult relationships with their mothers ***Trust Relationship Undermined Through Poor Communication*** • *Bullet: '*My Mum pulled up in the car and said they were splitting up…. • *Charlotte: '…* one day my Mum just like, we're leaving like, I was very confused' • *Harry-Henry:* 'Yea, I knew, I just knew, it was a bad day…it was probably frustrating as well cos you knew you couldn't do anything about it ….' • *Kate:* 'We only had one talk as a family…I think we could have done with a few more talks as a family…not knowing what is going on, you feel isolated' • *Amy:* '…I didn't have any idea it was happening, it was a big surprise I'd say I was very confused, I was upset, yea' ***Emotional Needs Not Recognised:*** • *Jennifer:* I was just told, I was small and just told "you are going here today and there tomorrow" • *Sharon & Bullet:* 'I never know what day I'm going to Mummy's or Daddy's but my sister does' • *Charlotte:* 'It was very strange going over there and not having Mum there, I'm the kind of person who likes to stay in one house …. I felt pressure to go to Dad's' ***Non-Recognition of child's rights to unique relationship with parents*** • *Rose: '*She (step-mother) does not like me at all, it's very awkward….I never stay over' • *Sharon:* '… my Mum found a new boyfriend ….I still don't like him, I don't know why' • *Kate:* 'It happened quite soon after they split up and you know, you're like "hey, that's not my Dad"… it was a huge thing for me' ***Right not to be exposed to parental conflict*** • *Lily:* 'He (Dad) used to get angry at my Mum a lot, Mum would take us upstairs, shouting at my Mum to see his kids' • *Spaceman:* 'I was scared, I lived in the country so I'd just go out in the middle of the field and just go there, sit quietly by myself…I wouldn't just go to the house' • *Sharon:* 'I was just scared of the fighting, I'd go to my room, sometimes with my sister and she's say "forget about it", she would give me a hug' • *Hardy-Buck:* 'I felt relaxed the fighting was over, the tension was gone. I used to have butterflies in my tummy' • *Harry-Henry:* 'Feeling frustrated and helpless…I just put my head down and studied' • *Lottie:* 'She (Mum) would take her anger out on the kids … there were lots of arguments and fights… I just left and came to live here with Dad'

Impact on Self-Respect: Through recognition of Legal Rights	**Lack of access to legal advice – no participant mentioned receiving legal information or advice.** ***Non-involvement in decision-making concerning their lives*** *Lily:* 'The court needs to be more fair…I asked my Mum if I could go to court, but she said "no, I don't want you involved", but I am involved' *Spaceman:* 'It wasn't really good, cos I had no-one to talk to' *Lottie:* 'Dads have as many rights as Mums; Dad fought for me, but I was sent to Mum' *Harry-Henry:* 'I thought I didn't need help, but it was all bottled up. I'd say to someone now, a teenager say, take any support you can get… it's going to help you along, definitely'.
Impact on Self-esteem: Through solidarity with and acknowledgement by the Community	**Embarrassment and Stigma** *Rose:* When I was younger, I was so embarrassed. I was afraid I'd start crying at school. It was a sensitive subject *Lily:* 'I couldn't talk to my friends because they had no idea, we were the only ones in the school' *Charlotte:* 'I got shier, I think it was my home situation…I struggled a lot and changed my eating habits…I would advise other children, don't isolate yourself, find someone to talk to'

7.3.1 Discussion of Recognition and Misrecognition in the Participants' Narratives

'Recognition is a vital human need and a precondition for a successful formation of identity' (Juul, 2009, p.405).

The examples of recognition and misrecognition provided in Table 7.2 and Table 7.3 concur with Thomas et al's (2016) view that '*Relationships are of course central to recognition, with acts of recognition and misrecognition, and struggles over recognition occurring in relational spaces'* (p.7). It is not difficult to see how these examples can be understood in terms of recognition and misrecognition. While the participants' narratives do not explicitly refer to 'love, rights and solidarity' or to 'disrespect, insult or undermining of rights or autonomy' it is clearly possible to explicate from them underlying narratives of '*care, attention and acknowledgement'* and of '*compromise, isolation and exclusion'*. In the discussion which follows, I have identified situations of recognition and misrecognition from the participants narratives and linked them to Honneth's modes of recognition. In doing this, however, I acknowledge that clear delineation of each – self-confidence; self-respect; and self-esteem –

was not always possible, resulting in over-lap between each mode of recognition and mis-recognition.

The care, attention and acknowledgement of those in close relationships with each of the research participants obviously enhanced their self- confidence, self-respect and self-esteem. Where recognition was given by parents of the impact of changed family life and appropriate support provided, the subsequent outcome was evident in the children's and young people's narratives. Where care was taken with regard to the introduction of parents' new partners, for example, relationships of love and confidence flourished, and when individual needs were acknowledged it was possible for difficulties to be overcome and for fractured relationships to be repaired. Examples of parents' abilities to respond to their children's needs and situations should not be under-estimated. When, despite their personal difficulties, parents were able to identify and respond to their children's needs, feelings of belonging flourished, leading to enhanced self-confidence. Where fathers or mothers recognised their children's experiences as being separate, and encouraged their autonomy and agency in their individual lives, self-confidence was enhanced and self-respect was built. When recognition was given for a child or young person's need for support outside of the family, opportunities for re-establishment of relationships of love and trust were provided and self-respect and self-esteem was restored. The efforts made by parents were clearly acknowledged by the children and young people as catalysts for change in their lives – this was expressed very clearly by Rose in her interview when she stated '*Mam helped me change the way I thought about things, about six years ago that* [anxiety] *stopped…*[if she hadn't]…*I wouldn't be myself, I'd probably still be colouring in black'*.

Relationships of love are built on trust. Poor communication or with-holding of information about important issues affecting a person's life can greatly undermine trust. This appears to be at the core of how misrecognition or disrespect was shown to the children and young people. This was coupled with a minimisation of the effects of lack of information; the impact of parental actions; and the unavailability of structural supports about family change. This

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minimisation led to confusion, sadness, distress and, in some situations, to more serious outcomes for the children and young people, including anxiety and depression. Being exposed to parental conflict, and in a number of situations to domestic violence, has been shown through this research to have been a difficult experience for children and young people. The review of the literature in relation to this subject in Chapter Three showed that such experiences can have long lasting effects on children's and young people's wellbeing and development, and such exposure by parents coupled with possibly ignoring these possible detrimental effects showed a lack of respect for the children involved which, for some, led to a marring of their childhoods through to adolescence, thus undermining their sense of identity.

The inability of parents and others to consciously acknowledge the difficulties inherent in living between two homes; having to adjust to the addition of new family members to their children's lives; and the silencing of their voices regarding issues that affected their lives, such as in family law court proceedings, is clearly disrespectful and left the research participants feeling lost and powerless. The fact of not having structural supports in place outside of the child or young person's immediate family, to whom he or she could turn when situations within the family became intolerable, compounded feelings of isolation. Feelings of isolation, manifest through not having anyone with whom to express his or her feelings, particularly for a young child, can potentially lead to an undermining of self-confidence. As with Fitzgerald's (2008) study of children who attended a contact centre in order to spend time with one of their parents, the children in this research also, as shown in their narratives sought *'conversations and dialogue'* about their situations, which was not forthcoming. A good example of such a call for dialogue from the present study is articulated by Kate when she said, having become aware of her mother's new partner '… *this was one of the times to have someone neutral to help me get it off my chest, you know to be able to release some of the tension that's there…'*. Because she was unable to engage in conversation with her mother or with her brother, who had hitherto been her main source of support, Kate was left isolated and unsupported within her family.

It can also be said, in reviewing the data from the viewpoint of recognition theory, that in a number of situations where recognition emerged, it was not through pro-active action by parents, but followed either a crisis in a child or young person's life, such as the emergence of anxiety; or as a result of the child or young person themselves invoking their agency in order to change what had become for them an intolerable situation. While it is clear that when parents 'picked up the gauntlet' in these situations a better outcome ensued for their children, it is worrying that in these cases action was only taken when children and young people reached crisis point in their adjustment to separation and family re-ordering. It is equally worrying to realise the severity of situations that participants dealt with without input from responsible adults in their lives and without access to appropriate supports. It is also clear that appropriate services were not freely available to the children and young people which highlights the minimisation of the effects of parental separation not just by parents, who are themselves dealing with very serious issues at personal and practical levels at this time, but by society in general.

Thomas (2014) has recommended that particular social settings ought to be examined in order to ascertain how different forms of recognition are present '*how they are expressed, in what ways they are contested*' (Thomas, 2014). The most obvious social setting to be examined here is the family, followed by schools and structural supports available to children and young people.   Recent research in Ireland has indicated that parents are receptive to hearing children's views within the home. The Growing Up in Ireland (2012) longitudinal study of thirteen year olds reported that this cohort of young people '*get on well with both parents*', with 70% reporting that their mother spends time talking to them each week, while 60% reported that their fathers do so. A recent publication by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA, 2015) of research on participation in decision-making at home, in schools and in their communities found that children and young people experienced their home as '*the most facilitative setting of their voice and participation out of the three spheres explored in the research*' with evidence suggesting that they '*were happy for the most part with their level of decision making and personal autonomy*' (p.65). The types of decision making that were

discussed in the DCYA research, however, concentrated on what could be described as 'soft' subjects. These included food choices; clothing and hair-style choices; pocket money; bed-times; leisure activities; and homework. Subjects described as sensitive or difficult included smoking and drinking. (ibid pp. 49-55). What could be described as more difficult subjects, such as those experienced by the children and young people in this research, were not discussed with the research participants. While it is clear that the research in question was not investigating parental separation or divorce, participants were not asked what happens within their homes when or if difficult issues such as conflict or disagreement between their parents or between themselves and their parents arise. Omitting such important elements of family life from research about children's and young person's participation in decisions within families can be seen as another indication of the minimisation of the impact of, perhaps, '_more difficult and sensitive'_ issues on children's and young people's lives. Participation in this present research, however, did provide a forum for the children and young people to discuss these sensitive issues, and their experiences can provide useful additional information about participation in decision making within families, albeit outside the remit of the DCYA (2015) research.

It is clear from the children's and young people's discussions during the research consultation days that they collectively had strong opinions on the issues pertaining to 'difficult and sensitive' issues in their lives as a result of parental separation and family re-ordering. Their individual experiences indicated that participation in this aspect of family life and decision making was not open to them, thus denying them the recognition they needed. Participation in the research provided an opportunity for them to re-claim their autonomy and seek the recognition they desired. This process will now be described and examined through the lens of recognition and misrecognition.

7.4   Recognition and Misrecognition

7.4.1   Introduction to the Collective Experiences

I begin this section by introducing the Research Review meetings. The methodological approach to this study provided an opportunity to the participants for on-going involvement through the participatory process employed. In order to encourage the on-going engagement of the research participants I invited their continuing involvement at the end of each interview and sent each participant, by post, regular updates of the progress of the research (Appendix 14). Following my initial analysis of the research interviews, all participants were invited to attend the initial research review meeting in order to discuss the findings.

The development of the structure of these meetings was organic. While I was hopeful, firstly, that participants would attend, I did not have any set idea of what the outcome might be. I was mainly concerned that the children and young people would have an opportunity to have an on-going input into the research process. The research advisory group, Liam and Megan, were a vital component in relation to the planning and to the conduct of these meetings. Their input in planning the format and agenda of each meeting was, I believe, central to the success of the overall process. For the initial meeting, we together planned an agenda for the day that included my giving a brief overview of the Child and Family Research Centre, its function and work, the process involved in getting a research project such as the one they were involved in off the ground, and, an update on what had been completed to date and where this meeting fitted into the process. Megan, Liam and I had prepared some visual posters that covered some of the themes that had emerged from the data. The participants were then invited, in pairs, to review the posters, following which, they held a discussion which was audio recorded. Liam and Megan had advised that for lunch, I should arrange for the delivery of pizzas. I also ensured that drinks, fruit and other refreshments were available throughout each day. The meetings were co-facilitated by myself and a PhD colleague with Megan and Liam engaging as participants in the groups. The first meeting was held in June 2014 and subsequent meetings were held in

March and November 2015 and during which participants discussed their views on their involvement in the research and generated ideas about how best to disseminate the research results. Six participants attended the first meeting and subsequent meetings were attended by twelve and ten participants.

Written consent for continuing involvement in this aspect of the research was obtained from all who participated and from a parent of participants aged under eighteen years (Appendix 15 and 16). This consent included consent for the meetings to be audio recorded for research purposes. Participant anonymity in this aspect of the process was ensured through the introduction of participants to each other by the first names only, without reference to the nicknames they had used during the research interviews. It was also agreed that individual contributions to the group discussions would not be identified, this decision proved to be important for participants when written summaries of the meetings were distributed by post to their homes.

Overall, the two-member research consultation group and ten research participants were involved in this process over a period between June 2014 and November 2015, while four participants chose not to become involved in this aspect of the research. During this time the research results were reviewed and commented upon, discussions were held about the participants' involvement in the research and options regarding dissemination were considered. From these discussions a decision was made by the group to their direct involvement in a dissemination project through the production of short videos which provide messages for parents; for national schools and for friends of how best to support children and young people who are experiencing parental separation. This work was undertaken by the participants under the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre Youth as Researchers Programme from January 2016 to April 2016, in association with the National Youth Organisation Foróige (www.foroige.ie) and the Creative Youth Education Programme TechSpace (www.techspace.ie). A separate protocol for the dissemination project was prepared by me for approval by the Child and Family Research Centre (Appendix 17) and written consent

was obtained at the beginning of the project from all participants and from a parent of those under eighteen years (Appendix 18). My role during this project was as facilitator rather than researcher as the children and young people made all decisions relating to content and production of the videos with the support of three technical experts from Foróige and TechSpace. While the discussions were not audio-recorded the participants entrusted me with their written documents as they developed their ideas, wrote scripts and engaged in the project.

7.4.2 Recognition and Misrecognition: The Collective Experiences

At the initial meeting held in June 2014, attended by six participants, themes that had emerged from the individual interviews were reviewed and explored. This led to some discussion of the participants' common experiences covering a number of topics. These included parental conflict; living in two homes; parents re-partnering; and the use of activities and sports as coping strategies, as well as discussing with each other aspects of their stories which included their views on how parental separation ought to be handled by parents. In this forum the children and young people provided mutual support for each other as their collective stories revealed aspects of their experiences they had not discussed with me in the individual interviews. As mentioned, the participants had agreed that their discussions would be audio recorded, thus providing additional data for the research. As with the individual interviews, I transcribed the recordings using NVivo and identified the emergence of particular themes.

Following this meeting I kept in touch by post with the participants, sending updates of my progress with the research and invited them to attend a second meeting in March 2015, the purpose of which was to discuss with them their views on their participation in the research and to obtain their views on how the research findings should be disseminated. Twelve participants attended this meeting, including the two-member consultation group who had once again helped me to prepare for the meeting and recommended that time be given to participants for some 'free talk' about their experiences before discussing their participation

and dissemination. This proved to be a very good decision, as having time together in this way helped people to get to know each other and feel at ease with each other. Following that informal encounter, which was done in two small groups, participants then discussed their experiences, the research findings, their participation and options regarding dissemination in the larger group.

Following my reading and analysis of the data from these two meetings, I was struck by the openness of the discussions on both occasions. I was also impressed by the level of trust evident between the participants, which resulted in a deepening of the discussions and progression in their thinking on the issues. It could be said that during the June 2014 meeting people were somewhat tentative with each other, and that by March 2015, participants had reached a level of comfort that enabled them to speak more freely and engage in nuanced dialogues with each other. The conversations held indicated to me a shifting of the discussion of experiences from the private, individual ones to a mutual public forum which has been described by Fleming (2014) as an exercise that:

> '*brings private matters to the centre of sociological attention …The theory of recognition establishes a link between the social causes of experiences of injustice and the motivation for emancipatory movements. The personal is political. This is an attempt to reconfigure the age old sociological discussion of structure and agency*' (Fleming, 2014, p. 320).

Children's and young people's experience of the transition of their family from intact to separated or divorced family is possibly one of the most intense personal experiences of childhood and adolescence and is one that sharply brings focus to the question of structure and agency, thus initiating the struggle for recognition that results from disrespect which is inherent to Honneth's Theory of Recognition. There are clear 'calls for recognition' in these discussions as the children and young people tease out the implications of the reality of their situations. For this reason, I made a decision to present extracts from both meetings under the topic headings discussed to illustrate this progression in Table 7.4.

Table 7.4 Collective Experiences (1)

Parental re-partnering (June 2014)	Parental re-partnering (March 2015)
'At the start I didn't like the idea at all, I found out from my sister, I didn't find out things properly, so I didn't like the idea at all….I've got to know him now, and it turned out he's a really nice guy and she's happy, so I've been lucky now' *'We had very much the exact same thing, I was happy that she's happy and he a nice guy, and he's really good to us, but it was just weird…I just find it strange…'*	*'My Mum didn't tell me about her relationship for a year and a bit, I was so angry with her, so I became close to my Dad, I really think she should have told me'* *'I found that as well, I knew about him. She never actually said "this is so and so". Gradually he was there more and more and then she brought him to a family event. I was like who is this guy? I didn't even know him and he was being introduced to the whole family and I was like, this is not right. I'd like to have been asked are you ok with this?'* *'My Mum started dating a while ago, she joined a dating website. I didn't know what to do. Then I found out my Dad has a relationship, but I'd prefer him to tell me. I want him to tell me stuff. I talked to him and he said he has an agreement not to tell us for a period of time, but it's like, I'm more important then a piece of paper'* *'You should tell your kids before you do anything'* *'My Mum asked me before she joined a dating website, it was good that she asked. My Dad, he didn't tell us at all, we knew this person from our old town and her kids were in my class, he understood that we knew, but never talked about it. It was a bit awkward – my Dad is dating your Mum'* *'… all of a sudden, she was my step-mother, they become part of your family, you have to be comfortable in your own family'*
Telling friends about their parents' separation. (June 2014) *'When I did tell my friends* [about the separation] *we were in the car and my Mam's partner was there and one of my friends asked "is that your Dad?" and that's the only reason I said it ….it was kind of a relief, there was only four people, they were the people I would have told anyway'* *'My mother just expected me to tell everyone…she told my teachers and my friends' parents and when I went in* [to school] *everyone was like are you ok? ….so I didn't have to prepare, everyone just knew'* *'Most of my friends just found out if they came over, I'd say you have to come to this house, cos I won't be at the other house'*	**Telling friends about their parents' separation (March 2015)** *'Yea, I shared it with a friend cos they felt the same about things'* *'You don't plan on going out and asking your friends for advice, sometimes it just comes out'* *'Everyone saw me as the person whose parents had split up. I just did what I was told to do, my Mum had told everyone'* *'We all know we end up doing what they decide, they need to take into account how you are feeling…I know what your Mum did, I wouldn't be happy, it would be up to me to tell'* *'Parents need to know how hard it is on kids, cos other*

'For me they were still living together, so it was hard, I felt a bit embarrassed to tell people, it sounds stupid now….also, they asked me not to tell anyone, so that was hard, I didn't like that' *'[Telling people] it leaves you vulnerable to people, you'd have to trust…you don't want special treatment and you don't want to be bullied''*	*kids wouldn't know how hard it is on kids'* *'It should be my choice to tell in my way, it's the only thing you really have control over, it's important for children to have control'* *'I think it's harder when you are younger, 7 or 8 year olds whose parents are together don't understand'* *'Adults need to know how hard it is for younger kids'* *'When you're younger it's a completely foreign thing, this isn't a real thing. I hadn't a clue that families live like this'*
Two homes (June 2014) *'Some people think if you have your clothes there it should feel like home, we moved our bed sheets into his apartment, but like it was a different place, a strange place and it didn't feel like home'* *'Well I never felt like my Dad's house is my home, he lives close by but I only see him two or three days every month, I've nothing there, so I can understand the bedclothes and stuff…it just will never be my home'* *'My Dad's home is nice and I like it … but my mother's house, that's my home, I could never call Dad's house home'* *'Both of them feel like home to me anyway…they are close by each other, we have a lot of freedom and can just walk over and back'*	**Two Homes (March 2015)** *'Two houses are hard…I know when I started 1st Year, I didn't know anyone and not being there every weekend, you miss out a lot, it took longer to make friends … you feel bad asking to stay up this weekend to meet friends, so you go along with it'* *'You're the one who wants to be happy, to be happy yourself you'd stay where you are, yea, but you go to make the other person happy'* *'…I've got to pack, every time, we weren't allowed to leave our stuff at Dad's cos Mum said she paid for it'* *'It works with rules as well, like you used to be in one house and now you go to two houses and there are two completely different sets of rules'* *Having to split your things between two houses, you're at one, you want to wear something and it's in the wrong house…* *'My mam says I'm like piggy in the middle and like I go in my Dad's car and I go to his house'* *'It's just confusing, I'm looking for a book and it's not there and I've to collect it and then do the homework'*
Parental Conflict June 2014 *'It was hard for me whenever they argued, it was always in the kitchen, I'd be outside I'd want to leave, but I'd need to listen and feel like I wanted to do something…I'd kinda feel helpless and that was the worst, I'd wish they'd argue somewhere I couldn't hear…'*	**Parental Conflict March 2015** *'It would be better if the parents were friends'* *'My parents don't like each other at all; whenever my Dad comes to pick me up they just say hi, there's nothing like how are you or anything.'*

'Yea, if you want to help them and they're really fighting and upset, they'd say "go away, I don't want you to get involved", but you really are involved, they don't realise it, they think you haven't heard, they don't know we can pretend nothing happened, but we do know, we're not stupid'	*'It shouldn't be like that and they shouldn't be like making it up, will you tell your Dad something, I hate that'. 'I find it really annoying, the way they do that'.*
	'My dad will not go into my mother's house, I was bringing in a suitcase; she wasn't even there. She goes into his house all the time, but for him, he brought it as far as the front door, it makes no sense at all'.
'Sometimes things would get out of hand, so sometimes me and my sister were old enough to sort out some of the problems, so we'd give our opinion and that would generally help and I suppose we had grown up with both of them so we did not want everything to change'	*'My dad gets too comfortable, when it comes to things like that'.* *'I think it's easier if they are across the country or whatever'*

At the Research Review meeting in June 2014 the participants discussed a number of other topics including coping through activities; relationships with parents and getting support, illustrated in Table 7.5

Table 7.5 Collective Experiences (2)

Coping through activities:
'For me it was rugby, it's a great sport to get rid of any kind of stress or anger'
'I joined dancing around the time my parents split up, having them [other dancers] *to be with helped a bit'*
'My experience is you try everything, but nothing sticks and you don't know why…you're like, I'm going to be a kick boxer, I'm going to be a basketball player, but you get sick of it after a while and you don't know why'
'Yea, I understand, you take up things and you think it's going to take your mind off things, but then you get fed up of it and you don't know why, I kinda know that feeling'
Relationship with mothers and fathers
'My mother just understands a bit more…she looks deeper into how you are feeling, but Dad, he'll just say "don't worry" and that will be it, he won't give advice…whereas my Mum will give better advice'
'Sometimes they will forget that you are still a kid, sometimes my Mum will tell me so much at once, it's a shock cos like she tells me all this stuff and I'm whoa, I don't need to know that'.
'In my case, I'm very close to my Dad'
'It's kinda the one that easier to talk to would be the one you get on better with generally, like I've more in common with my Mam, cos my Dad is really into football and I'm not, so I talk to her about things I've more interest in'
'Much the same, I hate football, I was supposed to give it up last year and he made me go back just cos he's my coach'
Getting Support
'I'd say that's the worst thing for me anyway and then you can't control the outbursts and that can really affect relationships and I think it's because I never talked about it, so I think that really messed me up and then I started writing down things and that helped'
'I went to a counsellor and that helped and I didn't need it for long, but they help you to move on'
'I think it would really help, but I never had the courage to go to anyone'
'I went to Rainbows when I was younger and as I got older I got more problems like with my step-mother and what not, but now I find it hard to trust anyone, I think it's a control thing I have, not trusting'

7.4.3 Analysis and Discussion of Collective Experiences

The analysis of the data gathered from the discussion groups through the lens of Honneth's modes of recognition and misrecognition needed to be done differently from that undertaken for the individual narratives, because, this collective process provided the research participants

with an opportunity to directly engage in one of Honneth's modes of recognition, namely solidarity with each other. The individual narratives as described in Chapter Six and analysed through Honneth's modes of recognition in Tables 7.2 and 7.3 illustrate aspects of the experiences that the children and young people found confusing, isolating and difficult to deal with. In my overall examination of the collective narratives as they progress through the process of the discussions, I detected from the children's and young people's dialogues with each other a sense that they were laying claim to these experiences through collective activity. While acknowledging that some experiences had been difficult, they were now, as a group, in a position to use these experiences for the benefit of other children and young people who might be in similar situations. This realisation by the research participants concurs with Thomas' (2012) conclusion following his analysis of group activity engaged in by young Welsh people that their involvement provided the opportunity for:

(1) *Voice and recognition*

(2) *Developing skills and capacity;*

(3) *Becoming part of the community* (p.460).

To fully analyse the group narratives presented in Tables 7.4 and 7.5, however, it is necessary to return to Honneth's modes of recognition and misrecognition as presented in his 1995 seminal work *the Struggle for Recognition* with particular emphasis upon the modes of misrecognition. (Table 4.2) Honneth points out in this work that:

'… *the distinctions between three patterns of recognition gives us a theoretical key with which to separate out just as many kinds of disrespect. Their differences would have to be measured by the various degrees to which they are able to disrupt a person's practical relation-to-self by denying him or her recognition for particular claims to identity''* (p.132).

Tables 7.2 and 7.3 identified the examples of recognition and misrecognition from the participants' individual narratives. In their collective discussions the children and young people,

for the most part, expanded upon these themes, as illustrated in Table 7.4. Table 7.6 provides some examples from these narratives.

Table 7.6 Examples of Modes of Recognition and Misrecognition as identified from the Collective Discussions

Recognition	Love	Rights	Solidarity
	Provided through open dialogue between parents and children and young people:	The right to be provided with support	Provision of opportunity to contribute (participating in the research)
	'My Mum asked me before she joined a dating website, it was good that she asked'	*'I went to a counsellor and that helped me, I didn't need it for long, but they help you to move on'*	*'It's something for your voice to be heard and you're not going through all that stuff for nothing to be done about it'*
Misrecognition	Threat to integrity	Threat to self-respect	Threat to self-esteem
	Lack of dialogue between parents and children and young people about issues relating to their lives	Right to have input into decisions not available to children and young people	No opportunity to have some aspect of control within child's or young person's community
	'It works with rules as well, like you used to be in one house and now you go to two houses and there are two completely different sets of rules'	*'You're the one who wants to be happy, to be happy yourself you'd stay where you are, yea, but you go to make the other person happy'*	*'It should be my choice to tell in my way, it's the only thing you really have control over, it's important for children to have control'*
	'My mother just expected me to tell everyone'	*'Telling people, it leaves you vulnerable,,,you'd have to trust*	*'you don't want special treatment and you don't want to be bullied'*
	'When you're younger it's a completely foreign thing, this isin't a real thing. I hadn't a clue that families live like this'	*'Everyone saw me as the person whose parents had split up'*	*'...they*[parents] *shouldn't be like "will you tell your Dad something" I hate that'*
Effect of Collective experience	**Restoration of self-confidence**	**Recognition of individual and collective rights**	**Building of Solidarity**

Honneth's (1995) examples of an undermining of self-confidence focuses on '…*experiences of physical abuse that destroy a person's self-confidence…*' (p.133) I contend that there exists in the participant's narratives illustrated in Table 7.6 elements of emotional abuse or disrespect which had the effect of undermining self-confidence. The examples provided above also illustrate what Honneth has described as '*… those forms of personal disrespect to which an individual is subjected by being structurally excluded from the possession of certain rights within a society'* (ibid, p. 133). Honneth further contends that:

'*For an individual, having socially valid rights-claims denied signifies a violation of the intersubjective expectation to be recognised as a subject capable of forming moral judgements'* (p.133-134).

The participants' collective narratives illustrate that their exclusion from discussions within their families, schools and communities amount to an undermining of their rights.

The content of the discussions, as well as provided additional information regarding the '*pointy end'* (Fitzgerald, 2008) experiences of parental separation and family re-ordering also illustrate that a number of the issues, and how they continue to be dealt with, present more complex dilemmas for the participants than they had indicated in the individual interviews. The ability of the research participants to openly discuss their individual family situations possibly stemmed from the fact that this forum was the first they had been offered in which to explore and share their collective experiences. The fact that they displayed enough ease with each other to reveal sensitive and difficult aspects of their lives indicates the need for such opportunities to be offered more frequently, thus creating opportunities for building solidarity. The undermining of the third form of recognition creates, according to Honneth (1995) '*… negative consequences for the social value of individuals or groups'* (p.134.) These negative consequences may result in:

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'… *negative emotional reactions, such as being ashamed or enraged, feeling hurt or indignant.* *These compromise the psychological symptoms on the basis of which one can come to realise* *that one is being illegitimately denied social recognition'* (p.135-136).

There is evidence of feelings of shame and hurt in the participants' collective narratives, illustrated in Table 7.6.

These examples also bring to light the participants' lack of power and their desire to have some element of control at a personal level around their lives and the decisions being made that impact on their family life, on their lives in school and with their peers. It is also made clear from these discussions that children and young people have the ability to take a nuanced view of their families' situation, and, if given the opportunity, could provide useful insights into how the challenges inherent in parental separation and family re-ordering might be tackled. Their discussions also point to their abilities to be reflective about their situations, which was clearly evident in their dialogues with each other.

There are challenges for adults, however, in taking this view of children's abilities, particularly in relation to views held that parental separation adds to children's and young people's vulnerability, as adults cite the need to protect children and young people as a reason for not involving them in discussion or in decision being made. This view comes through clearly from the individual experiences and from the group discussions when children and young people were specifically told by parents that they did not wish them to be involved. The structures in place within Irish society for the resolution of family law matters, namely, family mediation; resolution through solicitors; and the family law courts also face challenges relating to children's and young people's participation in these forums. Fitzgerald (2008) identifies these challenges as falling into three categories *structurally* at the level of legislation, policy and practice; *relationally* between children and those who interact with them through the parental separation process; and *reflexively* where individuals (parents, mediators, solicitors, judges) must critically examine their role in either supporting or preventing children and young people

having an input into these matters that critically affect their lives (See Fitzgerald, 2008, pp257-265). I shall be returning to this topic and to the subject of power later in the thesis when discussing in more detail the policy and practice implications of the findings of this research and will also discuss the power imbalances that can occur between adult researchers and children and young people.

Prior to that, I now provide detail of the final phase of the research process – the dissemination project that the participants engaged in as a result of their discussions. One of the purposes of the meeting in March 2015 was to gather the children's and young people's views of their participation in the research project and to discuss how they would like to have the findings disseminated. During the discussions in March 2015, some additional topics were discussed. These included how difficult parental separation is for younger children, as it was considered that their peers do not have an understanding of different family types and that young children *'are feeling confused about what's going on'* and that it would be useful for young children to *'learn about it in school so it's not so strange'*. Focussing on this aspect of their experience was interesting for me and led me to a new understanding of the complexities of separation and divorce in relation to peer relationships, a subject that had also been evident in the individual interviews but is one to which I had not hitherto in my work given much attention and is not one that, to my knowledge, has been explored through research.

The discussion about dissemination of the research findings was also a very interesting one for me and opened my eyes to how adult-centric my views were on such matters. The children and young people clearly placed their target audience for dissemination within their social worlds and identified parents, friends and educators in primary school. These decisions were made following a process, however, which I shall now describe.

7.5 The Struggle for Recognition

'For each of the negative emotional reactions that accompany the experience of having one's claims to recognition disregarded holds out the possibility that the injustice done to one will cognitively disclose itself and become a motive for political resistance' (Honneth, 1995, p.138).

In March 2016, I received the following e-mail from a fifteen year old participant in this research:

> *'After my parents split up I didn't feel like there was anyone else going through the same thing or understood what I was feeling….I never thought when I was 10 years old my situation could be used to benefit other people. My voice was heard. I am so grateful for that. I have made some great friends through this project and I have learned to appreciate the power of young people's minds'*.

The sentiments expressed in this correspondence echo the views of a young participant in Houghton's (2015) research with young people who had experienced domestic violence in their lives and were involved in a project with the Scottish Government to influence policy in this area. Lola, aged 19 years, said:

> *'I'm still in disbelief that something so dark and supposedly crippling has become the spark of something that's the best thing I've ever done in my life…support was a stepping stone, participation a bridge to a new life'*.

In order to provide that bridge to enable children or young people to engage in a struggle for recognition and to have positive views of their experiences of engaging in research the opportunity for them to do so must be made available in a safe environment. I will now discuss how this opportunity and safety arose through the participatory process employed, which allowed for their sustained and committed involvement over a 2-3 year period. It was early in the participatory process that I realised, through the commitment of the children and young people, that the potential existed to enable them use the opportunity provided to empower themselves, and possibly influence how other children and young people might deal with parental separation and family re-ordering. This realisation concurs with Thomas' (2012) view

that recognition theory could be used to understand children's and young people's issues by approaching children's participation from the following standpoint:

(1) That children do belong to the class of morally responsible persons, are therefore rights-bearers and entitled to respect; and
(2) Children are people with talents and capabilities, who contribute in a variety of ways to society and culture, and so are worthy of esteem (p.458).

It was through the group meetings, discussions and their commitment to take the research findings to wider audiences in order to *'tell them what it's like for us'* (group meeting, March 2015) that these children and young people set out their stall for recognition of their experiences of parental separation and family re-ordering. It is also true to say that the words 'rights'; 'justice'; or 'social action' were not used by the group members to describe their commitment or activities. Their actions, however, sought to push the boundaries of their involvement in this research from what Lansdown (2013) has described as adult initiated *consultative participation* to *child led participation* where a shift occurred in my role as the adult researcher to that of facilitator of the group's activities, with the participants leading and controlling the process. O'Kane (2004) informs us that *'The genuine use of participatory techniques requires commitment to an ongoing process of information sharing, dialogue, reflection and action'*, (p.138) while Fitzgerald (2008) has posited the view that '[participation]:

is not just about the process of listening to children, hearing their voices or accessing their views, experiences, fears, desires and uncertainties; it holds out possibilities for children to discover and negotiate the essence of who they are and their place in the world' (p.233).

Engaging children and young people as active participants in the research process requires, therefore, a level of commitment to ensuring that their involvement will, as advocated by Petrie et al. (2006) '...*establish relationships with them and also give them something back, with a view to achieving positive change'* (pp 35-36).

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Table 7.3 has illustrated that the research participants experienced misrecognition at an individual level across all three realms of Honneth's structure of relations of recognition, while Table 7.4 and Table 7.5 shows that they collectively recognised each other's struggles for recognition. In this unspoken realisation the children and young people support Honneth's (2003) call for *'attempts to identify the societal causes responsible for the systemic violation of the conditions of recognition'* (cited in Warming (2006) translated from German)and the call of from Thomas (2012) that Recognition Theory be considered an appropriate theoretical framework for participation by children once '*it has first been critiqued for its inherent bias against children's agency, sociality and citizenship'* (p. 464).

The overall experiences of the fourteen children and young people who have participated in this research reveal that opportunities for their participation were not made available to them during the process of their parents' separation, divorce and family re-ordering that followed. Yet, each of them were very willing participants in the research, with many participants self-referring to participate and a large number expressing the view that they had done so in order to 'help other people'. This view was particularly expressed at the outset of the research process. My perception is, however, that this motivation was reinforced through their collective participation and led to a growing sense of being recognised resulting in the emergence of sense of solidarity with each other. Warming (2006), following her research with children and young people who had experienced foster care, emphasised the role of '*social recognition that "occurs through the relationship to the group, the community or society in which the participation and positive engagement of the individual is recognised"* (Warming, 2006, p.32, citing Willig, 2003 translated from German). Graham and Fitzgerald (2011) have posited the view that participation by children and young people has the potential to '*promote their social and emotional well-being'* [and] '*that at the heart of authentic participation lies a call for recognition of children and what they have to say'* (p.448). By pursuing participatory approaches in this research a space was created in which the children and young people could explore their experiences collectively and decide on their on-going participation and on the action they wished to take in their 'struggle for recognition'. The next section of this chapter

will discuss the changes that occurred during the research process that enabled the participants to develop a greater sense of ownership of this research project.

The exciting development began during the first research review day and alerted me to the potential of the research to do more than record and report upon the narratives I had gathered. Six young people attended on that day, including the research consultation group, who had worked with me during the previous week to prepare for the meeting. The entire group's engagement in the task of reviewing the analysis was commendable as was their engagement in the discussion that followed. However, it was their informal engagement with each other that was most striking. The young people showed respect for each other and for each of their experiences and were also able to engage with each other with a sense of fun and camaraderie. This is illustrated well in a subsequent e-mail I received from one of the participants upon receipt of a summary review of the day from me:

> '*I think it would be a nice idea to circulate the review with the people who couldn't attend…. Please do keep in contact, and I really hope we have another meeting, I really enjoyed the day (and not just because of the pizza!) ….it's nice to know that the child's view isn't overlooked all the time. It's also nice to have your voice heard without feeling judged and to know someone is actually interested in your opinion*' (July 17th 2014)

following the initial research review day. This e-mail encapsulates all three realms of recognition – emotional, legal and social recognition as described by Warming (2006, pp.32-34).

During the months between June 2014 and March 2015 I kept in contact with all participants, informing them of my progress with the research and subsequently invited them to meet again with the purpose of discussing their participation in the research and their views on how the research findings should be disseminated. In their discussion of their views, in the second meeting, on their participation in the research, the children and young people again displayed a commitment to the project as a vehicle for helping others in the future: '*It was hard, hard but rewarding; it will be rewarding at the end, when something comes out of it*' and as a means for their experiences to be recognised: '*It's something for your voice to be heard and you're not going through all that stuff for nothing to be done about it'.* There was also an acknowledgment

to each other of the personal importance they attributed to the work in which they were engaged:

'Getting the letter with what you said on it...it was mad to think what you actually said was in print with the NUIG logo on it...I felt important.' 'Yea, me too, my dad was kinda like, "what's that about what you've been saying"?' 'Hope you told him it's not his business' (much laughter in the group). The group also discussed their participation in the research review days: *'All the stories are different' 'the food is a big draw'* Laughter and *'why do you think we all came?' 'It's nice and light-hearted, we're discussing something that's hard, but the atmosphere is good' 'Yea, its topics that you think are important' 'The control thing is important, that you feel you have a bit of control over your life, if you get it all out' 'It would be good to have workshops like this for parents'* (Research Review day, March 2015).

These exchanges occurred while the young people were alone and the tape recorder was running with their permission. It is very clear from these exchanges that at this stage in the process the children and young people had expectations that '*something would come out of it*' and '*you're not going through all that stuff for nothing to be done about it*', indicating their investment in the research as having potential to bring about some change.

I had asked the participants to discuss their views on participating in the research. They did, however, go 'off topic' and other conversations took place relating to the reality of parental separation and its effect on their lives: *'things are going to change like, when they separate, you've no idea what to expect'.* Referring to the different age groups at the meeting it was considered that:

'it's great having different ages here, you guys are great' yea, if you can get it all out, even little bits' 'Parents they need to take into account how you are feeling and make sure you are happy with everything, that you're not uncomfortable with anything'. 'It's important for parents to tell their kids they don't have to choose between them, it shouldn't be like that' 'There's a few things I'd like to tell them – not being allowed to take things, not having clothes in the right place, different rules in each house, not being able to prioritise your friends' 'It kinda makes you grow up faster' (Research Review Day, March 2015).

Through these dialogues with each other, the children and young people indicated that they were adapting what Thomas (2012) has termed '*modes of recognition'* (p. 161) in their interactions with each other. While the words love, rights and solidarity were not used, what is

evident from these dialogues is an over-whelming sense of respect for each other and their individual experiences of parental separation, and also is a very clear call from the young people for recognition of their experiences.

As indicated earlier, the group eventually agreed that there were three specific groups that they wished to 'get messages to' about their experiences of parental separation, divorce and changed family life. Not surprisingly, given the focus of their discussions, these target groups were: parents; friends; and to those involved in national school education.

Strong views were held on the need to get messages across to parents: *'Basically, we are trying to get them* [parents] *to see our side of stuff, if they could watch us and listen to us'*. Four areas of concern with regard to raising parental awareness were identified:

1. General concerns relating to communication with children and giving of information: *'parents need to find a way to make the child feel more in control'; 'Involve children when arrangements are being made, don't say "you <u>have to</u> do this or that"; 'There should be a workshop like this for parents as well. They don't understand what's going through our minds'; It's not nice to feel like a messenger between parents, "will you tell your Mum or Dad this and that".*

2. The struggles for children and young people around living in two homes: *'Allow children to take their belongings, regardless of who bought them'; 'Having to pack each time is difficult; having to split your stuff…you want to wear something and its in the wrong house, same with school books, you want to do some homework and the book is in the other house; 'Two houses are hard, its usually every other weekend, and you miss out a lot, especially if you just moved house or school. It can take much longer to make friends'.* ;

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3. Dating and introducing new partners: *'it's better if parents tell you stuff, like if they are dating – you need to tell your kids before you do anything'; 'It was good that my Mum asked me and my sisters before she started dating to see if we were ok about it'; 'Sometimes parents do not even know what you know'.*

4. Adjusting to blended family life: *'don't put pressure on the child to think a certain way, like "you have to like this person cos I like him or her"; 'Let it be gradual…you have to be comfortable in your own family'; 'Just be careful about it, it depends on the children and where they are at'.*

Friends: The need to get information about parental separation across to friends was identified as being a little more complex. The participants want to emphasise that their changed family circumstances did not change them as persons; that they did not want to receive sympathy, but that their circumstances (particularly living in two homes) now required additional understanding from their friends:

'Some people like to talk to their friends, some don't'; 'Not talking to your friends can help take your mind off it when you are with them'; 'It's easier to share stuff with friends who had the same thing happen to them'; 'Some friends might be afraid of someone crying and they wouldn't know what to do'; 'It's better not to talk to friends, because you can just be normal and you don't want loads of sympathy'.

There was emphasis also on how difficult separation and family re-ordering is for younger children, as it was felt that their peers do not have any understanding of such a family situation. This is what led to the decision to include educators in primary schools so that teachers can help children understand families whose parents do not live together.

Educators in National Schools: This group was identified as a number of the young people felt that younger children needed special care during the time of parental separation and also that teachers had a role to play in raising awareness among children in general about different types of families in order to 'normalise' this occurrence in some children's lives:

'Parents should tell the teacher'; 'Primary schools need to know how to help'; 'Teachers should understand that the child will be distracted, especially just after hearing the news and for a time should not go too hard on you' 'Teachers should not pity you; none of this "sit over there today"; 'Yea or turn you into a teacher's pet'; 'They should make it part of play as well, showing different kinds of families'.

The decision to target these groups was very interesting from my point of view. As an adult researcher, my aim is to use the findings of this research to influence government policy and service provision in the area of parental separation and divorce for parents and their children. Reflecting upon the choices made by the children and young people indicated how 'adult-centric' my thinking on this subject is and raised my awareness that the areas of concern of the participants were rooted in *their* personal and social world, thus reinforcing the need for me as facilitator to ensure I did not influence the choices made. Further discussions about how the messages identified were to be transmitted covered a range of options and also proved to be a very enlightening discussion for me to listen to. Options were discussed and dismissed. These included articles in school newsletters or magazines, but '*does anyone read them?* Posters and leaflets were also considered, however '*people ignore leaflets, they are useless';* having workshops for parents (similar to the group sessions) was given careful consideration and not dismissed. In the end the group agreed that the use of social media provided the best option, to put messages onto sites accessible to young people, such as Spunout.ie; Headstrong; Jigsaw and other mental health awareness websites. The final decision was to create video clips that could be easily accessed by children and young people, their parents and schools. The group recognised that this option would require commitment, some funding and would keep them involved for a period of time. The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre committed to supporting the initiative. The meeting held in November 2015 started the process of getting the video project under way and the children and young people worked on this between January and April 2016, developing, scripting and producing two short videos. One is aimed at Primary Schools entitled '*It's OK'* the second, aimed at parents and friends is entitled '*Dear Parents, Dear Friends'.* During this process my role shifted from researcher to facilitator in which I undertook the work of organising meetings; providing support; and ensuring refreshments

were made available, including the provision of pizza each lunchtime – no other menu choices were considered! The participants were supported in this endeavour by their parents who showed a commitment to the project by providing transport and other support.

E-mails received from participants towards the end of the video project sum up the impact of participation:

> '…when this project began I would never have imagined having so much fun and feeling such support and love from people all over the country whom I'd never met before…we might not have realised that someone values our opinions. We have been let have control of this project…everyone's ideas and opinions were respected…never have I been looked down on or treated as a child. I really hope our work and experiences help people, even one person or one family' (e-mail communication, April 2016). '… simply being given the opportunity to speak to other children and young people whose parents had split up was just fantastic…it was so comforting to discover others had experienced the same things I had and that the feelings I had were normal. Parents' separating is difficult enough for children, but having no one to speak to about it makes it ten times worse. I really hope this work will make even a small amount of difference for the future' (e-mail communication, March 2016).

The process of facilitating this, somewhat unexpected but welcome, aspect of the research project was a very interesting one for me where my training and experience as a family mediator helped in enabling me to allow the process to reveal itself through discussion and to respect the autonomy of the main players in developing the videos as they wanted. Ideas were garnered through looking at other videos made for and by children and young people, their merits and de-merits were discussed. Ideas that I considered to be gems were discussed and discarded, some to re-emerge later to my relief. Care was taken by the children and young people to ensure that positive messages emerged and acknowledgement was given to their parents of the difficulties they [parents] face in dealing with separation and family re-ordering. A very gentle message was given to parents '*These are the things that would have helped us, we hope they help you*' (Dear Parents, Dear Friends, video, 2016) while the overriding message of the video '*it's Ok*' is that teachers should encourage conversations in primary schools about parental separation and divorce. Both videos may be viewed on the Child and Family Research Centre http://www.nuigalway.ie/cfrc/youth-as-researchers/

7.6 Chapter Conclusion

There is much that can be learned from the employment of Honneth's Theory of Recognition as an analytic tool for the examination of children's and young people's experiences of parental separation and divorce and subsequent family re-ordering. Its use in this context can be linked, as proposed by Houston and Dolan (2008) with theories of social support in order to enable practitioners to develop *'renewed understanding of identity formation, the dynamics of self-realisation and the material basis of existence'* (p.458). While these authors were speaking in the context of social work practice with the intention of applying Honneth's theory to *'the needs of children and families'* (ibid) this research has shown the possibilities of its application to research with children and young people, particularly, but not exclusively, when a participatory approach is taken. It is clear, however, that the potential exists to look at the contribution of recognition theory within the broad area of parental relationship breakdown and its impact on the lives in the short and long term of children and young people. Through a recognition approach, primary relationships would be preserved; children's and young people's rights would be recognised; and their esteem within their community would be acknowledged. For this to happen, however, what will be needed, as proposed by Fitzgerald (2008) is a paradigm shift in how this issue is approached in Ireland. It is my view that the mechanisms exist, albeit in separate spheres of social, political and children's rights theory, to enable this paradigm shift to be taken to ensure that what has emerged from this research, in particular the minimisation of the effects of parental separation, divorce and subsequent family change on children and young people, would be overcome. The mechanisms that exist include the UNCRC (1989); the Participation Policy Framework of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2015) and Honneth's Theory of Recognition.

In Chapter Eight, following my review of the research process to ensure that the research objectives have been met, I will propose a framework, incorporating the three tenets of the UNCRC (1989); the DCYA (2015) Participatory Framework; and Honneth's (1995) Theory of

Recognition that will enable the necessary paradigm shift to be taken. Chapter Eight will conclude with my personal reflection on the entire research process.

Chapter Eight

Moving On:

Where to for Recognition and Participation?

8.1 Introduction

'I often think of data (no matter what shape it takes) as a recalcitrant mound of wet clay which defies you to shape it into something recognisable' (Smart, 2010).

What this final chapter requires is that I thoroughly review every aspect of the research to see if I have managed to shape *'the mound of wet clay'* I was given by the research participants into a recognisable entity that has answered the research question: *'How do children and young people in Ireland experience the process of parental separation, divorce and subsequent changed family life? Giving recognition to children's experiences'* and fulfilled the three objectives of the research:

1. How children and young people in Ireland have experienced the process of parental separation, divorce and subsequent changed family life.
2. Whether these experiences have been given recognition or been misrecognised within their families and within relevant societal structures, including schools, support services and family justice systems? And thirdly
3. The implications of the research for policy and practice in light of the legislative changes that have occurred in Ireland in relation to children's and young people's lives.

This chapter begins with a brief review of the entire thesis. Section two discusses the key findings relating to objectives one and two. I then address objective three of the research by discussing in detail how the findings of this research may be used to promote a paradigm shift in policy development and in practice in order to utilise the research findings for better

outcomes for children and young people who experience this family transition in the future. In section four I discuss the ethical issues that have arisen during the research process and will examine the role of power relations in this context of the findings and in the context of the research process. The chapter will conclude with a personal reflection on the research process and its meaning.

8.2 Review of the Thesis

Chapter One provided an overview of the context of the research; the methodological approach; theoretical contexts; introduced the New Sociology of Childhood (James and Prout, 1998); and Honneth's (1995) Theory of Recognition. In Chapter Two, an historical overview of the conceptualisation of children in Irish society since the foundation of the state in 1922 was provided, positioning children and young people within the social, cultural and legislative context of the newly-formed state. The social changes that have occurred over the past number of decades, including the introduction of divorce and the shift in policy towards children and young people were highlighted.

A comprehensive review of international and Irish literature on the subject of children, young people and separation and divorce was provided in Chapter Three. It pointed to the prevalence in early research of a developmental psychological approach being taken and to researcher's reliance on evidence from adults about children's and young people's adjustment rather than on the experiences of children and young people themselves. More recent approaches to research in this area were also discussed, particularly the influence of new sociological approaches that have included children's and young people's own perspectives. This was followed in Chapter Four with a full discussion of the theoretical perspectives underpinning the research: The New Sociology of Childhood and Honneth's Theory of Recognition, and of methodological approaches taken: Narrative Inquiry using Participatory Methods within the framework of the UNCRC (1989). An overview of the entire research process and the method of analysis was also provided in Chapter Four. The analytic process began in Chapter Five with the

introduction of each of the research participants in their social contexts, leading the way for the presentation of the research findings which began in Chapter Six where the participants' individual experiences were explored. The three themes that emerged from the research analysis, namely *Initial Reactions; Adjustments and Struggles; and Coming Through what helped, what hindered?* pointed to the complexity of the lived experiences of the children and young people. In Chapter Seven these initial findings and data gathered during the research consultation days were further analysed through the lens of Honneth's (1995) Theory of Recognition. The chapter concluded with a description of how the children and young people garnered their collective response to the research findings by engaging in a participant-led dissemination project.

The main purpose of this chapter is to explore the meaning of the research findings for the lives of children and young people who have experienced parental separation, divorce and family re-ordering and should answer the 'so what?' question, which will indicate how this study has addressed the research objectives and added to knowledge in this area.   It is important that I, prior to discussing the research findings, acknowledge that the findings have resulted from research with a relatively small number of participants, which prevents generalisation of the findings. However, the research methodology has provided a high degree of depth of experiences which provides rich and significant accounts of the participants' perspectives on this subject.

8.3 Key Findings from the Research

Three overriding messages have emerged from this research: Firstly, participants' experiences of parental separation, divorce and subsequent changed family life are minimised and while some recognition was given to the children's and young people's experiences, for the most part evidence of misrecognition emerged. Secondly, children and young people indicated a strong desire to participate in the process of parental separation and in decision making relating to their lives in this context; and thirdly, the theory of recognition can offer a framework for such

participation. These three significant findings have been informed not just by the evidence provided through the individual interviews with the participants and the data gathered during the research review days, during which group discussions took place, but also by the methodology employed in the conduct of the research and through the employment of Honneth's Theory of Recognition in the research analysis.

The key messages from objective were provided through the individual interview data and reinforced through further analysis using the theory of recognition. These findings are summarised here,

- *Communication and non-involvement in decisions*. The evidence from the individual showed that parents did not communicate openly with their children about the changes that were imminent or occurring in their lives. This lack of information left children and young people confused, sad, upset and worried about the future and pointed to a minimisation by parents of the effects of the major change to their lives for the research participants. This dearth of information added to the complexity of adjustments the participants needed to make to their lives. This finding largely concurs with that of international research with the exception that a significant number of participants in this research found themselves in unsettled living arrangements for longer periods than had previously been reported.

- *Parental conflict:* While a number of participants reported an awareness of conflict between their parents pre-separation, for most the overt conflict abated following separation. For a number of participants, however, the conflict present in the parental relationship pre-separation influenced their on-going relationship with parents, especially with fathers, following parental separation. Relationships between siblings were also influenced by the pre-separation parental relationships, with those whose parents' relationships were highly conflictual or violent having less close relationships with their siblings. Continuing parental conflict led, in some instances, to on-going,

protracted involvement with the family law courts, to which participants did not have access. This, and other examples from the narratives, highlighted the fact that appropriate and sufficient support was not available for children and young people in clearly difficult situations in a timely manner.

- *Impact on Relationships:* The majority of the research participants reported having good close relationships with their siblings and with their mothers. Relationships with their fathers, however, were not so close for the majority of participants, with some reporting strain on or complete breakdown in this relationship. Relationships between a small number of participants and their mothers were also strained as the result of the family change. The majority of participants reported close relationships with their siblings, with a number of siblings relying on each other for emotional support. Grandparents were also a source of support, as was interaction with pets. Peer relationships following parental separation proved to be complex for a number of participants, largely due to feelings of isolation and stigma, particularly for those living in rural communities. This pointed to a lack of supportive environments within schools to enable participants deal with their concerns.

- *The Provision of Support*: Support, when provided, came for the most part as a result of crisis in the child or young person's life or following the engagement of their personal agency. The areas where participants indicated they needed support included struggles relating to living between two homes; relationships with their fathers or mothers; anxiety relating to their family situation; and feelings of depression. Where appropriate support was made available, however, participants were enabled to use their agency to bring about improvements in their lives. When appropriate support was not available, participants reported feelings of isolation and anxiety. Protracted family law court proceedings impacted negatively on children and young people, resulting in distraction and anxiety while at school. Participants were of the view that should conditions and support be amenable they would have welcomed having their views made known to the

courts. Participation in their parents' mediation process was welcomed by those to whom it was made available.

The above findings for the most part concur with international research on this subject, as detailed in Chapter Three and discussed in relation to the participant's experiences in Chapter Six. This study did, however, provide some additional insights into the experiences. Notably, a substantial number of participants did not have close relationships with their fathers following parental separation; a significant number of participants' living arrangements remained unsettled for a considerable period of time following the transition from intact to separated family; and children and young people revealed complexities in their peer relationships, some of which might be due to stigma associated with separation and divorce in Ireland. These additional findings require further investigation.

The further examination, in Chapter Seven, of the experiences through the lens of Honneth's Theory of Recognition provided evidence of instances where the challenges being encountered by participants were given recognition by parents, resulting in appropriate support being provided. There was further evidence, however, of misrecognition of the children's and young people's experiences that resulted in their need for support not being met. This misrecognition did not just occur within families, but also within schools, support services and in the family justice system. Data from the research review days, during which participants further discussed issues relating to their experiences was also analysed using recognition theory. These discussions highlighted additional complexities in the children's and young people's lives and the challenges they encountered as a result. These complexities included living between two homes; adjusting to parental re-partnering and step-family life; and the strategies used by the children and young people to help deal with issues like parental conflict and acrimony.

The analysis of these discussions led to my identification of the second message from the research, that children and young people are seeking to participate in decisions about the changes in their families and wish to have their experiences recognised, particularly within the

social worlds of their families; peer relations; and schools. Their participation must extend to a wider spectrum of involvement, however, to include policy development and opportunities to influence the practice of those who provide services and support to children, young people and their families during the process of separation, divorce and family re-ordering.

How this participation might occur in a meaningful manner led to my consideration of whether Honneth's (1995) Theory of Recognition might be utilised as part of a framework for children's and young people's participation in issues that affect their family and personal lives. This led me to reflect upon what mechanisms and supports would need to be in place to achieve this. I concluded that with the addition of the theory of recognition to mechanisms already in place, namely, the UNCRC (1989) which forms the bedrock of the Department of Children's and Youth Affairs' *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020* (DCYA, 2015) a framework for participation that will ensure the preservation of relationships; the recognition of rights; and the recognition of contributions made by all involved could be developed. As stated by Honneth these three components are attained inter-subjectively and '*are dependent on the establishment of relations of mutual recognition for self-realisation'* (Wynne, 2000, p. 5)*.

Following a review of the implementation of the findings of the Hogan et al (2002) research on children's experiences of parental separation and an update of the legislative and policy changes in Ireland relating to children and young people, I discuss how the third significant finding from this research might be utilised in order to bring about a paradigm shift relating to the provision of services for families.

8.4 How can this Research Influence Policy and Practice? The Possibility of a Paradigm Shift.

In 2002 a group of eminent researchers (Hogan, Halpenny & Greene) from the Children's Research Centre at Trinity College, Dublin carried out research on the subject of children's experiences of parental separation and divorce with the support of the Department of Social

and Family Affairs, to whom a range of comprehensive recommendations were made at that time. It is worth reproducing these recommendations in full here

- *A range of accessible support programmes should be offered to address the varied and changing needs of all family members, both at a time of separation and afterwards. Support services should be available for those who need it on a rapid basis around the time of separation.*
- *Attention should be given to the particular service needs of families experiencing multiple difficulties in addition to separation.*
- *Information on services should be widely disseminated.*
- *Provision should be made for ongoing research and evaluation. There is a need for research on trends in service uptake by children, parents' support needs, and children's experiences of court processes. Current services for children should be evaluated.*
- *Family policy regarding supports for families experiencing parental separation should be coordinated with legislative developments and service planning.*
- *The needs and rights of both children and parents should be given due consideration in the development of policy, should be underpinned by Irish legislation and by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and should be integrated within the National Children's Strategy.*
- *Family policy should encourage continuity and stability in family relations, should promote an ethos of lifelong parental responsibility for children and facilitate long term contact and involvement between children and non-resident parents. It should also promote parental cooperation after separation* (Hogan et al, 2002, Summary of Findings, xiv-xv).

What strikes me when reviewing these laudable recommendations is how different they are to the recommendations made by the children and young people when asked their views on the messages they wanted to highlight from the present research. This is not surprising. The choices of the children and young people reflect areas in which they have a degree of expertise: these children and young people are aware of the pressures their parents are under; they are sensitive to the difficulties their peers encounter when trying to understand their changed family situation; and have empathy for younger children in primary school who may be feeling lost, alone and misunderstood because of what is happening in their lives. Their focus also indicates the areas where they considered they might be able to influence tangible changes. It is not that they were unaware of the wider issues such as access to services and the reality of the family law courts, but, in their lives they do not have the capacity to influence these structures, whereas, there is a possibility of bringing some influence to bear that might be of

assistance to parents; to friends; and within primary schools. The Hogan et al (2002) recommendations sought to influence the wider policy and legislative area taking a broad approach to what was considered necessary from these perspectives. What is also striking about the these recommendations, however, is the absence of consideration that children and young people might be involved in any way in influencing how legislation might develop or having a say in policy development. It is worthwhile here to identify similarities and differences in the research finding of these two studies and to consider whether the recommendations made were implemented. One striking similarity between the two studies is children's and young peoples' reluctance to openly discuss their changed family circumstances outside of the family. Hogan et al (2002) attributed children's tendency to feel that their families were different from other families and their extreme reluctance to talk to others outside the family about their parents' separation or divorce to:

> '… a sense among children that others may judge them or their families negatively, or simply fail to understand separation and its meaning for children, combined with a cultural value for privacy in matters relating to family relationships' (p.99).

The evidence from the current research indicates that these cultural norms persist today, particularly for those who live in rural areas and see themselves as being the only person in their locality and school who is in this situation. There is evidence from the present study that children's and young peoples' lives following parental separation and divorce have become more complex. Issues relating to parental re-partnering; re-marriage and step family life did not feature for children and young people in the 2002 study, indicating changes in post-separation family life in the intervening years. Access to support services do not seem to be as readily available to children and young people in the present study as was in the 2002 study where two-thirds of participants had received support from formal services. Significantly, however, participants in the 2002 study were recruited through support services; the cohort of participants mainly came from Dublin where services might be more easily available; and as a result of the recent economic recession there has been a cut back in a range of social services in Ireland. When support was made available to a number of participants in the present study, it

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enabled them to use their agency to bring about change in situations that were causing them distress.

Looking at the recommendations made as a result of the 2002 research, there is evidence that for the most part the recommendations have not been implemented. One specific recommendation, had it been invoked, would possibly have made a difference to the children and young people whom I met '*These findings suggest the need for greater public awareness of parental separation and its meaning, particularly in children's everyday environments, such as schools'* (p.99). One has got to wonder why some initiative in this area was not taken. That is not to indicate, however, that no changes have occurred to raise awareness. Specifically, the Ombudsman for Children's Office has, in association with the Courts Services made a short video entitled *You Are Not Alone* that provides information about '*some of the routes parents may take when they separate'* and '*encourages young people to talk about how they are feeling and get support'* (www.oco.ie/educationandparticipation). This video is available on YouTube also. The recommendations regarding the provision of a range of accessible supports to families on a rapid basis have not been fully implemented, although there have been initiatives to provide mediation services within the family law courts in a number of areas throughout the country. Additionally, there have been a myriad of changes in terms of legislation and government policies about children and their lives in Ireland since the earlier research was conducted, indeed major changes have occurred since the commencement of this research. The Hogan et al.(2002) recommendation that '*policy should be underpinned by Irish legislation and by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and should be integrated with the National Children's Strategy'* is evident in the Department of Children and Youth Affair's 2014 policy framework document *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures.* This document has as its main guiding principle '*The rights of children, as outlined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child are recognised and child-centred-approaches are adopted'* (p.20)*.* Throughout this policy document, relevant articles of the convention are foregrounded in relation to each of five targeted outcomes for children and young people. Table 3.1 gives an overview of the legislative changes and policy documents that have been introduced so far during this century.

The most significant change with regard to children's and young person's lives in Ireland resulted from the Referendum on Children's Rights held in November 2012 which has led to the insertion of Article 42A into the Irish Constitution which was signed into law on April 24th 2015 following the upholding of the referendum result by the Supreme Court. Article 42A.1 states '*The State recognises and affirms the natural and imprescriptible rights of all children and shall, as far as is practicable, by its laws protect and vindicate those rights*' (Constitution of Ireland/Bunreacht na hÉireann). The insertion of Article 42A into the constitution resulted in the enactment of *The Children and Family Relationships Act 2015.* Section 63 of this Act according to Ní Longaigh (2016) '*paves the way for further participation* [by children] *in Irish private family law proceedings*' (p.2) through the insertion of a provision into the Guardianship of Infants Act 1964 that has '*placed the right of the child to be heard on a constitutional footing, cementing the significance and value of listening to what the child has to say theoretically and enforcing the need for legislative development in relation to child participation*' (ibid, p.2). Ní Longaigh, based on a review of literature associated with the implications of the Children's and Family Relationships Act 2015, highlights concerns relating to how the participation of children in private family law matters will be practically undertaken, with some commentators seeing it as having '*a more cultural significance*' (Daly, 2012) than a legal one while others, notably O'Shea (2012) cited in Ní Longaigh (2016) notes that the amendment "*glaringly avoids the elephant in the room by leaving Article 41 intact*" and in order *to "give real sustenance to the issue of children's rights, the superior issue of the marital family needs to be amended".* O'Mahony (2015) notes that while '*Article 42A.2.2 requires that the views of the child be ascertained, it is silent on the means by which this is to be achieved, leaving the legislature to decide*' (p.5). This view is reinforced in recent research conducted with family mediators and family law solicitors employed by the Legal Aid Board by Corrigan (2016) who found that practitioners considered that:

'*The implementation of the Child and Family Relationship Act 2015 was rushed and reactionary with an over simplified aspiration as to how in reality the various sections might translate into practice, with no direction or additional resources*' (p. 26).

This view concurs with that of Corbett (2012) who considers it is necessary to '*breathe life into the amendment to ensure that it will make a tangible difference to children's lives*'.

It is the possible tangible differences that might be made to children's and young people's lives that I now want to discuss, because, as has been evidenced through this research, the perspective of the participants shows that their experiences of parental separation, divorce and family re-ordering have reached far beyond the legal implications of their parents' decisions. My aim here is to broadly consider how the findings from this research coupled with the obvious abilities of the children and young people might be utilised in light of the legislative and policy changes that have been implemented in Ireland in recent years.   This focus on the lives of children in legislation and policy is to be welcomed and contrasts favourably with the historical overview of the conceptualisation of children in Ireland during the twentieth century provided in Chapter Two which indicated that children's and young people's concerns were not prioritised by successive governments during the last century.

The emphasis on children's and young people's participation in matters affecting their lives is also to be welcomed. The reality of this participation, however, is that it is confined to the public arena through engagement in Comhairle na nÓg which elects delegates to participate in the biennial Dáil na n-Óg hosted by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and concentrates on matters of general and public concern rather than on the individual or private concerns for children and young people. The research on participation within families conducted by the DCYA (2015b) clearly showed that '*the pointy end*' of family life, which includes parental conflict, separation, divorce and subsequent changes in family life, was not a subject for discussion with the participants. This brings me to the point where I consider that a paradigm shift is needed so that these and other '*sensitive topics*' (DCYA, 2015) of family life might be dealt with. In his Introduction to the DCYA (2015a) *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision Making 2015-2020,* the then Minister Dr James Reilly states:

> '*The goal of this strategy is to ensure that children and young people have a voice in their individual and collective lives across the five national outcome areas set out in Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*' and goes on to state '*Giving children and young*

people a voice in decision-making requires a cross-Government response and initiatives and actions from all key departments and agencies are included in this strategy' (p. v).

This is very good news for this research as it opens possibilities to involve children and young people in policy development in the area of parental separation, divorce and subsequent changes to family life. I will now outline my proposal about how this might be achieved, beginning with a re-examination of the UNCRC (1989) through the lens of recognition theory and finally establishing a vital link with the DCYA Participation Policy Framework. Practical examples of what might be achieved will be offered.

8.5 Reconciling the UNCRC with the Theory of Recognition

Thomas (2014) has recommended that in order to utilise Honneth's theory of recognition to understand issues relating to children and young people we need, initially, to look at children not only as recipients of care and affection, but also as givers of care and affection, *and* as rights bearers and rights-respecters; *and* as members of a community of solidarity based on shared values and reciprocal esteem (Thomas, 2012, 2014). Thomas posits the view that broader society level questions need to be asked about how children are cared for, how their rights are respected and in what ways they are valued as contributing to general society good. In Chapter Four I outlined my reasoning for the use of the UNCRC (1989) as an ethical guide in the conduct of this research. Here, I explore its utilisation in conjunction with Honneth's Theory of Recognition to enable the ethical participation of children and young people in 'having a say' at a personal and policy level in matters affecting their lives.

Lundy's (2007) conceptualisation of Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Figure 4.1, p. 65) provides a good starting point from which to build upon the participation of children and young people. This will include participation in what I term the private and personal sphere of their lives as opposed to areas of public concern such as in education or, for example, the provision of safety and security in neighbourhoods. Parental separation and divorce as pointed out by C.Wright Mills (1950/2002) catapults thee '*personal troubles'* of the

individual into a *'structural issue'* about which society needs to concern itself. It is, therefore, the responsibility of public agencies to ensure that necessary supports are provided to families in this situation.   Lundy's (2007) Model of Participation is used as a template by the DCYA (2015) in its National Strategy for Children's and Young People's Participation Document. To this model, Lundy has developed a '*checklist for participation'.* The document states that:

> '*This checklist aims to help organisations, working with and for children and young people to comply with Article 12 of the UNCRC and ensure that children have the space to express their views; their voice is enabled; they have an audience for their views; and their views will have influence'* (DCYA, 2015 pp21-22).

In the context of this research and in the context of children's and young people's personal lives it is necessary to include the provisions of additional Articles of the Convention, not identified by Lundy (2007) in order to give full provision to Article 12. These are Article 9; Article 18 and Article 42 of the UNCRC. A better awareness of these additional provisions would allow for increased possibility of adherence to Article 12 within the family and within social and structural settings relevant to this research. Article 9.3 provides for children who are separated from one or both parents to maintain personal relations and direct contact with each parent on a regular basis, provided this is in the child's best interest as provided for in Article 3; Article 18.2 puts the onus on State Parties (governments) to provide appropriate assistance to parents in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities; and Article 42 tasks governments to make the principles and provisions of the UNCRC widely known *by appropriate and active means,* to adults and children alike (emphasis added). Invoking these Articles, along with Lundy's (2007) conceptualisation, will lead to a re-conceptualisation of Article 12, as outlined in Figure 8.1.

Sutherland's (2014) examination of the application of the UNCRC and Article 12 in particular to the family setting suggests that taking account of the entire content of Article 12 and the UNCRC as whole can overcome the fears often expressed in relation to children's rights under Article 12 within the family. These include the fear often expressed in relation to children's participation in discussions relating to parental separation and divorce, where the reason for non-participation is often given that '*children may be forced into making choices...and they may*

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be burdened with decisions that are beyond their competence' (p.160). Article 12, however, while giving children and young people the right to have their views made known, does not endow children with decision-making. Research with children in this context has shown that children know the difference between "having their say" and "having their way" (Cashmore, 2002; Graham and Fitzgerald, 2010).
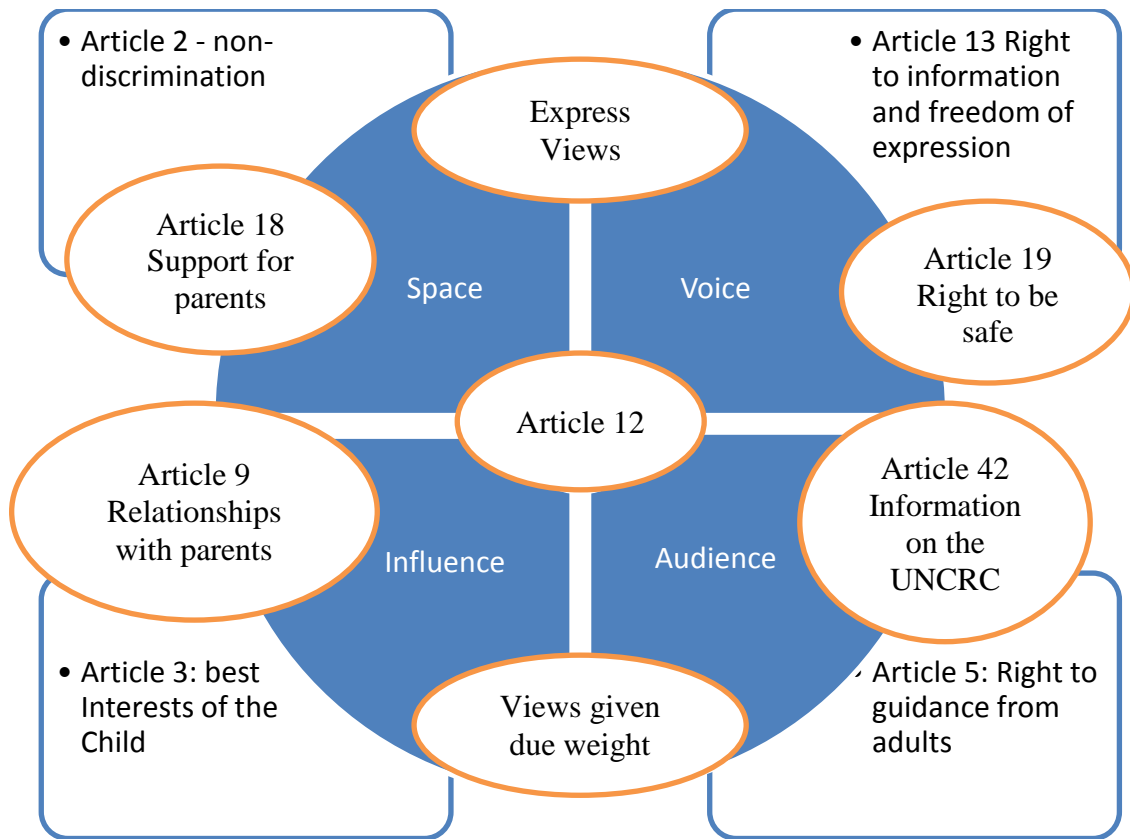
Figure 8.1: Conceptualising Article 12 for Participation in Family and Personal Matters.

It is the addition of a less tangible component to this conceptualisation, Honneth's Theory of Recognition, however, that will ensure that the integrity and individual identity of all involved in endeavours to bring children's and young people's experiences, insights, voices, expertise and vulnerabilities into play will be maintained. This component will also provide opportunities for both adults and children and young people to contribute to an arena that may make the

process of parental separation, divorce and family re-ordering an easier transition. My proposal is to consider increasing participation across the full spectrum of both public structures and within the private realm of the family. I begin with what Fitzgerald (2008) has termed '*reflexivity*' (p.257) that is the ability of all adults involved to '… *think critically about their role in supporting (or preventing) children's participation*' (p.258)*.* I propose that the combined conceptualisation of the Children's and Young people's Participation (DCYA, 2015); the UNCRC (1989) and Honneth's (1995) Theory of Recognition as illustrated in Table 8.2 will initiate a '… *movement towards the recognition of children as a guiding principle…*' (Fitzgerald, 2008 p261). This will shift the balance from a purely adult-centric focus on this issue to one that is inclusive of both adults and children's and young person's views and capabilities, because as Hooper and Gunn (2013) remind us Honneth's work is concerned with:

> '...*the fundamental importance of relationship, interdependence and inter-subjectivity to human development, and of non-instrumental social relations involving recognition by a circle of partners in all phases and spheres of life to the development of an autonomous self, individuation, moral subjectivity and agency*' (p.4).

Throughout this work, I have placed emphasis on what I consider to be the linkages between the UNCRC (1989) that recognises children and young people as rights holders and the principles of Honneth's Theory of Recognition (1995) that emphasises the '*three inter-subjective conditions*' of self-confidence; self-respect; and self-esteem in order to achieve self-realisation.

It must be acknowledged that the UNCRC (1989) and Honneth's (1995) theory have different functions. The Children and Young people's Assembly for Wales has answered the question 'What is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child?' as follows: '*In a simple way, it's a promise that the international community has made to children in respect of the rights of children*' (p.5). and goes on to contend that '*Regardless of the UNCRC's legal status, it does create a set of recognised standards that are often referred to by national and international courts and bodies*' (ibid). Rossiter (2014) has described Honneth's recognition theory as '*three spheres of recognition, which, when denied create an impediment to the development of self-*

realisation, or the real and effective capacity to develop and pursue one's own conception of a worthwhile life' (p. 94).

I am of the view that, in particular, the principle of participation as articulated in the Article 12 of the UNCRC, illustrated in Figure 8.1 requires that intersubjective recognition, as advocated by Honneth (1995) be given to children and young people as rights holders. This research has indicated that the self-identity of the children and young people can be undermined through the with-holding of opportunities to participate in decisions that have far reaching implications for them. This is particularly pertinent in the face of adversity such as occurs during the process of parental separation and divorce. To this end, I am in agreement with Warming's (2006) argument that while *'All work with children and youth… is covered by the UNCRC….the extent to which this formal right is actively supported in actual practice varies greatly'* (p.33). I concur with Warming's view that: *'Honneth's concept of social recognition thus calls for thinking about how we can create participatory spaces characterised by a spirit of solidarity and mutual recognition'* (p.34) and believe that the links between the principles of participation of the UNCRC and Honneth's Theory of Recognition can go a considerable way towards ensuring that real participation can occur.

Figure 8.2 provides, in visual format how each of these principles may be linked while Table 8.1 illustrates the practical application of both to the subject that has been researched.
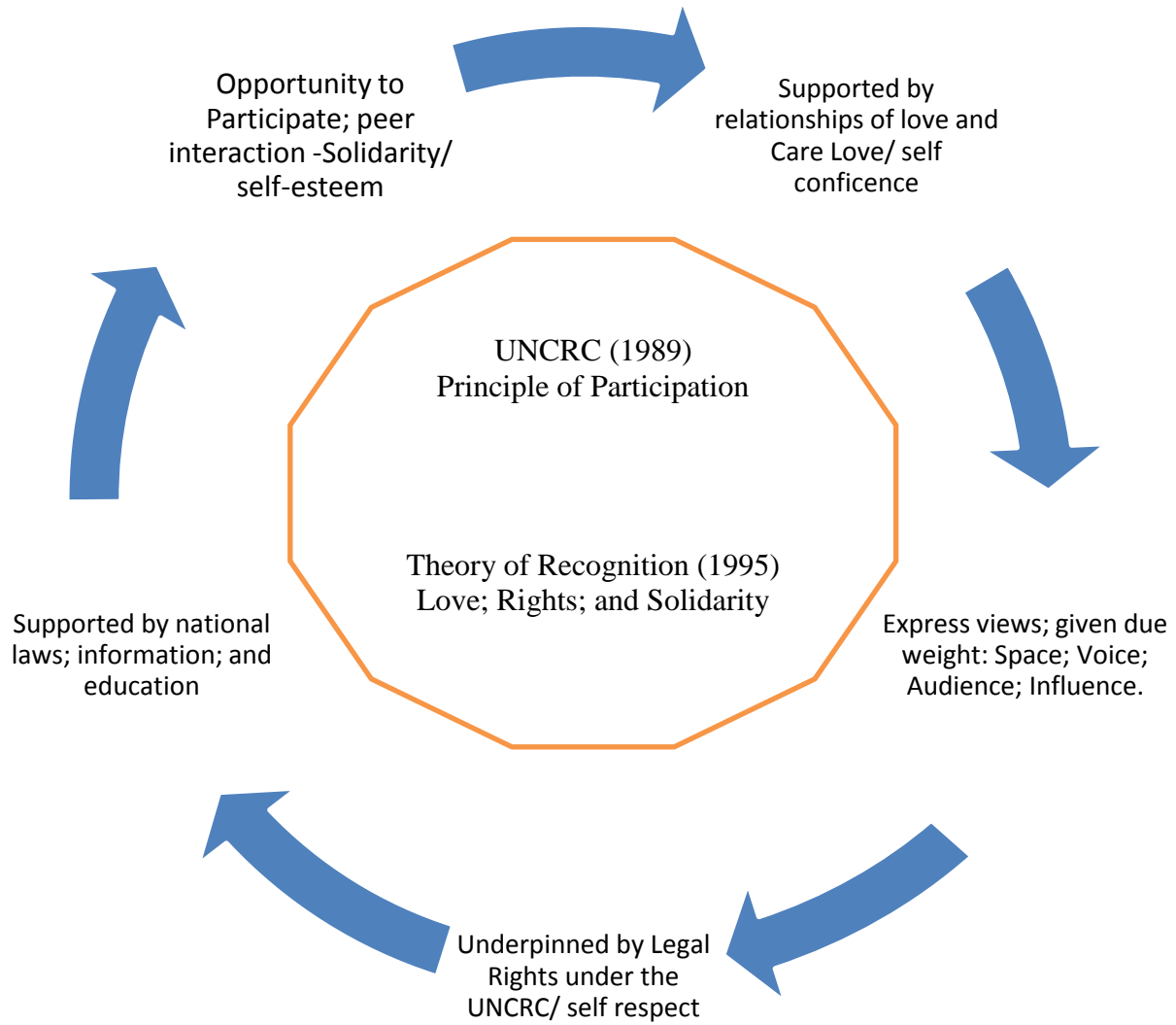
Figure 8.2 Combined Conceptualisation of the UNCRC and Theory of Recognition

Table 8.1: Utilisation of Figure 8.2 in Personal and Policy Contexts

Article 12 of the UNCRC Theory of Recognition	Personal Context	Policy Context
Enhancement of Relationships of Love and Care: Love	*Articulated in Honneth's Theory of Recognition.* ***Application in Context of Separation and Divorce:*** *Awareness raising initiatives with parents of children's and young people's experiences through use of videos and other methods.*	*Input into the development of 'Parenting After Separation' Courses to assist other children and young people.*
Legal Rights under the UNCRC and National Laws: Rights *Right to express views and have views given due weight*	*Articulated in the UNCRC and in Honneth's Theory of Recognition* ***Application in Context of Separation and Divorce:*** *Awareness raising with parents of children and young people's rights when separation occurs; Raising awareness of other children and young people of their rights* *Participate in family discussions and in family decision making about issues affecting children's and young people's lives.*	*Provision of training for children and young people about their rights under the UNCRC and national laws. Have input into how the 2015 Child and Family Relationships Act will be implemented.* *Have input into how the child's or young person's views will be ascertained in all family law services: counselling; mediation and the family law courts.*
Provision of opportunity to participate: Solidarity *Supported by National organisations; teachers; Departments Justice and Equality and of Education and Skills; youth leaders; office of the Ombudsman for Children and the DCYA. .*	*Articulated in the UNCRC and in Honneth's Theory of Recognition* ***Application in Context of Separation and Divorce:*** *Opportunities to be provided for peer interaction through peer led awareness raising initiatives in schools, in youth clubs, youth cafes through the use of the videos.* *Opportunities to develop skills to enhance awareness among teachers; social workers; counsellors; mediators; solicitors; judges.*	*Provide for peer-led training with input from children and young people in the development of training materials.* *Embed participation in matters concerning family and personal lives across all government departments as recommended in the DCYA (2015) Participation Policy Framework.*

8.6 Applying Principles to Practice

'Turning the principle of children's participation into practice is a complex task that involves changing the cultures of adulthood alongside those of childhood' (Neale, 2004, p. 164).

I realise that paradigm shift in the direction of children's and young people as rights holders and as people whose experiences should be given recognition will not be achieved merely by providing a framework within which such concept might be placed. There is no doubt that children's and young people's status in legislation has been elevated in Ireland in recent years – this is evidenced in Table 8.1. This is the first step. The areas identified by the participants' in this study as needing to be informed about the reality of parental separation were embedded in their social contexts of the family; school; and their friendship circles. Their initiative has given me the opportunity to critically reflect upon the processes involved to arrive at the place where the children and young people took that leap from private participation to engagement at a more public level. This was due in no small way to the peer interaction offered through the research participatory process, as was evidenced in Warming (2006) and Houghton (2015). It is through the garnering of the possibilities offered through peer interaction and other mechanisms such as education programmes to improve children's and young persons' understanding of what is occurring in their families that I consider the possibilities for children and young people to influence policy and practice in this area lies. Indeed, such awareness raising and educational initiatives could be provided through peer led projects following appropriate training.

Table 8.1 has provided examples of how I see the possibilities regarding this paradigm shift. The following section expands upon the application of these examples particularly at practice and policy levels.

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs aforementioned national strategy on children and young people's participation in decision-making highlights the role of the Department's *Citizen Participation Unit* and identifies the establishment of a *Children and Young People's Participation Hub* (pp 30-31) as a key priority with the vision to the:

> *'establishment by the DCYA of strategic formal partnerships with organisations and initiatives in the statutory and non-statutory sectors to develop and document innovative best practice in children's and young people's participation in decision making'* (p.31). The Citizen's Participation Unit *'collaborates with other Government departments, statutory agencies and non-governmental organisations in providing opportunities for children and young people to have a voice in decisions that affect their lives, with a strong focus on ensuring participation by seldom heard children and young people* (ibid, p.30).

Furthermore, this strategy as well as identifying detailed commitments to the Action Plan also identifies which Government Department that will take the lead in each area. The indirect experiences of the children and young people in the family law courts were unsatisfactory, not least because opportunities to participate directly were not offered, with a number of participants indicating that they would have welcomed an opportunity to participate, should safe measures be in place to enable them to do so. The recent introduction of the Child and Family Relationships Act 2015 offers a unique opportunity to involve children and young people in discussions about appropriate ways to ensure that children's voices are heard in family law court proceedings, when necessary. Because of the centrality of the family justice system to the decisions made about children and young people following parental separation and divorce, I will look in particular at the commitments of the strategy document in this area, not least because this is an area that has not traditionally involved children and young people in decision-making processes. For example, Commitment G14.43 requires the Department of Justice and Equality (DJE) to:

> *'Devise regulations setting standards with regard to the qualifications an, role and performance of the experts provided for under the Child and Family Relationships Act 2015 to ascertain the views of the child in private family law proceedings'.* Commitment G14.14 requires that the DJE *'In reviewing its services, the Legal Aid Board's External Consultative Panel will seek to improve its mechanisms for hearing the voice of children*

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and young people in the context of examining the impact on children and young people of the Board's policies and procedures' and finally Commitment G18.1 states that *'Mediators from the Family Mediation Service will ensure children's views are heard and taken into account in the process of family mediation, as appropriate, to ensure the best interests of the child are upheld'* (DCYA, 2015b pp 40-53 for a full list of commitments).

The DCYA has recently published its *First Annual Report on Implementation of the National Strategy on Children and Young People's participation in Decision-Making (2016)* in which is details the progress made by various government departments regarding each commitment. It highlights as a *'featured example'* that the *'Legal Aid Board/Family Mediation Service* (LAB/FMS) *published a Policy and Procedures document for its mediators in relation to direct consultation with children'* (DCYA, 2016, p.13) and consequently the Department of Justice and Equality indicates that Commitment G18.1 has been achieved (p.35). Corrigan (2016) conducted qualitative research with seven practitioners (family mediators and family law solicitors) employed by the Legal Aid Board to explore if these practitioners *'are prepared and resourced to effectively empower children's free expression in decision making on matters concerning their lives'* (p.6) as a result of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015. She found that both sets of professionals *'expressed concern about lack of resources; and while they are frustrated with the bluntness of the recent legislative changes, they were expressive about the opportunity to review practice, policy and procedure'* (p.28). Corrigan's (2016) research concluded that practitioners did not consider that adequate support has been offered by management to enable them to properly implement the 2015 Act and recommends collaborative practice for all involved that will *'include children and young people who have been through the family justice system'* (pp. 28-29). The DCYA (2016) document also states that *'Reflection is being given to the potential role of mediators as a conduit for conveying "the voice of the child" in certain court proceedings'* (DCYA, 2016, p.13). All of this indicates that the question of children and young people's engagement in the family justice system is being taken seriously at government departmental level. What remains to be included in developing policies and procedures are the commitments inherent in the decision-making processes in this area; an involvement that has not been sought or commissioned in the past. The appropriate dissemination of the findings from this research could, however, provide opportunities for a start to be made in this

direction. This dissemination should include the use of the participants' video initiatives; and should be carried out with their assistance.

In their dissemination project, the participants emphasised the need to '*get their messages*' to parents as a means of making a difference to the future experiences of separation, divorce and family re-ordering for children and young people in the future. To my knowledge, children's and young people's views have not been included in the development of initiatives for parents following separation, such as the *Parenting After Separation* courses that are currently offered through Family Resource Centre. Hearing children's and young people's voices directly, either in person; in written format; or via video links has the potential to be incorporated into such education initiatives with input from children and young people. One of the options they considered in their discussions was that workshops on children's and young people's experiences should be provided for parents.

As well as identifying parents as a group who need to hear messages regarding their experiences of separation, divorce and family re-ordering, the participants also considered that schools and peers need information about providing support to children and young people in this context.. This concurs with the Hogan et al (2002) recommendation for '*… greater public awareness of parental separation and its meaning, particularly in children's everyday environments, such as schools* (p.99). Awareness raising options would be of benefit to both parents and to children and young people. The development of awareness raising initiatives could involve parents, children and young people and service providers working together. Other options available for awareness-raising include the development, in association with the Department of Education and Science, of materials that can be delivered in both primary and secondary schools. The development of such materials will need to be prepared in association with children and young people and options for their delivery by children and young people to their peers should be considered, following the provision of opportunities for capacity building.

The individual narratives of the research participants indicated that their experiences of support services when accessed was satisfactory, however not all participants had access to appropriate support services, this being particularly true for those who could be described as being most vulnerable. Consultations with children and young people about the most appropriate services to offer and encouragement of input from experienced children and young people in service development also has the potential to enhance services.

The majority of the research participants opted to engage collectively with this research and to take their participation into the public arena through the dissemination project, indicating to me that children and young people in Ireland have the interest, the capacity and the expertise necessary for engagement at a policy level and I believe that the three-pronged framework of the Principles of the UNCRC (1989); the Participation Policy of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2015) with the addition of the principles of Honneth's Theory of Recognition (1995) will provide a respectful and ethical mechanism to enable their involvement at this level. I realise, however, that this will not just happen. It will be necessary for me and others, including the research participants, to engage with organisations; government departments; non-governmental organisations; and with children and young people's services through a thorough dissemination of the findings as well as through peer reviewed academic journals and conference presentations so that other researchers can pick up on the addition to knowledge this research has provided.

Prior to engaging in a final reflection on the research, I now discuss the overriding ethical issues that arose and the role of power in the research process.

8.7 Ethical Issues and the Role of Power

The question of ethics in research cannot be separated from the issue of power relations in research. Houghton (2015) has pointed out '… *that children's voices are missing from the exploration of ethics…*' (p.237). This, she considers '… *reflects the ongoing struggle to recognise*

children's agency and to see children as central participants who are competent in deciding their own best interests' (pp 237-238). For her research with young survivors of domestic violence in their homes, the young people were involved in *'…exploring "ethical codes"…then identifying, reflecting and acting on ethical and rights issues that arose…'* (p.238). Her work concluded that *' there is a need to reposition children as agents in their own protection and as agents of social and political change. This requires an adaption of current ethical approaches that focus on adult protection of children…'* (p.239). The results of this research are calling for opportunities for children and young people to be involved in the development of policies in areas of practice. I would propose that this call be extended to include the views of children and young people when ethical guidelines are being developed by Universities and other Ethical Committees in relation to research involving children and young people.

I am conscious that the question of power relations within the research process and in this research in particular should not be ignored. Thomas & O'Kane (1998) have highlighted that researchers must, in addition to redressing the power imbalances between child participant and adult researcher, also *'redress the power imbalance between children and important adults in their lives, which may prevent children's full participation in the research'* (p. 337). From the outset of this research, the power that adults exert over children was at play. This was manifest in the need to access children and young people through adult gatekeepers: parents or service providers. Table 4.4 has illustrated that interest in the research was expressed by an additional seven families. However, because four adults' request for feedback about 'how my child is coping' could not be met it is unlikely that the children and young people in those families were given the option to participate.

During the process of data gathering and during the research review meetings, I endeavoured, as much as possible to follow Waksler's (1991) advice to sociological researchers that '… *by suspending adult beliefs about children, sociologists can claim children as fully-fledged subjects of sociological understanding'* (p. 67). That is not to say, however, that the children and young people did not view me as an adult who might have a degree of power over them. During the

research consultation days, especially at the beginning, some of the children and young people raised their hands (as done in school) when they wanted to speak and asked permission to use the bathroom. I was also aware, particularly when the participants were working on the dissemination project, of notable, less formal interactions with each other than with me or the co-facilitators of the project – manifest through them finding time to catch up with each other and obvious displays of friendship. The development of the research, however, occurred in an organic manner without set expectations on my behalf of how I wanted it to shape up and this, I think, contributed to its success. There were times when the children and young people looked to me for direction, such as when they were considering writing an article for school journals and asked if I would give them headings to work with. Confidence grew, however, through their interactions with each other and with the project facilitators, ensuring that they were enabled to develop their ideas and see them through to completion. There was one occasion where my adult-centric self emerged and I expressed concern about a small aspect of one of the videos. It was pointed out to me, quite rightly, '*but, we are acting, it doesn't matter'.* On another occasion, I was concerned that a particular idea, one that I considered had been appropriate, that had been mooted had been dismissed. This time, however, I didn't put my view forward and was pleased to see the idea included in the finished product. This is a good example of allowing the process of participation to evolve without adult interference.

One other issue relating to this aspect of the process is also worth mentioning and refers to the question of the informed consent for participation being needed from parents/guardians as well as from the participants themselves. During a meeting held with parents, participants, the TechSpace/Foróige personnel and me in November 2015, concerns were raised about the use of social media for the dissemination of the videos, an aspect that was very important to the children and young people. Parents were concerned about their children being identified and also about the fact that once an item is on social media it is difficult to erase it. To overcome this, it was agreed by all of us that children and young people would not be identified in any videos made, reassurance was given by the technical staff. The protocol approved for the project by the Child and Family Research Centre and the informed consent of all participants

and relevant parents specified this. However, as the project progressed, the children and young people, particularly those of teenage years, indicated that they were willing to be identified which led me to conclude that they had 'gone along' with the wishes of their parents and other adults involved, including myself. This led me to believe that perhaps I should have put more time, thought and preparation into this aspect of the consent procedure to ensure that the young people's views were properly elicited. Following discussion it was agreed by the children and young people and their parents, while they cannot be identified in the videos, that they would use their full names in the 'credits' for the videos and a number of them have indicated that they are willing to present the videos to groups and within their schools, if the opportunities arise.

Balan (2010) describes '*the power problem*' as being central to the French philosopher Michel Foucault's (1926-1984) thinking '*regarding relations between society, individuals, groups and institutions*' (p.1). Balan (2010) describes what are normally considered to be power relationships: '*Usually, power is understood as the capacity of an agent to impose his will over the will of the powerless, or the ability to force them to do things they do not wish to do*' (p.2). However, from a Foucauldian viewpoint:

'*… power is not something that can be owned, but rather something that acts and manifests itself in a certain way; it is more a strategy than a possession…something which circulates or …only functions in the form of a chain…Individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application*' (ibid, p.2).

Power, according to Foucault '*is coextensive with resistance; productive; producing positive effects; ubiquitous; being found in every kind of relationship; a condition of the possibility of any kind of relationship*' (Kelly, 2009, cited in Balan, 2010, p.3). In the context of this research, this effectively means that it is not just parents and other adults who may exercise power, but children and young people may also.

Ervin-Tripp and Strange (1985) have stated that:

'The low status of children in stratified societies can keep them silent, forbid them to initiate or discuss certain topics, prevent them from interrupting, or require them to use special deferential variety of speech' (cited in Van Dijk, 1993).

While this statement was written over thirty years ago, its sentiments resonate with aspects of the narratives of the participants in this research. I am thinking particularly here about parents' tendency to not discuss the reasons for their separation; not to inform their children of their intentions; and at times to deliberately exclude their children from the possibilities of participation in discussions. Holland et al (2010) consider that '...*power in child-adult relations is theorised as both a productive and repressive force'* (p.362). In conducting the analysis of the data provided by the research participants in order to ascertain situations where recognition was given or denied, it became clear to me that the '*repressive force'* of power relations dominated in the context of this research. This was manifest through lack of communication about important decisions; exposure to parental conflict, particularly protracted, unresolved conflict and domestic violence; and non-involvement in important decisions that affected children's and young people's lives. This included decisions about living arrangements; the introduction of new partners; and integration of new members into participants' families. It was not just within the participants' families, however, that evidence of power imbalances were identified in this research. Children's and young people's reports of limited or no access to structural supports and their concerns regarding friendships and interactions with their peers in schools and social settings also indicated that structural forces outside of the family exert what might be described as covert repression of children's and young people's ability to invoke their power in relation to this phenomenon in modern Ireland.

While acknowledging the difficulties experienced by the children and young people particularly in light of not being provided with information which can be seen as a prerequisite in the exercise of power or autonomy, it is possible throughout the participants' individual narratives and their group discussions, to discern situations where children and young people exercised their agency/power. Examples of this include Lottie's decision not to live with her mother; Charlotte's decision to 'take a break' from spending time with her father; Rose's decision not to

challenge her step-mother in order to continue her good relationship with her brother; and Harry-Henry's decision to remain distant from his father and to avoid meeting his partner. Children's and young people's discussions of how they manage parental conflict by what can be described as colluding with their parents' view that they (children and young people) are unaware of what is actually happening in the household: '*they think you haven't heard, they don't know we can pretend nothing happened, but we do know, we're not stupid*' provides a very good example of the participants' use of their power in the family situation.

Speaking in the context of adult education, Hamer (2013) points out that in situations where people may feel disempowered:

'*…opportunities for recognition emerge and our capacity for individual autonomy and personal agency is variously supported or undermined. Thus, through specific acts of individual or collective recognition we may generate the normative conditions for social justice*' (p. 488).

This, of course, places Honneth's Theory of Recognition at the centre of struggles for power that result from people, individuals or groups, feeling disempowered through misrecognition. This is precisely what happened when the participants in this research engaged in their 'struggle for recognition' when the opportunity was offered to them through their participation. Through this, they demonstrated a very high level of reflexive capacity which needs to be garnered in order to ensure that a nuanced view is taken of children's and young people's experiences of parental separation, divorce and family re-ordering. This research points to a gamut of systems across which this might be achieved: within the family; across societal attitudes to parental separation; within service provision; and within the mechanisms of family law. To fully and properly embrace children's and young people's capacity to participate authentically in policy development will, however, require a balancing of power between children and young people and the adults who normally drive decisions.

I will now present my concluding reflections and final considerations on this research.

8.8 Concluding Reflections and Final Considerations

From the beginning I knew this research had the potential to challenge me; to excite me; and to energise me. I am not disappointed, as my engagement with this research has done all three.

This research has concentrated upon the experiences of fourteen children and young people whose parents do not live with each other and has sought to find out what life, following parental separation, divorce and subsequent family re-ordering, is like for them in twenty-first century Ireland. It also set out to explore if these experiences had been given due recognition within their families; schools; and within structural systems designed to assist families in the transition from intact to separated status. The findings of the research as outlined in Chapter Six and Chapter Seven have provided the answers to these objectives and the early sections of this chapter have put forward proposals and ideas about how these findings might be utilised to assist in the development of policy and practice in this area. Particular attention has been given to the possibility of ensuring engagement with children and young people as active participants in this context. The research was conducted with a relatively small number of participants. This prevents generalisation of the findings. However, it has provided a high degree of depth of experiences which fitted with the theoretical approach and allowed for the realities of the participants' lives to be explored. Not only that, the approach taken enabled a level of participation by the children and young people that stretched beyond my expectations and resulted in a significant participant-led output from the research.

The research set out to capture the lived experiences of children and young people whose parents live apart from each other through separation or divorce and to find out how the subsequent changes in family life were experienced. The findings have shown that these realities were influenced by social and cultural aspect of Irish life which made the experiences unique. I am very conscious that, while the experience of each participant is unique, as a group children and young people who experience parental separation and divorce do not live in a

vacuum and their experiences are influenced by the society in which they live. Their parents, of course, are also influenced by societal norms; are treading in personal unchartered waters; and for the most part Irish society does not offer the level of support that people need to help them find their way safely to a new harbour. Indeed, according to Crosse's (2015) research with low income mothers, the way is paved with obstacles within the legal and social welfare systems. There is no research to date detailing the experiences of fathers, except that gathered by Egan (2011) which concentrated on their experiences of the Family Law Court system. Clearly, more in depth research is needed. This comprehensive research should cover the gamut of experiences of all involved in the process of separation and divorce: fathers; mothers; children and young people; extended family; social workers; counsellors; family mediators; family law solicitors; court staff; ancillary services; and family court judges.

Judge Rosemary Horgan, who is currently president of the District Court in Ireland in a speech to the Mediator's Institute of Ireland Conference in October of last year made the following remarks:

'*I would like to talk about chemistry. As you know, there are certain substances that can change the molecular structure of others. Some compounds are inert until they come into contact with a new agent that makes them explode. Marriage and relationship breakdown can act as just such a new combination of elements. Perfectly sensible people can, for a time lose, not only common sense but common courtesy. Relationship breakdown is a most discombobulating experience. The conflict can deeply affect the main players and also affects those around them especially their children*' (pp 1-2).

The judge went on to advocate for greater use of mediation for couples in this situation; to encourage the government to introduce the long awaited Mediation Bill to the statute books; and emphasized, using the metaphor of a three-legged functional stool, the need for changes in perceptions about mediation; having well qualified mediators available; and the enforceability of mediated agreements by the court.

I am unsure, however, if mediation can provide the full solution to the realities of the '*pointy end*' (Fitzgerald, 2008) of parental separation, divorce and family re-ordering that have been

described in this research. Engaging in mediation can certainly be helpful to couples, it provides opportunities for dialogue; for encouraging parents to consider their children's needs; and may provide for their children to be consulted, as well as giving opportunity to arrive at viable solutions to practical dilemmas, such as living arrangements and managing finances. Given that we are aware of the *most discombobulating experience* that parental separation is, it is incumbent on society in general to provide the necessary support to assist families who are travelling through it. It is, therefore, essential that those of us who are involved directly in the provision of services for people during family transition endeavor to learn from them what supports they need. This research has provided insights into what children and young people consider might be helpful to them.

The initial starting point of this research occurred in Melbourne with a conversation with Jenn McIntosh in March 2011 when we discussed how I should put the learning I had gained during my time with her into practice. One option discussed was to try to find out what the process of separation and divorce was like for children and young people in Ireland. The research process opened up avenues of learning I had not hitherto encountered, and has made me realise that for the children and young people the experiences of parental separation and family re-ordering were much more complex that I had envisaged; these new realisations have influenced my practice as a family mediator. My engagement with the participants, however, has highlighted that helping them find solutions to the difficulties faced should not be over-complicated, and essentially requires meaningful dialogue; reflexivity on the part of practitioners; co-operative practices; and a recognition that the experiences of children and young people are valid and that they, in association with adults, must be provided with real opportunities to participate in finding solutions to the dilemmas that parental separation, divorce and family re-ordering pose for families as we approach twenty years since the introduction of divorce in Ireland. I leave the final words to the research participants to illustrate this point.

'It's nice to know the child's view isn't overlooked all the time'

'I feel I contributed a lot that will help children and parents deal with difficult situations that can arise from separation or divorce'

'We wanted to help parents and friends understand what to do and what not to do in particular situations, based on our own shared experiences'

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APPENDICES

I couldn't live without…

The thing I like doing the most is…

The best holiday I ever went on was to…

My favourite colour is…

My favourite TV show is…

The person that makes me laugh the most is…

If I could have any super power I'd choose…

If I won a million dollars I'd…

If my life was made into a movie I'd like to be played by…

My favourite kind of pizza is…

The food I love the most is…
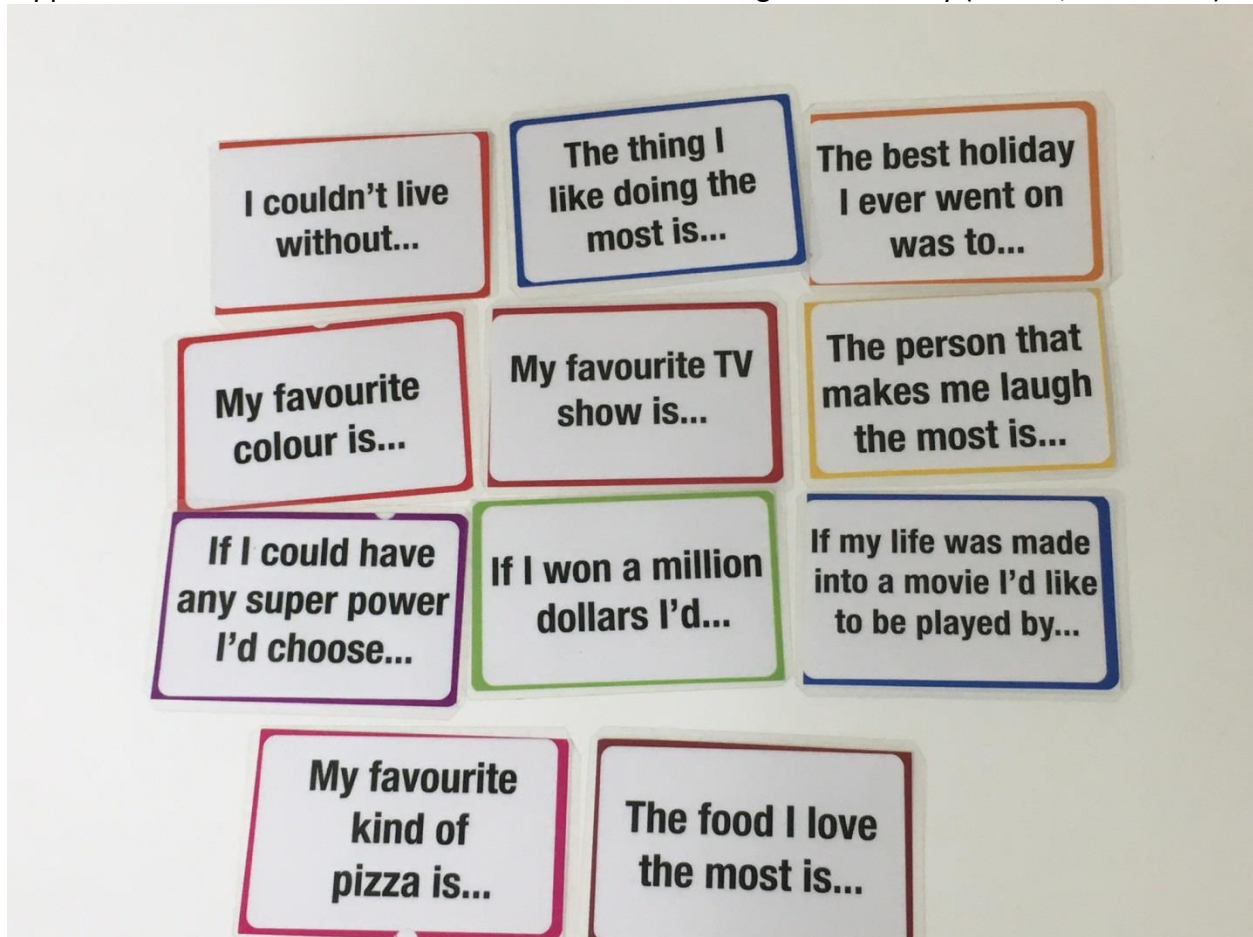
Letter to Service Providers

November, 2013

Dear Colleague,

I am writing to inform you of my PhD research and to request support in recruiting participants. The title of my research study is:

> **How children in Ireland experience the process of their parents' separation and divorce and subsequent changed family life. Giving Recognition to Children's Experiences.**

The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre at the National University of Ireland, Galway is conducting this research. The full research team members are Professor Chris Curtin, Dr Bernadine Brady and I, Ann O'Kelly, the main researcher. As well as being the main researcher on this project I have over fourteen years' experience as a family mediator, working with parents, young people and children during parental separation. I can assure you that this research will be conducted in a caring, sensitive and age appropriate manner, using tried and tested child-focussed research methods. The research methodology has been approved by young people who are advising on this research.

This study has received Approval from the National University of Ireland Galway Ethical Committee.

Through my work and study, I am aware of the stresses encountered by parents and their children during separation and divorce and the changes in family life which follow. It is an area however, that has not been researched in Ireland since 2002, during which time, we know from CSO figures there has been an increase in separation, divorce and parental re-partnering and re-marriage, all of which affect children and young people. Through the research I intend to address the following:

a.   to explore, from the child's or young person's perspective, how they experience their parents' separation

b.   to identify the coping mechanisms employed by children during the process of their parent's separation

c.   to understand issues identified by children in relation to their adjustment to changed family life resulting from their parents' separation or divorce

d. to identify if unique issues exist for children in Ireland relating to the cultural context of marital separation and divorce

e. to elicit children's views of their participation or non-participation in their parent's separation or divorce processes – counseling, mediation, family law and family law courts

f.   to identify possible support needs of children in relation to parental separation

g. the parents of each child will be asked to complete a short questionnaire prior to the commencement of the research

My intention is to talk to two particular age groups of children – eight-ten children aged between 8-12 years and eight-ten young people aged between 13-17 years whose parents have separated or divorced. Research in other countries has shown that children have a great deal to offer in relation to this subject and appreciate having their views heard.

I am aware that separation and or divorce may be a distressing time for parents and their children which can lead to particular vulnerabilities. I will ensure that the following ethical guidelines will be followed:

1. Informed written consent will be obtained prior to the commencement of the research – this means that each person who gives permission to take part in the research will have full knowledge of what the research is about, what it is for and what risks it might involve.

2. All participants will have the option to withdraw from the research at any time.

3.   Service providers who agree to help in the recruitment of participants will be requested to make it clear to parents, young people and children that their participation or not in this research will not in any way influence the service they receive from the Agency in question.

I am requesting assistance from you and your organisation in the recruitment of participants for this research by:

•   Displaying Research Posters in prominent positions on your premises

•   Identifying families/young people who meet the eligibility criteria

•   Ensuring that those who meet the eligibility criteria will have access to RESEARCH INFORMATION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE and RESEARCH INFORMATION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE which informs them of the research and gives my contact details.

I can provide as many Posters and Information packs as you require.

It is anticipated that the findings from this research will provide important information for children, parents, service providers, legal organizations and policy makers in this area. The findings will also have the potential to contribute to policy in relation to the implementation of changes necessary as a result of the passing of the recent Children's Rights Referendum.

Thank you for reading my letter. Should you wish to discuss any aspect of the research, please contact me via e-mail: a.okelly2@nuigalway.ie or by phone at 085-7412711.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Kind regards,

Ann O'Kelly, PhD Fellow,
UNESCO Child & Family Research Centre, NUI., Galway.
http://childandfamilyresearch.ie/anneokelly

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Cultural Organization : Ireland

Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

NUI Galway
OÉ Gaillimh

tIonad Taighde um Leanaí   **Child and Family**
agus Teaghlaigh   **Research Centre**

RESEARCH PROJECT INFORMATION FOR PARENTS
HOW DO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN IRELAND EXPERIENCE THE PROCESS OF THEIR PARENTS' SEPARATION AND DIVORCE AND SUBSEQUENT CHANGED FAMILY LIFE: GIVING RECOGNITION TO CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES.

Why research this topic? Research of this kind is important in order to develop more knowledge about what it is like for children in Ireland to experience their parents' separation or divorce. Children's views are needed to inform children, their parents, service providers and government policy in this area. Through the research, I intend to explore with children and young people how they experience their parents' separation or divorce, what coping mechanisms they employ, how they adjust to changed family life (such as living in two homes), find out children's and young persons' views on participation and identify possible supports needs of children and young people during this family transition.

Who is doing this research? The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre at the National University of Ireland are conducting this research. The full research team members are Professor Chris Curtin, Dr Bernadine Brady and Ms Ann O'Kelly. Ann is the main researcher on this project - she is a doctoral fellow at the UNESCO Centre and is also a family mediator with the Family Mediation Service, having more than fourteen years' experience of working with parents and children during parental separation. The research has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the National University of Ireland and is supported by the Family Mediation Service.

Who will participate? Children aged 8-12 years and young people aged 13-17 years will participate, provided they and their parents have given informed written consent. Informed consent means that a person gives their permission to take part in research with full knowledge of what the research is about, what it is for and what risks, if any, it might involve.

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UNESCO   uni Twin   NUI Galway
United Nations   UNESCO Chair in   Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Educational, Scientific and   Children, Youth and Civic Engagement   Health Service Executive
Cultural Organization   Ireland

Who will know about it? Just you, your child and I the researcher, will know who has participated. I and my supervision team only will have access to the data gathered. Each child and young person will be invited to choose a 'nickname' and no identifying information (such as location) will be used. Confidentiality of all data gathered is guaranteed in accordance with the National University of Ireland, Galway's Code of Practice relating to research data. Children and young person participants will be offered confidentiality except in situations where their or another persons' safety is at risk. Should an issue be raised concerning the safety of your child or the safety of any other person, the researcher will be obliged to follow the National University of Ireland's *Child Protection Guidelines* which may involve sharing information with you and with others.

This is a sensitive subject - will my child be taken care of? Yes, most certainly. You can be assured that the research conducted in a caring, sensitive and age appropriate manner using tried and tested, child appropriate research methods. The researcher is a mature, experienced professional family mediator who has worked with parents and children experiencing family separation for the past fourteen years and has received specialist training relating to consulting with and undertaking research with children.

What kinds of questions will be asked? During the interview conversations with children and young people we will discuss how they have experienced your separation, how they have coped with the changes in your family, what has helped them and what they have found difficult. We will also discuss their views about being consulted regarding decisions parents make, what advice they might give to children and other parents and if there are particular issues that might be relevant to children in Ireland relating to separation and divorce. Each interview discussion will be informal, younger children may be asked to do drawings and visual aids will be used to help the participants express themselves.

Where will the research take place? The location of the interview can be decided by you and your child it could be at your home or in an office near your home, such as a local Family Resource Centre. Each interview will last about one hour and will be audio recorded. Each participant will receive a token of appreciation from the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre.

Are there any risks associated with this research? Speaking about sensitive issues that have occurred within a child's or young person's family may cause some distress. Should this occur, the researcher will stop and provide appropriate support for your child and will re-commence only if your child agrees to do so. If necessary, details of appropriate support services will be provided to you and your child at this time.

What are the benefits to my child? Past research has shown that children and young people benefit from participating in research of this kind, even though they may not directly reap the benefits. It has also been proven that children and young people appreciate being given an opportunity to have their views heard and report being pleased to be involved in research that might bring about change for other children and young people.

What should I do now? Contact Ann O'Kelly at **a.okelly2@nuigalway.ie or by telephone at 085-7412711**. I will answer questions and provide more information for you and your child about the research and what it will involve.   **Thank You for reading this Information.**
Ann O'Kelly, UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway.
http://childandfamilyresearch.ie/anne-okelly

Information for Children

Hello, my name is Ann O'Kelly. I am a student at the University in

Galway.

Part of my studies involves a research project and I hope you will be able to help me with it. This research is about what it's like for children, like you, when their parents separate.

The title is: *How children in Ireland experience the process of their parents' separation and divorce and subsequent changed family life. Giving Recognition to Children's Experiences.*

Why am I asking you to help me ……………. Even though a large number of parents separate each year in Ireland, we don't really know what that is like for the children in these families – in fact it has been eleven years since anyone asked children in this country about this.

If I agree, what will happen…………………… If you and your parents agree to take part in this research project, I will get some information about your family from your parents and will then meet you meet and will give you a lot of information, answer any questions you might have

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and then ask you to sign a form giving your permission to taking part in the research.

And then…………………………………………………I will meet you at a place you think is best – it could be at your home or in an office near your home and will ask you some questions and you can ask me questions as well. It won't be like school, though, because there are no right or wrong answers and if there is any question you don't want to answer you can just tell me. I might ask you to draw some pictures of your family and we might play some games that will help you talk to me about what it has been like for you since your parents separated.

The things we might talk about are

> What has it been like for you since your parents have separated?
> How have you coped with the changes in your family?
> What has helped you?
> What has been hard for you?
> Do you have advice for your parents?
> Do you have advice for other children?
> Anything else you'd like to tell me?

If it's ok with you, I record our conversation, so that I don't have to write everything down! But you will be in charge of the recorder and can turn it on or off whenever you want. This will take about one hour and I might contact you again at a later date for another short

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interview. You will receive a small gift – my way of saying 'Thank You' for agreeing to help me with my research.

Who will know what I have said? What you say to me will be 'confidential' which means that I am not going to tell anyone else what you have said, including your parents, - unless you say something about you or someone else being unsafe or being hurt or hurting someone else. If that happens, I may need to tell your parents and other people to make sure that you and everyone else is safe. I will be writing about the research, but when I do, I won't use your real name or any details about where you live. If you want to, you can choose a 'fake name' or 'nick-name' for yourself that I can use, so no one will know who you are or what you have said.

What if I become upset …………………………Talking about things that have happened in your family might cause you to become upset.

 If you do, we will turn off the audio-recorder and stop immediately. I will make sure you are ok before we continue. If you don't wish to continue, we will end the interview and I will not use any of your information. If it's ok with you I will let your parents know you are upset. If you are very upset, I will stay with you until either your parents or I have got someone for you to talk to, I will also contact you or your parents the next day make ensure you are ok.

What if I change my mind ? You are in charge and can change your

mind at any time! This can be before we start, during the interview or even after the interview, if you don't want me to include what you have said when I am writing what you have said.

Why should I do this? Because you are the expert!

For a long time, people did research ABOUT children and young people, without ever talking TO children and young people. Your parents' separation or divorce is a very big event in YOUR life and it's important that you have a chance to talk about this. I also hope that you might enjoy telling me your story of the change in your family. Other children who have participated in research say that it is good to talk about things. By hearing from children like you, it is hoped that things might change for other children whose parents separate or divorce in the future and you will have helped.

What will I do now …………………………………… Your parents have a lot of information about this research project, so you can start by discussing it with them. You can then ask one of your parents to contact me

(they have my contact details) and I shall meet with them and with you, I will answer any questions you might have and will then ask

you to sign a form giving your consent.

Thank You! Thank you for reading this Information Leaflet – I hope I hear from you.

Appendix 5   **Information for Young People**

NUI Galway
OÉ Gaillimh

tIonad Taighde um Leanaí   Child and Family
agus Teaghlaigh   Research Centre

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Hello, my name is Ann O'Kelly. I am a student at the University in Galway.

Part of my studies involves a research project and I hope you will be able to help me with it.

Project Title: How children in Ireland experience the process of their parents' separation and divorce and subsequent changed family life? Giving Recognition to Children's Experiences.

Why am I asking you to help me? Even though a large number of parents separate each year in Ireland, we don't really know what that experience is like for the children and young people in these families. In fact, it has been more than ten years since anyone asked young people about this. By doing this research, I hope to get information that will help children, parents and others.

If I agree, what will happen? If you and your parents agree to take part in this research project, I will get some information about your family from your parents and will then meet you to discuss the research, answer any questions you might have and ask you to sign a 'Consent Form' giving your permission.

And then? I will meet you at a place you think is best – it could be at your home or in an office and will ask you some questions. It won't be like school, though, because there are no right or wrong answers and if there is any question you don't want to answer you can just tell me. I will ask you to tell me about your family, the changes that have happened and how you have coped with these changes in your family, what has helped you and if there are things you think could help other children and young people. I might use some visual aids to help you tell me what it has been like for you. If it's ok with you, I will audio-record our conversation, so that I don't have to write everything down. The interview will probably last about one hour and I might contact you again at a later date for another short interview. You will receive a small gift to reflect my appreciation of your contribution to the research.

Who will know what I have said? What you say to me will be totally confidential, I will not tell anyone else what you have said, including your parents, - unless you say something about you or someone else being hurt or hurting someone else. If

that happens, I may need to tell your parents and other people to make sure that you and everyone else is safe. I will be writing about the research, but when I do, I won't use your real name or any details about where you live. If you want to, you can choose a 'fake name' or 'nick-name' for yourself that I can use, so no one will know who you are or what you have said.

What if I become upset? Talking about things that have happened in your family may cause you to become upset. If you do, we will turn off the audio-recorder and stop the interview immediately. I will make sure you are ok before we continue. If you don't wish to continue, we will end the interview and I will not use any of your information. I will give you details about where you can get support and, if you wish, I will let your parents know you are upset and make sure they have information about support for you. If you are very upset, I will stay with you until either your parents or I have found someone to help you, I will also contact you or your parents the next day make ensure you are ok.

What if I change my mind? You are in charge and can change your mind at any time! This can be before we start, during the interview or even after the interview, if you don't want me to include what you have said when I am writing up the results of the research.

Why should I do this? Because you are the expert on this subject and it is important for researchers to speak to experts! For a long time, people did research ABOUT children and young people, without ever talking TO children and young people. Your parents' separation or divorce is a very big event in YOUR life and it's important that you have a chance to talk about this. It is also important that other children, parents and people who make decisions know what it's like and you.   I also hope that you might enjoy talking to me about your experience of this change in your family. I promise I will faithfully report what you have shared with me. You might not benefit directly from talking to me, but young people like you who have participated in research say that it is good to talk about their situation to the researcher. By hearing from young people like you, it is hoped that things might change for other children and young people whose parents separate or divorce in the future and you will have contributed to this change.

What now? Your parents have a lot of information about this research project, so you can start by discussing it with them. You can then ask one of your parents to

contact me (they have my contact details) and I shall meet with them and with you, I will answer any questions you might have and will then ask you to sign the 'Children's and Young People Consent' form.

Thank You! Thank you for reading this Information Leaflet – I hope I hear from you.

NUI Galway
OÉ Gaillimh

tIonad Taighde um Leanaí   **Child and Family**
agus Teaghlaigh   **Research Centre**

Children's and Young Persons' Views Sought

I am undertaking research with children and young people to find out how they experience and cope when their parents separate and divorce.

The views of children and young people in Ireland on this topic are needed to inform children, their parents, service providers and Government policy in this area.

Participants aged 8-17 years required.

Experienced, sensitive and caring researcher

Confidentiality and child protection guaranteed

NUI Galway Ethics Committee Approved   Supported by the Family Mediation Service
Parental consent required   Child/young person's consent required
For further details, please contact me: Ann O'Kelly
Email:a.okelly2@nuigalway.ie   Tel: 085-7412711
All participants will receive a token of appreciation from the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre

Appendix 8   **Press Release**

NUI Galway Researchers Seek Children's Voices to Study the Effects of Divorce and Separation on Children

UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre study aims to give recognition to children's voices

Wednesday, 18 September 2013 NUI Galway researchers are seeking volunteers to help answer questions about how children and young people in Ireland experience, and cope, with the process of their parents' separation and divorce and subsequent changed family life.

The research has been approved by NUI Galway's Ethics Committee and will be conducted by Professor Chris Curtin, Dr Bernadine Brady and Ms Ann O'Kelly at the NUI Galway UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre.

Ann O'Kelly, the main researcher on this project, is a doctoral fellow at the UNESCO Centre and is also a family mediator with the Family Mediation Service, with many years' experience of working with parents and children who are experiencing separation and divorce. She says "Children's views are vital to research of this kind to develop more knowledge about what parents' separation or divorce is like for children in Ireland and is particularly important given that separation and divorce are increasing in this country. Research of this kind has the potential to inform children, parents and policy makers about services needed by children at this time'.

Children and young people aged 8-17 years are invited to participate, provided they and their parents have given informed written consent. Informed consent means that a person gives their permission to take part in research with full knowledge of what the research is about, what it is for and what risks, if any, it might involve. The research team only will have access to the data gathered, with confidentiality being guaranteed in accordance with the NUI Galway Code of Practice relating to research data. Each child and young person will be invited to choose a 'nickname' and no identifying information (such as location) will be used when reporting on the research findings.

As a family mediator with over fourteen years' experience, the researcher is aware that speaking about sensitive issues that have occurred within a child's or young person's family may cause some distress and can offer assurance that the research will be conducted in a caring and sensitive manner, using tried and tested child appropriate research methods. Details of appropriate support services will be provided to participants and their parents should a child or young person become distressed and, if necessary the research will not continue. The safety of each participant will be paramount throughout the research process and will be conducted in line with the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre's *Child Protection Policy*.

The location of the interview can be decided by the volunteers. Each interview will last about one hour and will be audio recorded and may employ the use of visual aids, drawings and story-telling. Each participant will receive a token of appreciation from the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre.

Past research has shown that children and young people benefit from participating in research of this kind, even though they may not directly reap the benefits. It has also been shown that children and young people appreciate being given an opportunity to have their views heard and

are pleased to be involved in research that might bring about change for other children and young people.

Volunteers are asked to contact Ann O'Kelly at **a.okelly2@nuigalway.ie or 085-7412711**. I will answer questions and provide more information for parents, children and young people about the research and what it will involve.

Further information available at http://childandfamilyresearch.ie/anne-okelly

RESEARCH PROJECT

HOW CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN IRELAND EXPERIENCE THE PROCESS OF THEIR PARENTS' SEPARATION AND DIVORCE AND SUBSEQUENT CHANGED FAMILY LIFE.
GIVING RECOGNITION TO CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES

Survey of Parents of Participating Children and Young People.

Research Team: *Prof C. Curtin, Dr Bernadine Brady & Ms Ann O'Kelly*

Confidentiality of all information provided is guaranteed.

The UNESCO Child & Family Research Centre's *Child Protection Guidelines will be followed, if necessary, during the conduct of this research.*

PART 1 – General Information

Are you: Male ☐ Female ☐

Name: ....

Address: ....

Age Group: Under 30 years ☐
30-39 years ☐
40-49 years ☐
50-59 years ☐
60 plus years ☐

Your nationality is?
Irish ☐
British ☐
European (state which country) ☐ ....
American ☐
Australian ☐
African (state which country) ☐ ....
Asian (state which country) ☐ ....

If in paid employment, what is your occupation? ....

If not in paid employment, what is your main source of income? ....

What is your approximate gross income per year?

Under €15,000 ☐

€15,000-€30,000 ☐

€30,000-€50,000 ☐
€50,000-€75,000 ☐
€75,000-€100,000 ☐
Above €100,000 ☐

_____

PART 2 – Relationship Detail

How long had you been in a relationship with your former partner? ....

Have you been married to each other?   Y ☐   N ☐   No

If yes, for how many years?   ....

If no, have you co-habited together?   Y ☐   N ☐

If yes, for how many years   ....

How many children do you and your former partner have together? ....

Their names and ages?   Child 1 ....
Child 2   ---
Child 3   ---
Child 4   ---
Child 5   ---

How did you and your former partner resolve the issues relating to your separation?
(please tick all relevant options)

Informally together ☐
With the help of solicitors ☐
Through Family Mediation ☐
Through the Family Law Courts ☐

When did you separate from your former partner?
....

Are you now in a new relationship? Yes ☐ No ☐

Are you married to or do you live with your new partner? Yes ☐ No ☐
Do you and your new partner have children together? Yes ☐ No ☐
Do you or your new partner have other children? Yes ☐ No ☐
Do all of your children know each other? Yes ☐ No ☐
Do all of your children enjoy good relationships with each other? Yes ☐ No ☐

_____

PART 3 – Research Participant Children's Details – Children who have experienced your separation/divorce

Please give the name and age of your child or children who will participate in this research?

Child 1 --
Child 2 --
Child 3 ……………………………………………………..

Briefly describe each child, his/her interests, friendships, how s/he is doing at school. Please include any concerns you may have about your child's health, wellbeing or development and any difficulties your child may have had to deal with in the past, such as illness, loss or bullying.

Child 1
……
……
……
……
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Child 2
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Child 3

....
....
....
....
....
....
....
....
....

Finally, how did you hear about the research?

_____

_____

_____

Thank you for completing this confidential survey.
Please complete the Parental Consent Form.

Parental Consent Forms

I .... give consent to my child/children
....to participate in the above study.
The research has been fully explained to me, verbally and in writing. Any matters
on which I have sought clarification have been answered satisfactorily.
In summary, I:

- Give permission for my child to be interviewed for the research and for the
  interview to be audio-taped

- Understand that if I feel worried or have any questions before, during or
  after the interview, I will discuss these with the researcher

- Realise that my child is free to withdraw from this research at any time
  before, during or after the interview and if s/he does the data will not be
  used.

- Understand that once information has been aggregated and is unable to be
  identified, from this point it is not possible to withdraw consent to
  participate

- Realise that what my child says is confidential and will not be shared with
  anyone, including myself, except if my child discloses that he/she or
  someone else is being harmed or is at risk of being harmed, the researcher
  will have a duty to share this information

- Realise that the research data provided by my child may be included in a
  written thesis, presented at conferences and published in journals, on
  condition that names or identifying information is not used.

Signature: ……………………………..   **Date: ………………………**

Parental Consent Form for Interview (to be used when only one parents' consent is possible to obtain)

I .... give consent to my child/children ....to participate in the above study.

The research has been fully explained to me, verbally and in writing. Any matters on which I have sought clarification have been answered satisfactorily.

In summary, I:

- Give permission for my child to be interviewed for the research and for the interview to be audio-taped

- Understand that if I feel worried or have any questions before, during or after the interview, I will discuss these with the researcher

- Realise that my child is free to withdraw from this research at any time before, during or after the interview and if s/he does the data will not be used.

- Understand that once information has been aggregated and is unable to be identified, from this point it is not possible to withdraw consent to participate

- Realise that what my child says is confidential and will not be shared with anyone, including myself, except if my child discloses that he/she or someone else is being harmed or is at risk of being harmed, the researcher will have a duty to share this information

- Realise that the research data provided by my child may be included in a written thesis, presented at conferences and published in journals, on condition that names or identifying information is not used.

It is agreed that it is not possible to obtain the consent of the child(ren)'s other parent at this time

Signature: ……………………………..   **Date: ………………………**

Appendix 10:   **Participant Consent**

Children's and Young Person's Consent for Interview

Research project: How do children and young people in Ireland experience the process of their parents' separation and divorce and subsequent changed family life? Giving Recognition to Children's Experiences.

I ...., age ...., give my consent to participate in the above study. I have chosen the 'nickname' ……………….
The research has been fully explained to me, verbally and in writing. Any questions on which I have sought clarification have been answered satisfactorily.

In summary, I:
- Agree be interviewed for the research and for the interview to be audio-taped

- Understand that if I feel worried or have any questions before, during or after the interview, I will discuss these with the researcher

- Know that I am free to withdraw from this research at any time before, during or after the interview and if I do, nothing about me will be written down.

- Know that what I say is confidential and will not be shared with anyone, including my parents, except if I tell the researcher that I or someone else is being harmed or is at risk of being harmed, the researcher will need to tell someone about this to make sure everyone is safe.

- Realise that the researcher may write down what I have said in her reports and may talk about what I have said in meetings or at conferences, but that my name or where I am from will not be used at any time.

   Signature: …………………………   Date: …………………………

**Research project: How children in Ireland experience the process of their parents'
separation and divorce and subsequent changed family life?
Giving Recognition to Children's Experiences.**

**Researcher: Ann O'Kelly
Supervisors: Professor Chris Curtin and Dr Bernadine Brady.**

Prior to commencing each interview the researcher will:
1. Review all aspects of the informed consent process and ensure that the child understands and wants to participate
2. Reiterate the nature and purpose of the research, using appropriate, understandable language
3. Offer each child an opportunity to ask questions
4. The interview will be conducted in a conversational style and the researcher will, if appropriate, follow the child's lead. The questions below will be used as a guide only, not all of them might be asked.
5. The interviewer will build rapport with the child by talking briefly about his/her interests, school, neighbourhood and friends (information which she will have obtained from parents). She will also have checked how each child addresses his/her parents: Mammy, Mam, Mummy, Mum, Mama, Dad, Daddy, Papa, or by their first names and will be aware of the names and ages of each child's siblings and step siblings.

_____

Q 1   Tell me about yourself and your family?

Q2   Can you draw me a picture of your family and how you all live now (paper and coloured markers will be provided)

Q3   Tell me about your picture and how you all came to live this way

Q 4   When did your mother and father start to live in different homes? (should they be)

Q 5   What was that like for you at that time? (if appropriate)

Q6   Have a look at these Bears and tell me which one you felt like at that time

Q7   What did you do when you felt like this?

Q 8   Do you ever feel like this now?

Q 9   Which Bear do you feel like now?

Q 10   How much time do you spend each week/month in your mother's house? In your father's house? Would you like it to be different? How?

Q 11   Did you have to make other changes when your parents separated? What were these?

Q12   Did your parents talk to you about their separation? What did they say? Would you have liked them to talk some more to you? Would you have liked to have known more about the decisions your parents made?

Q13   Have you spoken to anyone about your parents' separation? Whom did you speak to? Was that helpful?

Q14   If you are worried about anything, who do you speak to? Is that helpful? Is there anyone else you would like to speak to?

Q15   What do you think would be helpful to other children whose parents are separating?

Q 16   What advice would you have liked to give to your parents when they were separating? What advice would you like to give to them now?

Q 17   What advice would you like to give to children when their parents are separating?

Q 18   If you met the Minister for Children, what would you like to say to her about services for children whose parents have separated?

Q 19   If you had a magic wand right now, and you didn't have to be fair to anyone except yourself, what would you like to see happen in your family?

Q 20   Is there anything else you would like to say to me now before we finish?

Q 21   is there anything you have said that you would like to change now? Would you like to go back to any of the questions and change anything?

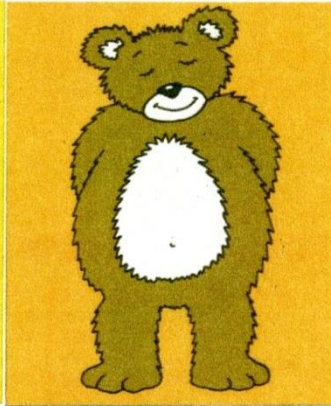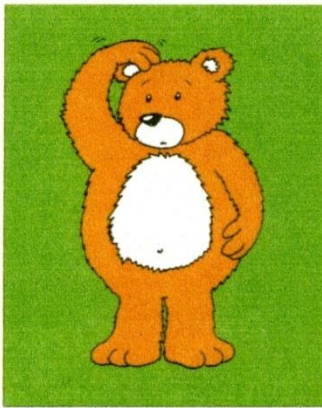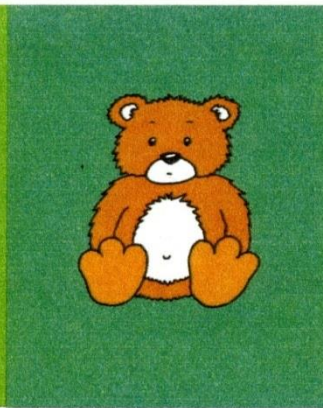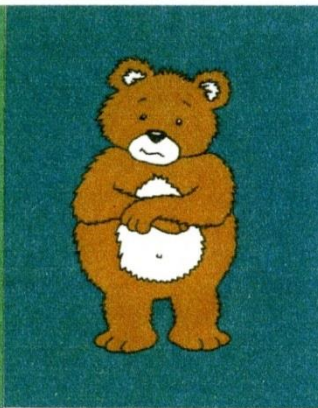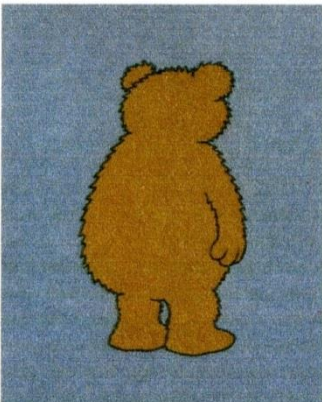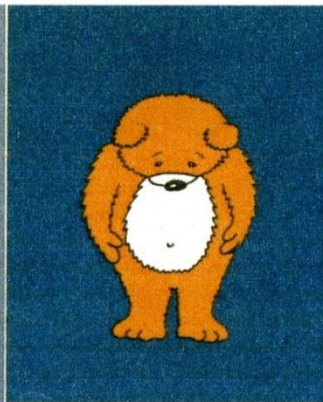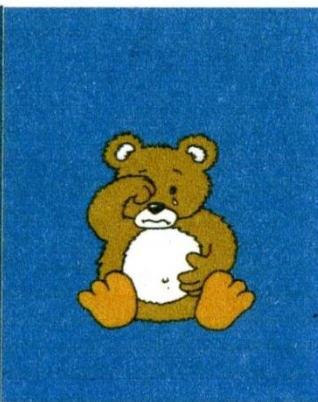**Thank You, I really appreciate you meeting me.**

Bears
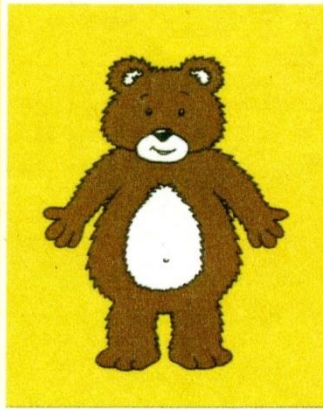
Appendix 12:   Bear Cards (1-9) above (10-15 below from St Luke's Innovative Centre.

Bear Cards (10-15) St Luke's Innovative Centre.

Appendix 13:   Family Sculpture Figures

April 15th 2014

Research Update: How do Children & Young People in Ireland experience the process of their parents' separation and divorce and subsequent changed family life: Giving Recognition to Children's Experiences

Dear ,

I hope you are well. I am writing to once again thank you for participating in my research project and to give you an update of how it has been going for me since we met.

I have done interviews with fourteen young people ranging in age from 7 to 19 years from many different parts of the country – this has been a most enjoyable time for me. I have listened to most of the tapes at this stage. I do this by plugging the recorder into my computer and listening through the headphones – I am able to slow the tape down and type what you have discussed with me – what I am hearing and writing is really interesting, at times I get very excited by what you have said! I should have this part finished by the end of this week.
 I must then get down to the hard work of re-reading and re-listening, so that I can be sure that I don't miss out on anything, before I actually 'analyse' what I've read and heard. This involves me going over everything to see what has been said and I must see if any of you have said the same things (perhaps in different ways) if there are new things being said and also see what each means. This might sound boring, but it's not, it is very interesting. I can then link what you have said with what children and young people in other research have had to say!

As I mentioned when I met you, I really want you all, as a group, to give me some feedback into what I have done at this stage, so that I and you can be sure that I what I write is correct and shows your experience properly. I am, therefore, organising a meeting here at the University in Galway for Saturday June 28th 2014 from 11:30-15:00. I am also including a letter for your parents about this – will you pass it on to your father or mother, please?

Please let me know if you will be able to come to the meeting - I really hope you can and look forward to seeing you again.
Kind regards,
Ann O'Kelly, UNESCO Child & Family Research Centre.
Tel: 091-494048/085-7412711. E-MAIL: <u>a.okelly2@nuigalway.ie</u>

Appendix 15:   Participant consent for continuing participation

I, ………………………………… agree to continuing my involvement in the research by attending a Group Discussions at the UNESCO Child & Family Research Centre, NUI Galway.

I understand that this will involve me meeting with other young people who have participated in the research.

I understand that the discussions will be recorded on paper and will be audio recorded.

I understand that I may withdraw from the research at any time during the day.

I understand that at least two members of the UNESCO Child & Family Research Centre team will be present throughout the day.

I understand that I will be asked that the discussions be kept confidential.

 I realise that the research data provided on this day may be included in a written thesis, presented at conferences and published in journals, on condition that names or identifying information is not used.

I understand that, if necessary, the Child and Family Research Centre's Child Protection Guidelines will be followed during the conduct of this research.

Signature: …………………………………………………

Date: ……………………..

Thank You.

Research Update: How do children and young people in Ireland experience the process of their parents' separation and divorce and subsequent changed family life? Giving Recognition to Children's Experiences.

April 15th 2014

Dear

Once again, many thanks for your support for my research.

I have now completed the interviews with the young people and am moving on to the next stage – the analysis of what I have heard from everyone. I am confident that that the data I have gathered is very interesting and will be of significant importance.

You may remember that I discussed the possibility of bringing all the young people together in order to let them comment on my findings. I am happy to let you know that this will now be possible and this meeting will take place at the UNESCO Child & Family Research Centre, NUI Galway on Saturday, June 28th from 11:30-15:00. I do hope that …………..will be able to attend.

I have received a small grant from the UNESCO Centre to enable me do this part of the project and will be using this to help with transport costs and for the provision of lunch for those who can attend.

Will you please complete the attached forms giving your consent for this part of the project and details of your transport costs and dietary requirements for your child - this information will assist me in planning the day. Should you have any queries, please contact me on 085-7412711. Full details and directions to the venue will follow closer to the date.

I enclose a stamp addressed envelope and would appreciate it if you can return this information. I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,
Ann O'Kelly, UNESCO Child & Family Research Centre, NUI, Galway.
Tel: 091-494048/085-7412711. Email:a.okelly2@nuigalway.ie

Appendix 17:   Parental Consent for On-going Participation and Attendance Requirements

How do children and young people in Ireland experience the process of their parents' separation and divorce and subsequent changed family life?
Giving Recognition to Children's Experiences.

I, …………………………………… agree to my son/ daughter ……………………………..continuing his/her involvement in the research by attending a Group Discussions at the UNESCO Child & Family Research Centre, NUI Galway.

I understand that this will involve him/her meeting with other young people who have participated in the research.

I understand that the discussions will be recorded on paper and will be audio recorded.

I understand that my child may withdraw from the research at any time during the day.

I understand that at least two members of the UNESCO Child & Family Research Centre team will be present throughout the day.

I understand that all participants in this research discussions will be asked that the discussions be kept confidential.

 I realise that the research data provided on this day may be included in a written thesis, presented at conferences and published in journals, on condition that names or identifying information is not used.

I understand that, if necessary, the Child and Family Research Centre's Child Protection Guidelines will be followed during the conduct of this research.

Attendance Requirements for ……………………………………………………….. (Confidential)

In order for my child/ren to attend this meeting, we require the following assistance:

Transport cost of ……………… euros and …………..euros to cover personal expenses

My child has the following dietary requirements (please give details)…………………………………………………………………………………………………...

Thank You.

Signature: ………………………………………………   Date: …………………………………………

Research Project
HOW CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN IRELAND EXPERIENCE THE PROCESS OF THEIR PARENTS' SEPARATION AND DIVORCE AND SUBSEQUENT CHANGED FAMILY LIFE.
GIVING RECOGNITION TO CHILDREN'S VOICES

Introduction and Background

This research project, which began in 2013, sought to obtain the views of children and young people on their experience of parental separation and divorce and subsequent changes in family life. The objective was to give recognition to their views on this subject in order to inform parents, policy makers and service providers.

The findings from the research are currently being written up as part of a PhD thesis by the researcher, Ann O'Kelly of the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre at NUI, Galway. The methodology employed to conduct the research placed an emphasis on the on-going participation of the children and young people in the research process. This was done through written updates and meeting which gave the research participants an opportunity to comment upon the research findings and to have input into how they wanted to have these findings disseminated. The children and young people discussed innovative ways of disseminating the findings including through the use of social media. Following an exploration of their ideas, the research participants and the researcher together decided to explore the possibility of making three short video clips with specific messages on this subject for parents, friends and national schools, three groups that participants considered it important to reach.

The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, through its Youth as Researchers programme, have agreed to support the participants in this unique endeavour, in collaboration with Foróige's Techspace initiative. The primary aim of this support is to enable the children and young people to develop, produce and launch three short video clips which will be distributed via social media. Through their participation the children and young people will also receive instruction in the use of technical equipment for video making.

The children and young people involved in this project range in age from 9-21 years. All participants involved must give their written consent to their participation, while those under 18 years must also receive the written consent of their parent or guardian for their on-going involvement.

Project Process

The research methodology emphasised the need to regularly inform, consult with and involve the participants in the progress of the research. Through this involvement, particularly through

group meetings held at the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, the children and young people developed rapport with each other resulting in a cohesive supportive group being formed.

Group meetings were held in June 2014, March 2015 and November 2015. These meeting involved discussion of the research finding; participants' views of their involvement in the research; and dissemination of the findings. Most importantly, however, they provided a forum for the children and young people to discuss their experiences, build rapport with each other and to decide how they wanted to have the research findings disseminated. It was following the meeting in March 2015 that the idea of using social media as an outlet was first mooted. In November 2015, these ideas were further developed. Participants viewed videos made for and by children and young people on social issues, including separation and divorce and committed to involvement in a project.

Ideas generated included whether to use actors or real people; black and white format vs colour; animation vs real actors; sound effects; whether to use individual personal or general experiences; whether to script or ad-lib; the need for inclusion of the views of younger and more mature children. The participants agreed that three short video clips should be made to cover the three identified areas in order to: raise awareness within primary schools of the issue of parental separation (for teachers and children); to make friends more aware of the experiences of young people whose parents separate; and to highlight important issues for parents to be aware of when separation occurs in families. An additional issue discussed was the need to highlight some issues for extended families.

Parental Consent and Participant Consent:

Whist a number of the participants were aged over 18 years, it was considered by all that parents should be made aware of the proposed project. A meeting was held that included parents, informing them of the groups' intention. Questions were asked and answered and the proposal was outlined to parents who gave their full support. Following this, a detailed letter was sent to all parents by the researcher and Parental and Participant consent forms were prepared, emphasising that confidentiality and anonymity for all participants would be ensured unless and until participants and parents of those under eighteen years decided otherwise. The making of the video began in January 2016 and is on-going with the expectation that the project will be completed by the end of March 2016.

Ethical Approval
Ethical approval for the original research that initiated this research was granted by the National University of Ireland's Ethics Committee. Through the lifetime of the project the emphasis moved from an adult led consultative process to a child and young person led project. The original application for ethical approval allowed for increased involvement by the research participants and anticipated that a specific output from the research might be achieved. Through the participatory process, the participants decided upon the format of the output.

Their ideas and plans were outlined to the Child and Family Research Centre who gave support and approval to the project.
The following protocol was followed prior to the commencement of the project.

- All participants were asked if they wished to continue their involvement in the project, having been given details of the time involved.
- A discussion took place with parents of the children and young people, questions were addressed.
- All parents and participants then received a written outline of the project and what it would involve.
- Written consent to participate was received from all participants and from parents or guardians of those aged under eighteen years.
- Confidentiality and anonymity of all participants has been ensured and assurance has been given that participants will not be identified in any material produced in this project unless and until s/he wishes to, has given written permission and, if under eighteen years of age has received written permission from a parent or guardian.
- For health and safety reasons, at least two adults will be present at all time during this project, one from the UNESCO Child & Family Research Centre and one from Foróige.
- All participants and their parents or guardians have been informed that the material produced through this project may be distributed via social media and may be used by the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre as part of its Youth as Researchers programme and may also be included in a written thesis, presented at conferences and published in journals, on condition that names or identifying information is not used.
- If necessary the Child & Family Research Centre's Child Protection Guidelines will be followed while the project is on-going.
- All expenditure will be accounted for through the production of receipts.

Research Project
HOW CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN IRELAND EXPERIENCE THE PROCESS OF THEIR PARENTS' SEPARATION AND DIVORCE AND SUBSEQUENT CHANGED FAMILY LIFE - GIVING RECOGNITION TO CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES

Introduction

This research project which began in 2013 sought to obtain the views of children and young people on their experience of parental separation and divorce and subsequent changes in family life. The objective was to give recognition to their views on this subject in order to inform parents, policy makers and services. The findings from the research are currently being written up as part of a PhD thesis by the researcher, Ann O'Kelly of the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre. The methodology employed to conduct the research placed an emphasis on the on-going participation of the children and young people in the research process through written updates and meetings. These meetings have led to the building of rapport between the participants who have jointly decided that they would like to be actively involved in an activity in order to disseminate the findings and their views on the subject via social media.

The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre have agreed to support the participants in this unique endeavour. This support is being provided to enable the children and young people to develop, produce and launch three animated video clips which will be distributed via social media. This project will be included in the Youth as Researchers strand of the UNESCO CFRC's work.

The children and young people involved in this project range in age from 9-21 years. All participants involved must give their written consent to their participation, while those under 18years must also receive the written consent of their parent or guardian for their on-going involvement.

Parental Consent:
I .... give consent to my child
....to participate in the above project
by attending and participating in the development of Videos .

The project has been fully explained to me, verbally and in writing. Any matters
on which I have sought clarification have been answered satisfactorily.
In summary, I:

- Give permission for my child participate in this project
- Understand that if I feel worried or have any questions before, during or
  after the project I will discuss these with the researcher
- Realise that my child is free to withdraw from this project at any time
- I understand that that at least two adults will be present at all time during
  this project, one from the UNESCO Child & Family Research Centre and one
  from Foróige.
- Realise that what my child will not be identified in any material produced
  in this project unless and until s/he wishes to, has given written
  permission and, if under eighteen years of age has received written
  permission from a parent or guardian.
- I understand that that all participants in the project will be asked that the
  discussions be kept confidential
- Realise that the material produced through this project may be distributed
  via social media and may be used by the UNESCO Child and Family Research
  Centre as part of it's Youth as Researchers programme. The material
  produced by the group in which my child is participating may be included in
  a written thesis, presented at conferences and published in journals, on
  condition that names or identifying information is not used.
- I understand that, if necessary the Child & Family Research Centre's Child
  Protection Guidelines will be followed while the project is on-going.

Signature: ……………………………..   **Date: ………………………**

Participant Consent:

I... agree to participate in the above project by attending and participating in the development of Videos .

The project has been fully explained to me, verbally and in writing. Any matters on which I have sought clarification have been answered satisfactorily.

In summary, I:

- Understand that if I feel worried or have any questions before, during or after the project I will discuss these with the researcher

- Realise that I am free to withdraw from this project at any time

- I understand that that at least two adults will be present at all time during this project, one from the UNESCO Child & Family Research Centre and one from Foróige.

- Realise that I will not be identified in any material produced in this project unless and until I wish to, have given written permission and, if under eighteen years of age have received written permission from a parent or guardian.

- I understand that that I will be asked that the discussions be kept confidential

- Realise that the material produced through this project may be distributed via social media and may be used by the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre as part of its Youth as Researchers programme. The material produced may be included in a written thesis, presented at conferences and published in journals, on condition that names or identifying information is not used.

- I understand that, if necessary the Child & Family Research Centre's Child Protection Guidelines will be followed while the project is on-going.

Signature: ……………………………..

Date:………………….