"Familia en lo Bueno y lo Malo"

("Family in the Good and the Bad")

The Experience of Emerging Adults:

A Counselling Psychology Perspective

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Interview Transcription System Definitions

Ellipsis: indicates a pause in respondent's speech.
Example: "I had this illusion that could never happen to me... like, that happened to other kids" (Sam: 56).

Ellipsis within square brackets: indicates part of the transcript has been edited out for clarity.
Example: "I placed them in a different circle completely [...] I was like, what? Like, what are you talking about?" (Sam: 56).

Text within square brackets: indicates non-verbal context relevant to the discussion.
Example: "so there was a big divide [pause, sigh]" (Rosie: 74).

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Table 1: Individual respondent data: p.98.

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Seize the Day!

Declaration of Powers of Discretion

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Preface

Introduction to the Portfolio

This section introduces the three elements of this doctoral portfolio: an original piece of doctoral research, a publishable article for submission to a peer-reviewed academic journal and a client case study. What links these three elements is my interest in the interconnectedness of the emerging adult with their family. The central theme of the portfolio is to understand the dynamic of that relationship, particularly in the face of disruptive experiences such as parental divorce.

My interest in this subject has evolved over the course of my doctoral training, through my work with clients who describe life experiences that are inextricably linked to the relationships that they have with their parents and siblings. I have been interested in research that provides insight into how the emerging adult understands and navigates their own experiences within the traditions and culture of their family. In parallel to this, I have immersed myself in the humanistic nature of counselling psychology and its emphasis on a curious, explorative and empathic therapeutic relationship that provides a space in which each individual's story can be heard and acknowledged.

It is expected that that these three pieces of work together demonstrate that emerging adults are able to adapt and adjust to painful and difficult experiences and how this can inspire personal growth and a renewed sense of wellbeing. It is also expected that these pieces of work reflect my own journey of both academic inquiry and the development of my skills in the practice of psychological therapy. This portfolio represents my efforts to be as close to the individual's lived experience as possible.

Part A: Research Study

In Part A, I present a qualitative research study on the experience of parental divorce in emerging adults. I have always been interested in how the family system encourages the individual members of that system towards personal growth. Taking this interest further, I aim to understand these processes during a period of significant change and unrest in the family. My own experience of family, both in terms of my family of origin and with my husband and four daughters, has informed this research process. Both personally and as a practitioner, I feel enriched by this opportunity to explore and deepen my understanding of the experience of parental divorce for emerging adults.

There is a significant body of existing literature that describes both quantitative and qualitative explorations into the effects of parental divorce upon offspring. These studies are often contradictory, and it is therefore difficult to make any general statements as to how the offspring of divorced parents cope with this event. I have focused on the experience of emerging adults, as there are fewer studies that focus on outcomes related to parental divorce for this group.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was the method chosen for this study because its phenomenological origins allow the researcher to connect to the 'lifeworld' of each respondent's story, and to be as close as possible to their lived experience. Eight respondents were interviewed using semi-structured interviews in which they were asked open, curious questions about their experience of parental divorce. The data was analysed using IPA, and three main interconnecting superordinate themes emerged. These themes can be understood as connected and related, as the respondents move between the themes throughout the interviews.

The first superordinate theme is *loss*, in which respondents describe feelings of shock and distress relating to their parent's divorce: the loss of identity as a 'perfect' family, the loss of co-parenting and the loss of the idyll of romantic love. The second theme is *altered reality*, in which respondents speak about how their parents coped and adapted post-divorce. Respondents often describe finding themselves playing a mediator role, as their parents are unwilling to find a way of communicating directly with each other and identify some of the challenges around renegotiating individual relationships with each parent after divorce. This theme also embodied how respondents viewed long-term relationships and marriage in general. Finally, in the superordinate theme *hope and continuity*, respondents show how they have coped with the experience of their parents' divorce. They describe how they have adapted and adjusted to their transformed family structure, and the re-partnering of parents, as well as how they maintained hope for their own abilities to form enduring and committed partnership in the future.

Part B: Publishable Article

In Part B, a publishable article is presented for submission to *The Journal of Marriage and Family Therapy*. For this study, I familiarised myself with the literature related to divorce and its effect on emerging adults. I collected and analysed respondent data and reflected on the significance of these responses in informing and developing the practices of the counselling psychologist practitioner. The findings support the proposal that emerging adults will benefit from therapeutic interventions that facilitate a space to express their feelings associated with their parents' divorce. Respondents described feelings of loss and disbelief that impacted on their sense of wellbeing following this event. The findings also suggest that a communication platform would be beneficial for emerging adults and their families to work through parental divorce and to strengthen parent-child relationships, thus actively encouraging parents to understand and support their offspring during this process. Some of the issues highlighted in

the data are loss of family identity, conflict in inter-parental relationships, renegotiating parent-child relationships, family transitions and how to maintain the hope of success in future intimate relationships. The limitations of the study and recommendations for future research are also presented.

Part C: Case Study

In Part C, I present a client case study based on a piece of work I conducted during my counselling psychology training. This case study details my therapeutic process with Kaylee, a client who endured prolonged sexual abuse from her foster brother. I adopted family systems theory (Minuchin, 1974) and Bowlby's attachment theory (1958) as a framework and basis from which to develop a secure therapeutic relationship of trust, essential for working through Kaylee's feelings of anger and sadness. Systemic thinking encourages the client and the therapist to explore not only their early life experiences, in order to understand their worldview (Bateson, 1972), but also recurring themes, patterns and beliefs that are "interconnected into what might be called a family system" (Burnham, 1986, p.2).

The work aimed to provide Kaylee with a safe and nurturing therapeutic space where she could explore and find a way of managing her often overwhelming and painful feelings of worthlessness and shame connected to the sexual abuse she suffered. I aimed in this process to support her as she struggled to make sense of her life experiences and of the inability of her family to acknowledge what she had been through. After her parents divorced, Kaylee described the distress she felt in the post-divorce family structure. By using the systemic framework, we were able to explore together her relationships with her family and the impact of their attitudes and behaviour on her sense of self.

The goals of this therapy were for Kaylee to feel able to tell her story and to build on the strength, courage and resilience that she embodied in the therapy sessions. Kaylee and I developed a meaningful therapeutic relationship during the course of this work, which I believe supported Kaylee to find new and positive ways of experiencing herself.

I reflect upon the nature and function of our therapeutic relationship in the paper, and explore the difficulties I experienced in the therapeutic process, my limitations as a practitioner and my use of supervision to work through these.

Personal reflections

Over the course of my training, I have drawn together the threads of my professional life in order to develop my identity as a counselling psychologist. My experiences as a registered general nurse enabled me to be part of a depth and breadth of human experience that has enriched my practice. I was drawn to counselling psychology as a profession, as I see it as embodying the ideals in which I believe. I have immersed myself in the humanistic ethos of counselling psychology and its emphasis on the therapeutic relationship, while also recognizing its focus upon the subjective and inter-relational aspects of human experience.

The three pieces of work in this portfolio have enhanced and informed my practice as a counselling psychologist, and my professional and personal journey has in turn been enhanced by these experiences.

Part A: Research Study

The Phenomenon of Parental Divorce: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the Experiences of Emerging Adults

Abstract

According to recent figures from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) and Eurostat in England and Wales (2016), 42% of marriages are expected to end in divorce. Existing literature is varied and often contradictory about the implications of this phenomenon for the offspring of divorced parents, proposing evidence for both positive and negative outcomes. The majority of studies have used a quantitative approach to focus on the effects of parental divorce on children and adolescents.

This qualitative study used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore how emerging adults describe their experiences of parental divorce. Semi-structured interviews produced in-depth insights into how respondents made sense of their experiences. The following three key themes emerge: loss, highlighting feelings of grief and disbelief related to the end of the 'family' as respondents had known it; altered reality, in which respondents describe issues related to altered parental relationships and mediating interparental conflict post-divorce; and finally hope and continuity, highlighted the way that emerging adults adapt, adjust and develop coping mechanisms following the divorce of their parents.

The findings expand academic knowledge of the ways in which emerging adults experience parental divorce, and will encourage counselling psychologists working with divorcing couples or with their offspring to remain curious and mindful of the significance of these themes.

Chapter One: Introduction

This study will consider the changing nature of the family structure in contemporary society and the impact of divorce on that structure. Family systems theory can add to the context in which parental divorce takes place (Hooper, 2007). Attachment theory and psychosocial development can also inform understanding of the phenomenon of parental divorce. Finally, the review will reflect on the ways that emerging adults show resilience and develop ways of coping with their reconfigured family structure following the divorce of their parents.

It should be noted that many studies have been reviewed that have investigated the impact of divorce on children of all ages, but I will focus particularly on the ages of 18-25, a developmental stage known as 'emerging adulthood' (Arnett, 2000). My area of professional interest specifically relates to the role of the family in emerging adult mental health, including risk factors such as divorce that amplify vulnerabilities among this group. Whilst research exists that explores and explains the impact of divorce on emerging adults, there is a need to understand this phenomenon better. I will consider what the current research tells us about parenting emerging adults after divorce, the impact on family relationships and how emerging adults describe their own unique experiences. I am also curious as to what new research and theory concerning clinical practice and research-based intervention models has done to promote better adjustment of emerging adults after parental divorce. The developmental stage known as 'emerging adulthood' is a time of significant change and transformation and I will explore issues such as how an altered family structure may be seen to influence personal identity, self-esteem, belief systems around commitment and intimacy, and confidence in the veracity of long held beliefs about enduring relationships. My interest in this respondent group has been triggered by my clinical work with emerging adults and the stories that they tell. I have observed how some of the changes that have occurred in the

everyday life of this group have impacted on their well-being and capacity to flourish; this has inspired me to further explore some of the issues that they face.

Due to the increasing numbers of children and emerging adults who have experienced parental divorce, counselling psychologists should remain open and curious to the stories that are told in relation to this phenomenon and have a responsibility to develop and expand our skills and knowledge in order to understand, as well as we are able, the lived experience of others.

Studies of 'informal divorces' among unmarried cohabiting parents have been omitted as this topic is beyond the scope of this research project. It is relevant to note however that the greater instability of families that originate in cohabitation means that children are more likely to experience family disruption (Bumpass & Lu, 2000). There is a body of literature that explores the impact and spread of cohabitation (Thornton, 1988; Bumpass & Sweet, 1989a) and the role of premarital cohabitation as a predictor of divorce (Amato, 2010; Amato & Rogers, 1999; Tach & Halpern-Meekin, 2009; Stanley, Rhoades, & Markman, 2006; Tach & Halpern-Meekin, 2009). As a consequence of both formal and informal divorce, single-parent families have become an inescapable part of contemporary society, with implications for the lives of many children involved (Amato et al., 2015; Ahrons, 2006; Cherlin, et al., 1995; Bumpass & Sweet, 1989a; Cherlin et al., 1995; Wu, Cherlin, & Bumpass, 1997).

1.1 Family Systems Theory and Its Influence on Understanding the Experience of Parental Divorce for Emerging Adults

Whilst this review does not include an in-depth exploration of family systems theory (Bowen, 1978; Minuchin, 1974), it is relevant to acknowledge its influence on the understanding and interpretation of existing literature on the experience for emerging adults of parental divorce.

Working with families also enables a deeper understanding of childhood attachments, the family environment and family roles. Christian (2006) argues that to serve children well, clinicians need to work with their families and to be effective in this work, it is necessary to understand that families are diverse in factors such as culture, economic status, work, religious beliefs and composition. Single-parent families, families of divorce, blended families, extended families and cohabiting families, represent some of the diversity that is seen in clinical practice as a trainee counselling psychologist.

A primary concept in family systems theory is that the family includes interconnected members, and each member influences the others in predictable and recurring ways (Van Velsor & Cox, 2000). Family experiences shape our expectations of how the larger world will interact with us (Nieto, 2004). Family systems theory focuses on family behaviour rather than individual behaviour, and considers communication and interaction patterns, separateness and connectedness, loyalty and independence and adaptation to stress in the context of the whole, as opposed to the individual in isolation (Bowen, 1978).

Family systems theory can help to explain why members of a family behave the way that they do in a particular situation, such as during and after a parental divorce (Fingerman & Bermann, 2000). Christian (2006) highlights six characteristics of the family as a system that are especially relevant when considering how children may respond to a stressful family event: "boundaries, roles, rules, hierarchy, climate, and equilibrium and that each of these characteristics lies on a continuum" (2006, p.1). The reciprocal arrangement of the influences in family life is often referred to as the 'coherence' of the family (Barnes, Thompson, Daniel, & Burchardt, 1998, p.21). Family coherence includes the idea that families have core characteristics that distinguish one family from another. The family themselves may recognise this as being an aspect of their family, and children may absorb those

characteristics as patterns and mental representatives of relationships (Dunn, 1988). Bateson refers to these core characteristics as "habits" (Bateson, 1973, p.115) and that working with habits and the beliefs associated with them is a way of understanding family processes (Barnes et al., 1998).

The changing nature of family structures will be considered in light of current knowledge and how an event such as parental divorce can impact on the way emerging adults view family coherence, both in terms of themselves and in relation to one another. Parental divorce can involve the development of new patterns in a family and the loss of old ones. The details of the ways in which families adapt to such changes are of key importance to informing counselling psychologists as to the impact of parental divorce on emerging adults.

1.2 The Significance of Attachment and Psychosocial Development

Again, whilst this topic is not the main focus of this study, it is acknowledged that attachment theory (Ainsworth, 1973; Bowlby, 1969), has contributed to the understanding of emerging adults' experience of divorce. According to attachment theory, humans are born with an instinctive desire and capacity to form close connections to at least one primary caregiver, and this is necessary for personal development. Current research has questioned the significance of how the disruption of certain attachment structures (such as divorce) can affect children and their wellbeing, (Malik, Wells, & Wittkowski, 2015; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005, 2007). The literature on this topic is contradictory and somewhat inconclusive, with some research asserting that either attachment style or external influences may be the main contributor to the behaviours seen in members of divorced families, whilst other sources state that it can be a combination of both influences (Amato, 2001; Booth &

Lindaman, 2000; Summers, Forehand, Armistead, & Tannenbaum, 1998). A recent study reported that "the effects of divorce are selective in how they shape working models of attachment in having a stronger impact on representations of parental relationships than romantic ones" (Fraley & Heffernan, 2013, p.1208).

Mikulincer (2006) notes adult romantic relationships are characterised by the involvement of the attachment, care giving and sexual behaviour systems. Secure individuals are more attuned to their partners' needs, and more likely to trust, hold positive views of their partners, and experience more fulfilling relationships (Mikulincer, 2006). Attachment is also associated with assessment of commitment beliefs. Anxious attachment is correlated with both more awareness of the benefits of the romantic relationship and the cost of its dissolution, while avoidant attachment is correlated with reduced awareness of the positive aspects of the relationship (Dandurand, Bouaziz, & Lafontaine, 2003).

Parental divorce has the potential to disrupt early bonds and alter later attachment patterns with biological parents by influencing or altering the emerging adults' internal models, but its impact on adult romantic attachment is not especially clear (Sirvanli-Ozen, 2005)

Erikson's (1959) stage-based theory of psychosocial development is a key conceptual framework that has helped to illuminate the influence and changing functions of family relationships in individuals' psychosocial development. Erikson did not discuss specific ages in his theory, but wrote in developmental terms of 'adolescence' and of 'development in young adulthood'. His theory of human development describes a period typical of industrialised societies "during which the young adult through free role experimentation may find a niche in some section of his society" (1968, p.156).

Arnett (2000) proposed that as a result of demographic changes in the timing of marriage and parenthood in recent decades, a period of emerging adulthood is a more clearly defined and distinct period of life and is distinguished by relative independence from social roles.

The data group in this study is made up of emergent adults, a developmental stage described by Arnett (2000) and Cohen et al. (2003), with an approximate age range of 18-25. Arnett (2000) defined this as a time of "frequent change and exploration" (p.469), "offering the most opportunity for identity explorations in the area of love, work and world views" (p.473). Arnett (2007) proposed five features that make emerging adults distinct: "the age of identity, explorations, instability, self-focus, of feeling in-between and of possibilities" (p.69). This developmental stage is characterised as being full of risk and adventure, where rules are self-governed and nothing is certain (Tanner & Arnett, 2009), and it is therefore important to examine the significance and impact of parental divorce on emerging adults in this particular period of their lives.

In conclusion, whilst family systems theory and attachment theory have not been the main focus of this study, which has focused on the individual experience of emerging adults of parental divorce, it is inevitable that the work has been informed and enriched by such theories.

1.3 Literature Review

This literature review examines current knowledge in light of the effects of divorce and ongoing family transitions on children and emerging adults, considering the effects of parental conflict, the importance of parental relationships post-divorce; offspring's attitudes towards divorce, how communication platforms contribute to the wellbeing of the offspring

in a divorce and how complex feelings regarding trust and commitment are expressed. These factors are considered in relation to shifting social and cultural attitudes to divorce.

Research has been seen to focus on the child's well-being after parental divorce (Amato & Keith, 1990; Hetherington, 1993), while less attention has addressed the long-term consequences of the childhood family structure for relationship quality, perceived supportiveness and communication with parents and siblings in emerging adulthood (Collardeau & Ehrenberg, 2016)

This review will be conducted with an open mind as to how divorce impacts children of all stages of development, but will particularly consider how current research explains and describes the experience of parental divorce on emerging adults. Whilst a number of authors, including Amato (2012), Gager et al. (2016), and Shafer et al. (2017), have focused their work on this group, a review based only on these studies would have a limited scope of inquiry.

As new themes were identified in the literature relating to emerging adults and parental divorce, opportunities emerged to extend and expand the exploration of their experiences. This led to a deeper appreciation by the researcher of a number of broader issues in the existing body of knowledge, and towards an understanding of the kinds of questions that could be used at the data collection stage of the research process.

1.3.1 Divorce statistics in contemporary society and predictors of divorce

Statistical studies that report on current divorce rates will now be explored. These are based on recent figures from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) and Eurostat.

In England and Wales, 42% of current marriages are expected to end in divorce. Around 50% of these divorces are expected to occur in the first ten years of marriage (ONS, 2016). Once the twentieth wedding anniversary is reached, the cumulative percentage increases at a slower rate.

Despite the increase in unmarried cohabitation, the majority of families in England and Wales consist of a married couple with or without dependent children. 2016 is the first year that the number of divorces has risen since 2010. A period of relative stability occurred between 2010 and 2012, followed by a decline in numbers between 2013 and 2015 (ONS, 2016).

Overall, the rate of divorce has declined since the 1980s; however, Amato (2010) considers the relevance of the increasing prevalence of cohabiting parents and the need to understand effects on offspring following the 'uncoupling' of that relationship. The divorce rate has declined among college educated couples but has remained the same for couples with lower levels of education. It is not clear whether the predicators of divorce vary across racial and ethnic groups, due to the majority of the research on divorce being applied to white, middle class families and students (Amato, 2010).

Researchers typically explain the probability that a marriage will end in divorce by looking at people from different cohorts; people born in a particular year. The only way to know for sure how many of those couples' marriages will end in divorce is to follow them until they are all dead, divorced or widowed. For some couples in a particular cohort, such longitudinal studies will take many years, even if it were possible to accurately keep track of them all. There is research that shows the rate of divorce for people born in, say, 1910, but this does

not say much about whether a couple who marry in 2018 will divorce. The early 20th century was a different time with a different set of norms and demographics (Amato, 2010).

Although research suggests that the predictors and consequences of divorce vary across nations, reflecting historical, economic or cultural factors, much of the research on divorce has been carried out in the United States (Amato, 2010). Although divorce rates are not as high in Europe as in the US, they have been rising in recent decades (Amato, 2012). European research also shows that offspring of divorced couples incur educational disadvantages compared with those who grew up with continuously married parents (Keith & Finlay, 1988).

Divorce is a global phenomenon and research suggests that the predictors and consequences of divorce vary across nations, reflecting historical, economic or cultural factors (Amato, 2010). Marriages in the EU-28 (the 28 member states that constitute the European Union) have become less stable, as reflected by the increase in the divorce rate, which doubled from 1.0 divorces per year per 1000 inhabitants in 1970 to 2.0 divorces per year by 2010 (Eurostat, 2017).

According to Amato (2010), demographic and economic predictors of divorce include: marrying as a teen, being poor, low education levels, cohabitation, bringing children from a prior relationship to the marriage and remarriage. Amato (2010) also highlights interpersonal predictors of divorce, including domestic violence, frequent conflict, infidelity, perceived relationship problems and a weak commitment to marriage.

The implication of these trends for this study is the need for further exploration and understanding of the effects of parental divorce on offspring.

1.3.2 A brief history of changing attitudes towards family structure and resulting societal changes

Half a century ago, the nuclear married family was the dominant norm. That norm has disappeared in nearly all European countries, and major changes in family structures have occurred (Bailey, 2007; Demo, Aquilino, & Fine, 2005; Pailhe et al., 2014). Whilst marriage was the dominant family structure in Europe and the US in the 1960s, a large number of people are now living in single-parent families, stepfamilies, a cohabitation arrangement or across two households with shared custody. Resident and non-resident parents are questioning traditional definitions as they are faced with the reality of their current family configurations (Bailey, 2007).

The family has always been seen both as an important social institution and as fulfilling basic human needs: "It is a central tenet of socialisation, belonging and identification" (Kiernan, 2004, p.970). As with many aspects of social life, the family is seen as constantly changing. According to Kiernan (2004, p.980), "The golden age of marriage prominent across many Western nations from the 1950s to the early part of the 1970s is well and truly over".

Esping-Anderson and Billari (2015, p.25) predict "low fertility and widespread divorce are likely to remain permanent features of family life". Cherlin, meanwhile (2016), considers the argument that Western societies are "entering a new phase of family life based on stable, egalitarian partnerships and rebounding fertility" (p.121). These changes in household and family structures in western European and US families have seen marriage rates fall and divorce and cohabitation increase (Clarke & Joshi, 2003). Such trends have been used as evidence that the importance of family life is declining (Popenoe, 1988, 1993).

The most contentious part of the 'family values' debate is the underlying battle about the *vision* of the family (Ahrons, 2004). On one side, divorce is described as being responsible

for the moral collapse of society, and on the other, divorce is an acceptable response to unhappiness and discontent in a relationship. As the possibilities of diversity in how we live our lives multiply, there is much discussion as to what type of family structure best suits children (Ahrons, 2004).

Heterosexual parent-child families with gender roles have not vanished. It is simply the case that this particular family type is just one of many diverse family structures that exist today. LGBT research in family studies focuses on the dynamics of lesbian-headed families with children (Goldberg, 2006; Goldberg & Sayer, 2006), examining their strengths and innovations, without the automatic "assumption that LGBT families must be compared to heterosexual single-parent or married-couple families in order to gain legitimacy" (Allen, 2007, p.175).

Same-sex couples have a higher risk of divorce than heterosexual couples. It has also been reported that all-female couples are more prone to divorce than their all-male counterparts (Wiik, Seierstad, & Noack, 2014). There is a scarcity of studies, however, focused on the association between having common children and relationship stability among same-sex couples, and the impact of the dissolution of the union on their offspring (Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007).

According to Goldscheider, Bernhardt and Lappegard (2015), the gender revolution is at the core of what has been referred to as the 'second demographic transition' (SDT), the changing demographic patterns that can occur as societies develop economically (Lesthaeghe, 1995). Observed since the mid-1960s, these have included improved education for women, rising divorce rates, increased cohabitation, falling birth rates and delayed marriage (Lesthaeghe, 2010; Lesthaeghe & Surkyn, 1988). Scott (2006), in her study of changing attitudes in

families and gender roles, identifies two major social changes: "The transformation of women's roles and increasing secularisation which has redefined the traditional base of many moral certainties associated with family values and behaviours, like divorce, adultery, and abortion" (Scott, 2006, p.25).

Cherlin (2016) argued that, "because individuals can more easily satisfy their basic material needs they turn their attention towards higher order needs such as self-expression" (p.121). Amato (2012, p.8) describes the new norm as "the freedom to seek happiness and self-fulfilment outside of traditional norms and existing social structures".

Divorced families have also been widely portrayed as "flawed structures and environments" (Kelly & Emery, 2013, p.352), with research suggesting that children are at greater risk of psychological, behavioural and educational problems in comparison to children of married parents (Amato, 2000; Barber & Demo, 2006; Fergusson, McLeod, & Horwood, 2014). In their 2013 study, Gatins, Kinlaw, and Dunlap reported that the "negative effects of divorce on adolescents are underestimated" (p.325), while Thompson and Amato (1999) proposed that, while divorce changes family boundaries and communication patterns, adaptive processes allow for the continuation of the family but in a transformed arrangement.

The significance of divorce within heterosexual families will now be considered.

1.3.3 Significance of divorce within families with reference to emerging adults

Multiple research perspectives have sought to understand how differing family structures (single-parent families, stepfamilies, multiple parental relationship transitions) affect the cognitive, social and emotional wellbeing of children of divorce. Research has also considered the effects on children in post-divorce families, including their school and social life emotional reactions, parental relationships and adjustment (Wallerstein & Blakeslee,

1989; Amato, 2000; Kelly, 2007). According to Bailey (2007), "Divorce has come to be considered by some to be a normative life event although the larger social system continues to struggle to accept it (p.83).

Overall, emerging adults from intact families have been found to have significantly more positive attitudes toward marriage than children of divorce, although the significance remains small and might not be meaningful (Yu &Adler-Baeder, 2007). Furthermore, the research supports a robust yet non-linear association between parental divorce and more favourable attitudes towards divorce, with emerging adults from divorced families more likely to think positively about divorce than young adults from intact families (Amato & DeBoer, 2001).

Further studies report that two-parent families do not always offer a happy environment for parents or children (Amato, Loomis, & Booth, 1995; Cummings & Davis, 1994) and that although there are differences in the average psychological wellbeing of offspring from happily married families and divorced families, these are small and that many children from divorced families are emotionally well-adjusted (Amato, 1994, 2001; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Cherlin, Chase-Lansdale and McRae (1998) reported that negative effects on the offspring of divorced parents can persist into adulthood: "parental divorce can trigger events such as early child bearing or curtailed education that in turn affect adult outcomes" (p.247).

This review reflects the varied evidence in the literature of the effects of divorce on offspring within and across disciplines, and across methodological approaches. Researchers use different measures when they study the effects of divorce, and they use different variables to

define outcomes and intervening factors. The lack of control or comparison groups may also be an issue in some studies (Kelly & Emery, 2003). The findings can also depend on the researcher's personal point of view concerning divorce. Adding to the complexity of studying the effects of divorce is that samples across studies are rarely the same, and children are studied at different ages and at different stages in the divorce process (Amato, 2003).

Divorce can arguably be understood as a process, extending over a period of time, and involving many different transitions and possible challenges, rather than as one single event (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). The process is unique to every child and for every family (Coontz, 2007; Amato, 2000; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002).

At present, nearly one-third of children live in stepfamilies (Bumpass, Raley, & Sweet, 1995). As Coleman, Ganong and Fine report, "We continue to be limited in our understanding of variables that contribute to positive stepfamily functioning and we know little about factors that facilitate the formation of positive stepfamily functioning and bonds" (2000, p.1301).

King, Thorsen and Amato (2014), using a stepfamily-focused approach, aimed to explore the quality of relationships between stepfathers and stepchildren. (the majority of children live with a stepfather rather than a stepmother; Stewart, 2007). The authors conclude that the closer the child is to their mother, the closer they are to their stepfather. They also found no evidence that closeness to the stepfather is impacted by closeness to the non-resident father: "Having strong ties to either biological parent does not interfere with developing strong ties to stepfathers, and indeed in the case of the mother-child relationship, may even facilitate it" (King et al., 2014, p.27).

Given that many children live with step-parents, this suggests "strengthening stepfather-stepchild relationships may be a useful strategy for improving children's wellbeing" (King et al., 2014, p.28).

As the King et al. (2014) study interpreted quantitative data, it was not possible to explore other variables that may have affected the findings. If it had been possible to explore the step-parent-stepchild relationship using interviews, respondents may have disclosed different external influences on the relationship that affected feelings of closeness. A more phenomenological approach, outlined in the present study, would allow for a deeper exploration, and therefore understanding, of factors that affect the step-parent-stepchild relationship.

Laumann-Billings and Emery (2000) report that while most children from divorced families displayed resilience, it was important not to underestimate the pain and suffering that they may endure in the process. Their study also highlighted the value of maintaining a relationship with the non-resident father, and that this mitigates the sadness and loss of parental divorce. While the authors do not find any limitations in the self-reported measures, it could be argued that as there was no differentiation for psychosocial development (Erikson, 1958) in the questionnaires, there could be no allowances for the experience to be understood in terms of that development. Moreover the 'distress' described could have alluded to many aspects of parental divorce, such as how sibling relationships are affected or the experience of the parental relationship pre-divorce. Using a more explorative, individual approach, the study could have understood the experiences in terms of themes, which then could be used to calibrate the meaning of the word 'distress'.

The way an individual views the world is profoundly influenced by their experiences in their family of origin (Riggio & Fite, 2006). Divorce can be a "highly charged and emotional issue about which people hold deeply entrenched values, beliefs, stereotypes and opinions" (Ahrons (2007, p.48). Riggio and Fite (2006) demonstrated in their study that strongly embedded attitudes towards divorce are likely to be linked to certain outcomes, such as relationship conflict and choice of partner. Amato and Keith (1991) in their meta-analysis found that adults who experienced parental divorce exhibited lower levels of wellbeing than adults whose parents had remained married. A later study also reported that the former had a greater acceptance of non-traditional family forms (Amato & DeBoer, 2001). Adults from divorced families are 50% more likely than adults from intact families to experience their own divorce (US Census Bureau, 2002). This is a discrepancy that persists despite controlling for income, parental education, age, race and sex (Amato & DeBoer, 2001).

According to Amato and DeBoer (2001, p.1039) "parents represent the most important source from which children learn about the nature of marital relationships" and poor relationship skills are a risk factor in the breakdown of a marriage (Amato & Rogers, 1997; Leonard & Roberts, 1998).

In her book *We're Still Family*, Ahrons (2004) proposed that divorce will remain a central tenet of modern society and that marriage is no longer the organising principal of family life. She is positive that it is possible to have "good divorces" that allow children and adults to live harmoniously in reorganised families. As she notes, "This generation is less likely to want to make a commitment for 'as long as we both shall live'" (p.33). Considering the long-term implications of divorce, Ahrons (2006) suggests that what is most important is to listen to the voices of children who have experienced parental divorce. She states that "wellbeing is a social construct and how children perceive the effect of their parents' divorce and the

resulting changes in their lives is central to understanding the personal experience of divorce and its impact" (2006, p.64).

The current study is designed to be open and curious as to the way that respondents perceive their parent's divorce. Using IPA, I aim to move as close as possible to their "inner world" (Wallerstein, Lewis, & Blakeslee, 2000, p.32) in order to try and understand it.

As a general rule, children do not favour their parents' decision to divorce and are at a higher risk of emotional difficulties than children whose parents remain continuously married, but there are some ways of helping children to manage and cope with their feelings (Eldar-Avidan, Haj-Yahia, & Greenbaum, 2009). These include developing positive parental relationships (Fincham, 1994), improving parental mental health (Kelly, 2000), ensuring stable financial arrangements (Amato, 2000), good communication between family members (Dunn & Deater-Deckard, 2001) and regular contact with an often non-resident father (Wallerstein et al., 2000).

Eldar-Avidan et al. (2009) describe different patterns of adaptation to the experience of parental divorce, with vulnerability and resilience at opposite poles of the same concept. Resilience, survival and vulnerability form the theoretical conceptualisations that are central to their study. The authors also identify the importance of the loss of emotional closeness between emerging adults and their parents as having major implications in coping with parental divorce: "the negative pole of the continuum is consistent in connecting individual resilience with familial resilience and its interpretation and functioning" (Eldar-Avidan et al., 2009, p.42).

This supports the proposal that family relationships play a central part in how well offspring of divorced parents cope. This can be a useful way to understand the different levels of

coping that these offspring describe, and encourage clinicians to focus on strength and resilience rather than pathology in their work with this client group (Patterson, 2002). Their study also helps to highlight how the systemic paradigm can help us to understand associated feelings and emotions, and focus intervention on the value of the relationships between all family members.

Other studies, however, are less optimistic about the future of family life and how children are required to navigate their post-divorce family. As a result of divorce, many one-parent families live in poverty (Finer, 1974) and poverty has been found to be a risk factor associated with psychological wellbeing. Many previously married women may have had their careers interrupted by children and find it difficult to return to work, as opposed to single-parent men who generally have better paid careers and receive greater help with their children (Abercrombie, 1994). Divorce reduces the standard of living for the custodial parents and their children (Duncan & Hoffman, 1985), and moving home after divorce is a common cause of distress, as children move away from non-resident parents and wider support groups (Kelly & Lamb, 2003).

Whilst the differences in the effects of parental divorce have been found to be minimal between children of divorced parents and those of continuously married parents (Amato, 2000), research suggests that offspring with divorced parents obtain lower levels education, earn less income, have lower levels of psychological wellbeing, report more problems with their own marriages, are less close to their parents and are at greater risk of their own divorce (Amato, 2014). Studies also indicate that educational achievement is positively related to people's reports of being happy and having fulfilling experiences both at work and at home (Campbell, 1981). Education is believed to decrease the risk of depression (Kessler & Essex, 1982) and increase people's sense of personal control. Wolfinger (2015) proposes that

compared to individuals from intact families, the children of divorced parents are more likely to marry as teenagers, but less likely to wed overall. They are more likely to marry other people from divorced families, and more likely to dissolve second and third marriages. In their book *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: Report of a 25-Year Study*, Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee propose that "Divorce is a life transforming experience. After divorce, childhood is different. Adolescence is different. Adulthood – with the decision to marry or not and have children or not – is different" (2000, p.xxxiii). They go on to state that while the call to liberalise divorce in the 1970s promised happier and better families, divorce can "benefit adults while being detrimental to the needs of children" (2000, p.39).

Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1989) claim that "the effects of divorce are often long lasting, what children see and experience becomes part of their inner world, their view of themselves and their view of society" (p.298). They acknowledge that while many of the children in their study emerged resilient and competent, "Almost half of the children entered adulthood as worried, underachieving, self-deprecating and sometimes angry young men and young women" (p.299).

The authors proposed that while parents set themselves free from unhappy and often distressing situations, their children may not experience the divorce in the same way. They may find themselves burdened with the responsibility of supporting their parents amidst their own, unacknowledged, sadness and loss. The offspring of divorced parents often describe having to manage maintaining a relationship with a non-resident father, challenges around parental remarriage and of navigating the often complex and conflicted relationship between their parents (Ahrons, 2004).

These studies highlight the diverse and often diametrically opposed views that continue to drive the discourse about the wellbeing of children and emerging adults following parental divorce and remarriage. The voices of social science, social change, politics and psychology are constantly debating and exploring the implications of the 'social experiment' that is divorce (Wallerstein et al., 2000, p.38). Shafer, Jensen, and Holmes (2017) described family transitions as "processes that unfold over time" and this is mirrored in the evolving nature of the conversation about this phenomenon. This study seeks to inform and enhance current knowledge on this topic.

The discrepancy in the research regarding the extent of difficulties encountered by the offspring of divorced parents, compared with those from continuously married parents, needs to be contextualised in the studies themselves. Some of these studies focus on distress and loss (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1998), while others focus on coping and survival (Hetherington, 1999; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Although many children of divorce will have painful memories and feelings, these can run alongside successful social and psychological functioning (Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000).

1.4 Stressors During the Divorce Process

1.4.1 Communication pathways

Often, the revelation of the impending divorce will be the first that the offspring will know about any relationship difficulties their parents had been having. Children avoid talking about their parents' relationship and the way they communicate as a way of keeping the peace in the family (Afifi, Afifi, Morse, & Hamrick, 2008). "The immediate consequences of children 'finding out' are of shock, disbelief, and emotional distress" (Robinson, Butler, Scanlan,

Douglas, & Murch, 2003, p.77). Complicating children's attempts to cope with these changes, most children seem to be inadequately informed by their parents about the divorce (Dunn & Deater-Deckard, 2001; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). This often leads to feelings of confusion and fear. The majority of parents are not able to communicate with each other regarding custody arrangements, let alone with their children (Kelly, 2003). In one study of parent-child communications about divorce, 23% of children said no one talked to them about divorce and 45% said they had been given abrupt and extremely brief explanations. Only 5% reported that they had been fully informed and encouraged to ask questions (Dunn & Deater-Deckard, 2001). Very often, there is the abrupt departure of one parent, often the father, which can cause significant distress and pain because very few children are provided with explanations or plans as to when they will next see that parent (Dunn & Deater-Deckard, 2001).

Birnbaum and Saini (2012), in their review of 35 qualitative studies relating to child custody disputes, suggest that the voices of children are often shaped and constrained by social and legal obstacles. They propose that children are eager to be heard and have input into the decision-making process regarding custody and access; for them, having a voice to express their views and feelings is as important as being able to make a choice.

Scanlan, Perry and Robinson (2000) also report that children feel that they would like to be as involved in the process of their parents' divorce as their parents are. They report that children feel a need to be kept fully informed and included in decisions that ultimately affect them the most. Increasingly, children have been recognised as active constructors of their own experience and as persons in their own right (Cashmore & Parkinson, 2007).

Communication-based coping strategies, such as open and effective communication in friendship, parental, romantic and extended family relationships, have been found to have a

beneficial effect when coping with parental divorce (Du Plooy & Van Rensburg, 2015): "The most important factor influencing children's post-divorce adjustment is communication" (Afifi, Granger, Joseph, Denes, & Aldeis, 2015, p.1010).

1.4.2 Logistics: being fair and carrying messages

When my third daughter, who is 12 years old, asked me what I was writing my thesis about, I told her that I wished to understand how young children and grown-ups feel about their parents' divorce. "Oh" she replied, "that's sad". I asked her how she would feel if it were her mother and father that were getting a divorce; she responded "well, I know that whenever I was with you, I would want to be with Daddy, and whenever I was with Daddy, I would want to be with you!"

When confronted with parental divorce, children may be drawn into their parents' disputes, becoming mediators (Amato & Afifi, 2006; Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). Against a background of resentment and recrimination, parents may use the child to pass messages between them – this often being their only form of communication. The child may have to learn to hide their hopes and desires in order to maintain a relationship with the other parent, lie about seeing one parent to the other and feel that they have to take sides (Afifi & Hamrick, 2006).

The experience of carrying messages between parents was shown to have a negative effect on female emerging adults from divorced families (Yarnoz-Yaben & Garmendia, 2016; Kelly & Emery, 2003). Carrying messages is considered to be a dysfunctional way of communicating in divorced families, in which the child is asked to pass messages between parents and, in the process, the child takes on adult worries and concerns (Segrin & Flora, 2014).

This family strategy is rarely effective at solving problems between parents, and often ends up causing the family system more harm than good (Buehler & Welsh, 2009). Children who are drawn into parental conflict have been found to internalise problems; this seems to be more predominant in adolescence and emerging adulthood (Fosco & Grych, 2010). Moreover, Ahrons (2004) found that the practicalities of, and emotions related to, transitioning between parental homes caused real concern, and she posited the existence of "loyalty conflicts" (p.76) in which one parent manipulates their child's views of the other parent, and the child feels compelled to take a side in parental conflict.

Whether their parents are married or divorced, children have different relationships with each parent and given that mothers are usually given greater custody responsibilities than fathers, these relationships can be further complicated by post-divorce arrangements. How fathers maintain relationships with their children post-divorce is dependent on a number of complex factors (Ahrons, 2004) After divorce, the child may feel both the loss of a parent who could have supported them in their choices, education, or in a crisis, but also feel guilty about 'betraying' the parent who is the unhappiest. According to Yárnoz-Yaben (2015), supportive, co-parenting relationships in post-divorce years increases the probability of good outcomes for children. Divorce dissolves the couple, not the family, and a well-documented line of research asserts that forgiveness helps divorced parents to share their parental responsibilities and take care of their children after divorce (Yárnoz-Yaben, 2015; Bonach 2009; Rye et al., 2012). As Ahrons states, "No single factor contributed more to children's wellbeing after divorce than the continuing relationship between parents. How divorced parents relate to each other is a strong predictor of grown children feeling like they still have a family" (2004, p.55).

In the common event that parents are not able to find a way of getting along with each other, daughters are more likely than sons to be involved in parental conflict through a mediator role (Herzog & Cooney, 2002).

Amato and Afifi (2006) and Buchanan, Maccoby and Dornbusch (1991) report that the extent of a child's direct exposure to anger and conflict does not seem to be as significant as feeling trapped between mutually antagonistic parents. Amato and Afifi (2006) acknowledge that this feeling is only one of many variables that may influence children's responses to divorce. However, as their study was based on only three interview questions, it was possible that the subtler aspects of their feelings could have been missed.

Some emerging adults report logistical difficulties and emotional consequences that arise from trying to maintain and balance relationships with divorced parents (Cunningham & Waldock, 2016). The authors identify this group as feeling pressured by each parent's expectations to maintain "time equality" with them (p.208). This is characterised by coordination difficulties and attempting to schedule visits with each parent, whilst forging a new identity away from home. Also, trying to spend time equally and maintain relationships with both parents is complicated by parents living in multiple households, often in different parts of the country. Cunningham & Waldock (2016) report that respondents in their study describe the emotional consequences of "experiencing life through the filter of divorce with the loss of family cohesion" (p.208). Yárnoz-Yaben (2015) state that emerging adults display lower levels of satisfaction with life, increased likelihood of exhibiting symptoms of depression and anxiety, and lower self-esteem than emerging adults from non-divorced families, but they describe the difference between the two groups as relatively small.

Several studies emphasise the strong desire of children and emerging adults to maintain a sense of fairness in the time that they are allocated with each divorced parent (Fabricius, 2003; Fabricius & Hall, 2000; Smart, Wade, & Neale, 1999) and discuss an "ethic of fairness". Robinson et al. (2003) described children managing their "time-maps" (p.87), where their descriptions of their feelings highlight the emotional highs and lows of moving between parents. Moxnes (2003) describes the importance of fairness as a core principal in how children navigate their post-divorce family relationships.

1.4.3 Implications of interparental conflict pre- and post-divorce

Interparental conflict is a much-discussed topic in research exploring the effects of parental divorce on offspring. According to Kelly and Emery (2003), the most distressing effect of divorce on children's adjustment and wellbeing is being exposed to interparental conflict. Establishing a high-quality co-parenting relationship is one of the most challenging aspects of the divorce process and one of the most important; it is crucial both for parental and offspring wellbeing and adjustment (Katz & Woodin, 2002; Nunes-Costa et al., 2009). Amato and Keith's (1991) meta-analysis of the effects of divorce on children concludes that children exposed to parental conflict and consequently divorce score worse on measures of academic success, psychological wellbeing and peer relationships than those who are not. Emery (1982) reports that persistent conflict between parents causes significant stress for offspring, and Amato and Sobolewski (2001) state that parental marital conflict weakens the bond between parents and offspring in adulthood. Weak parent-child bonds, in turn, place adult offspring at risk of feelings of distress, low self-esteem and general unhappiness (Amato & Afifi, 2006; Baker & Verrocchio, 2013).

According to Kumar and Mattanhah (2018), exposure to interparental conflict poses a risk to mental health throughout life, including feelings of loneliness, sadness, anger and fear

(Rokach & Morris, 2013). Lucas-Thomson and Hostinar (2013) propose that the quality of family relationships is a significant mediator of the link between interparental conflict and reduced outcomes in emerging adults. How emerging adults conceptualise and experience their relationships with their parents as they navigate the numerous life transitions that are associated with the emerging adulthood developmental phase is critical (Lucas-Thomson & Hostinar 2013). According to Tucker, Holt and Wiesen-Martin (2013), and Lopez et al. (1989), emerging adults' exposure to interparental conflict in childhood and adolescence predicts poorer life adjustment, including raised levels of anxiety and depression in the emerging adult developmental stage.

Johnson, Carr and Whisman (2015) report that interparental conflict has been associated with depression in emerging adults, and Afifi and Schrodt (2003) state that offspring who feel caught in the middle of a conflict-ridden and unhappy parental relationship often develop poor communication skills, as well as a reduced sense of wellbeing in life. When parents engage in conflict that is intense and ultimately unresolved, a violation of boundaries can take place and these conflicts can become intrusive into the lives of offspring, thus resulting in distracted parenting and reduced parental emotional support (Benson, Buehler, & Gerard, 2008).

In their longitudinal study, Gager, Yabiku and Linver (2016) report that conflict in families, particularly between parents, is linked to an increased likelihood of maintaining romantic relationships in offspring of divorce, which further supports previous research that the long-term effects of family conflict can be lessened by parental divorce. The authors propose that children who are no longer exposed to their parents' high-conflict style of relationship, for example an inability to resolve or manage conflict, they are less likely to model it in their own future relationships.

There is evidence for both direct and indirect influence of interparental conflict on emerging adults' attitudes towards marriage and divorce, with emerging adults from divorced parents more likely to consider divorce a viable alternative (Cui et al., 2011; Wolfinger, 2005). There is further research that proposes that interparental conflict influences only emerging adults' behaviour while parental divorce influences attitudes (Cui & Fincham, 2010). There is no consensus yet about the association between interparental conflict and attitudes toward marriage. In addition, birth order seems to play a role in attitudes toward the permanence of romantic relationships through the different levels of exposure to parental conflict of older and younger siblings. Older siblings are usually more exposed to parental conflict and as a result tend to doubt the stability of marriage and romantic relationships (Roth, Harkins & Lauren, 2014).

1.4.4 The role of trust and commitment

Wallerstein and Blakeslee argue that parental divorce "impacts detrimentally on the capacity to love and be loved within a lasting and committed relationship" (2004, p.363), and that the inability to deal with differences and resolve conflict has a long-lasting effect that impedes the journey into adulthood. Dennison and Koener (2006) also report that higher post-divorce interparental conflict is significantly predictive of less positive attitudes towards marriage among emerging adults. Cui and Fincham (2010) state that parents who have difficulty communicating clearly, and who are openly critical of each other, are seen to have offspring who pick up on those behaviours and display similar problems in their own romantic relationships. Amato (1996) reports that emerging adults are also more likely to leave a relationship they feel may not be working, rather than apply effort to improve it; this may be due to having observed unhealthy interpersonal behaviours between parents, and this attitude causes the overall quality of their romantic relationships to suffer (Cui, Fincham, & Parsley, 2008).

Research on attitudes of offspring towards marital permanence also testifies to the importance of family characteristics and structures in explaining emerging adults' attitudes towards divorce (Li, 2014). Emerging adulthood is an important period when individuals are able to explore intimacy and sexuality (Arnett, 2000), as well as to test the assumptions or attitudes that they might hold regarding romantic relationships. The curvilinear relationship between marriage entry and parental divorce peaks around respondents' 20th birthdays, and thus provides further evidence of the developmental importance of this period (Wolfinger, 2005). After witnessing their parents' relationship during their childhood years, and then experiencing their first romantic relationships, emerging adults are likely to start thinking about marriage and long-term relationships.

Previous research studies emphasise the link between successful romantic relationships and wellbeing, and propose that a failure to establish and maintain healthy romantic relationships can cause unhappiness and distress throughout life (Braithwaite, Delevi, & Fincham, 2010). The findings of Kumar & Mattanah' s 2018 study highlighted the link between interparental conflict and wellbeing in offspring, particularly in predicting a reduced capacity for successful interpersonal relationships.

Evidence has shown that emerging adults who have experienced parental divorce show less enthusiasm, confidence and commitment in their intimate relationships (Whitton et al., 2008). They are more likely to experience relationship disruption (Fergusson et al., 2014) and have more negative attitudes towards marriage (Garmendia & Yarnoz-Yaben, 2014). Thornton and Young-DeMarco (2001) report that while there remains a strong emphasis on getting married and having children, and the majority of young people are both planning for and expecting marriage and parenthood, these are no longer seen as inevitable. The trend is towards the voluntary nature of marriage, and this is considered alongside the acceptance of divorce.

Despite an emphasis on the increased freedom of behaviour, the overwhelming majority of Americans believe that extramarital sex is unacceptable (Amato, 2012). There is a limited body of literature that examines how children and emerging adults experience their parents' infidelity, and thus a limited understanding of the long-term outcomes related to trust and commitment that this event may cause (Buncombe & Marsden, 2004; Reibstein & Richards, 1992). Considering that infidelity is reported to be the most common cause of divorce (Atkins et al., 2001), with 20% to 40% of married couples experiencing infidelity (Buss; 2000: Glass, 2003), this would appear to be an area that requires further research to further understand the implications for the offspring of divorce.

Thorson, (2007) states that adult children's (19-32 years) discovery of their still married parents' extramarital activity represented a violation of expectations for both their parents and marriage generally. Lusterman (2005) writes that children may experience distress, confusion and discomfort when discovering their parents' infidelity. Infidelity is often referred to as a taboo topic (Tafoya & Spitzberg, 2007), and a lack of ability to voice any suspicions, fears or disappointment relating to parents' infidelity may have a negative effect on family communication patterns and offspring wellbeing.

1.4.5 Parent-child relationship quality post-divorce

For many offspring of divorced parents, the experience of family breakdown and the consequent disruption is a form of crisis. The attempt to regain a new sense of balance to their lives is often a defining characteristic of most children's reactions to their family breaking up (Scanlan et al., 2000). Zill, Morrison, and Coiro (1993) suggest that divorce is associated with weakened emotional bonds in adulthood, and Amato (1994) demonstrated

that discord and disruption in the parent-child relationship can have an effect on self-esteem well into adulthood, as well as producing a number of other negative effects for children. A major study of parent-child relationships in divorced families over two succeeding generations identified greater tensions between parents and their children in each of the three generations studied than in comparable intact families (Amato & Cheadle, 2005). Arditti (1999), however, reports greater warmth and closeness between divorced mothers and their daughters post parental divorce, lasting well into adulthood, compared with mother-daughter relationships in intact families.

There is a growing body of research that suggests many divorced fathers (often the non-resident parent) fail to maintain close relationships with their children, and that this can lead to a devastating erosion of family support (Amato, 1987; Kelly & Lamb, 2000). This may be due to fathers reducing their involvement (Emery & Dillon, 1994), maternal remarriage (Bray & Berger, 1993) and adversarial attitudes that mothers may adopt (Emery, Laumann-Billings, Waldron, Sbarra, & Dillon, 2001), such as becoming gatekeepers of the father's involvement after divorce (Pleck, 1997).

Changes to the legal system have made it easier for fathers to spend more time with their children following divorce (Emery, 2012), and there is an emphasis on the importance of children remaining in contact with their father and maintaining a good quality relationship with him. A meta-analysis of 57 studies found that children who had close and positive relationships with their fathers, with associated supportive parenting, benefited from regular contact and were more likely to be well-adjusted after parental divorce (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999). Less positive outcomes were seen for children who saw their father against a background of intense interparental conflict (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002).

Kelly and Emery's (2003) review of research suggests that children adjust in a more positive way when they are co-parented by parents who are able to communicate well and have a positive relationship with each other. Schaick and Stolberg (2001) describe how the impact of ruptured parental relationships affected emerging adults' – both male and female – capacity to develop intimate relationships. Mustonen, Huurre, Kiviruusu, Haukkala and Aro (2011) found that parental divorce was associated with "poorer intimate relationship quality" (p.3) for daughters but not for sons.

In emerging adulthood, major depressive disorder (MDD) is a leading cause of ill-health (Ferrari et al., 2013). Interpersonal domains such as chronic romantic relationship issues, chronic friendship stress and family conflict all predict an increased risk of depressive symptoms (Sheets & Craighead, 2014). These authors propose that interpersonal stress experiences may be more acute during the transition from adolescence to adulthood, as young people individuate from the family and are motivated to create new social networks (Arnett, 2004). Sheets and Craighead (2014) further state that the relationship between interpersonal difficulties and stress is important to understand given that early experiences impact future coping resources and functioning. Rather than using assessments reliant on self-reporting, respondents in this study will have the opportunity to make their own connections and apply meanings in relation to their experiences and sense of wellbeing.

Offspring of divorced parents are seen to have better outcomes if their parents are able to maintain positive co-parental relationships in the post-divorce years, despite the complications of living in separate households, and parents do not involve their children in arguments related to living arrangements, visitation and child support (Amato, 2012). Children often respond well to periods of sustained stability and need time and space to

establish new norms and relationships with parents' new partners (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002).

After parental divorce, some children experience little parental conflict, whereas others are burdened by continuing or intensified conflict (Ahrons, 2007; Hetherington and Kelly, 2002). Family dynamics such as high levels of parental conflict, poor parenting practices and poor parent-child relationships after divorce have been found to hinder children's adaptation to divorce and are more likely to result in negative emotional, behavioural, and health outcomes (Frosch & Mangelsdorf, 2001; Krishnakumar & Buehler, 2000).

1.4.6 The significance of family transitions for emerging adults

In the past twenty-five years, remarriage has become increasingly common (Amato, Booth, Johnson, & Rogers, 2007). Many studies have explored the impact of the 'blended' family, a family unit that includes one or more step-parents as a consequence of marriage, divorce and remarriage. There are both obvious benefits and challenges for blended families. While remarriage can provide stability, an improved economic situation and positive new relationships, divorce can also create the possibility for children to experience a continuous series of changes and disruptions (Kelly & Emery, 2003). For some, these new relationships are fraught with tension and conflict (Montgomery, Anderson, Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992).

Couples who remarry are at relatively higher risk of divorce than those in first marriages (Bulanda & Brown, 2007). Remarriages are not generally characterised by poorer relationship quality than first marriages (Amato et al., 2007), but increased rates of divorce may be explained by differences in attitudes towards divorce, as individuals who have

remarried following divorce reported more positive attitudes towards divorce than those who had not divorced.

Wallerstein and Lewis (2007) raise awareness of how stepchildren and biological children can be parented differently in the same family. The authors describe stepchildren's feelings of rejection when they perceive that they are not as 'important' as other children in the household. A central finding in their study is that "the instability of parenting during the post-divorce and remarriage years has a profound impact on children's development" (p.455). They argue that parenting can be stressed and potentially shattered by disorganised and unhappy life experiences, such as parental divorce. They put forward evidence that stepparents favour their biological children over their stepchildren (Hetherington et al.,1999). White (1994) is more positive, however, and finds that remarriage is likely to produce positive long-term effects such as family solidarity.

The notion that stability benefits children suggests that more research is needed to understand whether it is the addition of a step-parent that can cause distress or the number of transitions that the family experiences as it seeks that stability (Hetherington, 1987). Gamache (1997) argues that assumptions from the nuclear family model permeate our view of the stepfamily, and that confronting that bias can help stepfamily members to make the necessary relational and emotional transitions in a more positive way. Conversely, Aughinbaugh, Pierret and Rothstein (2005), in their quantitative study, suggest that marital transitions do not greatly affect behaviour or cognitive assessments; however, their study does not answer the question of how the marital instability of parents affects how emerging adults transition into being well-adjusted and productive adults. These discussions also encourage further exploration into how to understand the boundaries of where 'family' begin and end when including step-relations, former spouses, extended others and\or significant others.

Previous research has found family transitions to be correlated with attitudes towards divorce and marriage. Family transitions hold the potential to change emerging adults' attitudes. A study spanning thirty-one years and two generations provides support for the association between parental remarriage and more favourable views toward divorce in offspring (Cunningham & Thornton, 2005). More specifically, the characteristics of the biological parents' romantic relationship are no longer predictive of the emerging adults' attitudes toward marriage when the characteristics of their parents' remarriage are accounted for (Yu & Adler-Baeder, 2007).

1.4.7 Adjustment of offspring to parental divorce

Many studies all over the world have tried to understand the way that parents and their offspring cope with divorce. Most studies of the consequences of divorce have used large quantitative samples, comparing children from nuclear, intact families with children of divorced parents, or reports from parents about the way their children have coped during the divorce process (Amato et al., 1995; Amato & Afifi, 2006; Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991). The aim of these studies has been to identify both positive and negative developments that affect the wellbeing of children post-divorce.

In the past ten years, researchers have identified a number of factors that may moderate negative outcomes for the offspring of divorce and contribute to how well they make sense of and cope with experiences associated with their parents' divorce. These have included communication within the family (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980), the psychological adjustment of the custodial parent, usually the mother (Hetherington, 1999), and the quality of co-parenting (Amato, 2000, 2004), including the strength and type of relationship that children have with their non-resident parent, usually the father (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999).

A meta-analysis of 33 studies reported that children in joint custody arrangements were better adjusted generally, including emotionally, behaviourally and in academic achievement, than children in sole custody arrangements (Bauserman, 2002). In fact, children in joint custody were better adjusted regardless of the level of conflict between parents and did not differ from children in continuously married families (Kelly & Emery, 2003). Mothers are also more comfortable with higher levels of paternal contact than they were 20 years ago (King & Heard, 1999), perhaps reflecting changing family structures that allow, and even actively encourage, fathers to be more involved with child care and mothers to be in the workplace (Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1998).

Ahrons (2004) argues that divorce does not destroy families, and that "to better understand why some children thrive and others do not require us to look at a host of factors that mediate or intervene between the cause (the divorce) and the outcome" (p.51). She identifies some of these factors as individual differences, parents' emotional wellbeing, life changes, and the interparental relationship after divorce. Amato (2010) highlights the significance of quality in family relationships prior to marital dissolution, stating that for offspring exposed to high levels of marital conflict, parental divorce may be the better option.

Certainly, the picture of divorce is complex, both for the parents and children involved in a divorce. Before divorce, the principles that governed the parent-child relationship may not have been clarified or defined; the relationship may have just been lived and experienced. The required redefinition of those principles can often be a challenging and gradual process.

Luthar, Cicchetti, and Becker (2000) describe how greater cognitive capacity and higher self-esteem help to promote resilience in offspring during and after parental divorce, while Eldar-

Avidan et al. (2009) highlight factors such as positive parent-child relationships and stable financial circumstances that help offspring to adjust after parental divorce.

Despite the increased risk of negative outcomes for offspring of divorced parents, such as a deeper sense of loneliness (Wallerstein, Lewis & Blakeslee, 2000) and increased emotional difficulties (Kelly, 2000), the majority continue to fall within the average range of adjustment (Amato, 2001; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). If a family is able to see itself as being more challenged than damaged (Dunst, Trivette & Deal, 1994) and emerging adults are able to recognise their parents' ongoing parental responsibility and support, even during the most stressful periods of the divorce process, offspring of divorced parents are more likely to develop resilience and find ways of adjusting to their parents' divorce (Eldar-Avidan et al., 2009):

> *"First, the individual attempts to relate effectively to the environment in which he or she lives – by developing traits, skills, and behaviours that will bring success, happiness and other goals. Second, the individual will master the environment – that is, modify it for his or her own advantage" (Schwebel, Barocas, Reichman, & Schwebel, 1990, p.6).*

This definition suggests that offspring of divorced parents may develop strengths, skills and abilities to meet new challenges or new self-cognitions as a result of mastering the challenges that parental divorce can present (Gately & Schwebel, 1991).

1.5 Critiquing the 'Negative Outcomes' Literature

Hetherington and Kelly (2002) propose that the negative effects of divorce have been exaggerated and that most children recover without long-term harm. Laumann-Billings and Emery (2000) acknowledge that while most emerging adults coped and showed resilience,

greater distress was found in offspring of divorced parents around residency, loss of contact or distant relationships with their fathers, and parental conflict. Ahrons (2004) states that divorce does not have to destroy families and that it is possible to have a "good divorce" (2011, p,528).

Aspects of the divorce process, such as the nature of the breakdown of the parental relationship, parental conflict, parental state of mind, stability of economic resources, the introduction of new partners, and individual characteristics, can all have an effect on the shorter- and longer-term outcomes for the child (Kelly & Emery, 2003). However, Kelly and Emery (2003) go on to say that researchers need to look more closely at the varied evidence relating to the effects on children of divorce; they suggest that previous studies have confused correlation with cause, in that any psychological problems found among children of divorce are often portrayed as 'consequences' of divorce and results from often small and unrepresentative samples are overgeneralised. They suggest that "there is often a failure to distinguish between normative outcomes and individual differences in drawing implications for practice and policy, for example, by noting that the majority of children from divorced families are not 'at risk' and that family processes *after* divorce are strong predictors of risk versus resilience" (Kelly & Emery, 2003, p.352).

There remains some discussion about the severity of the long-term negative effects caused by high-conflict divorce on emerging adults' levels of distress (Amato, 1994, 2001). Furstenberg & Kieran (2004) suggest that moderate effects were seen in their study, while others recommended parenting support to reduce conflict and increase co-parenting skills after divorce (Rotter 2016). Despite acknowledging the difficult feelings that parental divorce can invoke in children and emerging adults, Amato (1999) reported 42% of adults from divorced families in his study had wellbeing scores above the average of adults from intact families.

He goes on to propose that the average estimated effect of divorce is moderate rather than strong, and that this is because children react to parental divorce in a variety of ways, which can also depend on how well their parents have adapted to the disruption (Amato, 2014).

1.6 Models Used to Explain the Literature

The research was influenced by the suggestion of Gately and Schwebel (1990) concerning how research questions about outcomes for offspring of divorced parents are framed and studied. They argue that if a study uses either conceptual or pathogenic models and methods to present the post-divorce family as a deviation from the traditional two-parent, nuclear family, or study clinical samples in a state of crisis immediately following the divorce, findings will most likely show that offspring of divorce are less well-adjusted (Kanoy & Cunningham, 1984; Kanoy, Cunningham, White, & Adams, 1984). This is why the present qualitative study is positioned as one of curious exploration, of attempting to get at the heart of the lived experience of the respondent through their own eyes, rather than through any pre-existing assumptions the study sets out to prove.

Drawing on the concept of stress, Wallerstein (1983a) and Peterson, Leigh, and Day (1984) develop models that could account for the absence of negative outcomes in children. Wallerstein acknowledges that parental divorce is a major life event that makes unique demands on children, but states that if children are able to make a series of adjustments, outcomes can be improved post-divorce. This model included children accepting the divorce and its permanence, relinquishing longing for the pre-divorce family, regaining a sense of direction and freedom to pursue normal daily activities, support in dealing with feelings of loss and rejection, and trust and confidence in the possibility of renewed relationships (Wallerstein, 1983a, 1983b). Of course, the divorce process may also include family conflict and compromised parenting (Block, Block, & Gjerde, 1986).

Gately and Schwebel (1991) propose that the Challenge Model, specifically designed to identify children's reactions to divorce, could be a way of supporting them as they navigate the process of their parents' divorce. The Challenge Model maintains that throughout the adjustment process, children's potential for growth is a function of the demands placed on them and that being 'stretched' may allow for a more confident experience of themselves. The model assumes that "children's adjustment to divorce is a dynamic, developmental process, the effect of the individual, family, environmental, and socio-cultural factors on children post-divorce outcomes varies with children's age and developmental level" (Gately & Schwebel, 1991, p.64).

The capacity for offspring to cope and manage the experience of parental divorce can be seen to be dependent on many different circumstances: the quality of the parental relationship pre- and post-divorce; the quality of attachments between children and their resident and non-resident parents, as well as any step-parents; parenting styles pre- and post-divorce; environmental influences, such as financial strain; and new parental partners, to name but a few.

1.7 Rationale for Current Study

This literature review considers empirical evidence on the adjustment of offspring of divorced parents from the perspective of the emotional and logistical difficulties that can arise, the type and extent of the risks observed for offspring of divorced parents when compared to children of continuously married parents, and factors that have been found to ameliorate risk for children and emerging adults during and after divorce.

The body of research that is focused on deepening understanding of the way that emerging adults experience divorce is relatively small. This study focuses on emerging adults, who are

in a critical developmental stage. The aim of the present study is to contribute to and enhance existing knowledge, based on the literature review, in order to provide insights into what the experience of parental divorce means and feels like to the emerging adult. The main purpose of this phenomenological research is to illuminate the specific and to obtain an in-depth understanding of respondents' experiences and unique points of view (Smith, 2004).

From this inquiry into the existing body of knowledge, a number of themes could be discerned that are related to emerging adults and their psychological well-being. These themes enhanced my thinking when developing the research questions. These included the impact of parental divorce on emerging adults' ability to flourish, loss of the ability to sustain emotional closeness, a reluctance to trust in and commit to personal relationships, taking on parental worries and concerns, loyalty conflicts, maintaining positive co-parental relationships after divorce and the risk of losing contact with a parent, most often the father.

This introduction chapter has further inspired me to reflect and further explore some of the multi-layered perspectives that have emerged in the current literature on how parental divorce impacts emerging adults. In the Methodology chapter, I will now consider how IPA will enable me to move closer to the lived experience of my respondents and to understand this phenomenon from their unique individual experience.

Chapter Two: Method

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the rationale for selecting a qualitative approach to my research, explains the reasons why Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was considered the most suitable approach for this study and illustrates how it was applied. I will describe in detail how the research was conducted and the reasoning behind the decision to use IPA. An assessment of the quality, integrity and validity of the research is proposed. Finally, I reflect on how my own thoughts, feelings and life experiences have shaped the research process, and my understanding of the experience of their parents' divorce for emerging adults.

The chapter also includes a reflection on how my understanding of the creation of knowledge is positioned, in relation to a phenomenological approach to obtaining and analysing data.

2.1.1 Research aim

This research investigates the lived experience of emerging adults who have encountered parental divorce. A qualitative methodology has been used in order to engage at a uniquely personal level with the respondents.

2.1.2 Objectives

The objectives of the research were to:

1. Engage with emerging adults who have experienced parental divorce
2. Reflect on their experiences
3. Consider the implications for practice

2.1.3 Research question

How do emerging adults experience parental divorce?

The following assumptions and preconceptions that may impact on my position as a researcher are acknowledged:

- I expect parental divorce to have had some effect, be it positive or negative, on the majority or all of the respondents.
- I expect that each of the respondents will be able to identify how they have been affected by parental divorce.
- I expect that each of the respondents will be able to talk freely and openly about their experiences.
- I expect that some issues may be hard to talk about and that this may affect the sharing of experiences, and consequentially the data collected.

I also acknowledge that my sample group cannot be fully representative of the population of emerging adults who have experienced parental divorce, as agreeing to be part of the study is a decision based on a variety of aspects of an individual's personality.

2.2 Rationale for Adopting a Qualitative Approach

A qualitative methodology was considered appropriate for a number of reasons. The aim of the study was explorative, rather than a confirmation or refutation of a predetermined set of hypotheses. This is in order to take part "in the construction and negotiation of meaning, and with quality and texture rather than cause and effect" (Willig, 2013, p.8). The focus of the research was "to interpret, make links and to capture the subjective 'feel' of the experience" (Willig, 2013, p.11). Using a qualitative approach, the research was intended to produce descriptions and explanations of the experience of parental divorce, facilitated by taking the position of critical realist as "qualitative approaches are engaged with exploring, describing and interpreting the personal and social experiences of respondents" (Smith, 2006, p.2).

The context of exploration throughout the study is also compatible with counselling psychology's focus on subjective experience and relational ways of being, as well as complementing an ideographic approach to understanding human experience; "insights are produced as a result of intensive and detailed engagement with individual cases" (Willig, 2013, p.87). It was necessary to find a methodological approach that would recognise the complexities of human experience and the world in which those experiences are played out:

> *"the world in which we find ourselves before we set out to calculate and measure it is not an inert or mechanical object but a living field, an open and dynamic landscape subject to its own moods and metamorphoses" (Abram, 1996, p.32).*

Qualitative approaches also acknowledge that knowledge is situated in time, people and place and that the complexity of social, cultural and economic factors influences the individual to produce their experience and understanding of that knowledge. Qualitative methods can give a voice to human beings, where the researcher is encountered as an "impassioned listener, not a dispassionate scientist" (Orford, 2008, p.12).

In contrast, the quantitative paradigm is rooted in positivistic methods that assume an unbiased and passive observer and do not take into account the influence of the researcher (Langridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2009). Whilst the qualitative approach ensures that the researcher remains accountable through the process of reflexivity (Griffin, 1995), quantitative research tends to make attempts to explain '"what happens' in events, while qualitative research tends to focus on how people 'make sense' of the event" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p.44-45).

2.3 Philosophy of Research and Epistemological Position

2.3.1 Selection of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Ontology and epistemology are concerned with the consideration of truth and knowledge, and how to provide answers to "how, and what, can we know" (Willig, 2003, p.4). For qualitative research using IPA, it is a challenge to apply a single epistemological position. The aim of this research study is to understand and explore respondents' experiences of parental divorce, and just as there will not be only one way of describing that experience, there will not be only one method of interpreting it.

There are a number of ways of 'understanding' acquired knowledge, and various epistemological positions have been suggested to be used with IPA (Willig, 2001). The aim of utilising IPA in research is to produce knowledge of what and how people think about a certain phenomenon (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006), what the human experience is actually like, and especially which things are the most important to us (Smith, 2009). IPA is designed to investigate, in detail, the way that an individual reflects on a significant event and how they make sense of it (Larkin et al., 2009).

When considering how an individual may describe their experience, it might be assumed that this is their 'true' version and that this aspect of IPA supports a 'realist' approach to knowledge production: that reality exists independently of our explanations of it (Willig, 2001). While the focus of IPA is the individual experience, no theoretical assumptions are made about what can be learned from such descriptions, as they are unique to that individual (Larkin et al., 2006). The potential for openness and flexibility that IPA can provide in order to make sense of a significant event is grounded, however, in the experiential, exploratory

nature of the approach (Larkin et al., 2006), and this aspect of IPA supports a more relativist ontology (Willig, 2001).

Several theoretical perspectives have influenced the development of IPA as a research method, including phenomenology, hermeneutics and ideography. IPA draws on each of these main theories. One of the advantages of IPA is that it allows for a rigorous and comprehensive analysis of accounts from individuals as they deal with specific circumstances in their lives (Larkin et al., 2006).

In this study, I will interpret the stories of my respondents as possessing multiple realities, acknowledging both their reality and their interpretations of it. I therefore position myself as a critical realist. Willig (2013) acknowledges that the critical realist aims to get to the heart of an experience, while understanding that the data gathered may not shed direct light upon the issue and that, while experience is always a product of interpretation, it is completely real to the person who describes it. Rather than adhering to a positivist/realist epistemology, critical realism recognises that human perception, cognition and ideology impact on our interpretation of the world (Caldwell, 2003).

IPA fits with my epistemological position as a critical realist, as I believe there is a reality to an individual's experience and IPA allows for that reality to be explored. IPA also supports social constructionism's claim that "sociocultural and historical processes are central to how we experience and understand our lives, including the stories we tell about these lives" (Eatough & Smith, 2008, p.184). Therefore, when thinking about the ontology of IPA, it could be seen to be located in a centre-ground position compared to a more positivist or more interpretivist approach, in the "less strong form of social constructionism" (Smith, et al., 2009, p.196).

2.3.2 Philosophical perspective: The critical realist approach

In this study, I felt locked in a 'battle' with myself as to how I was going to understand and interpret both my own and my respondents' 'realities'. I considered at length how to position the knowledge gained from this study. I accepted that realism and relativism represent two distinct perspectives on a continuum between objective reality at one end and multiple realities on the other, and that both positions are problematic for qualitative research.

Adopting a realist position ignores the way the researcher constructs interpretations of the findings, and assumes that what is reported is a true and faithful interpretation of a knowable and independent reality. Relativism, meanwhile, leads to the conclusion that nothing can ever be known for certain, that there are multiple realities, with none having precedence over the others in terms of claims to represent an ultimate truth about social phenomena.

2.3.3 Ontological position

Critical realism "is a meta-theory for social sciences. It is concerned with aspects of the philosophy of science, ontology, epistemology and aetiology, along with conceptions of what constitutes an explanation, a prediction, of what the objectives of social science should be" (Fleetwood, 2013). Critical realism acknowledges the existence of an independent reality, a world that has an existence independent of our perception of it, but denies that there can be direct access to that reality, emphasising instead the representation, not reproduction, of social phenomena. Representation implies that the critical realist position will be from the perspective of the researcher, thereby implicitly acknowledging reflexivity, which is that researchers influence the research process; just as respondents' interpretations of past

experiences will impact on the information they give in the research interview, my own lived experiences will influence the wording and focus of my questions and my interpretation of the data.

In my work as a trainee counselling psychologist, I have found that I do believe in the 'truth' of my clients' experiences and the stories that they tell, that this is their 'reality'. Just as I hear from my clients, I also hear how my respondents position themselves in relation to their father, mother, brother, sister, friend and that they appear to interpret their feelings and emotions in terms of those ever-changing relationships and contexts as 'their truth'. I have also come to understand this to be a way of making sense of ourselves in relation to others, and that we have identities that are constructed in the context of those relationships.

This thinking has been influenced by social constructionist theory, that, as Burr (1995) suggests, our identity originates not from inside the person but from the social domain. Berger and Luckmann propose that "socialisation takes place through significant others who mediate the objective reality of society, and render it meaningful and, in this way, it is internalised by individuals" (1991, p.34).

2.3.4 Epistemological position: The social constructionist approach

Social constructionism is a theory of knowledge that attempts to come to terms with the nature of reality and the way in which individuals participate in the creation of their perceived social reality. (Andrews, 2012). Social constructionism, as explained by Berger and Luckmann (1991) makes no ontological claims, confining itself to the social construction of knowledge, thus making epistemological claims only. According to Kukla (2000), members of a society together invent the properties of the world they inhabit.

Constructionists such as Schwandt (2003) view knowledge and truth as created, not discovered, by the mind. This is consistent with the ideas of Berger and Luckmann (1991) who propose that reality is socially situated and constructed through interaction with others and that this reality refers to the subjective experience of everyday life; people develop understanding through experiences and interactions with others.

Social constructionism involves looking at the ways in which social phenomena are created, institutionalised, and made into tradition by humans. A socially constructed reality is seen as an ongoing, dynamic process that is reproduced by people acting on their interpretation and knowledge of it (Arabiun, 2010).

The type of knowledge that social constructionists aspire to is not concerned with "how things really are, or even about how they are experienced by individuals, but rather knowledge about the *process* by which such 'knowledge' is constructed in the first place" (Willig, 2013). The respondents in this study sought to make sense of their experience through their own interpretation of events and the meanings that they draw from these events. In turn, their own actions may be seen by others as being meaningful. It is my role as the researcher to seek to understand the subjective reality of these respondents in order to make sense of and understand their motives, actions and intentions in a meaningful way.

According to Willig (2013), "Social constructionism problematises given constructs such as 'psychological variables", it questions their validity and is concerned with exploring the various ways in which they are made real". In this study, a phenomenological perspective has been taken In order to fully explore the experience of parental divorce for emerging adults. A phenomenological perspective is one that captures information relating to respondents' subjective experiences: "the quality and texture of that experience" (Willig, 2013, p8.),

accounting for the sense of self as being: "constituted by a multitude of contextual influences, gendered, cultural, historical, political, linguistic and any account of the world that is open to critique, re-interpretation and re-negotiation" (Lyddon, 1998, p.556).

As Wallerstein wrote in her book 'The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce', "From the beginning, my interest has been in the inner world of these people, I've tried to see the world through their eyes" (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989, Introduction p.xxxii). Holding these words in mind, I decided to use a phenomenological approach in order to understand more about the respondents' lived experiences ande reflected on the process of knowledge formulation that occurred as a result. This included conceptualising the knowledge from a critical realist perspective: "there is a real world that exists independently of our perceptions, theories and constructions" (Maxwell, 2013, p.10). It has been useful to appreciate, however, that access to experience is both partial and complex and "any account is always constructed by the researcher and the respondent and tries to get as close to the respondent's view as is possible" (Larkin et al., 2006, p.104).

2.4 Principles and Limitations of IPA

IPA is a phenomenological approach that is committed to the detailed "examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences" (Smith et al., 2009, p.13). It involves the development of themes through a process of reading and analysis (Smith & Osborn, 2007). The influence of Husserl and Heidegger on phenomenology is seen through the emphasis on examination and interpretation, and the role of both respondent and researcher in this dynamic process; "Experience should be examined in the way that it occurs, and on its own terms" (Smith et al., 2009, p.12).

Husserl (1927, p.121) argued that "focusing on our psychic life would help us to go back to the things themselves" and therefore allow us to identify the essential features of a phenomenon. He proposed that we needed to 'bracket' or "put to one side the taken-for-granted world in order to concentrate on our perception of that world" (Smith et al., 2009, p.13).

Heidegger aimed to understand what constituted being 'human being', or what he described as "Daesin" (1927/1962, p.93), which is more accurately translated as 'existence'. Heidegger was concerned with the question of human existence and how the individual navigates the world. For Heidegger, Daesin is "thrown into the world of people and objects, language and culture and cannot be meaningfully detached from it" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p.94). "Daesin is essentially being-with" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p.156-157) and "relatedness to the world is a fundamental part of our constitution" (Larkin et al., 2006, p.106).

Both of Husserl's and Heidegger's concepts have contributed to the study of the experience of what it is to be a human being. Husserl's work focused on the process of reflection and the systemic examination of the lived experience, while Heidegger sees the human being as situated in a context that consists of relationships, language and people through a hermeneutic lens. "As such, a researcher's sense-making is second order; he/she only has access to the participant's experience through the participant's own account of it" (Smith et al., 2009, p.3).

Like many forms of qualitative research however, IPA has been criticised for its practical and conceptual limitations (Willig, 2008). Issues have been raised regarding the length of time required for the analytical process, and the depth such an analysis is able to provide (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). Another frequent criticism is that adequate guidelines do not exist on how

to specifically manage reflexivity and the influence of the researcher's belief system, assumptions and experiences on the analysis of the data. However, Smith and Osborn (2007) argue that IPA is a flexible, inductive approach and as such allows for a loose interpretation of method and analysis, as it is the in-depth exploration of phenomena that is the focus of an IPA study.

A further aspect of IPA that has been challenged is its emphasis on cognition (Willig, 2013). Smith (1996) argues that as IPA is concerned with understanding how a person makes sense of an experience, it is also able to make links with underlying cognitions, such as the beliefs, ideas and hopes that the person uses to construct themselves as a thinking, feeling person in the world. This suggests that to understand a person's cognition (the mental processes involved in gaining knowledge and comprehension) is to be able to make sense of their experiences. Willig (2013) challenges this paradigm as being incompatible with the phenomenological focus on pre-cognitive aspects of experience, and proposes that this chain of connection is complicated by the fact that people struggle to explain what they are thinking and feeling. If feelings are vague or unformulated, or cause too much distress, this may result in the researcher needing to adopt a more interpretive stance to understand the experience.

Another criticism of IPA is the role of language. There is an assumption that the respondent will have the ability to communicate the possibly complex and distressing nature of his or her experience; they may not, however, be accustomed to describing their feelings, emotions and thoughts clearly and articulately. It could be argued therefore that interpretations of that experience can only be accessed through the ability of the respondent to express them (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). Willig (2007) argues that language is not the way that we express how we think or feel, but it stipulates what we can think or feel: "the conceptualization of language in much phenomenological research can be criticised for not engaging sufficiently

with its constitutive role" (Willig, 2013, p.94). However, despite these potential limitations, one of the strengths of IPA is its recognition that contextual factors influence the way an individual constructs meaning. It has been argued that this can result not only in unique experiences being uncovered, but also in revealing the shared aspects of an experience across individuals that result from the "external forces within a culture" (Shaw, 2001, p.12).

2.5 IPA and Idiography

An important influence on IPA has been idiography. This is concerned with a distinct commitment to a focused level of detail and the analysis of a distinct phenomenon in a carefully selected small sample; "Idiography is focused on the particular" (Smith et al., 2009, p.29). Transcripts are analysed, case by case and systematically, based upon distinct words and expressions used by respondents. Idiography facilitates the examination of a single case, such as the individual experience of parental divorce, as well as more general claims about the nature of divorce. The phenomenological approach can be understood as considering experience to be "uniquely embodied, situated and perspectival", but can also be a "worldly and relational phenomenon immersed and embedded in a world of things and relationships" (Smith et al., 2009, p.18).

2.6 IPA and Hermeneutics

IPA acknowledges that the researcher's view of the world is present throughout the research process. IPA does not disregard the researcher's values and beliefs, but instead views these as an essential part of understanding and making sense of the person's experiences. In order for the research to be as unbiased as possible, it is essential that these subjective attitudes should be reflected upon and made explicit (Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie,1999). IPA acknowledges the

central role of interpretation in the research process. Beyond this, "the accessing of the 'whole' and any given 'part' of the whole is described as being a 'double hermeneutic'" (Smith et al., 2009, p.35): the researcher is making sense of the respondent making sense of the phenomena. "The researcher is like the participant, a human drawing on resources to make sense of the world" (Smith et al., 2009, p.36).

As stated in Ricoeur's study (1970), another way IPA uses a 'double hermeneutic' is that IPA holds two positions, the hermeneutics of 'empathy' and of 'suspicion', in order to examine phenomena in greater detail. Smith (2004) and Larkin et al. (2006) have suggested a central position of remaining 'empathic' and 'questioning' when employing IPA, and that this can be interpreted as 'understanding' (Smith et al., 2009, p.36) when trying to make sense of what is being said.

IPA is also influenced by symbolic interactionism (Eatough & Smith, 2008). Symbolic interactionism is a theoretical perspective that describes people's behaviour in terms of the meanings that they apply to things. Eatough and Smith (2008) describe these meanings as being created through interaction with others and propose that an interpretive process can be used to make sense of them. In this way, "people form new meanings and new ways to respond and thus are active in shaping their own future through the process of interpreting meaning" (Benzies & Allen, 2001, p.544).

2.7 IPA and Counselling Psychology

For this study, IPA was considered the most suitable method to analyse data in this study, in order to get as close as possible to the lived experience of parental divorce for each respondent. Using IPA, it was possible to "focus on the uniqueness of a person's experiences, how experiences are made meaningful and how these meanings manifest themselves within

the context of the person both as an individual and in their many cultural roles" (Shaw, 2001, p.25).

IPA is an approach that also supports the position I take as a trainee counselling psychologist, particularly in the interview process. I do not think of myself as the expert but as the 'explorer', seeking out the nature and meaning of my clients' experiences, while also enabling them to make sense of them. Smith et al. (2009, p.79) suggest that "IPA has not prescribed a single 'method' for working with the data and that the essence of IPA lies in the analytic process". I would also propose that there is no one way of listening to and interpreting a client's experiences, and that a story can be heard from multiple perspectives.

IPA was considered a suitable method for this research because the aim of the study was to explore and understand the experience of divorce without any preconceived ideas or theories that could influence the conclusions drawn. This approach allowed me to embody a way of being that I recognised in my work as a counselling psychologist. I am aware of my automatic use of active listening skills to get as close as I can to each respondent's lived experience, with the aim not to contaminate the data with any input I may be tempted to contribute myself. I noted the value of being present in the pauses and silences throughout the interview as a way of creating new meanings and a greater depth of understanding of the phenomenon of parental divorce. I embraced a phenomenological attitude, as I do in my clinical practice, in order to experience the richness of the respondent's "lifeworld", suggesting an individual's pre-reflective experience (Smith et al., 2009).

I was able to use my training and clinical experience to assess the potential risks to the respondent's state of mind and I aimed to provide a safe and compassionate space to mitigate any distress or sadness that may be expressed. Some respondents' did become tearful as they

described their experiences and I ensured that they felt supported and able to continue, ensuring I complied with empathetic, ethical research practices. This process again aligns with my clinical practice, where I undertake to understand the client's experiences from an inquiring and curious position rather than an all-knowing one.

This way of thinking resonated within the research context (Smith et al., 2009) and I felt comfortable with this way of being. I was also mindful of ensuring that any power imbalance between myself and the respondent was addressed (Finlay, 2002a). I managed this in the same way as I manage the power imbalance between myself and my clients. I reminded each respondent that I was there to listen and that I wished them to act as my guide. I believe this demonstrated that I respect and value each individual prepared to share their inner thoughts, feelings and emotions with me.

2.8 IPA Compared to Other Qualitative Methods

2.8.1 IPA versus quantitative research

This study sought only to understand and interpret each respondent's reflections in the light of their own experiences. Whilst there are extensive studies on the impact of divorce on self-esteem (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001; Cartwright, 2006), depression (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989; Aro & Palosaari, 1992) and fear of intimacy (Schaik & Stolberg, 2001; Richardson & McCabe, 2001), there are few that allow for an openness of lived experience and for the discovery of the 'unexpected' (Schweitzer & Steel, 2008). IPA focuses on the subjective experience of each respondent and is concerned with understanding, not explaining (McLeod, 2011).

A quantitative study, on the other hand, is concerned with objective measurements that generate measurable data. These data are transferred into statistics in order to identify cause-

effect relationships guided by positivist ideas (Willig, 2013, p.8). A quantitative approach could be used to survey a much larger sample population than a qualitative study, thus allowing for a broader but more general study. A qualitative approach is concerned with examining, in specific detail, individual experiences, which is the aim of this study. However, in consequence, no claims can be made regarding the generalisability of the results.

2.8.2 IPA versus grounded theory

Willig (2008) and Smith et. al. (2009) consider grounded theory to be the most similar to IPA in its approach. Grounded theory was first developed by Glaser and Strauss in their 1967 book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, written both to question the assumptions of positivism and to argue in support of qualitative approaches to research.

Both IPA and grounded theory aim to represent a person's view of the world. Willig (2008), however, argues that IPA differs from grounded theory in that the goal of grounded theory is to develop a theory of social processes rather than to understand individual personal experiences at a deep level. 'Grounded theory researchers set out to generate a theoretical level account of a particular phenomenon', (Smith et al., 2009, p.201). In contrast, IPA is likely to offer a more detailed analysis of the lived experience of a smaller sample of respondents.

For the purpose of this study, IPA was applied as I was not seeking to develop a theory or framework in order to understand the phenomenon of parental divorce. I was seeking to understand and explore the essential nature of an individual's experience of that phenomenon.

2.8.3 IPA versus Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA)

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) was first propounded in the work of Michel Foucault as a way of exploring language and its role in the "constitution of social and psychological life" (Willig, 2008, p.130). Whilst our interpretations of experience are inevitably positioned in language, IPA's primary attention is to explore experience rather than discursive processes:

> *"While IPA studies provide a detailed experiential account of the person's involvement in the context, FDA offers a critical analysis of the structure of the context itself and thus touches on the resources available to the individual in making sense of their experience" (Smith et al., 2009, p.196).*

In the context of my study, discourse analysis could have been used to explore ways in which the respondents use discursive resources to construct their experience of parental divorce. This, however, was not the aim. I sought to explore detailed and particular descriptions provided by individuals in relation to their experience of parental divorce.

2.9 Rationale for Applying a Phenomenological Methodology

In this study I applied a phenomenological approach to allow each respondent's unique voice to be heard. "A phenomenological methodology involves the collection of naturalistic first-person accounts and recognises the influence of the researcher on the data-collection and analytical process" (Langdridge, 2007, p.4). Phenomenology is both a philosophy and a family of research methodologies concerned with exploring and understanding human experience in respondents' own terms. The specific focus for phenomenology is that it is "a return to the things themselves" (Husserl, 1927, cited in Smith et al., 2009, p.12).

My research is concerned with gaining deeper understanding of the experience of parental divorce for my respondents, allowing their voices to be heard with as little interference as possible. They are the experts on their own experience, or "co-researchers" (Moustakas,

1994, p.110). It is in the telling and hearing of the story that the phenomenon is explored; one does not come without the other.

2.10 Personal Reflexivity

Throughout the study I am mindful of how my own attitudes and values may influence the interpretations that I make in response to the stories, feelings and emotions that are shared with me by the respondents. "Reflexivity can be defined as thoughtful, conscious self - awareness. Reflective analysis in research encompasses continual evaluation of subjective responses, intersubjective dynamics, and the research process itself" (Finlay, 2002b, p.532).

Shaw (2010) proposes that reflexivity is integral to experiential qualitative research, as it allows for public scrutiny of the integrity of the research and strengthens the trustworthiness of the findings. In showing my reflexivity throughout this study, rather than only during the collecting and analysing of the data, a critical degree of transparency is provided and insight into my decision making and engagement with the research is made possible.

As a researcher in a qualitative study, I am aware of how I will influence the information that I will hear, interpret and analyse. Finlay (2002a) suggests that in this way, we are viewed as co-constructing the knowledge we acquire. I have continually reflected on my motivations, interests and assumptions concerning the topic of parental divorce, as well as my relationship to it; "the researcher needs to consider how his/her values, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments, wider aims in life and social identities have shaped the research" (Willig, 2008, p.10).

I am a middle class Caucasian woman, a wife, a mother, a daughter, a friend, a sister, a trainee counselling psychologist, a nurse and a theoretical thinker positioned in a particular

race, ethnicity, society, culture, socioeconomic group, religion, family and education level, and I am mindful of how the biases that all these influences have instilled in me will unconsciously or consciously affect my abilities as a researcher in this study. I acknowledge that the assumptions, beliefs, on-going interactions and experiences that I share with my family will impact on the questions that I ask and the information that I attend to, and I have reflected continually on this throughout the study.

Finlay (2002a) suggests that personal reflexivity should begin the moment the research idea is formulated. I am keenly interested in the meaning of family for the individual and the influence of family structures post-divorce. I consider this research an important opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the effect of parental divorce on emerging adults. I am not from a divorced family, and there are no incidences of divorce in my family going back three generations. I have been married for twenty-three years but am continually aware of the challenges that a long-term relationship faces in the personal, political and social world that it inhabits.

Family can be described as a 'construct' positioned in a very particular social, cultural, political and socio-economic context that is regional, fluid and not easy to classify. Every member of every family will experience it in their own particular way; no one family is the same. I have always been moved by the first line of Leo Tolstoy's Anna Karenina, and each time I look at it, I reflect on both the singularity of each family unit and its interconnectivity: "All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way" (1961, p.13).

I was aware at times of wishing to respond in interviews with clients more as a trainee counselling psychologist than as a researcher. In IPA research, however, the act of offering any feedback (Kvale,1996) is discouraged, as it interrupts the respondent's narrative flow and

may lead to responses that would not otherwise have been expressed (Smith et al., 2009). I consciously attempted to notice and withhold from demonstrating empathy or making observations on process issues such as their body language, but this required constant effort and attention. I appreciate that this was an issue throughout all the interviews and I reflected at times on how much this may have inhibited my capacity to be fully present and in the moment whilst listening.

Throughout my study, I used my diary as a way of identifying thoughts and feelings that may have interfered with the research process in that moment, clouded my perception of parental divorce or otherwise side-tracked me. This gave me a valuable way of recording my assumptions without asserting them as true, at the risk of falsely interpreting the data.

I also wrote thoughts about each respondent after the interview and was able to use this during the analytic process and access parts of myself that had been evoked in both a positive and negative way.

2.11 Data Collection

2.11.1 Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted in order to assess whether the interview questions were appropriate and insightful as a method of eliciting rich and descriptive phenomena regarding the experience of divorce. The questions were discussed with my supervisor for the study and then an interview was carried out with an individual who is known to me and who has experienced parental divorce. This enabled me to practice interview techniques in a semi-structured interview using open-ended questions. In my pilot study, I was then able to explore how a respondent may answer the initial interview questions and the process of reflecting on their experiences, thoughts and feelings.

This was also an opportunity to receive feedback on the experience of being a respondent in the study, and whether any distress or potential difficulties emerged. In this instance, I only used the first of the questions on the schedule: "What was it that encouraged you to be part of this study?" The respondent spoke with barely a pause for a full forty-five minutes about her experience of divorce and what she perceived to be the most resonant features of that experience. I believe that the IPA method supported my desire for freedom and flexibility to explore the very individual and particular quality of that experience with the depth and rigour that I sought (Smith et al., 2009). This initial response suggested that further questions along the same lines would be a fruitful avenue for the main research.

The pilot study reminded me of the need for extra vigilance in watching for signs of any distress that this subject matter might cause the interviewee, as it was clear that discussing such a topic could cause heightened emotions. It also gave me confidence and a sense of excitement about the breadth and depth of experience that could be facilitated in the eight interviews planned for the study. I was interested to find that the less I spoke, the more open and unencumbered by the process the respondent appeared to be. I recognised, however, the need to steer the interview occasionally, in order to focus on my research question, as at times, I became aware of the respondent leading me into other aspects of their family's story that were not relevant to the present study. I realised that if I were to include interview questions, they would need to strike a balance between allowing freedom of expression and the requirement to obtain answers to the research question.

2.11.2 Sampling and respondents

The way that data were collected for this study was based on purposive sampling, as opposed to 'random' or 'probability' sampling, in which each respondent was carefully selected because they shared the experience of a particular event to which the research question was

relevant (Reid et al., 2005). All respondents were aged between eighteen and twenty-five years and had experienced parental divorce at some point in their lives.

Because the main aim of IPA is to construct a detailed account of an individual's experience, this study had a specific focus on a small number of respondents. Sample size can vary in studies following IPA methodology. In the studies reviewed by Brocki and Wearden (2006), the use of smaller sample sizes is recommended. In this study, eight respondents were recruited for the main sample, with one respondent recruited for the pilot study.

With a small number of respondents, it was useful to think in terms of a defined group for whom the research questions would be meaningful (Shinebourne, 2011). Respondents who would be available to attend interviews in London were recruited, as that enabled me to meet with them. For ethical and professional reasons, respondents who were currently receiving therapy at the time of the study were not included in the study. This was to ensure that respondents who might already feel overwhelmed with difficult feelings related to their parents' divorce would not be placed under any further duress.

2.11.3 Inclusion criteria

1) Must be a British adult (4 male and 4 female) aged 18-25 years
2) Must have experienced parental divorce at some point
3) Must be English speaking

2.11.4 Exclusion criteria

1) Any respondent who is known to have had therapeutic intervention in the past, or to be involved in therapy sessions at the time of the study. This is justified by concern for the psychological wellbeing of the respondent, as if the client has previously

received therapy, I would be concerned that the interview may cause increased distress.

2) Any respondent known to the researcher. This is justified for ethical reasons and because it was important that the case studies and data gathered were not influenced in any way.

2.11.5 Recruitment

In order to try to permit the broadest cross section of society to participate in the research, a number of services, such as educational, sports, dance and music venues, including, for example, Willesden Sports Centre and City, University of London, were approached to hand out flyers and put up posters to advertise the opportunity to be involved in the research project (see *Appendix A: Flyer*). I was not successful in recruiting respondents from any of these locations.

'Snowballing' was then used. This refers to a method of selecting potential respondents based on whether they know of other individuals with relevant characteristics and experiences who might be approached. This was successful, as each respondent then contacted me asking if they could recommend a friend or work colleague to take part in the study. Once an individual responded to the poster or flyer, the criteria for inclusion in the study were checked and the research was explained to the potential participant in a telephone conversation. This was considered to be an important safeguard for all parties. Smith et al. (2009) suggest that "one must always evaluate the extent to which simply talking about sensitive issues might constitute 'harm' for any particular participant group" (p.53). Risk was assessed in an informal manner during telephone conversations. Direst questions were asked as to whether the respondent was in or had been in therapy, and the content of their responses

was considered in relation to clinical knowledge. All potential respondents that I spoke to informed me that they felt psychologically able and were looking forward to participating in the study. I noted no cause for concern with any of the individuals that I spoke with concerning the study and none of the respondents withdrew at any point over the course of the research. Respondents who met the eligibility criteria and wished to participate were then sent an information sheet (see *Appendix B: Information Sheet*) to ensure that they fully understood what their participation would involve, and a written informed consent form was signed by them when they attended the interview (see *Appendix C: Consent Form*). The consent form outlined the respondents' agreement to the recording, storing, transcription, analysis and publication of the data. Respondents were also advised that all notes would be coded and that no identifying information would be included.

Whilst the risks of using a snowballing approach are acknowledged, in that, for example, respondents may not be representative of the general population, the use of the procedure to reach a population that is considered difficult to engage with was considered an appropriate solution. This approach would best enable me to obtain answers to the questions and meet the research objectives.

2.11.6 Respondent information

See the following table for the personal details of each respondent who took part in the present study.

Table 1: Individual respondent data

Pseudonym	Age at interview	Gender	Siblings	Ethnic origin

Sam	24	M	1(F)	South American
Rosie	21	F	1(M)	Caucasian British
Zac	25	M	3(F)	Asian British
Hope	23	F	1(F)	Caucasian British
Tom	25	M	1(F)	Asian British
Sylvia	23	F	3(M)	Caucasian British
Dave	25	M	2(F)	Caucasian British
Lucy	25	F	2(M)	Caucasian British

The research describes the experiences of eight emerging adults aged between 18 and 25. Five of the respondents were Caucasian, two were British Asian and one was from a South American country. Respondents experienced their parents' divorce between the ages of 6 and 20.

2.11.7 Interview procedure

As described above, one of the most relevant benefits of IPA for this study was its ability to reveal unanticipated phenomena. The methods of data collection encouraged a flexible, idiographic, detailed and open-ended interview style. Data were gathered through one-to-one semi-structured interviews of between 60 and 90 minutes, using the guidelines suggested by Smith et al. (2009). The open-ended research questions (see *Appendix D: Interview Questions*) formed the basis for as open a discussion as possible, with the researcher speaking as little as possible in order for the respondent to not feel restricted or distracted, or be interrupted.

The interview schedule was designed with the aim that the respondent would feel comfortable and encouraged to express any thoughts, ideas and feelings about their experience of parental divorce that emerged, which could then be explored in greater depth (Smith & Osborn, 2003). I wished to use as flexible a method as possible, as this allowed a richer source of knowledge to be gathered as respondents were encouraged to describe their experience in as relaxed and free flowing a way as possible, and for the researcher to have the freedom to follow any number of interesting topics that emerged.

Questions were developed within an IPA framework to focus on a reflection by each individual on their lived experience (Smith et al., 2009) and although it is acknowledged that the data gained are a function of the questions asked (Brocki & Wearden, 2006), several respondents in this study described phenomena entirely unrelated to the questions. My supervisor regularly provided feedback on the interview schedule and their suggestions were taken into account. As Smith et al. contend:

> *"Unexpected turns are often the most valuable aspects of interviewing: on the one hand, they tell us something we did not even anticipate needing to know; on the other, because they arise unprompted, they may well be of particular importance to the respondent" (Smith et al., 2009, p.58).*

I was mindful of the way my assumptions and bias can affect the research questions asked, and that this in turn can influence the findings (Larkin et al., 2006). Care was taken to reflect on the questions with my supervisor and peers to ensure that they were not leading or unhelpfully shaped by me. Furthermore, I aimed to be led through the narrative as much as possible by the respondent, in order to prevent the data from being unduly influenced by me.

It is relevant to consider the similarities between the practice of counselling psychology and the interview process for a qualitative study. My experience as a trainee counselling

psychologist helped me to show empathy, unconditional positive regard and curiosity throughout the research process, which appeared to support and encourage the generation of the rich data I was seeking. Throughout each interview, I was mindful, however, of the context in which they were set, and made every attempt to ensure that the interview would not be perceived by the respondent as a therapy session.

It has been suggested that qualitative interviews may have a therapeutic impact on respondents, as the experience of reflection may be a positive or thought-provoking one (Kvale, 1996). Conversely, the interview should not impact the respondent negatively, leaving them feeling unsettled or vulnerable. If this occurs, the interview should be terminated, and the respondent should be given information about accessing appropriate help if needed. In this study, none of the respondents expressed a desire to conclude their interview.

Each interview was recorded on a digital recorder and transcribed verbatim and took place in a setting that was convenient for the respondent. Each interview started by reiterating the information on the information sheet explaining the process of the interview and encouraging the respondent to talk freely and as openly as they felt able to about their experience of parental divorce. Respondents were asked if they had any questions, and were then requested to sign the consent form.

Respondents were advised that if at any point they felt upset by the interview process or wished to take a break, they could request a break in the interview. They were also reminded that the aspects of their experience they discussed was at their discretion. Before the interview ended, the respondent was given a final opportunity to add anything further about their experience and were then debriefed concerning the experience of the interview, in case

they were feeling anxious or agitated about any of their reflections (see *Appendix E: Debrief Form*). Respondents were then reminded that on the information sheet there was a list of counselling services and telephone numbers to contact, along with the contact details of the researcher and supervisor.

2.11.8 Ethical considerations

The experience of divorce can raise complex and often disturbing emotions, feelings and thoughts, and the nature of qualitative research, particularly IPA, suggests that the respondent may find themselves describing sensitive personal issues.

All procedures followed were in accordance with the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2009) and Health Professions Council (HPC, 2008) or Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC, 2012) ethical codes. Full ethical approval was granted for this research by the Department of Psychology of City, University of London (see *Appendix H: Ethics Form*). The research upheld the ethical principles of respect for the autonomy and dignity of persons, scientific value, social responsibility, and maximising benefit and minimising harm, as stated by the British Psychological Society in their 'Code of Human Research Ethics' (2010) document.

Respondents' data were stored on an external hard drive according to the requirements of the relevant data protection legislation (BPS, 2010) in a password-protected computer file. This hard drive file was then locked in a cupboard in the researcher's house and then destroyed six months after the study was completed.

Respondents signed a written consent form after the respondents were fully informed about the purpose of the study, how the study would be performed and how their data would be used and stored. There was no deception and respondents had the right to withdraw before,

during and after was confirmed without fear of being penalised. The respondents understood that the research would include verbatim extracts of the interview transcripts but would remain anonymous. The respondents understood that the study could be published within six months. Throughout the study, the respondents were encouraged to express any concerns that they may have about their involvement and that these would be taken seriously. Respondents were informed that they could choose to withdraw at any time before, during or after the study. In the event, none of the respondents voiced any concerns about their experience or wished to withdraw from the study.

The possibility of the interview causing distress was discussed before the interview, and a debriefing was undertaken after each interview. I encouraged each respondent to contact me if they wished to talk through the experience in any way. In terms of safeguarding, I ensured that I informed a colleague of my whereabouts for each interview.

It was agreed that I would remain vigilant to any difficulties, such as raised levels of emotion, that the respondent might experience as a result of the interview, and that this would be openly discussed with the respondent should I have any concerns during the interview. Respondents were reminded of the counselling services and other sources of support on the information sheet, and given the contact details of the researcher and supervisor should any concerns arise during or after the study.

2.12 Analytical Strategy

2.12.1 Coding

While IPA provides a flexible framework of processes and strategies for analysis (Shinebourne, 2011), Smith et al. (2009) suggest that there is no definitive way to process

data. In the case of IPA, the researcher pays particular attention to how the respondent makes sense of their experiences.

Overall, the transcript for respondent number one was read and reread on four occasions, in order to get to know the account intimately:

- Firstly, any thoughts, observations or comments were written in pencil in the left - hand margin of the transcript (see *Appendix F: Sample Transcript*). These included associations, questions, summary statements, comments on language use, absences and so on (Smith et al., 2009). Potential emerging themes were written in the header and footer sections. With each reading, the researcher felt more 'wrapped up' in the data, becoming more responsive to what was being said (Eatough, Smith, & Shaw, 2008).

- Secondly, initial themes or connected parts of the text were read with a descriptive focus and comments from this reading were written in black in the text. Comments were made about 'face value' content (relationships, events, processes, principles) of the respondent's 'life world' (Smith et al., 2009).

- Thirdly, the text was then re-read with a linguistic focus and notes were made in green. These focused on the respondent's use of language (pauses, repetition, tone, metaphor, fluency, pronoun use; Smith et al., 2009).

- Finally, the text was re-read with a conceptual focus. Comments were made in red about meanings that could be applied to areas of concern for the respondent (*Appendix F: Sample Transcript*).

The aim was to move beyond the superficial towards a deeper, more interpretative understanding of the respondent's experience: "The identification of the emergent patterns (i.e. themes) emphasised convergence and divergence, commonality and nuance" (Smith et al., 2009, p.79). The themes were noted down in the order in which they were recorded in the text, and an 'initial themes' document was then created, with a column for each respondent, in which subordinate theme titles were placed in the left-hand column and related line numbers were placed in the central column (see *Appendix G: Table of Themes*).

A process of collapsing, merging and dividing subordinate themes then took place, which involved re-reading all quotes thoroughly to make sure themes were distinctive. These then became the final group of subordinate themes.

The subordinate themes were then sorted into groups by linking them to a central superordinate theme in a spider diagram (see *Appendix H: Subordinate Themes*). This "enabled the development of a structure, frame or gestalt which illustrates the relationships between themes" (Smith et al., 2009). The superordinate themes were analysed further to make certain all subordinate themes corresponded to them. Any subordinate themes that did not correspond to the superordinate themes were eliminated.

Any new subordinate categories that were identified were either incorporated into existing superordinate themes or were placed on their own. During this process, it became clear that some subordinate themes could be merged with the initial superordinate themes; the richer the extract from which the theme emerged, the more likely it was to be included.

The subordinate themes were also printed, cut up and placed on the floor. They were then grouped together in accordance with guidance from Smith et al. (2009) and the clusters were given a 'superordinate' heading. This helped to support further engagement with the process.

This process was then repeated many times for each of the respondents, while continually referring back to the original transcripts in order to check that the themes continued to make sense as a reflection of what the respondents actually said. Any further data connected with the initial 'subordinate' categories were noted and any further ones that emerged were written down. Once no further data could be taken from the transcripts, the analysis could be concluded. "Analysis in IPA is an iterative, complex and creative process which requires the researcher's reflective engagement in a dialogue with a respondent's narrative and meanings" (Shineborne, 2011, p.56).

It is acknowledged that there may be some themes that emerge with more resonance than others, based on the researcher's own beliefs and understanding of the phenomena. This is likely to be reflected in the co-creation of IPA results between respondent and researcher (Larkin et al., 2006).

2.12.2 Data handling

After each interview, the recording was transferred from the recording device to my personal laptop, which was password protected. Each digital file was entitled with the respondent's pseudonym, and a key detailing which name corresponded with whom was created and stored separately. All research-related documents were kept in a locked cupboard. The laptop was also locked away when not in use. All paper and electronic research-related documents/records will be retained for six months after the study is completed. This allows time to write, amend, and possibly publish the research. All paper documents will then be shredded, and all electronic documents deleted.

2.12.3 Transcription

Each interview was transcribed verbatim (Smith et al., 2009). Interviews were transcribed to include laughter, pauses, sighs, stuttering and crying, as well as fillers such as 'like' and 'you know'. This was to ensure the data remained as close as possible to the original account for the purposes of analysis. All names and identifying information were changed to protect respondents' anonymity.

2.13 Quality of Research

Yardley (2008) states that the value of any research method is that it allows unexpected patterns and meanings to emerge so that "it is possible to explore new topics and discover new phenomena, to analyse subtle, interacting effects of context and time, and to engage with respondents to create new understandings" (Camic, Rhodes, & Yardley, 2003, p.156). There has been much debate, however, as to how to measure the quality and value of qualitative research (Golafshani, 2003; Mays & Pope, 2000; Denzin, 2009), and Hammersley (2005, p.3) observed that "qualitative research tends to suffer by comparison with quantitative work because there is a myth that quantitative researchers have clear-cut guidelines which are available for use by policymakers."

One consequence of the use of qualitative approaches is referred in a report by the National Centre for the Dissemination of Disability Research Standards (2007) states that "We need criteria for comparing research methods and research evidence, we need terms like credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity), dependability (reliability), confirmability (objectivity)" (as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p.646). In order for the data that is produced in qualitative research to be seen to have value and meaning that in turn will inform theory and practice, it is critical that methods such as IPA can meet similar validity and reliability criteria as are applied to quantitative research methods, and this can be understood

in the context of the specific epistemological and ontological framework of the methodology that IPA is positioned in, that is, of qualitative research.

I have applied Yardley's (2000) guidelines to assess the quality of my IPA study, as they offer several ways of establishing quality and can be used in a variety of qualitative methodologies (Smith, 2009). Yardley (2000) proposed that validity, sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence should all be taken into account.

2.13.1 Sensitivity to context

This study aimed to produce new knowledge about the experience of parental divorce for 18-25-year-olds. A review of relevant, existing literature about the effects of divorce was outlined in the literature review chapter and is referred to throughout the study. The literature in the methodology chapter was used to support the choice of IPA as the most effective method for gathering data. The epistemological position in which that method is placed was made explicit in the justification for which research method would be selected, on the grounds of being the best suited for the study.

Consideration was also given to how the interpretation of the experiences that were described in the data would contribute to therapeutic practice. The researcher was required to be sensitive to the social and cultural context in which the study was situated, the existing literature that was reviewed and the data gathered from the respondents (Smith et al., 2009). These were all relevant to this study and its use of IPA as a method of generating data, due to the sensitive and personal nature of the experience of parental divorce.

An ideographic and detailed approach to the data, and the need to delve as deeply as possible into the lived experience of the respondent, required the essential qualities of trust, empathy and understanding between the researcher and respondent to be developed. This balance

between being aware of the need for sensitivity and possessing the ability to access a richness of experience in the data was critical in terms of the quality of the knowledge that would be produced.

My training as a counselling psychologist helped me to develop and apply the skills and awareness that were needed to ensure this study of emerging adults who have experienced parental divorce was carried out both in a sensitive and explorative way. I was careful to be sensitive and reflective of any issues that could have provoked feelings of distress or power differentiation during the interview as they occurred during the interview process. "An IPA analysis is only as good as the data it is derived from and obtaining good data requires close awareness of the interview process" (Smith, 2009, p.45).

To maintain sensitivity to the context of the respondents, they were shown the outline of some of the research questions that may be asked in order for them to gain a greater understanding of what the study was about and ensure that they felt as comfortable as possible in the context of the interview process.

I also reflected throughout the study on my own impact and influence on the respondents' experience of the process and consequently in the analysis and interpretation of the data. Many verbatim extracts from each respondent were considered in order to ensure that the claims being made would be supported by the data and that the respondents' voices could be heard.

2.13.2 Commitment and rigour

As Yardley (2008) proposed, in order for my study to claim that it has validity as a research document, I needed to show that the analysis that I carried out had sufficient depth and breadth to provide new insight into the topic that I was researching. The way in which this

has been achieved is closely linked to the purpose of the study, which was to explore the subjective, lived experience of each individual. I therefore used a method that allowed me access to the stories and descriptions of those experiences and the extremely personal feelings, thoughts and emotions that were embedded in them. Smith et al. (2009) propose that commitment is revealed in the attentiveness shown to the respondent in the collection of data and the care taken in the way that each of the transcripts is analysed.

My personal determination and commitment to represent my respondents' experience was shown in the way that I supported them in the interview. I provided a quiet, peaceful and reflective space in which undertake each interview and encouraged a curious and warm dynamic to develop while listening to their stories. Smith et al. (2009) define rigour as 'thoroughness' in the development of all aspects of the study, and for the quality of the sample, the research questions, the interview and the analysis to be of a sufficiently high standard. For example, this could be seen in my carefully prepared interview schedule, which allowed for rich and uniquely personal data to emerge. It could also be seen in the depth of my systematic analysis of the data, using IPA in order to identify and develop themes that offer a greater understanding of each respondent's story. "Achieving rigour therefore demands substantial personal commitment, whether to attaining methodological skills or theoretical depth or to engaging extensively and thoughtfully with respondents or data" (Yardley, 2008, p.112).

I was mindful of applying rigour and a commitment to maintaining a high standard of academic work throughout all aspects of this study.

2.13.3 Transparency and coherence

Yardley (2008) describes the coherence of a study as the way in which the study as a consistent whole can be easily understood. My aim in this study was to explore the subjective experience of each respondent concerning the divorce of their parents and show connections between the theoretical approaches used, the research question, the method employed and the interpretation of the data (Yardley, 2008). I aimed to investigate the theoretical underpinnings of IPA and how they fit my study. I was careful to make every effort to ensure that my interpretations of the data were checked and re- checked against the verbatim extracts.

I have also been mindful throughout the study to emphasise the inherently interpretive nature of an IPA study, and of the way in which the researcher is trying to get to "the thing itself" (Hurssel, 1967) in developing an understanding of the respondents' own sense-making. The transparency of a study that uses a qualitative methodology is related to how well the reader can understand and follow how and why what has been done was done, and whether there is a clear and coherent explanation of how the study was carried out (Yardley, 2008).

Throughout the study, I have shown personal reflexivity about the extent to which my own ideas, life experiences, thoughts and assumptions could have influenced the process of understanding, interpreting and analysing the phenomena of divorce and the conclusions reached. I have also made significant efforts to describe in detail how respondents were selected; how the interview schedule was developed, modified and presented; what initial questions were considered and shown to the respondents; and the steps involved in the analysis (Smith et al., 2009). My ultimate aim was that a person who was neither a counselling psychologist nor a researcher could, after reading the study, undertake this research and understand the interpretations that have been made.

2.14 Resources

The cost of this research was confined to reading materials, digital recording equipment, travel and transcription costs. Each respondent was paid £25 for taking part. The total cost amounted to approximately £500. The recruitment stage did not exceed two months. Access to appropriate supervision and library facilities was required. A digital recorder, a mobile telephone, paper and writing materials were used.

Chapter Three: Analysis

I have chosen IPA for this study as it allowed me to move as close as I was able to the very heart of how each respondent experienced their parents' divorce (Eatough & Smith, 2008). IPA allowed me to explore the depth and complexity of the experience, whilst also using the values of compassion, curiosity and a commitment to the client's truth that I have learned in my work as a counselling psychologist to inform and guide me. IPA aims to protect that unique experience from any assumptions or preconceived notions that the researcher may have.

IPA encourages the researcher to be constantly reflexive and mindful throughout the process of interpretation. The respondent is trying to make sense of their experiences while the researcher is constructing an interpretation of that experience (Jeong & Othman, 2016).

The descriptions provided by my respondents provided a vibrant and poignant glimpse into the richness of their lived experiences. To be as clear as possible, I have systemically divided the participants' experiences into themes. In reality, the emerging themes all interweave; they are interlinked and highlight what I understand to be the interconnectedness of the individual within the family system.

According to van Manen (1990), themes are "knots in the webs of our experiences, around which certain lived experiences are spun, the stars that make up the universes of meaning we live through. By the light of these themes we can navigate and explore such universes" (p.90).

IPA values participants' own perspectives on their experiences. It is concerned with "how the person binds and integrates discrete elements of perceptions, memories, judgments, assumptions, and beliefs about something into one unified, meaningful experience" (Husserl, 1970 quoted in Jeong & Othman, 2016, p.559).

IPA is committed to understanding the respondent's experience while also situating experiences within their given context (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). IPA also enabled me to observe the dynamic nature of the experience described, the relationship between the part and the whole, and how one cannot be understood without the other (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). I observed a synergy where I as the researcher moved back and forth in the process of analysis while the respondent moved back and forth within and around their experience.

I will initially consider the context within which to situate the findings, introduce the findings and then provide a detailed analysis of each theme.

3.1 Introducing the Findings

When I was listening to the transcripts, I was reminded of a passage describing how painful feelings and emotions were evoked:

> *"Everything they said would seem to circle around some strangely intangible object, around a thing that they could sense, even if it could not be seen. All their questions, answers, pauses, responses, all their additions, hesitations, and elaborations, each and every utterance they made felt like a delicate attempt to move closer to it" (Arudpragasam, 2016).*

A thorough and systematic description of respondents' experiences of parental divorce will now be presented. As a researcher, I aim to get "as 'close' to the participant's view as is possible" (Larkin et al., 2006, p.104). The analysis aims to go back to "the thing itself, the

lived experience" (Smith et al., 2009, p.33), evoking and capturing the quality and texture of that experience (Willig, 2013, p.87). I encouraged respondents to be both cognisant and immersed in their experiences, while also being open and reflective concerning markers of recovery and transformation (Smith et al., 2009).

Due to the nature of this analysis, I acknowledge that this exploration implicates my own view of the world and that therefore a reflective and interpretative stance is essential throughout (Willig, 2013).

The analysis produced a comprehensive organisation of the data that aims to respect, as Larkin & Thompson (2011) advocate, both convergence and divergence. Care has been taken not to misrepresent respondents' experiences. Due to the large quantity of data generated in the analysis, the narrative produced here is an attenuated version of the full analysis. The themes that emerged were the strongest and best illustrated the respondents experience of their parents' divorce. IPA does not claim to be a 'catch-all' but it forces me justify the themes that I have presented in a more judicious way.

The relationship of the data to the research literature will be explored in the Discussion chapter.

3.1.1 Presentation

All identifying information has been altered or concealed to maintain confidentiality.

In extracts of dialogue, respondents have been given different names to protect their identity. The respondent's name and the line number from the interview transcript are given at the end of each quote.

The findings have been organised into the following framework:

1) **Superordinate Theme One: Loss**
    - Shock and disbelief
    - Disillusion and altered identity
    - Altered relationships with parents

2) **Superordinate Theme Two: Altered Reality**
    - Parent's feelings and actions post-divorce
    - Renegotiating relationships
    - Perceptions of love, relationships and family

3) **Superordinate Theme Three: Hope and Continuity**
    - Reframing of future relationships
    - Endings and beginnings
    - Coping and resilience

3.2 Superordinate Theme One: Loss

In this section, I explore how respondents have understood their feelings of 'loss', i.e., how these stories help me to understand respondents' shared experience of loss in their parents' divorce.

The shock and disbelief of being told of the divorce remains a vivid and disturbing memory for all of the respondents. I gained insight into feelings of disillusionment and altered identity, what it means for them to feel the 'end of the idyll' of their family life and what they felt had changed, both for the better and for the worse.

In *Altered relationships with parents,* I explore respondent's understanding of their 'feelings of loss and disconnection' in the parent/child relationship post-divorce and the sense of loss that came with this.

As Smith (2011) advocates, I am 'diving for the pearls' in the narrative that will take me straight to the heart of the respondent's story and help me to get as close to it as I am able.

3.2.1 Shock and disbelief

Respondents described in various terms the impact of being told about their parent's impending divorce. All eight clearly remembered the moment that they were told about their parents' divorce, but many struggled to articulate it. All respondents seemed to share the belief that they were moving from one type of family to another and described shock at coming to terms with that transition. For instance, Sam said:

> *"Only three kids in my year had the worst parents and I had this illusion that could never happen to me... like, that happened to other kids. I placed them in a different circle completely [...] I was like, what? Like, what are you talking about?" (Sam: 56).*

Sam reflected on his family culture; for him, it was hard to accept that divorce could actually happen to him. By using the word "illusion", however, it was clear that he had become aware that was not his reality, that what he had believed in was not in fact 'real'. He emphasised the word "never", as if it felt painful to say that for him this was not a possibility he had entertained in his mind. The image of a "circle" suggests that he experienced the unity and strength of his family as a whole and that the breaking of the "circle" led him to feel a profound sense of loss. Sam's voice became quieter and it was if he was deep in his own thoughts, struggling to articulate some painful and difficult feelings. He went on to elaborate:

> *"Then eventually my mum grabbed the strength and said 'kids, what we are trying to say is' [...] and at that moment it hit me. and I was like, but no. This... this can't happen to me... I'm not one of them. And for the next 20 minutes it was just me trying to avoid it, like I was trying not to cry and my mother was trying to soothe me and say it's OK to cry" (Sam: 71).*

It seemed to me that the shock of being told is reinforced by the image of him being hit, that he was going to try to "avoid" it as if it were a truck hurtling towards him that could not be stopped. As he repeated the word "avoid", I reflected on how often respondents describe the time it took them to accept their parents' divorce and the varying strategies they each adopted to distract themselves from their feelings about it. I also suddenly had a feeling of wanting to comfort him, which reminded me of how young he was (6 years old) at that time. As he remembered "trying not to cry", it seemed that he was able to still identify with a childish need to have both been 'soothed' by his mother and allowed to pretend that everything was as it was, in the way that children have make-believe games.

Like Sam, there was a sense of both sadness and loss throughout Rose's interview. She was often hesitant and tearful but could describe a "vivid" memory of being told about her parent's impending divorce that transported the listener to that moment:

> *"Um, basically my dad had an affair with my mum's best friend, um, so it was… I, I, I remember specifically… I've got quite a vivid memory of being in our house in Brixton, our family home, and my mum sitting in the kitchen with a beer, quite early on in the day and she looked upset and she never usually drinks beer at that time and my dad and brother in the other room… ah... watching football [...] I was the first one to pick up on it out of me and my brother [tearful]... I was like, something's wrong… something's wrong with mum and dad and he was no... [...] I can't remember how I found out who it was but eventually I found out it was my mum's best friend" (Rosie: 51).*

I was particularly struck with how hard it seemed to be for Rosie to talk about this moment. I felt a wave of sadness as I could visualise her and her mother sitting in their kitchen, the repetition of "I" and "something's wrong" emphasise the disbelief and shock of what she was hearing; "I just remember like crying loads". This experience seemed embedded within time and I wondered how much Rosie has been able to come to terms, over the years, with what happened. I wondered how much each of the characters in this story remain stuck in time, in the kitchen, watching TV. In Rosie's mind, they have not moved far from that position.

Rosie went on to describe how many aspects of her life changed from that moment. There seemed to be a definite line between 'before' and 'after' in terms of how she described her life:

> *"Like, we were all like really close, my mum and dad and their friends... [...] We went on holiday together every year [...] It's like a family thing and the… ah... I found out later, um… ah... it started on our family holiday with all of us... that the affair had started on our family holiday, the affair started then, um yeah, so there was a big divide [pause, sigh] there was this massive change with who hung out with who, some of the friends stuck with my mum and some with my stepmom now, um" (Rosie: 74).*

I noticed the way Rosie emphasised being "really close" and "together", and how this felt at odds with the disintegration of the feeling this moment embodied. I also observed how often Rosie used the word "family" in this section, and then "divide" and "change", and it seemed to me that something very profound, "massive", had been lost, both her identity as part of an extended family and her identity in her nuclear family. Her voice tailed off at the end of the sentence as if she had no more strength to think about it. This memory felt like a very emotional moment and I had a sense of the loneliness that had permeated Rosie's interview.

Listening to Sylvia, there appeared to be a parity of experience:

> *"And so we came back from holiday... my brother [...] was showing us his photos and then my mum just started crying, I think... and then she goes "oh go on tell them then" and then my dad told us... It's all quite vague because I was really young, um... he said he was moving out [...] It was such a shock that it didn't seem real. And then that night he moved to this flat. We were all as normal as we could be until the breakup" (Sylvia: 31).*

As she remembered what happened, I had a sense that Sylvia was metaphorically 'pinching herself', that it seemed to be vague and not real. To her, this felt like a very confusing and unexpected situation to suddenly find herself in. There were several pauses and hesitations in this segment that reinforced the idea of her taking some time to internalise the impact of what had happened in that moment. Sylvia went on to say:

> *"My mother didn't tell us until we were 18. We'd go to his house for dinner and we'd write this email, asking why he left and I can't remember if we ever sent it, it was a kind of disbelief that we didn't really know why and there was never any closure, because my dad never sat us down and said why" (Sylvia: 71).*

While Sylvia alluded to eventually receiving answers from her mother as to what had happened, as she spoke I had a strong sense of the loss and shock that she felt and a wish that things had been different. I sensed in the heightened emotions generated by Sylvia as she spoke, that she had continued to feel a sense of unreality about the circumstances of this new reality.

3.2.2 Disillusion and identity

Seven of the eight respondents spoke about the loss and shame that they felt as the idyll of their family life was shattered. They reflected on the impact of losing that identity and the struggle to redefine what family meant for them.

During the early part of his interview, Sam uses the language of the 'idyll': "I had everything I needed, I had my space, it was great and my family and my, well, friends is a different thing. But I... I had friends as well, and so I had everything" (Sam: 148).

There was a longing to his voice as he recalled this 'golden time'. It reminded me of the way that he described his home in a South American country. It seemed to me that he felt far from home as he was recalling this time in his life, and that this was how he could have felt when his parents told him this news. This was far removed from what he had ever imagined for himself: a child with a 'destroyed family'. He sounded nostalgic for that idyllic time when life seemed to be as it should be. There was a sense of impending doom as he repeated having "everything", and that there was an inevitable pull to then being the opposite.

Sam went on to say:

> *"I had this crystal palace made for me… and when they divorced, I was like oh, so things can go wrong, like within my family, which was the one thing that actually held us, the untouchable, that which cannot be destroyed. It is a fragile thing" (Sam: 156).*

With the emphasis on the words "crystal", "untouchable", "fragile" and "destroyed", I sensed the degree of loss that he felt and how painful it had been. What had been so important had been broken in a violent and irreparable way. There was a long pause before Sam continued quietly:

> *"And then that's when we… wow... like, wow, I didn't know things can change in the family... I… I… didn't know that, and in a way the only thing that changed was my own perspective of me, was just like, I am part of the 'other ones' [...] I knew I was before in certain aspects but not in that one. Which I think was closest to my heart" (Sam: 175).*

Sam stumbled over his words and hesitated as he described what 'family' meant to him at that time, that whatever else happened to him he knew his family remained the stable and unchanging feature of his life. His way of speaking reflected his confusion. The use of the word "heart" suggested that this experience went deep inside, to the very core of him, that this was where he could be hurt the most. Up until that point, he had not contemplated the possibility of the identity of his family changing. It felt to me that he was experiencing a loss of his future self in this moment.

Sylvia also seemed to have experienced a profound shock at the change in her family's identity: "Oh we were just like other families and, because I think that makes it quite difficult to then not to be, you know, to, sort of have one's identity changed somehow" (Sylvia: 79).

The language Sylvia used to describe the painful realisation that now her family was different highlighted how she was feeling. I had a sense of Sylvia being on the outside of this picture, looking in at herself and her family, being told that her parents were separating and the powerlessness she felt at that time by not being told what had caused this collapse of all that she had known:

> *"I couldn't go back now and say 'you really hurt us', and we've never kind of addressed it or had closure, my mum's never had closure because all the things that happened, she just thought we were a great family and there was no, no reason, reason to split up, they never fought, she's always had that 'where did it go wrong'" (Sylvia: 863).*

There was an element of anger and emotion in Sylvia's voice as she again described the 'broken' identity of her family. There seemed to be a painful lack of agency around not having "closure" or a way of expressing to her father the impact of the divorce. This was particularly difficult in the context of having seemed to be a "great" family and of how hard it

had been for her mother to move forward: "There is just this horrible resentment that he broke the family, when we were perfect, as perfect as can be considering everyone" (Sylvia:413).

Lucy used words such as "chilled" and "bubbly" and "mad" to describe her family and this is paradoxically also how I experienced her initially in the interview. Lucy presented herself in her body language and exuberance as being strong and resilient. I wondered, however, as the interview progressed if this was a way of buffering against some of her difficult feelings around her parents' divorce. I also had the impression that Lucy felt it was not acceptable to feel sorry for yourself in her family, that coping was the only acceptable option.

As Lucy spoke, I had a sense of how her family identity had been and remained closely linked with her own:

> *"My house was like a social club, was well, all kids were always at my house. Mum and dad were always really chilled, really bubbly people, so it was like a social club and there was the three of us, and we're all mad as hatters, so there was always a lot of people... and then that all ended" (Lucy: 819).*

This 'part' of her story embodied for me the journey Lucy described in the 'whole' of her interview. Lucy seemed to be referring to a time in the past when she had experienced good times; she spoke in the past tense: " my house was a social club", "kids were at my house" and then "it all ended".

Lucy spoke quickly, intensely, without many pauses:

> *"I don't know how I feel about it. I actually don't know how I feel about it. Like, it makes me feel a little teary though... when I think about it, but I'm*

not sad, I can't explain it, I'm just like... I'm just angry for what, for what happened. I can't, I can't explain it, it, it, it… not even the initial stages that I think I got over. What happened afterwards was so bad" (Lucy: 1187).

And then later, she made this statement:

"I think the, I think the bits that, that's that's destructive is seeing people hurt […] It's so horrible. And I think […] that maybe I am the way that I am cause I refuse to let somebody in, I don't, I don't wanna feel like that, it's just very vulnerable to show yourself to someone. I don't really trust people" (Lucy: 2409).

Listening to Lucy stumble and hesitate as she searched for the words to describe how she felt about her parents' divorce, I wondered if this mirrored how difficult it was for her to get close to the pain she had experienced at this time. It seemed to me that she felt overwhelmed by a range of emotions but that they were hard to express. I recognised I was feeling a deep sadness as I heard her confusion and I wondered how much of this was her sadness.

As she continued with her story, I did not get a sense of her being "bubbly" any more. Lucy went on to identify the "destructive" nature of being hurt and that this had led to her identifying with a more "vulnerable" self: "I witnessed people in my life in different ways than I'd ever seen them" (Lucy: 2370). Having experienced her parents' divorce, there seemed to be a difficulty for her in allowing people to get close and being able to trust them.

Some respondents had not experienced a positive parental relationship and while they were less shocked at their new identity, they expressed sadness and disillusionment in their interviews. Dave talked loudly and quickly as he told me:

"We are all quite fiery in our family, erm, it's good, it means we are a lot closer, it's much better than having long, long, you know, silences [...] But I

> *think it's only something that I realised quite recently, I always knew there was that, kind of, tension. We were terrified as kids, we hated them rowing, it would be very stressful when you feel that there is something building, and then suddenly they'd shout, it was horrible, it really was the worst, worst experience" (Dave: 80).*

The words rushed out of Dave and I had a sense that he wanted to get this part of the interview over with. It seemed to me that he found thinking about it painful. This was illuminated by the words "fiery", "tension", terrified" and "stressful" and he appeared to be unsettled and uncomfortable as he described the horror of his parents' arguments, moving about on the chair and uncrossing his legs several times. He had initially attempted to make sense and validate the family's ability to be open but went on to admit how ultimately "horrible" it made him feel.

Tom spoke softly and sounded nostalgic as he described his parents together: "And that I remember being like the happiest time in his childhood… and me and my father used to do things together, and my parents were happy" (Tom: 42).

Repeating the word "happy" felt at odds with how he often seemed to feel when he is with his father. At various points throughout Tom's narrative, I had a sense of Tom's longing to have this closeness and connection in his relationship with his father, to be accepted as himself in a loving and positive way. The idyll of his childhood had been replaced by disappointment and sadness in the absence of their relationship:

> *"When he left, he put a kind of separation between us. We never really felt like he wanted to spend much time with us. It was really hard, I think I struggled with it my whole life, really, it maybe, I was a happy child, and after that I was very unhappy" (Tom: 116).*

3.3 Contextualising the Findings

Sociocultural and family context emerged throughout the stories that the respondents told of their experiences. Sociocultural context was observed in the identity of the 'ideal family' often described by the respondents before the parental divorce, and how the loss of that identity continued to cause pain despite regrowth and redefinition over time. How the family navigated the new set of rules and traditions that governed it became an integral part of how all the respondents coped with their experiences. For some respondents, parental divorce had not been part of their sociocultural landscape, which included friends' parents, parents' friends and extended family, and this also seemed to negatively shape respondents' feelings, causing them to describe shame and isolation in this fundamentally altered reality.

The stories are set against the passing of time, an often circular journey where respondents described feelings and emotions that would ebb and flow. Where they were on this journey contextualised their experiences of it: "Things change in life and you go with it, whether or not you like it, or you accept it, or you understand it" (Lucy: 2117).

Respondents' experiences were viewed as embedded within their family context. Throughout the transcripts, the nature of communication in the family, particularly the parent's relationship with each other both before and after the divorce, repeatedly provided the context against which each of the respondents viewed and experienced their altered family. Having to help parents negotiate their relationship often caused confusion and distress, the shift of the parent/child relationship to being more one of 'friend' and the loss of childhood were all described as challenging outcomes of parental divorce. For all but two of the respondents, their father had undertaken a relationship outside of the marriage. Those respondents' descriptions of both the shock of this discovery and the ending of their parents' marriage appeared to cause particular struggles when it came to developing new relationships with each of their parents.

Poor communication, avoidance and conflict between parents and siblings featured in all respondents' accounts of their parents' divorce. These dynamics centred around issues of adjustment and transition: parents becoming accustomed to their own, new situation; children living in new homes, establishing a relationship with a non-resident parent; children mourning for their family as it was and resisting the vision of how their family may look in the future.

Economic changes in the family also allowed for different experiences between respondents. Several described difficulties associated with one parent, often the mother, suffering from economic insecurity and a powerlessness that came with having to rely on an ex-partner for day-to-day living expenses.

In this study, six of the respondents' fathers had extramarital relationships, as did a seventh respondent's mother. The feelings and thoughts of the respondents affected by this phenomenon have been shown to be profound. This has not been directly addressed as a theme, as the context of the study is the experience of divorce rather than the particular nature of the breakdown of the parental relationship. The impact of this aspect of the respondent's experience will be explored further in the discussion chapter.

Finally, the experience was contextualised within the respondent's social group. There was a certain solidarity between friends who understood what the respondents were going through. However, there was also a sense of isolation and shame; a respondent may feel these when they did not feel able to share their unhappiness and concerns with another individual who could properly understand.

3.3.1 Altered relationships with parents: Feelings of loss and disconnection

All eight respondents described their relationships with each parent as changing, with losses and gains as they all attempted to make sense of this new paradigm. Sam spoke lovingly about both of his parents, but also about how the relationship developed into less a parent/child one and more of a friendship: "I have my father and my mum. I don't have my parents. In order to have a relationship with me, that unavoidably broke the whole" (Sam: 1582).

The use of the word "whole" evoked a mental image again of the "circle" of his family and how he again described it as broken. It felt to me that Sam was assuring me that he had a mother and father but that he did not have "parents". I wondered if he felt they had lost the right to that privilege when they divorced and that it was a sort of unconscious punishment:

> *"I still remember that with my father, the relationship was very different because he was, was more the head of the house. And after that, the relationship became a relationship in a way [...] In a sense, it made my relationship with my father wonderful... [the relationship] turned into… more into my buddy" (Sam: 105).*

As I listened to Sam, it felt as if I were observing the reconfiguration of the parental relationship just as if I were observing the reformation of clouds after a storm. He intimated that the relationship with the "head of the house" was not in fact a relationship, it was then just about a parent/child dynamic. By using the word "wonderful", there was a sense of a transformation that had occurred in order for them both to move forward in a positive way. Again, I could observe the dynamic in the narrative of losses and gains, of the part and the whole.

Rosie seemed to lack the nurturing and communication that she desired from her father. In response to being asked whether Rosie's father had ever said anything to her about the time of the divorce, she replied:

> *"Never, ever, ever, ever, ever. Just does not talk about stuff like this. Would… I would never attempt to have an emotional conversation with him. Just wouldn't get anywhere [...] I just don't have that relationship with him, to be honest" (Rosie: 635).*

Rosie's repetition of "ever" emphasised the despair that she seemed to feel at the thought of trying and wanting, but being unable to have an intimate conversation with her father. This felt at odds with her comment slightly later in which she asserted poignantly that she "doesn't mind" and "it's only about having a laugh" when she sees him. I wondered whether this was a protective measure for her:

> *"I'm still not as close to him [...] I'm at the point where I don't really mind [...] It's all about having a laugh, good time, you know, just not... Now, I almost see him as a good mate; I see him as a good friend, who I'd like to see occasionally" (Rose: 639).*

Tom described a loss and sadness at the absence of the relationship with his father he had hoped for all his life. He used phrases such as "not being good enough," "he never gave it to me" and "I've struggled with it my whole life". There was a longing in how he expressed his hope for a connection that he admitted to still yearning for: "I thought I was unhappy just because it was who I was [...] only kind of becoming more comfortable and happy in myself did I realise what had made me so unhappy" (Tom: 348).

There was both hope and despair running through his interview, reflected in an optimism in his relationships with his mother and sister, but anger and disappointment with his father:

> *"I just basically was always trying to make him, you know, happy, or proud, or like... just kind of doing things for him, even though he gave me nothing. And it just, you don't really understand, because it feels natural, you want your parents, you know, to be happy with you and love you and when you don't get it, you're searching for it, but he never gave it to me, until I kind of stopped looking for it" (Tom: 360).*

Tom spoke softly and quietly and as though he was thinking deeply about the implication of this experience on him, still. He took deep breaths and his words tailed off at the end; this implied both the taking in and the letting go of the pain that he felt when he contemplated what he seems to have internalised, his father's ambivalence towards him. The impact of this has been a lifelong search for his own sense of self and identity due to the lack of a father figure.

Sylvia identified the before and after, both in terms of her father and the family unit: "He, he's clearly just completely shut that person out and he's this new person" (Sylvia: 893) and "it wasn't common that people's parents got divorced so you'd try and play it down and say 'oh no, they are not divorced, they are only separated'". (Sylvia: 659).

By using terms such as "shut" and "new", I sensed in her narrative the door of one life closing and the door of another life opening. Her family was never the same again. This was a theme that ran through Sylvia's narrative. She was flung from one family identity to another without warning or explanation, and her sense of isolation and shame informed her description of that experience.

Dave sounded impatient and frustrated as he describes his parents as being the 'children' and him having to be the 'adult, a role reversal in which they are "childish" and he felt he had to be "mature":

> *"I think it's been probably, er, erm, for me, you know, growing up as an individual, [...] I have had to be quite firm with them because they have been... like we said, playing... you know, childish, so I've had to, you know, to take the more mature, erm... I think if this wasn't happening we would have maintained a more typical father-son relationship a lot longer' (James: 676).*

Throughout Dave's interview, however, I did not have a sense that he had actually accepted or perhaps felt he was able to take this responsible role in the family. I wondered if he was struggling to accept the revised dynamic in the family where he was not being 'parented' anymore. There was a childlike quality as he described himself as "a bit of a tearaway", not really believing that the roles had changed and that there were new rules in place:

> *"It was really interesting because parental infallibly was the thing until a certain age [...] Everything they said is law. Then all of a sudden it shattered, when you get to a certain age and it's as if the roles are reversed" (Dave: 297).*

Throughout her interview, Lucy described extremely painful and difficult feelings associated with her parents' divorce. In her manner and way that she presented herself, she tried to convey resilience and strength. She spoke cheerfully, loudly and almost continually, only occasionally allowing herself to show emotion. I felt, however, as she spoke, that a deep wound had been inflicted on her as she described the care and support she had provided for each of her parents. Using words such as "gone", "vulnerable" and broken", she gave the sense that she had been abandoned by them and that she had felt very alone:

> *"I just felt oh god, you are not my dad anymore and you're not my mum anymore, you 're like these completely independent people, gone from being my parents to being human beings... Which I know, of course you are human beings, but I went and saw my mum in such a vulnerable place [...] she became a woman, instead of my mum, and dad became a broken man,*

> *and wasn't my dad anymore, he was heartbroken. You see your parents completely differently. Because suddenly your parents are people; they didn't act like my parents" (Lucy: 1771).*

There were some similarities between how Dave and Lucy presented themselves. They were both loud and opinionated, but also displayed a certain softness and sensitivity. I wondered whether this was a defence against the instability and vulnerability that they may have recalled as they recounted their experience.

3.4 Superordinate Theme Two: Altered Reality

3.4.1 Parents' feelings and actions post-divorce

"I am sure there are lots of amicable divorces. I just know that I have witnessed in my life my family in lots of different ways that I'd never seen them" (Lucy: 2369). Lucy spoke about how she had "witnessed" her family, as if they were in court and she were judging them and their behaviour:

> *"My dad descended and was not in a good place and my mum, from that moment on, and she still carries it now, it's so weird [..] she' s so guilt ridden, and it comes out in everything that she does" (Lucy: 1406).*

There was a heaviness in her words; I found myself descending into what felt to me like a dark and difficult place. I sensed that the family had collapsed somehow, with both parents lost in their own experiences and defined by them. I noticed, however, as Lucy spoke that I was not able to access any of her emotions:

> *"The six months after is very blurry, I can't really remember, erm, I think I went into a bit... I was getting, doing, doing drugs, and going and getting drunk, I had [...] the worst boyfriend in the world. I don't know. I didn't feel anything [...] I was very reactive [...] cause, cause you don't feel anything" (Lucy: 1367).*

Lucy went on to say "I didn't really face the reality", and I wondered if I was mirroring her own feelings as she recalled this time, that she had blocked out her own needs and emotions as this was her form of self-preservation. I gently observed this to her, that I had a sense that this was 'happening' to her rather than knowing how she was feeling, and she agreed: "I don't know how I feel about it, I'm not sad, I can't explain it, I'm just angry for what happened, I can't, I can't explain it. What happened after was, was so bad" (Lucy:1194).

"It was such a horrible divorce, such a horrible divorce" (Lucy: 995). Lucy spoke forcefully and angrily when she told me that her parents had recently told her that they regretted the way that she had been so involved. I reflected after our interview how she had found a way to protect herself from the difficult feelings by not acknowledging them.

As Sam described his experience, I felt connected to his emotions. He was warm and open and there was a poignancy and symbolism to the renaming of his father following the divorce:

> *"And after telling us, I remember my father was going to move out. We decided then that we were not going to call him as we did before, Papa, which is how you say it in Spanish. But we are going to call him in a special way. So, we turned it into Papo. Until this day, I still call him Papo. It's more of a pet name" (Sam: 81).*

This felt to me like a very powerful message to Sam's father. It seemed to me that this was tangible evidence of a new relationship being co-created between them all. The children were

able to take back some of the power with this decision, and their renaming of him embodied the transition between the old and the new relationship.

By suggesting that "Papo" was a "pet name", Sam invited me to think about his relationship with his father as being less that of a father figure and more of a friend. This was ultimately how he described redefining their relationship in the future.

There were many references by all respondents to how each parent had 'parented' post-divorce. This was also mapped in terms of particular phases in the process. While Sam recognised the effort made by both of his parents to maintain a sense of family, Rosie did not have this experience. She was often angry and tearful in her interview when she described how she had been left to cope:

> *"They should have made it better to co-parent me, not move me about, not say evil things about each other, my mum being dependent on me, my dad leaving me. They could have done it way better not to affect me; it's fucked me up in a way" (Rosie: 314).*

Using such strong language as "evil things", "leaving me" and "fucked me up", Rosie clearly stated how she believed that they could have behaved differently, that she had felt abandoned by them. Similarly, Lucy sounded resentful and disappointed as she recalled that the boundaries of confidence sharing became blurred and that the parent/child role had felt to her to have been reversed:

> *"Well, I look back and I think that my mum shouldn't have told me things and my dad shouldn't have told me things. I just saw them as completely different people. They were no longer my parents, they were like children fighting" (Rosie: 1871).*

Zac recognised that his mother at times worked hard to manage her feelings about the divorce:

> *"My mum at that time would do everything to make us seem that there was nothing wrong or nothing's changed. My dad used to have lots of money, he doesn't any more but at that time he gave money to my mum and she spent loads on us" (Zac: 153).*

Similarly, Hope felt that her parents had been "thoughtful" and had managed the transition in the best way that they could:

> *"Well they definitely managed it well. It was clearly thought through, there was quite a lot of… [trails off] I remember there being more arguing after the… after they told us... significantly more shouting and stuff, but not like screaming, nothing traumatising, but enough to like... [trails off] I've always... I've always... The only thing that did ever make me upset and still now is yelling [...] Even now if people yell at me, I get very upset. I start crying without any reason. I think it's that I get angry, that's always been the thing" (Hope: 105).*

Having listened several times to Hope's interview, I experienced some difficulty accessing her emotions and reflected on why this could be. At first, I wondered if this was because I was privileging the confidence and clarity of her voice, or perhaps because out of all the respondents, her parents remained friends and she had been able to make sense of their relationship in that context. None of the other respondents described having a similar experience. Hope spoke in pragmatic terms about her parents' divorce; this seemed to characterise the divorce itself. However, as I noticed how she trailed off at the end of her sentences and hesitated as she remembered this time, I wondered if she had, from an early age, learned how to cut herself off from her feelings and emotions about the divorce:

> *"I don't really remember crying at all or, like, being upset about it. I mean, still largely now but especially as a child, like really not in touch with my emotional side. I just wasn't an emotional child" (Hope: 94).*

I experienced Sylvia as being both sad and a little disconnected in her interview. This was reflected in how separate she seemed to see her father's feelings for her; he had not been able to reconnect with his daughter:

> *"When dad was with mum, he's like never left the country, he was really sensible and quiet and almost still a bit detached and odd, and then he had this mental breakdown, reinvented himself and this new personality and started a record label and [...] If he had stayed the same person, there is no reason that they would have broken up really" (Sylvia: 494).*

I found it interesting that she used the word "country", as it seemed to me that as far as Sylvia was concerned, her father had left the "country" and someone completely new had replaced him. Sylvia saw this person as the one that was responsible for breaking up their perfectly good family but could not make any sense of him.

3.4.2 Renegotiating relationships

All respondents spoke about the challenges of trying to maintain good relationships with each parent. Zac, Sylvia, Dave and Lucy all spoke about the guilt they felt about wanting to spend time with the parent that had instigated the divorce.

Sylvia sounded upset and frustrated as she described having to lie to her mother in order to see her father. She described not wanting to make a choice between her parents and that this meant that she felt "guilty" and that she was living "separate lives":

> *"In lots of ways it's probably worse now than it was when it happened because I was still young and I was allowed to still love my dad and love*

my mum, whereas now I kind of know everything my dad did was awful and mum put up with it and put on this brave face for the rest of us, and now I feel guilty for being close with my dad and especially his now wife, so a lot of the time my mum doesn't know half the times I am with my dad; it's like having to have two separate lives" (Sylvia: 378).

Zac also spoke often throughout his interview about the struggle he felt about wanting to see his father while remaining loyal to his mother. He hesitated as he told me "I was there for my mum but I wanted to be there for my dad also", and this emphasised the struggle that he continued to feel in trying to be fair to both parents:

"So dad left with the woman he cheated with and they didn't work out. When that happened, me and my sisters were totally on my mum's side, and my mum, I'm sure she would realise now that this wasn't the right thing to do, but at the time, she wanted us to cut him off, and if she caught us sort of talking to our dad, not that we did, but if we did, I knew she would be upset. I knew she would kind of feel it as kind of being a traitor, and she still has a bit of that now" (Zac:198).

His conflict was apparent in his language; by using words like "side", "cut him off" and "traitor", it was clear that he felt torn between his parents. He went on to say:

"I started to feel bad for my dad, and I ended up in a lot of arguments with my mum. I knew what he did was wrong, and, like, he hurt my mum and that would always, you know, I wouldn't forgive that, but at the same time, like, I knew that he was a good dad" (Zac: 234).

As a reaction, he described separating himself from his family: "I just kind of distanced myself from the whole thing". I observed during our interview a slightly detached, wistful quality as he recounted the sadness and regret he felt at not being more present for his sisters: "this is what I feel bad about. I don't feel like I was there enough for [my sisters]". I

wondered if this had been a coping mechanism for him after his parents' divorce and had remained so as time went on.

Other respondents described a more peaceful transition. Sam recognised how hard his parents had worked to create a new, positive relationship that they could all manage. Sam's emphasis on the word "never" suggested how important this was for him:

> *"After that they didn't involve us in the fight, except my mum every now and then would say things in front of me, but my dad never, never, never, spoke ill of my mum in front of me, ever. I think this was a mixture of honour, I won't do that because it is wrong, but at the same time, it might have been guilt" (Sam: 680).*

Rosie, Zac, Dave and Lucy all spoke about the challenges they experienced having to pass 'messages' between their parents:

> *"This was an unkind thing she used to do, this was one of the arguments we used to have. She used to get us to message him on behalf of her but making it look like we're asking him which I thought was unfair" (Zac: 1054).*

Zac spoke in an emphatic tone when he said "unkind" and "unfair", but there was also a sadness in his voice that reflected an inner struggle to make sense of the antagonistic nature of his parents' relationship.

Rosie also felt frustrated with her mother for disclosing information about her father and showed how it made her feel when she explained that she "doesn't need to know horrible stuff" about him:

> *"Sometimes mum tells me stuff that I just don't need to know. Obviously, my dad's an arsehole but I'd like a relationship with him and she tells me stuff*

that he's done and I'm trying to like this guy [laughs] I don't want to know all the horrible stuff that he has done. You know?" (Rosie:203).

Running through Rosie's interview, she described the difficulty she has had establishing a new relationship with her father post-divorce, without any real acknowledgement from him as to how his behaviour in the family affected her. As she spoke about her experiences, I had a sense of her sadness and a protective shell around that sadness. This is exemplified by her laugh at this moment, which is a sad laugh rather than a happy one, and almost feels like a laugh of disbelief that her mother could have been this insensitive. Also, the question of "you know?" belies an uncertainty and a wish for reassurance that what she is feeling is 'normal' and understandable.

All respondents described having to re-establish new relationships with both parents. Six of the eight respondents reported that their fathers had extramarital relationships, and one respondent's mother also. The parental divorce occurred after this information had come to light. In all circumstances, this caused significant pain and suffering for the faithful partner. In this context, the re-formed relationships were characterised by shame, guilt, loss and sadness on all sides. This was different for the one respondent whose parents made a mutual decision to separate.

Sylvia described a conflict in her mind, that she really wanted to see her father as they had not seen each other for a while, but was hesitant and then defensive with her mother as she did not want to hurt her. I gleaned a pleading element to this exchange, a plea for her mother's understanding as she described her position as "horrible", thus indicating the internal struggle she was feeling. She stated firmly later in the interview "because at the end of the day, you still want a relationship with your father":

> *"I said to mum that I was seeing dad and she was like 'what again?', and I was like 'well can't I see my dad' and she'd say something like 'well you're seeing him all the time now' and it was like once, it was twice in two weeks when I hadn't seen him for like 4 months before, and then I was put in this horrible position" (Sylvia: 405).*

Hope, however, described a different experience of establishing new relationships with her parents and that the divorce had a 'positive' effect on her relationship with her mother: "Yeah, I definitely wouldn't be as close to my mum and dad if they [...] hadn't got divorced [...] and I definitely got even closer to my dad" (Hope: 225).

3.4.3 Perceptions of love, relationships and family

All eight respondents described an aspiration to get married and to be in a committed relationship. They all speculated, however, as to the likelihood of that relationship lasting 'forever'.

All respondents described difficult feelings that they have had about the newly formed relationships within their family, and of coming to terms with the family's new identity and the part they are expected to play in it.

Zac described many difficult aspects of his parents' divorce, and that it took a long time for his dad to be settled with a new partner, but his mother remains single. As he spoke, there was a resigned element to his description of his experiences. He was silent for a few moments before he remarked: "Thinking about the future and thinking about marrying, I think I would make sure I don't do what he's done, because no one has gained from it really" (Zac: 1146). In his reflective tone of his voice, I had a sense that Zac felt resigned to what happened, of the pointlessness of it.

Sam was very sad both for his father and for his mother concerning his parents' divorce. He felt let down and betrayed by his father, using strong language such as "long time to forgive", loyalty", "treachery" and "righteous". His identity and the rules of behaviour that he thought governed the family were closely linked to the shattering of that idealised father figure: "my whole world came crumbling down"; "I didn't want to be him any more". It took some time before he was able to re-establish a relationship with his father again and to form a new identity for himself:

> *"I had a great respect for loyalty, for what is righteous, what is good. I have had a really hard time understanding what had happened; to me my parents shared that. When my father's, and this is going to sound ridiculous, honour was put in check, then my whole world came crumbling down in a moral way. Even him, who I respect and admire above anything. Before 14, he was my role model, he's what I wanted to be and now, I don't want to be him any more" (Sam: 430).*

Rosie was tearful as she talked about her step-mum. She stumbled over her words in a way that emphasised how hard it was for her to express her feelings of shock and confusion about her father's relationship with her mum's best friend:

> *"She was like an aunty to me before she was my step mum. My mum and dad met when they were 18 and they knew Dawn when they were that age. They've all been friends since like school, so like, yeah. Um, but yeah..." (Rosie: 143).*

She continued to recount their first meeting after her father left:

> *"I was, like, distraught, like, so scared to see her, like, when I first saw her I just, like, wanted to cry and stuff but I was like 'stay strong', 'stay strong', 'stay strong' and then, um, she… [tearful] Ah, she gave me a toothbrush, um, bubbly water, and I had to... to clean her skirting boards as she was*

moving and I remember on her floor cleaning [...] like, why is no one talking to me about this and being very upset" (Rosie:163).

I found this part of Rosie's interview one of the most painful and heart wrenching. She described a painful longing for her stepmother to reach out to her. I had this almost Cinderella-like image of this child, a picture painted of the powerlessness of her situation, "cleaning the skirting boards". She was treated as if she had no right to receive an acknowledgment of the pain that she was feeling, this was emphasised in the repetition of how hard it was for her to "stay strong".

Later in the interview, she stated clearly:

"I kinda want him to acknowledge, I want her to acknowledge what she's done to me. I think she thinks everything is fine, that she hasn't messed me up and I want to let her know that she has and that she should feel sorry for what she has done" (Rosie: 680).

Sylvia struggled to find a way to express how she was feeling. She spoke in a sorrowful way and I had a sense of how, for a long time, she has had to carry painful emotions for both her mother and father. I had a sense that she felt exhausted by this experience of trying very hard to remain connected to both of them. This was exemplified in these abstracts. She felt loyalty to her mother due to the hardship that her mother suffered after the divorce. Sylvia described how hard she tried to support the family but that in her opinion, the impact of this experience left the family disconnected and separate from each other's emotional life-worlds. She seemed to feel very saddened by this:

"I think my mum was really brave because she was sort of left with these four kids [...] who you've got to pretend like their dad did nothing wrong and then they are crying that their dad left and you've still, you got to be like, 'oh he still loves you'" (Sylvia: 154).

She went on to say later in the interview: "Now I think it's made us not that close emotionally, like, we are close in that we never fight, but there is not a huge amount of interest in each other's lives or sort of..." (Sylvia: 684).

Dave reflected on his experience and how he felt about the change in his identity that occurs as the result of being the child of divorced parents. In the following extract, he described feeling hopeless about the future of marriage – "the age of the nuclear family is at an end" – and that the children of divorce are used to feeling "alien". I wondered if this was how he initially felt as he came to terms with his new reality.

I had a sense of the passing of time, the journey that he had experienced. As a child, he had no concept of divorce but as an emerging adult, he felt more realistic, almost fatalistic somehow, about the possibility:

> *"It's interesting. I think the age of the nuclear family is almost at an end [laughter] sadly. [...] I don't know, it seems that every person I meet has a... parents who either had a divorce or are separated. I don't know, it just seems to be, erm, a lot more like that, you know, marriages aren't necessarily the 'to death us do part'. When I was young, you know, man and woman got married and that was it, you know, they stayed together. I didn't understand divorce. I've never been around it, never had parents who had been through a divorce. I remember, sort of, seeing kids who had parents who were divorced, they were slightly alien, almost" (Dave: 1060).*

However, in the following extract, as many of the respondents were able to do, Dave nevertheless maintained some hope for his future relationships. His voice was more cheerful and light as he stated that marriage is "wonderful", and despite divorce being "part of life", it would not prevent him from trying. He even suggested that having choices could be helpful to maintaining a healthy relationship:

> *"I think marriage is a wonderful thing as well, I should say I'd like to get married but I am completely aware that divorce is now part of life and marriages don't last. Maybe relationships are better now there is an option?" (Dave: 2146).*

Lucy spoke anxiously and without pause. She was the most eager to speak of all the respondents, which seemed to me to reflect the time she did not feel able to speak at all. It was as if all her feelings had been tightly held inside her as she struggled for many years to make sense of what had happened to her parents and family, and they came tumbling out in our interview. I felt that her rage finally had an opportunity to be expressed. Using words such as " harboured", I had a sense of the secrets, guilt and sadness that had been hidden from everyone:

> *"I knew from 14 that mum was having an affair, and none of my family knew. I was the only one that knew. She didn't know... she didn't know that I knew until I was probably about 16. But I used to work for him, she used to work for him at the hairdresser" (Lucy: 111).*

> *"I harboured it for so long. When you feel like I could be responsible for breaking up my family. I couldn't even bear the thought of it [...] I didn't face the reality of it, I just harboured hate, I hated both of them" (Lucy: 298).*

When Lucy described her family, I had a strong a sense from her of the betrayal and terrible disappointment that their happy, close family had been broken in such a way. Her understanding of what family represented for her had changed forever.

3.5 Subordinate Theme Three: Hope and Continuity

3.5.1 Reframing relationships

I experienced all eight respondents as being on a continuum in their journey through this life-changing event. Along with uncertainty and instability, they expressed despair, loss and sadness, as well as resilience, hope and a potential future.

Sam described, using the words "better" and "wonderful", how he was able to move towards his father as more of an equal, reframing their relationship as being a "buddy" rather than on a pedestal, as he had described their earlier relationship:

> *"I actually think with my father the relationship changed for the better, it made my relationship with my father wonderful, it turned more into my buddy, my support. My father got all the nice moments. He got the buddy moments" (Sam: 113).*

Like Dave, Rosie admitted that she didn't think "that love lasting forever" but also acknowledged that "people change". She repeated the word "change" as if she was contemplating the before and after. She also asserted that while she did not want her parents to be "unhappy", she would have liked the process to have been different. In this reframing, she appeared to have found a way of "understanding" her parents' divorce. She described herself as being "mentally mature", which highlighted to me that at that time she may not have felt able to be a child. There is a sense of journey in her story; there was a nostalgia in her statement "life changes" that felt painful at times:

> *"You know I, I don't believe in love lasting forever. I just think that, you know, life changes, you change and I don't think that they should have stayed together for us. I don't want them to be unhappy [...] I just think that, looking back on it, that they should have dealt with it differently" (Rosie: 309).*

Several of the respondents described coming to terms with what 'marriage' meant to them following the divorce of their parents, using terms such as "cynical" and "sceptical", but also

reporting that they would still get married, despite these views. There is a reflective nature to some of their musings on this issue. Hope, for instance, spoke slowly and thoughtfully as she stated:

> *"I think... I don't know if I would have been cynical of marriage anyway, but I am sceptical of marriage. That doesn't... that's not to say I wouldn't do it, it's just that I don't think 'forever after' is necessarily a reasonable idea [...] I wouldn't be surprised if I got married to someone and sort of knew that there might be like a 20-year limit cap on it and I wouldn't feel guilty for thinking that either. I suppose, but everything is ending in divorce anyway, so I don't think that makes a difference. 20 years is probably longer than most couples last anyway" (Hope: 646):*

Hope seemed to feel that she would like to believe in the concept of longevity, "to think that you can do it", but admitted that she would not want to stay in an unhappy marriage. She was, as she tended to be in her interview, practical in her approach but I still detected a reticence in her language about taking the risk – " I wouldn't be surprised", "I suppose" – of not quite wanting to be completely in one position. I experienced this as being self-protective and defensive: " I wouldn't feel guilty" and "everything is ending in divorce anyway".

As Sam described his view of relationships to me, I had a vision of a fire burning brightly and what needed to happen to nourish it and keep the flames alight, this is exemplified in his language:

> *"I have seen couples that have stayed married for a long, long time. I think it takes a lot of responsibility, respect, understanding and openness to know that the flames have gone, when you are not 'in love' but that you still love that person, it's a couple's love and being able to nourish it for a long time. I think it's very hard and it scares me. I didn't have that before my parents*

> *were divorced, I thought that you found your wife and loved her forever and it's that easy. But no, it takes dedication and it's not easy" (Sam: 1010).*

Sylvia spoke about her relationship with her father, rather than about the concept marriage itself. She described the slowly emerging nature of her relationship with her father and his new family over time. In using words such as "slow" and "burning", she reminded me of the last embers of a fire that will not go out, that the hope of a connection with him lay still in the embers, ready and waiting to be rebuilt. Her use of the word "different" suggests that the family he left behind had not been "fun". This reminded me of how difficult it had been for her and how fragile the relationship with her father was. Sylvia continued to be hopeful, however, of it providing warmth and light. She had found a way of being a part of his life: "They're fun"; "they are like family now":

> *"They're fun and they're a different, it's like another family now [...] The point we've got to now has been like a very slow, burning sort of nice relationship to build up. It's just there's, there's no reason to tell my mum when I'm seeing my dad because it's just another slap in the face" (Sylvia: 552).*

Sylvia, however, described the painful dilemma of trying to get close to her father while also protecting her mother's feelings – "there is no reason to tell mum" – and became a confidant as a form of support: "I sort of tend to be the one reassuring her". She admitted that "It's all very, still sensitive with [mum], so the closer I am with him, it's becoming more I'm lying to my mum and it's like two separate lives" (Sylvia: 777).

I understood in that moment that she had been forced to be complicit in this situation in order to have a relationship with both parents.

Tom spoke about how he would like to create for himself what he felt he had lost in his relationship with his father, giving what he didn't have "to my son" and using the word "solid" to represent the permanence and constancy he did not have. By understanding his experience with his father, he became determined that it would not be the same between him and his family: "Instead of me having a relationship with my father, maybe that's all I can have, is the ability to give what I didn't have to my son" (Tom: 1118).

Tom emphasised his vision of a different experience in the future: "I would love to have a family, I would like to have one family and stay there. I want a solid family" (Tom: 650).

Dave also described his hopes for romance and connection, but mentioned that he was nervous and "wary", admitting that he was "cynical" and did not want to "take after [his] father". He identified some of the characteristics of his father's relationships that he did not like and did not want to repeat, but also maintained that he had hope and would not be "put off":

> *"I get very attached to people as well, that's probably my father's thing, a hopeless romantic. I think I've definitely become more cynical about relationships. Seeing how it has affected my father, it has made me more wary, but never to put me off" (Dave: 1381).*

Despite the significant struggle she described throughout her interview to find ways of managing her experience, Rosie was able to describe, hesitantly both in language and tone, finding joy and a "spark" from the embers of her sadness and loss. As she spoke, I felt a glimmer of hope that she thought it could be possible to have a healthy, nourishing relationship:

"Yeah, they're so in love [mother and stepfather] and like they're just... It's quite nice to actually see a good relationship for once. Cause I hadn't... I don't think I've ever seen one, till I saw them. I guess it's like a little spark of hope, that, like, relationships aren't all shit. Yeah" (Rosie: 738).

3.5.2 Endings and beginnings

This theme encompassed some of the challenges that all eight of the respondents described facing in their new family paradigm. Dave described the spaces that lie between him and his family members, which can cause confusion and distress, and identified "communication" as being the most important way of being on the same "wavelength":

> *"For my family, we needed a communication platform, there needs to be strong communication in the family. it's hugely hard and you need to make sure every- one is on the same wavelength because there is so much emotion [...] sometimes things are over looked that are important and everyone's going to react to it differently [...] a lot of the time we don't understand what is going on, because we hear different things from our parents" (Dave: 1735).*

Sam spoke about the positive influence of his step-father on the family and how he had brought a "peace" to his parent's relationship with each other. His stepfather helped them to see the importance of the love and "connection" between them all, almost in the way that a mediator might be able to.

> *"My stepfather is a great, great man. Everyone in my family, we're all hot-heads and he helped my mum understand that this was important, for my sister and me and because they couldn't live with this poison. That they had a connection that could not be broken" (Sam: 730).*

Continuing with the theme of communication, Hope also spoke about how she enjoyed her relationship with her stepmother. She was a "god- send" as opposed to her mother's boyfriend who she "hates", As the extracts below suggested there can be some ambivalence and resentment in relationships with step- parents as well as benefits:

> *"Jane [Hope's stepmother] is a godsend, like, there could not be a better human being. She's very good. Whereas in contrast, my mother has had one very awful boyfriend for seven years who I hated with a passion" (Hope: 323).*

Lucy also struggled with her parent's new partners, and admitted that she did not want them back together but that it had been a challenge to see them in new relationships:

> *"it makes me hate both their partners when they are like that (showing affection). I'm very protective of my parents in that way, not them as a couple cause you couldn't pay me enough to ever let them be back together, just the idea makes me cringe. I just don't want to see them with anyone else" (Lucy: 1628).*

Hope had similar feelings: "The part of the divorce I find difficult is my parents being with a lot of people [...] I think other people [...] I guess other people trying to be my parent I've never taken very well" (Hope: 701).

Tom described the beginning of a much yearned for relationship with his father, free from expectation: "I don't feel like I'm owed anything anymore. I feel that I can give it to myself, so then the relationship with him can just develop as just, you know, two humans" (Tom: 276).

There seemed to be a hope for something different and new being created between Tom and his father as he relinquished his disappointment for what he felt he had never had. All the

respondents described moments that embodied 'beginnings' and 'endings' but I often reflected, as I listened to their stories, how these moments moved back and forth, in a circular motion, rather than in a straight line.

3.5.3 Coping and resilience

All respondents identified coping strategies that had helped them to make sense of and manage the lived experience of their parents' divorce. Each respondent had a very unique voice that expressed some of the difficult and painful feelings that had emerged following the divorce. It was clear, however, that they were also able to identify their strengths and had shown their capacity to withstand that pain and make sense of it.

Sam spoke about "defence", that he had to find ways of protecting himself against the "pain" that had caused his heart to feel "broken". I had a sense of time passing as at first the narrative was a powerful description of how he had experienced his parents' infallibility, but he then went on to say that he had found "peace" when he eventually realised that his parents were happy:

> *"One thing that I had to do just as a defence mechanism, I have a hard time living with something I don't understand. That was enhanced in the divorce, because I had to understand that things can go wrong, so that pain came out of that, but there was a reason underneath it. And I think what gave me peace after a long time was when I understood it's OK. Because as a kid you always have the idea my mum and dad are gonna get back together and I really want that. But the moment that I understood that they're happy as they are, and they deserve to be happy, and if they had stayed together, they would not have been happy" (Sam: 848).*

Like Sam, Lucy also seemed to come to a degree of peace with her parents. She had come to accept that life does not always go as hoped, and that although her mother could have been

"different", it was not to be in her case. She referred to the 'childlike' quality that other respondents had also observed in their parents, suggesting that when falling in love "you come like a child". When I reflected on her ambivalence to having her own relationships, I wondered if for her the idea of becoming 'childlike' felt very uncomfortable. There was a quality in the way she expressed acceptance of her mother's behaviour that embodied the powerlessness she seemed to have felt throughout her childhood:

> *"When you fall for someone else, just cause you are 40 or 50 [...] you come like a child. I really believe that she could have done things differently, but I understand that she would never have wanted what happened to happen. Life is not always the way we want it to go" (Lucy: 1110).*

Rosie, Zac, Sylvia and Dave identified both healthy and unhealthy behaviours they each admitted may have been ways of managing their emotions. Using phrases such as "escapism" highlighted how difficult it had been for them, whereas "I didn't have my parents" and "I'm quite insecure" suggest feelings of being alone and using unhealthy ways of managing their emotions.

Zac explained "I started smoking a lot of weed around that time [...] there was some form of escapism with it" (Zac: 557). Rosie admitted "I was a party girl. I was raving from 14, going out, taking drugs, had a very wild, druggy adolescence. I didn't have my parents around that much, I basically was allowed to do whatever I wanted to do" (Rosie: 405).

Sylvia told me:

> *"I think with men, you know, maybe sleeping around a bit and being attracted to horrible guys that aren't good for me. Like, the other day this really smart guy, they would never like me, someone intellectual and good looking. I don't know why but I think maybe that's from what happened with*

> *my mum and dad. I have such a low thing of myself. I'm quite insecure I think" (Sylvia: 602).*

Lucy spoke quietly and seemed a little ashamed when she said "the six months after is really blurry. I was doing drugs and got drunk and I picked the worst boyfriend in the world" (Lucy: 896).

Several respondents described their friends as providing invaluable support, of having a "sisterhood", "amazing friendships" and how they are "there for each other", which implied that these may be features that were lost in their relationships with their parents. In the description of these connections, there was an implicit need for them.

Zac recalled: "Talking to my friends, 'you guys mean more to me than my family does', because you know, I, it's an innate feeling, I have to love my family whereas I love you guys just out of being my mates" (Zac: 1258).

Similarly, Rosie told me "I have amazing friendships, I think. Like all my friends, we've come from shit families, like for some reason, like, all my friends' dads are not around or, like, something has happened" (Rosie: 442). Later, she mentioned that:

> *"Friendships are so important to me. Me and my best friends, we've been friends since we were very little, and we have a sisterhood and we are very close [...] We are all there for each other. When we do talk about it, it's like a joke. Occasionally, we will talk about it seriously, like when we are really drunk, and we'll end up crying" (Rosie: 992).*

It seemed to me that the solidarity and community of her friends provided the support and care that was often lacking for Rosie while she tried to manage the challenges of her parents' divorce.

Zac moved through his account of the changes in his family situation with a clarity and honesty that gave me a powerful and vivid snapshot of his experience. He highlighted how he coped at each stage of the transition, from not speaking to his sisters – "We haven't actually spoken about that night" (Zac: 534) – to being alone in his sadness: "I remember the nights being quite difficult. I'd put on depressing music and cry" (Zac: 563). Zac tried to establish a routine of seeing his father, although that was difficult to cope with: "meeting him was always a chore. Such a chore. My sisters and I would laugh about it, that was our way of dealing with it" (Zac: 732). Finally and poignantly, he described the experience as an opportunity to make life how he wanted it to be: "Me and my sisters, we had a great childhood, we had everything you could ask for and then when the money went, that was a kick up the arse… I've got to do this myself now" (Zac:1076).

I found this glimpse into the richness of his experience embodied the uncertainty and fragmentation of self and the identity of the family that could occur when parents divorce. Zac's account does, however, end with hope and a commitment to making life how he wanted it to be. There was also a kind of resignation to this reality, and this resonated across each respondent's story – that they felt they were the only ones who could control what happened in their lives and were determined to make sure they took control of the direction of their lives.

Tom spoke in a melancholic voice about his father and throughout the interview described his feelings of loss at not having a relationship with him. He was, however, able to find a way of reframing his experiences in a more hopeful way, and has found strength and identity with his mother's family: "In a way, I feel like I've gained a lot from, from my hardships. I've been through a lot of hard things and I feel like that's what kind of shaped me more than anything"

(Tom: 1057). Later, Tom state that "I love my mother's side of the family, and we are so lucky we all live close. I treasure it" (Tom: 1161).

Throughout Sylvia's interview, I had a sense of her loneliness and isolation. It seemed to me that both her and the other members of her family had learned to keep their emotions to themselves. Using expressions such as "bottled up" and stating that they did not "show their feelings" led me to reflect on how she had coped with the shock of this event. These extracts gave an example of how Sylvia experienced herself following the divorce:

> *"Yeah, we were never, no we were never the kids who sort of screamed and shouted about stuff, but because no one really showed their feelings at all, ever. It's probably not good to bottle it up as much as I do" (Sylvia: 644).*

When Sylvia spoke about how she saw herself in future relationships, she told me that she was "not massively dependent" on people. I reflected on how dangerous it might feel for her to trust in someone else:

> *"I don't think I let myself get close to men, to never expect something bad to happen. I feel like I am always expecting something bad to happen so I never get close enough to really depend on them [...] I feel like I am setting myself up to get hurt if something bad happens" (Sylvia: 945).*

This segment at the end of Lucy's interview, in a similar way to Zac, felt like a statement both to herself and to me. It was a moving and evocative journey through her experience and felt like a fitting end to this chapter. It embodied the essence of resilience and the nature of the circularity of that experience:

> *"Life... things change in life and you just go with it, so whether or not you like it, or you accept it, or you understand it, like, I think, like, it was such a whirlwind, those 10 years of everything anyway. It just, kind of like, is this*

> *my life now? [...] We were a very comfortable family [...] and then I blinked and I was 19 and my dad was following my mum because she was having an affair. My brother was kicking in bins and getting arrested, and I was like, what is going on? Like, we are, we are a lovely family, and now my life's like... it was just so bizarre. But then, you kind of accept what is happening, that becomes a reality. And then your next change, whether your dad meets someone else, or maybe I went through a bit of a horrible, horrible relationship, and I got into my own little horrible cycle, but then that became my reality. You, you, you kind of take it in your stride as it comes [...] I think I looked back on it and I was like, 'did that really happen?"(Lucy: 2117)*

As I listened to this part of her interview, I was struck by how often Lucy used the words "reality" and "change", and I wondered how hard it often seemed to be for respondents to come to terms with their new family structure, and that it was a process that had taken varying amounts of time to make sense of.

All respondents both laughed and were at times tearful throughout their stories, as they remembered certain experiences, moments in time recalled with a vividness that transported me to the heart of their story.

It felt like a privilege.

Chapter Four: Discussion

4.1 Introduction

In this final chapter, I reflect on how each respondent's unique story has helped me understand the experience of emerging adults' parental divorce. Following the analysis of the data, I reflect in this chapter upon Bowlby's (1969) work on attachment and Minuchin's (1974) work on family systems theory, and how they have contributed to the understanding of the experience of parental divorce. I also consider how current literature concerning emerging adults and parental divorce can be understood in relation to the emergent themes in the present study. I then consider the superordinate themes that have been identified: loss, altered reality, and hope and continuity. These emerged from multiple close readings of each transcript and I examine the way these enhance understanding of the experience of parental divorce for emerging adults. I further discuss the implications of the data in relation to current knowledge, and how the findings of this study have enriched understanding of the topic. I then critique the use of IPA with emerging adults who have experienced parental divorce, followed by examining the strengths and limitations of the study. Implications for the working practices of counselling psychologists and a final reflexive note round off this chapter.

4.1.1 Family systems theory and attachment theory: Making sense of respondents' stories

Family systems theory (Minuchin, 1974) and attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) informed my understanding of respondents' experiences of parental divorce. Both of these perspectives focus on relationship and communication patterns, and propose that individuals cannot be understood in isolation from each other, but rather must be placed within the context of the family unit:

> *"Families so profoundly affect their members thoughts, feelings, and actions that it often seems as if people are living under the same 'emotional skin'. The connectedness and reactivity make the functioning of family members interdependent. A change in one person's functioning is predictably followed by reciprocal changes in the functioning of others" (Kerr, 2000, p.1).*

Drawing on the analysis of the data, this study proposes that the intimate relationships and interdependent belief systems particular to the family provide us with a powerful means of understanding individuals' thoughts and feelings about parental divorce. In this research, it was only possible to hear the individual story of the respondent; the "'circular patterns of interaction', in contrast to the cause and effect 'linear' thinking" (Barnes, Thompson, Daniel, & Burchardt, 1998, p.3) provide a useful lens in this discussion through which the context of the experience described could be understood. Difficulties in patterns of family life are often related to an event, such as parental divorce, that involves a fundamental change in the way that the family functions. This requires the therapist to consider the many different narratives that may emerge as each family member makes sense of the change.

Bowen (1978, cited in Erdem & Aiman Safi, 2018, p.470) defines family both "as a relationship system and an emotional system whereby family members are influenced by one another at individual, dyadic, systemic and intergenerational levels". Kerr and Bowen, (1988) propose that the principal factors attributable to family functioning are chronic anxiety caused by the need to maintain the self while making meaningful connections with others, and differentiation of the self from meaningful others in order to regulate that anxiety; "achieving this balance of separateness and connectedness is a lifelong dynamic process and is universal to all human beings as a fundamental dilemma" (Erdem & Aiman Safi, 2018, p.470). This research considers this dilemma during the developmental stage known as 'emerging adult' (Arnett, 2000).

Both clinical and subjective knowledge suggest that an individual's early life experiences are "intimately connected to how they make the present, to the choices they consider they are able to make, and to their ability to respond to further life stress" (Barnes et al., 1998, p.5). Attachment theory provides a useful model for understanding children's development in the context of relationships. Main, Kaplan and Cassidy (1985) propose that the ability to present a coherent story about one's life is connected to the capacity to make secure attachments in future life, and Barnes et al. state that "children need secure relationships with their caregivers in order to develop healthy emotional and social relationships" (1998, p.40). Bowlby (1977) states that children need to have a positive and nurturing relationship with their parents or they can tend to build a representation of themselves as unlovable and unworthy.

The data in this study suggests that parental divorce is a risk factor for emerging adults, affecting, for example, parent-offspring relationships and an established family structure; however, not all respondents exposed to this event will experience it in a negative way. Throughout the research journey, I have aimed to understand in more depth how an individual experiences parental divorce, and the complexity of the ways in which that event interconnects with other beliefs and assumptions about themselves, their family life and their social world. The reader should hold in their mind as they read this chapter the circularity and interconnectedness of the experiences and perspectives described. The respondents appeared to move between the themes that emerged from the data, both consciously and unconsciously, and always within the parameters of relationships, described in many different ways, as 'family'.

4.2 Loss

This superordinate category grouped together subordinate themes that were interpreted as causing respondents to feel 'loss' following their parents' divorce. This theme links to the paradigm of 'loss' as discussed by Wallerstein et al.: "If happiness increases one's odds of experiencing loss, think how dangerous it must be to simply feel happy" (2000, p.15). Konstam (2009) states that "the key narrative of divorce is a narrative of loss" (p.29).

Wallerstein et al. (2000) emphasise the series of losses that children of divorced parents may experience: the loss of childhood as they take on more responsibilities in the face of their parents' distress; the loss of stability following a series of 'transitions' in which one or both parents find new long-term partners, or experience a succession of short-term ones; and the consideration that offspring of divorce have to adapt and find ways of coping with these transitions, often without support from their parents, who are themselves distracted and distressed.

The theme of loss encapsulates these emotions as a way of describing the sense of a young person robbed of a "normal life" (Valdez, Chavez, & Woulfe, 2013). As noted in the literature review, Laumann-Billings and Emery (2000) reported that emerging adults, both in college and in a community-based sample, described painful feelings, beliefs and memories about their parent's divorce. Distress about family life was greater among students from divorced families than those from married families. In both groups, loss was identified concerning relationships with fathers, loss of the family home and psychological symptoms such as sadness.

This study aims to explore and understand in more depth both this distress and ways of coping with it. There were no current studies identified that specifically focus on feelings of

loss in relation to parental divorce for emerging adults, but many identify how the disruption of family relationships, and at times the devastating loss of the relationship with one parent, can cause negative psychological consequences (Harvey & Fine, 2004). All respondents in the present study described feelings of sadness and loss in relation to the changing nature of their family lives, and particularly in their relationships with their fathers. As identified in studies in the literature review, respondents also described feelings around the loss of emotional closeness with their parents (Elder-Avidan et al, 2009) and the loss of family cohesion (Cunningham & Waldock, 2016). The latter study used semi-structured interviews with emerging adults and identified three sources of distress: family co-ordination difficulties, struggles balancing the politics of parental expectations concerning time with their children and perceptions of the break-up of the family. Ongoing logistical difficulties were much more commonly described by emerging adults than painful feelings.

The respondents in the present study all described both painful feelings and logistical difficulties when they spoke about their parents' divorce. This was expressed by Rose when she spoke about her parents: "*they should have made it better to co-parent me, not move me about, not say evil things about each other, my mum being dependent on me, my dad leaving me. They could have done it way better not to affect me; it's fucked me up in a way"* (Rosie: 314). This was also mentioned by Sylvia when she spoke about the politics of trying to maintain family life: "*now I feel guilty for being close with my dad and especially his now wife, so a lot of the time my mum doesn't know half the times I am with my dad; it's like having to have two separate lives"* (Sylvia: 378).

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According to Storksen, Arstad-Thorsen, Overland, and Brown (2012), offspring from divorced families have more anxious, sad and lonely feelings than offspring of continuously married parents, and these negative effects also seem to be present, irrespective of the type of relationship that parents have post-divorce (Beckmeyer, Coleman & Ganong, 2014).

Each respondent identified feelings of sadness and loss in the moment of being told about their parents' divorce, and vividly described the painful memories of that experience. All eight remembered clearly the moment they were told about their parents' divorce, but many struggled to articulate their feelings about it. The majority of respondents seemed to share the belief that they were moving from one type of family to another, and described feelings of shock at the loss of the concept of 'family' as they knew it. Sam spoke about the "crystal palace" (Sam:156) he had made for himself, and his belief that his family were "untouchable, that which cannot be destroyed" (Sam :159). No current research was identified that uniquely explored this moment of 'being told', and the present study informs a deeper understanding of the importance of this moment for the respondents.

4.2.1 Struggling to be heard

Research shows that meaningful communication when informing offspring of an impending divorce can help them to cope with the effects better, encouraging a more open dialogue both with parents and friends (Du Plooy & Van Rensburg, 2015). Dave stated that "to improve that whole process, it comes down to communication, having a platform on which you can all make sure you're on the same page" (1823).

In Morrison, Fife and Hertlein's phenomenological study (2017), communication emerged as a significant theme. The authors identified being able to talk openly with parents and friends about divorce and the changes that the family encounter in a healthy and productive manner

as being critical to the adjustment of the offspring of divorced parents. Zac explained that "the idea that my friends had divorced parents or single parents or whatever, it kind of got me through it" (Zac: 606). Rosie described having a "sisterhood" of friends (Rosie: 995). These respondents stated that it was helpful to feel understood and that this in turn helped them to make sense of their experience. According to Kramrei, Coit, Martin, Fogo, and Mahoney (2007), offspring of divorced parents with strong support networks were found to demonstrate healthier levels of adjustment and wellbeing.

Respondents also described how their experiences of communication shaped how they perceived the divorce, and consequently their parents. This view is supported by Morrison et al. (2017), who state that "communication both between parents and from parent to child was critical in the participants' view of the divorce" (p.57). In their study, respondents expressed negative views about their parents' divorce and relationships, and described a link between their own romantic relationships and their perceptions of how well their parents had managed their divorce. If they experienced their parents as being communicative and open with them during the divorce process, they described more positive feelings about long-term commitment in relationships. Those who had experienced interparental conflict expressed less optimism about having close relationships. In this study, while the there was no analysis of the link between how well their parents had navigated the divorce and respondents' attitudes towards committed relationships, all respondents showed some ambivalence to the likelihood of marriage lasting forever. This is consistent with Pantelis, Bonotis, and Kandri (2015), who propose that the offspring's vision of future relationships is often compromised after a divorce.

4.2.2 Fracturing of family relationships

Morrison et al. (2017) state that most adult offspring of divorced parents come to accept their parents' decision to divorce as the best option given the state of their marriage, and this was borne out by the respondents in the present study. However, the respondents in this study were more focused on the loss of 'family' as an identity and the changes in the family relationship system than on the unhappiness of their parents.

Wallerstein et al. (2000) state that divorce is "life transforming" (2000, p13) and this has been supported in the findings of the present study. They also identify emerging adults who had experienced parental divorce as having lost the "template" of a good relationship. As new family structures materialise, there can be "very different demands placed on each parent, each child and each of the many new adults who may enter the family orbit" (p.15). Current research suggests that there are many mitigating factors regarding the way that offspring of divorced parents cope: the degree of parental conflict before and after the divorce (Fincham, 1994; Amato & DeBoer, 2001), the involvement of the non-resident parent (Fabricus & Hall, 2000) and the extent of re-partnering by both parents (Daniels & Moos, 1990; Aughinbaugh, Pierret, & Rothstein, 2005). These can be seen as a series of losses for the emerging adult (Arnett, 2004).

This study has shown how respondents reacted in a variety of ways to their parents' divorce. The quality of the parental relationship is central to how the family functions (Roth, Harkins & Eng, 2013) and when the family is disrupted through divorce, all members of the family can be profoundly affected (Harvey & Fine, 2010). Hoffman and Ledford (1996) state that disturbed relationships with primary caregivers has been found to negatively affect behaviour and the development of social relationships throughout adolescence. Divorce often requires a stressful reorganisation of family relationships, negotiating physical and emotional transitions

(Cowan & Hetherington, 1991). The renegotiating of post-divorce parental relationships by the respondents in this study was described as being a significant cause of worry and stress.

From the perspective of family systems theory, the experience of parental divorce impacts upon how the family system and dynamic adjust and adapt to the demands placed on them in this new paradigm. In the present study, although individual differences were seen between respondents, exposure to parental conflict and divorce affected parent-offspring relationships, and this required a new set of rules and boundaries to understand and absorb when navigating the changing family system.

4.2.3 Attitudes towards sense of self and romantic relationships

There is evidence in this study of the way that respondents' 'versions' of themselves changed in light of their parents' divorce. Throughout the interviews, respondents discussed ways in which the development of their identity and overall sense of self has been affected by their parents' divorce. Lucy described herself as "very, very self-critical" (Lucy: 2415) and Rosie described herself as being "insecure" (Rosie: 627). Research shows that attitudes toward romantic relationships and communication styles change dramatically as a result of parental divorce and parental conflict, especially for females (Sanders, Halford, & Behrens, 1999). This is supported by Dennison and Koerner's study (2006), in which the authors report that higher post-divorce interparental conflict is predictive of more negative attitudes towards marriage in offspring.

The phenomenological approach of the present study allowed for a deeper exploration and therefore understanding of how emerging adults described their feeling about future relationships; this level of investigation was only found in a few previous studies.

Lucy stated that she did not think that "long-term relationships exist" (Lucy: 2189) and that she didn't "believe in monogamy at all" (Lucy: 2199). All respondents described feelings of disillusion concerning what 'being together forever' meant to them, a loss of the grand narrative of romantic love. Sam challenged the core belief that two people can love each other forever, as did Hope, Lucy and Dave. This potentially undermines their own notion of being lovable forever. In his interview, Sam stated that "you can find someone, but making it last for the whole thing is hard" (Sam:102).

All respondents in the present study commented on their hopes to marry, but on the understanding that they did not necessarily believe that the relationship would last a lifetime. South (2013) also stated that participants in her study, following their parents' divorce, did not feel capable of deep and lasting relationships with a romantic partner. Several studies have indicated that adult offspring of divorced parents are cautious and tentative about intimate relationships and their desire to start their own families (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989; Hetherington et al., 1999) as they fear being "rejected and hurt" (Johnston & Thomas, 1996, p.390).

When thinking about these perspectives in the light of attachment theory, Mikulincer and Shaver's (2003) attachment activation model highlights the way in which the offspring of divorce can develop insecure attachments and are therefore at risk of developing attachment anxiety or avoidance. Mikulincer's (2006) study, discussed in the literature review, considers the parts of attachment theory that deal with the nature and development of working models (Bowlby, 1969/72), and how the two major dimensions of attachment insecurity, avoidance and anxiety, affect those models. Attachment theorists and researchers (Cassidy & Kobak, 1988; Main, 1990) have extensively documented the negative consequences of fractured attachments and suggest that attachment processes shape sexual motives, experiences and

behaviors. Tracy, Shaver, Albino and Cooper (2003) found that securely attached adolescents experienced fewer negative emotions in intimate relationships and more positive emotions than their less securely attached peers.

Expanding on the discussion in the literature review, in Yu &Adler-Baeder's study (2007) five hundred and thirteen emerging adults completed a questionnaire regarding the quality of their parents' marital relationships and various aspects of their own committed relationships. Although the quality of the parents' first marriage predicted aspects of emerging adults' intimate relationships, for children whose parents remarried, results suggested that parental remarriage relationship quality has more influence on current relational dimensions than the quality of their parents' first marriage.

Offspring in one-parent families display more insecure and avoidant attachment styles (Gloger-Tippelt & Konig, 2007), and offspring whose parent's divorce earlier in their childhood tend to score lower on self-esteem measures than those whose parents divorced later in their lives (Connel, Hayes, & Carlson, 2015). These constructs are identified by significant discomfort with intimacy and closeness, or a strong fear of abandonment (Saavedra, Chapman, & Rogge, 2010). As was noted in the literature review, a failure to establish and maintain healthy romantic relationships has been seen to cause unhappiness and distress throughout life (Braithwaite, Delevi & Fincham, 2010). Braithwaite, Delevi & Fincham reported in their study that college students in committed romantic relationships experience greater well-being and fewer mental health problems than single college students.

The present study does not make any statements related to the age of the respondent at the time of the parental divorce, but this could be relevant for further research.

4.2.4 Joint parenting

After the divorce, all respondents spoke about the importance of trying to maintain positive relationships with both parents, and how difficult this could be at times; Fabricius and Hall (2000) report that "children of divorce wanted to have spent more time with their fathers as they were growing up and the living arrangement they believed was best for children was living equal time with each parent" (p.456).

There is evidence that emerging adults' relationships with their non-resident fathers is important for their wellbeing (Amato, 2010; Mattanah, Lopez, & Govern, 2011), and this is seen in the data of the present study. The way that the non-resident parent, primarily the father, navigates their post-divorce relationships with the rest of their family is a much-discussed subject (Dunn, Davies, O'Connor, & Sturgess, 2000; Laumann-Billings and Emery, 2000). The majority of respondents described their fathers' role in their lives as being sharply diminished post-divorce, and this appeared to be a source of considerable distress and sadness for them: "ex-husbands and ex-wives can tend to find themselves as the injured party and children are under implicit or explicit pressure to side with one or the other" (Arnett 2014, p.74).

McLanahan, Tach and Schnieder (2013) state that the absence of the father post-divorce affects offspring's social and emotional development, and that this can lead to increases in potentially risky behaviour such as sexual promiscuity or drug abuse. This was seen in two of the respondents in this study, who described feeling 'out of control' at certain times in the divorce process. Accoring to Vezzetti, "The consequences of loss of contact between one of the parents and the offspring will result in a heavy burden for future worldwide generations" (2016, p.9).

As was also identified in studies in the literature review, weaving throughout their stories, respondents' highlight the importance of good quality co-parenting parental relationships and how these are crucial for parental and offspring adjustment (Katz & Woodin, 2002).

Zac expressed his frustration at the lack of a positive co-parental relationship: *"this was an unkind thing she used to do, this was one of the arguments we used to have. She used to get us to message him on behalf of her but making it look like we're asking him, which I thought was unfair" (Zac: 1054).*

The preventative effect of shared parenting on parental loss has been reported in countries where shared parenting has become increasingly common (Bergstrom-Lynch, 2015). Research also suggests that co-parenting minimises parental conflict and that there is no significant difference in levels of conflict between families in joint custody arrangements and families with sole custody (Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1996). Parenting well following divorce has been highlighted as the central challenge of the divorce process (Emery, 2011). However, there is a paucity of studies on how functioning post-divorce co-parenting relationships are maintained (Jamison, Coleman, Ganong, & Feistman, 2014). Respondents in the present study clearly described the ways they were affected by their parents' responses to their divorce; loss of parenting due to altered parent-child relationships and interparental conflict were two that were frequently identified. This enhances and informs present literature to better understand ways of effectively co-parenting after divorce.

Levels of contact with the father and degree of parental acrimony have been most commonly linked with aspects of emerging adults' distress. Laumann-Billings (2000) and Mullins et al. (2007) reported close relationships with both parents as being a factor in the development of successful coping strategies at this specific life stage. Six of the eight respondents in this

study spoke of a wish to have developed a closer relationship with their father as they were growing up, and that they felt the loss of missing that opportunity. As they got older, the relationship improved, but it had taken time and determination on their part. Sylvia spoke positively about an improved relationship with her father as he became increasingly able to include her in his new family's life and spend more time with her. In this study, each respondent expressed the opinion that seeing both parents was important for them. Apart from Sam and Hope, they observed a painful tension between themselves and their mothers if they attempted to see their fathers. This did not stop them, but it affected the quality of their relationship with each parent.

Losses following parental divorce were described in physical and emotional terms. Hope described her sadness at moving out of her family home; Zac mentioned the loss of the family unit; Sylvia explained feelings of loss associated with identity, the end of being part of a "perfect" family and a loss of "wholeness" in her feelings about herself and her family; Tom mourned the loss of a "protective" father; and Sam described the loss of the social status of coming from a "happy" family.

The respondents all described the experience of undergoing a change in family structure and the loss of parental relationships as they had known them. This appeared to impact on their sense of wellbeing:

> *"When children experience disruption, instability and insecurity in the family, they can face significant stress, these stressors can define and propagate images of family that can have long-lasting effects on their both their sense of selves and on their relationships with others. They can react to the stressor with ambivalence, shame, secrecy and by reclaiming control" (Valdez et al; 2013 p.1094).*

Respondents in this study described feelings of loss and sadness that they were continuing to make sense of, often many years after the event. As the interviews progressed, these were often replaced with expressions of acceptance and forgiveness; conceptualising those feelings in terms of loss may be a useful way of hearing and acknowledging clients' stories as they learn to adapt to their new situation. King and Hicks suggest that perhaps happiness involves the recognition of loss and that "what is regrettable in life emerges from maturity and contributes to maturation itself" (King & Hicks, 2007, p.625).

4.3 Altered Reality

4.3.1 Post-divorce co-parenting

All respondents in this study reported a change in the quality of their relationships, an aspect of divorce that is seen across a wide body of research (Amato & Afifi, 2006; Luedemann, Ehrenberg, & Hunter, 2006). Considering the current knowledge on this issue, which emerged from the literature review, this present study supports the perspective that the quality of parenting after divorce and remarriage has a profound impact on children's development (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2007). Logistics related to transitioning between parental homes, and the emotional distress caused when one parent manipulates their child's view of the other parent, are examples of this, as was reported by Ahrons (2004).

Sam spoke about how proud he was of his parents for working hard to provide a collaborative and positive parenting model, and that this had been helpful. He did, however, describe having different relationships with them both after the divorce, both in terms of them as parents but also as individuals (Sam: 1494). Wallerstein et al. (2000) suggest that children have separate relationships with each parent, as well as the relationship between them; the authors argue that divorce "brings radical changes to parent-child relationships" (p.35). Sam explained this as follows: "I have my dad and my mum, I don't have my parents".

Robinson et al. (2003) suggest that the offspring of divorced parents often struggle to attempt to regain some balance in their bonds with their parents. All respondents referred to encountering a different type of parenting post-divorce, as well as having altered relationships with each parent. Lucy spoke about her parents as "not my mum any more, like these completely independent people that are gone from being my parents to being human beings" (Lucy: 1772).

Rosie spoke about how her family life completely changed after her father had an affair with her mother's best friend. She admitted that she had been "completely fucked up" (Rosie: 289) during the time of the divorce, and in her interview mentioned "looking back on it, they should have dealt with it differently, they should have made it better to co-parent me" (Rosie:315). According to Bonach (2005), high-quality co-parenting is characterised by low conflict and mutual support between co-parents. Of all the respondents, only Hope positively described a time when her parents presented a united front to support her in important issues in her life; other respondents referred to their parents as becoming 'buddies' rather than continuing in a parenting role.

No research was found that directly explored the implications of the blurred parent/friend boundaries following parental divorce, as studies mainly focus on how interparental conflict affects co-parenting. According to Emery (2011), divorce requires the reformulation of role definitions, relationships and boundaries between all members of a family. If, as has been described in the present study, parents are unable to process feelings of anger, hostility and guilt towards each other, they will have problems in their co-parenting relationship (Gurmen, Brown, Orbuch, & Birditt, 2017).

The concept of an "emotional divorce" (Vanderkool & Pearson, 1983) as a conceptual framework may help parents understand the impact of their relationship in the restructuring of the family system. Working systematically with families allows for increased understanding of the meanings that offspring of divorced parents give to parental interactions and provides a way of supporting them. A secure family base has many different forms and divorce can mean the end of not only the parental relationship and the daily rhythm of family life, but also other social systems that contribute to an individual's sense of self, whatever developmental stage they may be at (Barnes et al., 1998).

Ahrons (2007) stated that parent-child relationships continue throughout life and that parental divorce during any developmental transition can alter family relationships; "whether these family relationships remain stable, improve or get worse depends on a complex interweaving of both pre- and post-divorce factors" (p.62). After the divorce, the family works to find new ways of being. Each member of that system has to make sense of the new paradigm and find a way of living within it. Family life is guided by traditions such as "clear roles, routines, a positive emotional climate and traditions" (Fiese, Foley, & Spagnola, 2006, p.119) and respondents in this study often remarked on how the rules and routines of their family lives had been reconfigured after their parents' divorce.

Divorce does not seem to affect relationships with custodial mothers and fathers in the same way (Lye, 1996), and this was highlighted in the present study. After divorce, it is not uncommon for fathers to feel that they are not important in their children's lives, and it has been shown that early support provided to fathers has a significant impact, increasing their involvement (Cookston, Braver, Griffin, De Lusé, & Miles, 2007), and by doing so, ensuring they are more likely to have better relationships with their children twenty years on (Ahrons & Tanner, 2003). Sylvia described feelings of guilt, as her wish for a relationship with her

father caused her mother considerable distress. She believed that she was "betraying" her mother by visiting her father and his new family in secret.

There is some evidence that the quality of the father-child relationship is more important than quantity of contact in affecting outcomes for the offspring of divorced parents (Sandler et al., 2012). Six of the respondents in this study described a relationship between their parents characterised by conflict, and this was associated with difficulties re-establishing a positive relationship with their fathers. According to Kelly (2006), frequent contact with a non-resident father is related to positive outcomes in offspring if interparental levels of conflict are low, but negative outcomes if conflict levels are high.

A family systems perspective suggests that the quality of the father-child relationship will also be affected by other aspects of the post-divorce family system (Minuchin, 1974). These include, for example, the father's remarriage or relocation (Juby, Le Bourdais, & Marcil-Gratton, 2005). Another noteworthy aspect of the post-divorce system that may affect the father-child relationship involves the characteristics and situation of the mother. For example, her remarriage and socioeconomic status post-divorce are related to non-resident father's involvement and offspring adjustment (Dunn, Cheng, O'Connor, & Bridges, 2004).

4.3.2 'Passing messages' and loyalty conflicts

Several studies emphasise the importance of a sense of fairness in calculating the amount of time offspring spend with each divorced parent (Fabricius, 2003; Smart, Wade, & Neale, 1999). This highlights one of the most pertinent statements, provided by all but one of the respondents, about the experience of parental divorce in this study. They emphasised the challenges associated with maintaining a relationship with both parents, while feeling trapped in the position of mediating between them. For example, they describe in vivid detail how

they felt about having to ask one parent for financial assistance on behalf of the other parent, or having to console one parent due to an ongoing interparental argument. Children who feel caught between their parents often feel "torn", "put in the middle" or forced to defend their loyalty to one parent when confronted by the other (Amato & Afifi, 2006). Morrison et al. (2017) report that respondents in their study who described their parents' divorce in negative terms discussed the resentment that they felt towards their parents over being put in the middle, and Schrodt and Shinkowski (2013) identify feeling caught in the middle as a mechanism that links co-parenting communication to offspring adjustment. The authors go on to argue that "no other family relationship is more critical to adolescent and young adult adjustment than the co-parenting relationship" (p.978).

In this study, respondents also described the impact of their parents' divorce on their feelings of self-doubt and low self-esteem and how these had persisted into emerging adulthood. This finding is supported in a study by Clark, Caldwell, Power and Stansfeld (2010) who identify a link between dysfunctional family relationships and poor psychological health, persisting into adulthood. Ahrons states that:

> *"When parents still battle or denigrate one another – even 20 years later – children are likely to withdraw from relationships with one or both parents, it is sobering to hear how their behaviour, not the divorce per se, but the quality of their relationships – continues to echo throughout the family system" (Ahrons, 2007, p.63).*

A number of researchers have reported that loyalty conflicts between children and their divorced parents can lead to lower quality of the parent-child relationship and child wellbeing (Emery & Dillon, 1994). These factors support an argument that reduced family closeness may lead to distress for emerging adults (Amato & Afifi, 2006). Ahrons (2004) finds that adjustment for children in their parents' divorce is related to the smooth transition of visiting

arrangements and maintaining relationships. In her longitudinal study, she observes the following:

> *"Over and over again, they talked about how their family's dynamics actually had far more to do with whether they were happy with their living arrangements. Unlike their parents, however, who felt such concern over time allotment, their concerns were primarily with the practicalities, their feelings about transitioning between parental homes and their desire to see more of their fathers" (Ahrons, 2004 p.76).*

Research on parental divorce during emerging adulthood is of particular interest because of the view that the developmental tasks of this life stage, including individuation and identity development, "are most successfully accomplished within the context of continued connection to others, particularly parents" (Cooney & Kurz, 1996, p.496).

Cooney and Kurz (1996) reported poorer mental health outcomes in female offspring of divorce than in males. They proposed that young women appear to have more psychological adjustment problems when compared to their peers with married parents than young men do. The stronger reaction to parental divorce by females may be due to them maintaining stronger connections to parents and family as they move into adulthood (Youniss & Smollar,1985) or being more active in mediating conflicts between family members (Vuchinich, Emery, & Cassidy, 1988), or perhaps in having a greater sensitivity to relationship dynamics (Hill, Rubin, & Peplau, 1976). This was not found to be the case in the present study.

The females in the present study did display varying adjustment difficulties, but so did the males. Tom and Dave both described moments of feeling worry in relation to their parents' divorce, Although this study has not focused on the possible differences in adjustment

outcomes between male and female respondents, the findings suggest that both have struggled at times to adjust to their parents' divorce.

A key finding in the present study is that family processes such as the quality of the relationships both *between* parents and *with* each parent appeared to impact on all respondents' sense of wellbeing, and this is supported by the current literature.

4.4 Hope and Continuity

4.4.1 Adaptation and adjustment

The final theme of hope and continuity links to the paradigm of "resilience, survival and vulnerability" (Eldar-Avidan, Haj-Yahia, & Greenbaum, 2009, p.30). Divorce, Eldar-Avidan et al. propose, can under certain conditions be a transformative experience, one that results in growth for all members of the family (2009). This theme highlights the adaptation and adjustment that is woven into the stories of all respondents. As Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan observed, "although divorce may be associated with stressful changes and challenges in family members' lives, it also may present a chance for escape from conflict, for more harmonious, fulfilling relationships and the opportunity for greater personal growth, individuation and wellbeing" (1999, p.130).

As discussed in the literature review, Afifi et al. (2008) identify communication as the most important factor influencing adjustment to parental divorce. Research has shown that parents' inappropriate disclosures about the divorce can be stressful for the offspring of divorce (Afifi et al., 2007). Their study found that offsprings' perceptions of these inappropriate disclosures were also a stronger predictor of offspring well-being than parents' perceptions of their own disclosures.

When there is a significant rupture in family life such as parental divorce, offspring can face a level of sadness, confusion and pain that they had not previously experienced. The continued interdependence of the emerging adult with the family remains critical to adjustment because both autonomy and connectedness facilitate individuation (Aquilino, 2006). This can mean that offspring of divorced parents can develop "incoherent images of family life that shape their personal world and the way that they respond to their social world" (Valdez et al., 2013, p.1090), and these stressful experiences can be formative in the lives of individuals (Fiese et al., 2006).

This study acknowledges these findings in previous studies and that the respondents do describe an altered version of themselves, both as individuals and as part of their family unit post-divorce. However, this final theme emphasises the strength and capacity for acceptance, adaptation and renewal in the way that respondents have made sense of their experience and aims to capture the sense of hope and continuity that this embodies. The present study enriches the current literature that illustrates emerging adults' resilience and ability to adapt to their parents' divorce (Ahrons, 2005; Eldar-Avidan et al., 2009).

4.4.2 Reframing relationships

There were conversations throughout the interviews with respondents about how relationships can be reframed and experienced in a more positive way. Despite at times feeling frustrated with her mother's parenting during her divorce, Rosie also explained "I realise now I'm older what my mum went through, how traumatic it must have been for her. I just admire her so much". Hope spoke about how "the divorce had a very positive effect on my relationship with my mother, getting to know her as her own person, especially me and her and my sister where it was kinda like friends". All respondents had, to some extent, coped and adjusted to the emotional demands that their parents' divorce had placed on them, and the

present study exemplifies the resilience and strength required for this to have happened. It is important to note, however, that selection bias may have influenced this outcome as respondents who had not coped well with their experience of parental divorce may not have been likely to volunteer for the study.

Whilst this study has highlighted relationship difficulties that can arise following divorce, it has also shown the benefits of positive father-child and step-parent ties. Amato and King (2016) report the importance of maintaining strong ties to the resident parent as being a mediating factor in preventing depression or substance misuse, and that maternal remarriage is positively associated with close relationships with the non-resident father.

There have been many studies that have focused on the impact of new partners of divorced parents on offspring. There are wide differences in the way such partners treat offspring, with some step-parents developing close emotional ties with step-children, while others remain distant and at times divisive (King, 2006). In this study, some respondents described a positive and close relationship with their step-parents, whereas others did not. Baxter, Braithwaite and Bryant (2006) report that the most common pattern to emerge in their study was that the stepchild/step-parent relationship was most successful when moderated through a close relationship with the biological parent. The respondents in this study all remained close to one or other of their parents, but that did not always predispose them to developing a positive relationship with the step-parent. The literature supports the view that outcomes for children improve when they have a close relationship with both their resident and (often) non-resident father (Adamsons & Johnston, 2013; Amato, Meyers, & Emery, 2009):

> *"When these relationships remain emotionally close, parents continue to be valuable resources for their […] children, positive associations between the quality of parent- child relationships and multiple aspects of adolescent*

adjustment across a wide variety of family structures" (Amato & King, 2016).

According to Lamela, Figueiredo, Bastos and Feinberg. (2016), co-parenting emerges as a key family process in promoting family functioning and wellbeing.

4.4.3 Transitions

It is clear from this research that the experience of parental divorce can have a long-lasting, although manageable, impact on how emerging adults view commitment in relationships and marriage. Family transitions, such as divorce, can cause ties to be weakened between children and their non-resident fathers (Amato, 2010) and tension between all members of the family following paternal and maternal re-partnering (Cavanagh & Huston, 2006).

As identified in the literature review, parental divorce involves many different transitions and possible challenges (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980); it is a process that unfolds over time (Shafer, Jenson & Holmes, 2017) and can affect family income and experience of family conflict (Lucas-Thomson & Hastinar, 2013). In Shafer, Jenson and Holmes' study of one thousand one hundred and thirty-nine emerging adults, results indicated that greater closeness with resident step-parents and resident biological parents was associated with less stress in this group, whereas closeness with non-resident biological parents was associated with slightly increased levels of stress. These findings reflect and support the emerging themes in this present study. Respondents often described the importance of their close relationship with their resident mother, the benefits of parental relationships as sources of support during stressful family transitions and the potential for emerging adults to experience stressful loyalty binds during step-family formation.

Conran argued that family transitions are "long term processes that result in a qualitative reorganisation of both inner life and external behaviour" (1991, p.5). The findings of this study indicate that offspring of parental divorce are required to make changes in their thoughts, emotions and attitudes while also adapting their behaviour to fit the demands of the post-divorce family structure.

It can be argued that although the relationship between the father and mother is broken, they remain closely connected through a complex family system via their shared children. Family systems theory helps to understand the influence of larger patterns of relationships, such that can be seen in the transformation of post-divorce families. The diverse sequences of family reorganisations and experiences following divorce and remarriage, and the patterning and timing of these experiences, are critical for the long-term adjustment of offspring of divorce (Hetherington, 1992). Hetherington states that both divorce and remarriage involve a complex series of changes and that these can affect all aspects of family relationships: "the marital, sibling, and parent-child relationships will interact to affect the adjustment of all family members to marital transition" (p.2).

Although parenting effectively following divorce is a significant challenge for the divorce process (Emery, 2012), increasing numbers of couples continue to co-parent after their romantic relationship has ended (Feinberg, 2002). In divorced families, positive co-parenting is related to increased father-child contact and financial support (Sobolewski & King, 2005).

4.4.4 Resilience

Many families are seen to overcome the challenges that emerge with a parental divorce and continue to function well (Ahrons & Tanner, 2003). It is helpful to use resilience as a framework to better understand how offspring navigate their parents' divorce, understanding

the processes that facilitate resilience is important because the quality of resilience predicts child and family outcomes. Respondents in the present study did not state that their family is "functioning well" but they did acknowledge that improvements have occurred; adaptation and adjustment can be viewed as factors, in this instance, that promote resilience.

This theme highlights the way that respondents have attempted and often succeeded in finding ways of coping with painful feelings and in making sense of their experiences. The present findings, together with the broader body of research, indicates that most offspring from divorced families suffer but are nonetheless resilient (Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000). Rosie and Zac described feelings of empowerment having endured and survived their own personal experience of their parents' divorce, and have made connections between that experience and of self-determination and growth (Valdez et al., 2013).

As was identified in the literature review, the process by which divorce impacts the well-being of emerging adults is unclear (Konstam, 2009). The goal of this study was to deepen and enrich current knowledge of the way emerging adults perceive and experience parental divorce, and was informed by the theoretical conception of the family as a system (Bowen, 1978).

As shown in the current literature, some researchers describe negative outcomes for the offspring of divorced parents, while others focus on the resilience and strength of such children, identifying family processes as strong predictors of risk versus resilience (Kelly & Emery, 2003), and connecting individual resilience with familial resilience and its functioning (Eldar-Avidan et al., 2009).These factors in turn modify the effects of parental divorce.

Holding these different views in mind helped me to observe the complexities of the respondents' experiences in their uniqueness and adaptive nature.

The superordinate theme of hope and continuity emerged from each respondent's journey of adjustment and adaptation. There is a narrative of resilience and survival buried within the pain of endings and of making sense of their new realities. There are stories of despair, but there are also stories of rebirth and redefinition, both of the individual and of the system, the system being the 'family'. Whilst interweaving themes emerged from the data, each respondent described a completely unique and deeply personal understanding of their experiences.

According to Shoen and Canudas-Romo (2006), 40% to 50% of children in the United States of America are impacted by parental divorce before the age of eighteen. Although divorce is still perceived as a stressful period of transition in family roles, some researchers seek to describe it as a "developmental continuity rather than a detrimental disruption".

4.5 Critical Reflections

4.5.1 Reflections on the use of IPA

This study aimed to yield a deeper understanding of and insight into what it is like for emerging adults to experience parental divorce and "to give voice to" (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006) their understanding and description of this experience through speech, language and bodily gestures (Murray & Holmes, 2014). IPA was selected as the most appropriate methodology to use, as it was considered the most likely to meet the aims of the research questions due to its focus on the subjective experience of individuals.

The knowledge created in this research was understood through the lens of the critical realist. This epistemological position assumes that the data gathered in the interviews can tell us

about what is it 'really like' for emerging adults to experience parental divorce, whilst acknowledging that the data gathered cannot grant us direct access to the respondents' realities (Willig, 2008). The method used positions itself in the ontological 'middle ground' between realism and relativism (Willig, 2008).

This study sought to demonstrate the four principles set out by Yardley (2000). Its aim was to move as close as possible to the 'life world' of the respondents. The choice of IPA as a method was centred on the perceived need for "sensitivity to context" through close engagement with the ideographic and the particular (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Through IPA, I was able to access respondents who shared a very specific lived experience, and this method enabled me to establish a connection that was central to the viability of the research from the outset. Sensitivity to context was also demonstrated in the way that I created an empathic and supportive opportunity for respondents to share their thoughts and feelings, whilst remaining aware of any interactional difficulties or imbalances of power. Yardley's second principle of "commitment and rigour" (Yardley, 2000, cited in Smith et al., 2009, p.180) has been shown in the degree of commitment that I showed towards attending to each respondent's story in both the interview and analysis process.

Rigour refers to the thoroughness of the study; for example, the respondents selected had experienced parental divorce and the interviews were conducted whilst "keeping a careful balance between closeness and separateness" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 181), identifying important cues with sufficient ideographic engagement. The principles of "transparency and coherence" (Smith et al., 2009, p.182), have been followed as each part of the research process is clearly described in the summaries, ensuring the replicability of the study. The coherence of the study can be observed in the linking together of those themes that have emerged from the data and the repeated drafting and redrafting of the emerging themes. The

study is consistent with the underlying principles of IPA, which demonstrate a commitment to moving as close to "the thing itself" as possible (Smith et al., 2009, p.182). Finally, the "impact and importance" (Smith et al., 2009, p.183). of the study can be seen through the unique stories that are told by each respondent, and the meanings and understandings that have emerged from their lived experiences of parental divorce.

Throughout the analysis, I have been aware of the importance of the reflexive nature of the experience for both the respondent and myself as the researcher, whereby the respondent seeks to make sense of their experience (the first hermeneutic layer), and the researcher seeks to construct his/her own interpretation (the second layer). The findings are identified through an interpretive process known as a "double hermeneutic" (Smith et al., 2009, p.35).

Reflexivity can be seen throughout the research process as a way of "owning one's own perspective" (Elliot, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999). This involved acknowledging my own assumptions and values, both before the interviews took place, and as they became apparent during the process of the interview, analysis and writeup. I have attempted to ground all the themes in the data, but I am aware that the way in which I identified and arranged the themes and interpreted the data may also, to some degree, reflect my own unconscious motivations as much as revealing those of the respondents.

IPA respondent samples tend to be purposive and broadly homogenous, as a small sample size can give sufficient perspective given adequate contextualisation (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Holt and Slade (2003) argue that the validity of the qualitative research should be assessed in terms of the applicability of the illustrated themes to similar situations. However, just as in this study, most papers using IPA do not aim to achieve a representative sample in terms of either population or probability (Brocki & Wearden, 2006).

There is a need to address the criticism that IPA prioritises thought processes and meaning making over the principle of embodiment, "the place of the body as a central element in experience" (Smith, et al., 2009, p.19). From the perspective of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology (1962), body, language and speech are intimately connected, and yet in the IPA literature the body itself is often absent or presumed to exist as a manifestation of straightforward descriptions from respondents (Murray & Holmes, 2014). This bias is captured well in Giorgi's formulation, "whatever presents itself can be described according to how it presents itself" (1992a, p.122). For example, a respondent will 'describe' an experience but will not question the 'how' of his/her experience. Embodied experiencing, according to Willig (2008), is felt on an implicit level, in a pre-reflective way. Smith et al. (2009) attempt to address this criticism by urging the researcher to pay attention to any pre-reflective experiences respondents communicate. The interviews in this study included many forms of poignant and emotional expression of experience, not captured in words but in pauses, and in moments of quietness and contemplation.

Another criticism levelled at IPA concerns the suitability of respondent's accounts. Willig (2013) points out that IPA relies on language to capture experience and that "language constructs rather than describes reality" (p. 934). She proposes that the "conceptualisation of language in much phenomenological research can be criticised for not engaging sufficiently with its constitutive role" (p.94). If the respondent is not able to communicate the rich texture of their experience and employ language to describe the subtleties and nuances of their physical and emotional experiences (Willig, 2008), then the data will not be a true reflection of their experience. Whilst it is understandable that respondents who are not used to articulating their inner experiences can struggle to express themselves (Moustakas, 1994), this was not understood to be the case for the respondents in this study. Whilst there were moments in the interviews when respondents struggled to find the words to describe their

experiences of their parents' divorce, this was felt to be more a reflection of the complexity and depth of emotion that was being evoked, rather than due to any lack of capability on their part. This was evidenced through the course of the interviews as respondents became increasingly able to provide a broad range of insights into their experiences of parental divorce.

These accounts of course reflect only what respondents want or feel able to share of their experiences, and this itself depends on a variety of factors, including personality, connection with the researcher or mood on the day of the interview.

The final criticism of IPA is concerned with how IPA as a phenomenological approach focuses on the difference between 'how' respondents experience things and 'why' respondents experience things. Although Willig (2008) acknowledges that the descriptive focus of IPA allows for the emergence of vibrant and comprehensive stories, she contends that the lack of an attempt to understand why respondents experience things limits our understanding of the phenomenon. In acknowledging this view of Willig (2008), it should be remembered that IPA concerns itself with the detailed and nuanced analysis of lived experience and that other approaches, for example grounded theory, might be better utilise to arrive at a conceptual explanation of the phenomenon. Smith et al. (2009) note that grounded theory studies can be carried out as follow-ups to an initial IPA study in order to enhance understanding of the phenomenon, something that will be explored further in the recommendations for future research.

4.6 Limitations of the Study

As well as limitations placed on the study by the use of IPA, other limitations exist that may have had an impact on the findings. One of these is the sample size, as this is a defining feature that separates qualitative and quantitative studies; qualitative studies utilise smaller sample sizes in order to facilitate greater depth and breadth of understanding. A sample size of eight respondents was selected, as this has been considered suitable for an IPA-based study that retains its commitment to an idiographic approach, while enabling convergence and divergence between respondents to be studied (Smith et al., 2009). It was also considered to be an appropriate sample size when seeking to produce in-depth analyses of the accounts of a small group, rather than representative samples (Touroni and Coyle, 2002).

The conclusions drawn are specific to this particular group, and generalisations should be approached with caution (Flowers, Smith, Sheeran, & Beail, 1997); however, the relative convergence of experiences within the broadly homogenous group of respondents lends credence to the idea that the findings could be applied to a larger group. In the process of analysis, I felt at times that I was focusing more on the depth of each account, at the loss of some of the breadth. Brocki and Wearden (2006) recommend greater idiographic focus with more attention paid to the sequential nature of an individual's story.

The exclusion and inclusion criteria were two other key elements of the design, requiring a balance between homogeneity and access to respondents. Respondents' parents may have divorced at any time up until the respondent was the age of twenty-five, and half of the respondents were male and half female. The study did not set out to explore any differences between the respondents in terms of gender or age at the time of parental divorce.

The present study focused on emerging adults who had encountered parental divorce and who had not received any psychological support. Arguably, this may have ensured that the stories

told were more likely to be ones with more positive outcomes, as the respondents had not felt the need to seek support due to adverse psychological effects from the experience.

The sample is another element that may reflect a limitation. The respondents in this study were not representative of a wider sample. The respondents interviewed were from a similar socio-economic background, including education and income. Flyers were placed in a number of locations that could have attracted a more diverse sample group for the research, but there was a lack of response to this initiative. Having interviewed the first respondent, there was then a 'snowball effect', whereby respondents or other contacts in their social group recommended others. The remaining respondents contacted me directly, having heard about the study from other sources.

The use of snowballing as a recruitment strategy increases the likelihood of recruiting a similar pool of respondents, due to the connections and associations between them. Such factors need to be taken into consideration when considering the relevance of this research and the type of knowledge it has produced.

Various steps were taken to address the effects of researcher bias. These included regular meetings with my supervisor to review data collection and data findings, maintaining a reflexive diary, note-taking throughout the analysis process and meetings with fellow doctoral students. However, it is acknowledged that my comprehension and interpretation will have been influenced in some way by my own perspectives and assumptions.

4.7 Future Research

There is a substantial body of quantitative research about the outcomes for children and adolescents who experience parental divorce, but a paucity of deeper qualitative studies using IPA on the unique lived experience of the phenomenon for emerging adults. Many studies are limited to convenience samples of undergraduate students (Konstam, 2009).

Further research could use a larger sample size, as this would be more representative of the general population. A different sampling technique would acquire a more representative sample, and alternative interview questions would generate a new understanding of the phenomenon.

The present study found that emerging adults described feelings of sadness, loss and hope, and a follow-up study could adopt a grounded theory approach in order to develop a theory as to which particular aspects of their experience contributed to these feelings and emotions.

Additionally, an attempt to explore the reason that some emerging adults access therapeutic services, while some do not, would be helpful in order to develop greater understanding of what support may be useful for those who experience this phenomenon. Furthermore, a longitudinal study could be helpful to investigate whether the themes of loss, altered reality, and hope and continuity remained reliable means of understanding the experience of parental divorce over time, as the emerging adult moves into adulthood and long-term relationships of their own.

Bentall (2003) states that only once a piece of research has been completed can one understand how it should have been done. I could have consulted with an emerging adult in the development of the interview schedule and during the analysis stage. This would have made the process more collaborative and helped to prevent the interview schedule and

analysis becoming dominated by my values, assumptions and bias, which I possess based on my own experiences of family life.

I would also have liked to interview the respondents on more than one occasion, In a second interview, respondents may have felt more relaxed and open, and therefore contributed to a richer understanding of their experience. Further research could also explore how siblings describe convergence and divergence in their experiences of parental divorce, and the way that the relationships between members of the family influence adaptation and adjustment to the reconfigured family.

4.8 Implications for Counselling Psychologists

Willig (2008) explains that qualitative phenomenological research can be used to inform recommendations for improved practices in counselling psychology. Qualitative researchers exploring uniquely personal events seek "to show that findings can be transferred and may have meaning or relevance if applied to other individuals, context and situations" (Finlay, 2006, p.320).

Counselling psychologists take a holistic approach to understanding human psychological distress (Du Plock, 2010) and focus on the qualities of empathy, acceptance and congruence in the therapeutic relationship (Rogers, 1951; Roth & Fonagy, 1996). Counselling psychologists also recognise the contribution of different traditions in psychology, including the phenomenological (existential and humanistic), as well as related constructionist, narrative and systemic ideas. This encourages a way of working with emerging adults who have experienced parental divorce that emphasises the subjective nature of clients' experiences and seeks to understand their inner lives and realities (Strawbridge & Woolfe, 2010).

Given the prevalence of divorce in families in the UK, it is likely that counselling psychologists may meet clients of all ages who have experienced parental divorce, at any time after the event. The findings from this study can inform and enhance the approach that practitioners take when working with issues related to parental divorce. It is helpful that practitioners should consider the variety of divorce-related experiences and the complexity involved in understanding the pathways that inform adjustment.

The way that loss is negotiated and integrated is key to understanding the impact of divorce on emerging adults (King & Hicks, 2007). Loss can often be a feeling that is denied and ignored by the individual, and the counselling psychologist should remain attuned to what is not being said: the absences and denials in the individual's account of him or herself. This study indicates aspects of family communication that could help the offspring of divorce adapt to feelings of loss.

According to King and Hicks (2007), a signifier of adulthood status is the ability to confront "lost possible selves" (p.30) and that developing a sense of self is an ongoing process, particularly relevant during the developmental period of emerging adulthood: "Ego development is related to a diversity of experience – the ability to acknowledge, challenge and accommodate accordingly" (King, Collon, Ramsay, & Williams, 2000, p.627, cited in Kings and Hicks, 2007). Counselling psychologists can support emerging adults to accommodate their experience of parental divorce and integrate their understanding of the experience into a new narrative during this developmental period. The mature person is a person who "acknowledges loss but is not defined by it" (King & Hicks, 2007, p.630).

Many studies report that new roles and relationships develop over a two-year period after divorce (Ahrons & Miller, 1993; Hetherington, 1989). Studies show that where the offspring

of divorced parents maintain a conflict-free relationship with both parents, adjustment is improved (Black & Pedro-Carroll, 1993). Divorcing couples may each carry ideas about what 'family' is in their mind, as well as a fixed negative image of the other parent. The counselling psychologist can work towards helping parents to deconstruct these images in order for individual members of the family to establish revised positive models of relationships with each other.

For example, Lucy observed how much she wanted the secret of her mother's affair to be out in the open and that throughout her adolescence she realised that she had been harbouring "guilt and anger". She acknowledged that she had "carried" some of these feelings through her life and that she had "a real bad temper". She recognised that she was "very defensive, if anyone says anything I am straight on the attack". Rosie explained that she was "quite insecure" and that she didn't believe that "a smart guy, someone intellectual, like, good looking, would be interested in me". Rosie also admitted that she would not be able to have an "emotional conversation" with her father, but that she wishes she could. This data enhances current research that states parental divorce can affect the psychological wellbeing of the offspring of divorced parents (Wallerstein & Lewis, 1998). When working with clients who have been affected by parental divorce, it may be helpful to consider the impact on feelings of self-worth.

These research findings should be understood in the context of the development stage described as 'emerging adulthood'. Adjustment in this period can be shaped by formative experiences in childhood and adolescence, many of which occur in the family (Shanahan, 2000). Valdez et al. report that the family "acts as a source of belonging and connection, a regulator of emotions, enforcer of social norms and a source of individuation" (2013, p.1089). Parental divorce can be a stressor that disrupts these functions, and it may be helpful

for counselling psychologists to be aware and able to support this group by understanding the role of family in facilitating the autonomy and adaptation that emerging adults need to develop in order to meet the demands that adult life places upon them.

When considering the long-term implications of parental divorce for emerging adults, it would be useful for counselling psychologists to emphasise the experience from the family system perspective. Both parents could aim to understand the importance of positive relationships between each other and with their offspring and accept that a hostile relationship between parents can result in children having to side with one parent or the other, while hiding their true feelings about the implications of the divorce. Counselling psychologists should aim to explore the connections between altered relationships after parental divorce and clients' attitudes and approaches to intimate relationships, their attitudes towards divorce and their capacity to share difficult feelings and emotions.

A critical aspect of working with emerging adults who have experienced parental divorce is for counselling psychologists to be aware of their own biases towards divorce and marriage. The findings of this study support current research that proposes divorce is not necessarily a negative event for the offspring of divorced parents, and can in fact bring about positive changes for children and parents. This is mainly seen when close family relationships are maintained, and parents can co-parent in a mutually respectful, harmonious and stable way, in which their offspring are given a 'voice' to express their thoughts and concerns for the future.

4.9 Final Reflexive Note

Throughout the study, I have considered the way that my own assumptions, values, biases and beliefs have influenced the research process "both as a person (personal reflexivity) and as a theorist/thinker (epistemological reflexivity)" (Willig, 2013, p.25).

Earlier in the study, I acknowledged how my identity as a mother, wife, daughter, sister and friend informs and identifies me as a person, both in my family and in my social world, and how these multiple identities are implicated in the research and its findings.

I have used my reflexive diary to consider the way that my understanding of and beliefs about family systems and the interconnectedness of the individual parts to the whole have also influenced my reactions to the research context and the data that has been gathered.

I am aware that the descriptions of family life generated through data collection have been understood and interpreted by me in the context of my own personal views of 'family' and 'self', and I have used my reflexive diary as a way to consider how my beliefs and emotions could have interfered with my ability to listen impartially. One such entry stated the following: "I was very moved by Sylvia's sadness and pain; the lack of explanation and acknowledgment by her father of the devastation she felt was embodied in her descriptions of confusion and shock".

4.10 Strength and Resilience of Respondents

I would like to complete this thesis with a focus on the remarkable strength and adaptability that was observed in the respondents. Their courage, openness and honesty have had a profound effect on me. It was a privilege to have been given the opportunity to be with each respondent as they reflected on their experiences of their parents' divorce.

The themes of loss, altered reality, and hope and continuity that have emerged from this research were developed in order to contribute to a deeper understanding of how emerging adults experience their parents' divorce and to enhance the probability of adjustment and adaptation in the face of family transformation.

In my clinical practice as a trainee counselling psychologist, I have experienced firsthand the logistical and emotional challenges that children, emerging adults and divorced (or divorcing) couples face. This research is designed to both inform and enhance clinical practice for this client group as well as promote positive adjustment and wellbeing for emerging adults.

Whilst respondents expressed sadness and loss throughout the interviews as they made sense of the new iterations of their family lives, I was encouraged to find that hope and resilience were observed in abundance in this study. I was pleased to hear multiple voices of forgiveness, adjustment, resilience and reconciliation as respondents developed new narratives to understand what relationship and family meant to them in a positive way.

I end this journey of exploration with Sam's voice: "familia en lo bueno y lo malo"; "family in the good and the bad".

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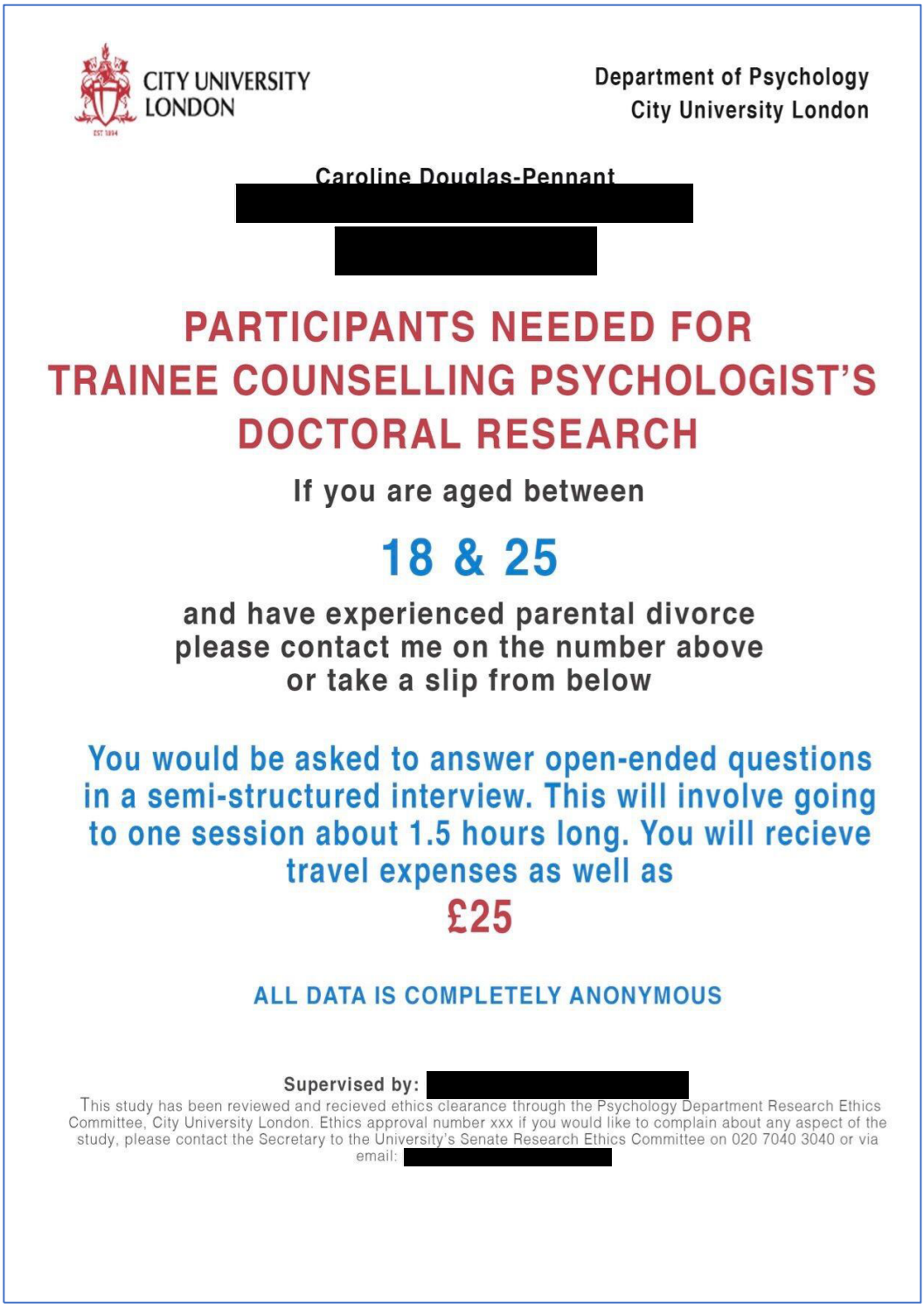
Appendices

6.1 Appendix A: Flyer



CITY UNIVERSITY LONDON

Department of Psychology
City University London

Caroline Douglas-Pennant
[redacted]

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR TRAINEE COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGIST'S DOCTORAL RESEARCH

If you are aged between

18 & 25

and have experienced parental divorce
please contact me on the number above
or take a slip from below

You would be asked to answer open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview. This will involve going to one session about 1.5 hours long. You will recieve travel expenses as well as

£25

ALL DATA IS COMPLETELY ANONYMOUS

Supervised by: [redacted]

This study has been reviewed and recieved ethics clearance through the Psychology Department Research Ethics Committee, City University London. Ethics approval number xxx if you would like to complain about any aspect of the study, please contact the Secretary to the University's Senate Research Ethics Committee on 020 7040 3040 or via email: [redacted]

6.2 Appendix B: Information Sheet

A qualitative exploration into 18-25-year-olds' experience of parental divorce with the intention of providing improved therapeutic support.

Thank you for your interest in this research.

We would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether you would like to take part, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of the study is to explore the experience of young people, ranging from 18-25 years, of parental divorce. Family breakdown is considered by the Centre for Social Justice (2013) to be an urgent public health issue with wide-ranging implications for young people. This study is for a doctorate in counselling psychology.

Why have I been invited?

You have been invited as you are within this age criteria, have experienced a parental divorce/separation and have not had any therapeutic interventions. There will be one participant in the pilot and eight participants in the main study.

Do I have to take part?

Participation is entirely voluntary; you may withdraw at any stage and must not feel pressured to answer any questions that feel too personal or intrusive.

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and any data that you have given will be destroyed.

What will happen if I take part?

You will have a telephone conversation with the researcher to ensure that you fit the criteria of the study. You will then make an arrangement to meet for the interview, which will happen at a time and place that suits you, have the study explained in detail and be encouraged to ask any questions regarding any concerns you may have. You will then be asked to explore and reflect on your experiences in the form of a confidential interview, where you will be encouraged to respond without any pressure or influence. The interview will be recorded and then transcribed verbatim.

How much time will the study take up for the participant?

It will be no longer than 2.5 hours and could be less.

What is the research method used?

The research method will be Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). This type of research method was chosen as it allows for an exploration of each individual's lived experience with minimal interpretive bias or restrictions placed by the researcher.

Where will the interviews take place?

The research will take place at City University in a private, quiet space.

Expenses and Payments (if applicable)

You will receive £25 for participating in the study.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

I do not anticipate any risks involved in participating. It is possible that the questions and following discussion may raise some anxieties that you may have in relation to your parents' divorce. It is important to acknowledge these concerns and ensure that you are be appropriately supported. We will have time after the interview to talk about the study. If you are left with any difficult feelings or thoughts, we can discuss sources of support and further information. See the following services that can be contacted if necessary. The contact details of the researcher and her supervisor are at the bottom of this sheet.

SAMARITANS
(Tel) 116 123
jo@samaritans.org

MIND
(Tel) 0300 123 3393
info@mind.org.uk
Text 86463

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

I hope that exploring your thoughts and experiences will be as interesting for you as it will be for me. The data gathered will benefit the wider community by contributing to knowledge and informing future therapeutic practice.

What will happen when the research study stops?

All the data will be destroyed 6 months after the study is completed. The data will be kept in a locked cabinet in the house of the researcher.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

The interview is confidential and I take very seriously your right to anonymity.
Any data that you have provided will be anonymous; there will be no features that may identify you in the data. You will be allocated a pseudonym and your transcript will be labelled with that fake name only; your real name will never be on the transcript.

Only the researcher, Caroline Douglas-Pennant, will know your identity. The research supervisor will not know the identities of the participants.

All identifying details in the transcript will be replaced.

Only the researcher will have access to the data, and the data will be stored in a password-protected computer and will be kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home.

Any data gathered for this study is used solely for this study and no other; there will be no archiving or sharing of the data.

All data will remain confidential unless the participant discloses information that suggests they are a danger to themselves or others; in this instance, it would need to be discussed with the researcher's supervisor.

When the study has been completed, the data will be shredded.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The researcher is hopeful that the study will be published in psychology publications, but anonymity will be maintained at all times. The researcher will send a copy of the publication and a summary to the participant once contact details have been obtained.

Researcher

Trainee counselling psychologist, Caroline Douglas-Pennant

[redacted]

Supervisor

Dr Susan Strauss

[redacted]

If you have any problems, concerns or questions about this study, you should ask to speak to a member of the research team. If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally, you can do this through the university's complaints procedure. To complain about the study, call 020 7040 3040. You can then ask to speak to the Secretary to the Senate Research Ethics Committee and inform them that the name of the project is *The experience of emerging adults: A counselling psychology perspective*.

You could also write to the Secretary at:

Anna Ramberg, Secretary to Senate Research Ethics Committee
Research Office
City University
Northampton Square
London
EC1V 0HB

Email: [redacted]

City University London holds insurance policies that apply to this study. If you feel you have been harmed or injured by taking part in this study, you may be eligible to claim compensation. This does not affect your legal rights to seek compensation. If you are harmed due to someone's negligence, then you may have grounds for legal action.

6.3 Appendix C: Consent Form

CITY UNIVERSITY LONDON

Title of Study: *The experience of emerging adults: A counselling psychology perspective*

1.	I agree to take part in the above City University London research project. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the participant information sheet, which I may keep for my records. I understand this will involve: • Being interviewed by the researcher • Allowing the interview to be audiotaped • Making myself available for a further interview should that be required
2.	This information will be held and processed by the researcher, and kept in a password-protected computer in a locked safe at the researcher's house. I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party. No identifiable personal data will be published. Identifiable data will not be shared with any other organisation. I understand that I will be given a transcript of data concerning me for my approval before it is included in the write-up of the research.
3.	I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.
4.	I agree to City University London recording and processing this information about me. I understand that this information will be used only for the purpose(s) set out in this statement and my consent is conditional on the University complying with its duties and obligations under the Data Protection Act 1998.
5.	I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of Researcher Signature Date

_____ _____ _____

Name of Respondent Signature Date

6.4 Appendix D: Interview Questions

1) What was it that led you to be willing to take part in this study?
2) Could you please tell me about your family and its circumstances?
3) Could you please tell me your recollection of the moment you were told your parents were getting divorced?
4) Could you talk to me about the memories you have of your parents' divorce?
5) Do you have any particular associated experiences you would like to talk about in relation to your parents' divorce?

6.5 Appendix E: Debrief Form

Debrief form for participating in the research project: *The experience of emerging adults: A counselling psychology perspective*.

Thank you for participating in this research project. *I hope that you have had a positive experience.* We now have 15 minutes to discuss the study and your experience of the interview. I can also be contacted using the details below if afterwards you remember anything you would like to add.

Please let me know if you feel that the interview has brought up difficult thoughts or feelings in relation to your experiences. We can talk about sources of support; for example, you may find it helpful to discuss these with a therapist.

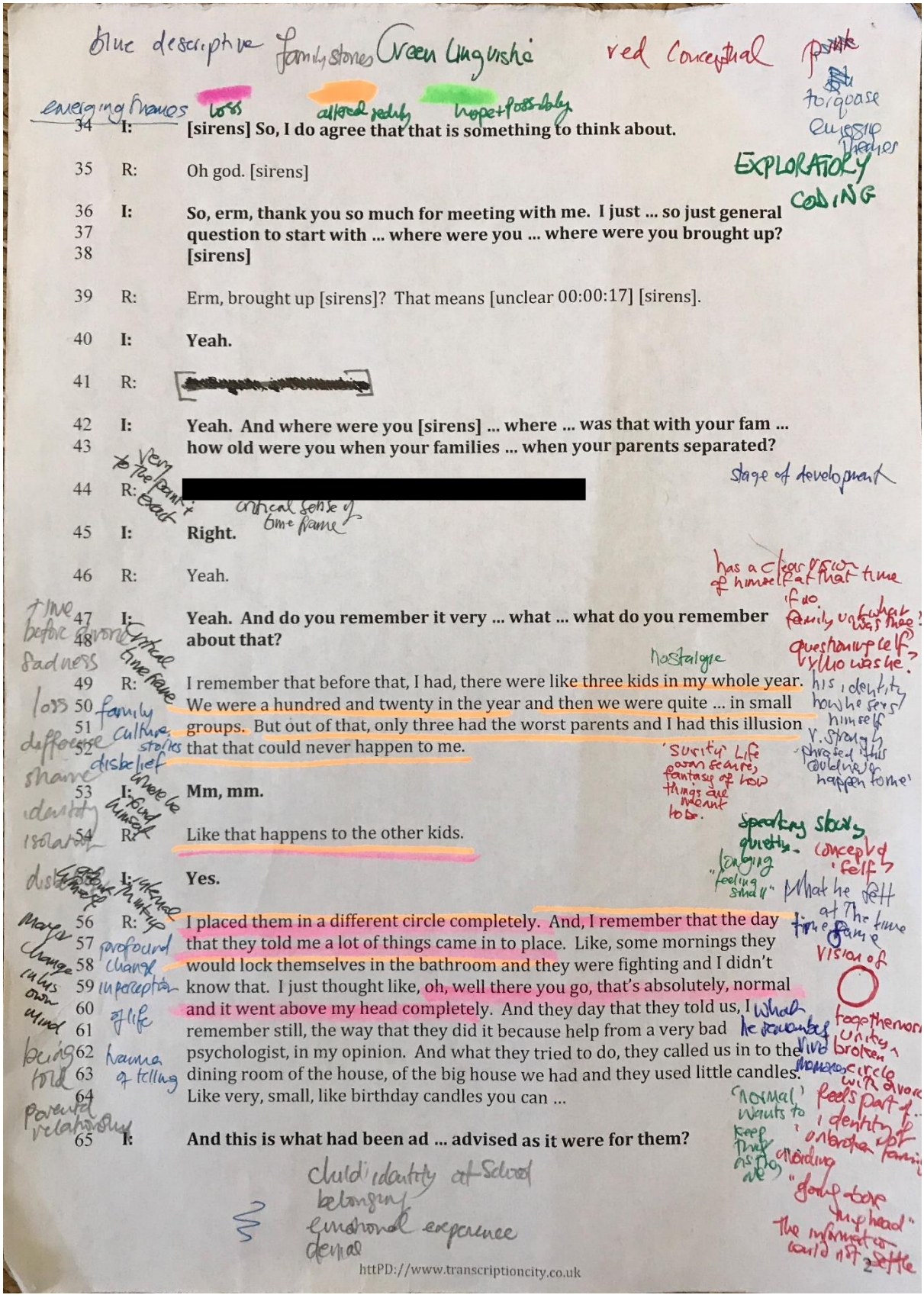
I confirm that the interview has been conducted in a professional manner, that the interviewer took care to check I was not in distress upon leaving and that I'm happy for the research to proceed using my material.

I would/would not like the transcript to be sent to me so I can be sure that identifying details are removed or disguised.

Name……..
Signature…….
Date……

Researcher: Caroline Douglas-Pennant
Research Supervisor: Dr Susan Strauss, City University
[redacted]

6.6 Appendix F: Sample Transcript



blue descriptive family stories Green Linguistic red Conceptual

emerging themes loss altered reality hope+possibility

EXPLORATORY CODING

I: [sirens] So, I do agree that that is something to think about.

R: Oh god. [sirens]

I: So, erm, thank you so much for meeting with me. I just ... so just general question to start with ... where were you ... where were you brought up? [sirens]

R: Erm, brought up [sirens]? That means [unclear 00:00:17] [sirens].

I: Yeah.

R: [redacted]

I: Yeah. And where were you [sirens] ... where ... was that with your fam ... how old were you when your families ... when your parents separated?

R: [redacted]

I: Right.

R: Yeah.

I: Yeah. And do you remember it very ... what ... what do you remember about that?

R: I remember that before that, I had, there were like three kids in my whole year. We were a hundred and twenty in the year and then we were quite ... in small groups. But out of that, only three had the worst parents and I had this illusion that that could never happen to me.

I: Mm, mm.

R: Like that happens to the other kids.

I: Yes.

R: I placed them in a different circle completely. And, I remember that the day that they told me a lot of things came in to place. Like, some mornings they would lock themselves in the bathroom and they were fighting and I didn't know that. I just thought like, oh, well there you go, that's absolutely, normal and it went above my head completely. And they day that they told us, I remember still, the way that they did it because help from a very bad psychologist, in my opinion. And what they tried to do, they called us in to the dining room of the house, of the big house we had and they used little candles. Like very, small, like birthday candles you can ...

I: And this is what had been ad ... advised as it were for them?

child identity at School belonging emotional experience denial

66 R: Yeah, to help the children understand. And it was ... it just confused me. And it
67 was just like, err, so this candle represents your father and this candle
68 represents me. And these two candles represent you. And look when you put
69 them together they may the same flame and the size never changes. And is that
70 what you see? And I was just like, what? Like, what are you talking about? And
71 then eventually, my mum grabbed the strength and said like, kids what we're
72 trying to say is that your father and I ... and they didn't say the word 'divorce'.
73 They said, we're separating. And at that moment it hit me. And I was like, but
74 no, this ... this can't happen to me, I'm not one of them. And for the next like
75 twenty minutes it was just me trying to avoid it. Like, I was trying not to cry
76 and my mother was trying to soothe me and say, it's okay to cry.

77 And after that, I tried to completely to avoid because there were candles and
78 that confused me. So, I was happy. So, I was like, maybe we should grab like a
79 little cake and put the candles in it and we could all eat it. And, erm ... and after
80 that, I remember that my father was gonna move out. We were gonna stay in
81 the big one. And erm, that day, like a lot of effort was done by both parents and
82 I ... I really thank them for that. To keep their relationship with us. So, we
83 decided then that my father was gonna move out but we were not gonna call
84 him as we did before which was Papa, which is how you say it in Spanish. But
85 we ... we're gonna call him in a special way. So, we just turned it into Papo.
86 Which was fine. Until this day, I still call him Papo I think.

87 **I: What so for ... before you called him?**

88 R: Papa.

89 **I: Papa?**

90 R: Which is the normal thing.

91 **I: Yeah.**

92 R: Like everybody does that. And then I turned it into Papo which is, I discovered
93 that some people do it. But it's just more of a pet name.

94 **I: Okay.**

95 R: It's even more ...

96 **I: Special than most ...**

97 R: ... special ...

98 **I: Yeah.**

99 R: ... in a way. And erm ...

100 **I: It's interesting that you remember that day so clearly.**

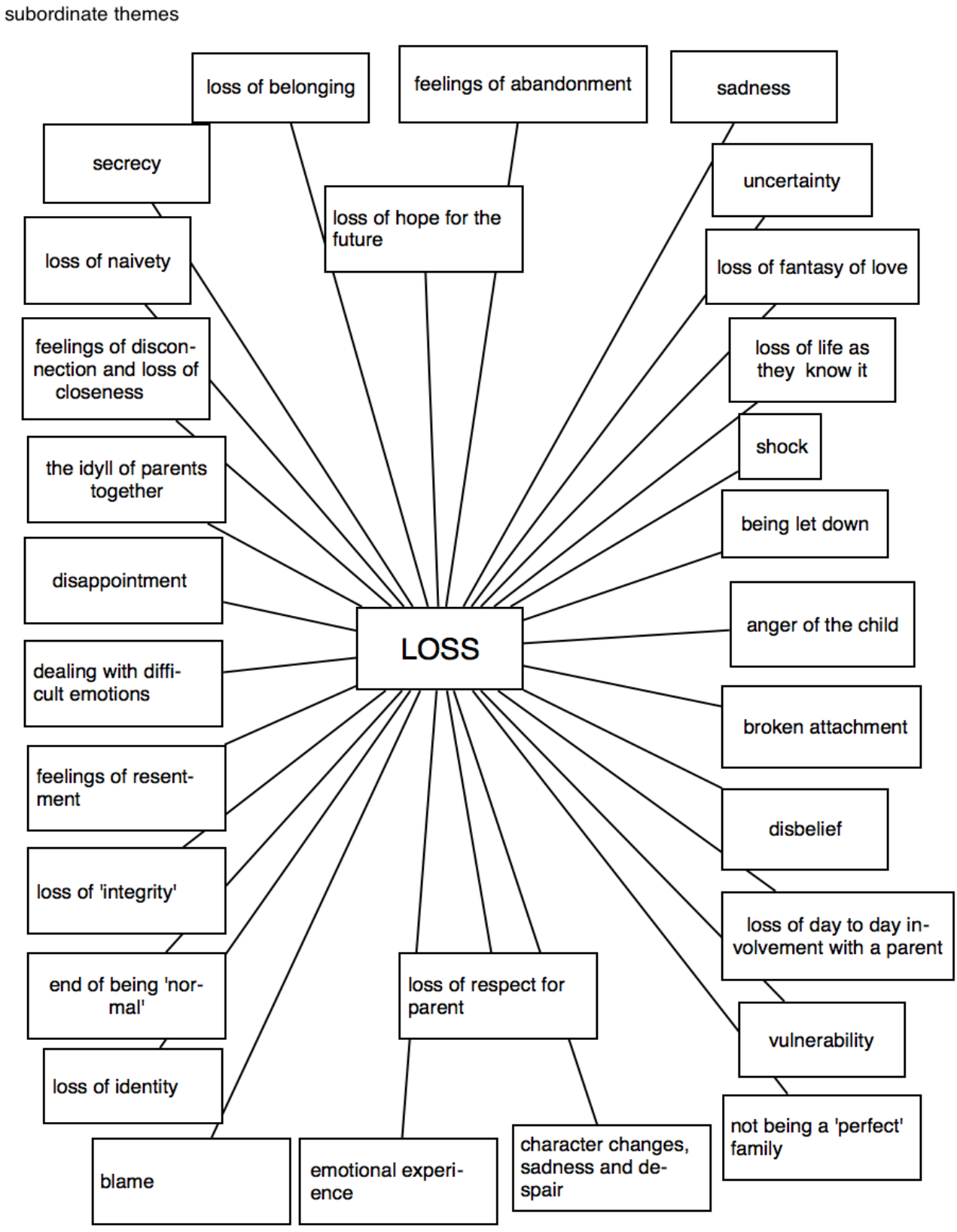
http://www.transcriptioncity.co.uk

6.7 Appendix G: Table of Themes by Respondent

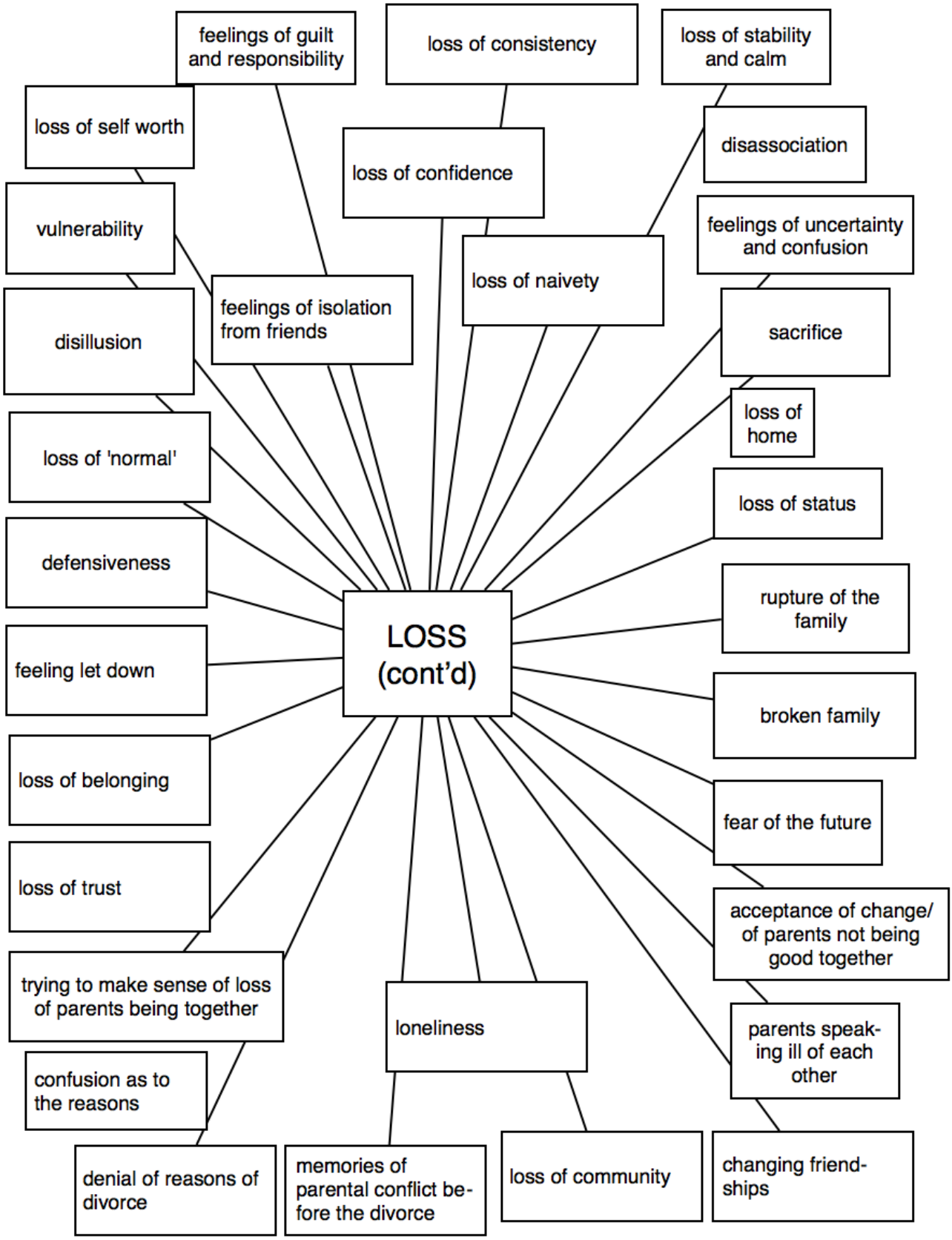
THEMES	Sam	Rosie	Zak	Hope	Tom	Silvia	Dave	Lucy
Life Before Divorce	49-52, 148-150, 113, 119, 263	39, 47, 245	40, 58, 68, 76	16, 46, 58-60, 70, 382	39, 41	759	22-23, 104	115-119, 242-246, 324-339, 428-430, 457
Character Profiles	169-171, 188-190, 197-203, 251-252, 868, 1208, 1294-1295, 1335-1336	50-52, 75-76, 83	91-92, 343, 356, 654	42, 58-61, 276	210-212, 214-217, 222, 247, 288-292, 449-450, 706-707	210-214, 433-436	41, 232, 824-826	23-26, 242-246, 252
(Not) Being Told	56-64, 66-76	27, 54-56, 198	142-146	20-26, 46-47, 73	52, 108, 260	28-33	74, 80-82	123-125, 167-168, 364-365
Reasons for Divorce	403-410, 446-448,	26, 245	38, 102	60, 382	44, 141, 143	13, 53, 458-459, 762	56-62	115-119
Reacting to Parents' Emotions	188	103, 145	68, 142, 212	28-30, 45, 75	138, 1125			364-365
Logistics of the Divorce	80-83, 384, 699, 922-923	83, 109	63, 82, 298	30, 48, 63, 175	97, 99-101	8,42, 110, 127	99-100	
(Altered) Relationships with and Perceptions of Parents	84-86, 105-106, 113, 242-243, 259, 263-267, 451-452, 600-701, 1178	47, 53, 91, 125, 145, 185, 237, 245, 267	68, 86, 190-192, 198, 218, 246, 254, 258, 314	36-42, 84, 86, 88-92, 96-98, 288, 300	107-108, 240, 246, 271, 354-364, 411-412	134, 171, 227, 602-603, 611,	280, 298-304, 520-526, 659-661, 785-788	245-246, 252
Resultant Psychological Effects	409-410, 849-852	107, 193, 285, 289, 311, 315, 405	46, 357-359	46, 247, 359	340, 345-347, 773, 777	661, 829, 856, 991	1024, 1044-1046, 1439-1441, 1647	539-544, 575-576, 581-585

Reacting to Parents Moving On/ Not Moving On	1138, 1142, 1163, 1549-1555	81, 107, 137, 391	284, 286, 314	156, 166, 178, 257	159, 178, 245	294, 310, 318, 318-321, 783-785	224-228, 1262-1264	43, 56, 498
Feelings of Responsibility	197, 251, 480, 503	145, 183, 185	72, 102, 120	228, 279	622, 893	494, 594	749	289, 302-303
Feelings Towards Marriage/ Relationships	158-160, 824, 969-970, 999, 1001, 1005-1022, 1045, 1789-1790	145, 391	26, 369, 287	235, 247, 279	187, 639, 643, 1097-1098	827-830	1080-1082, 1376, 1813-1816, 2162	65, 476
Emotional Experience/ Character Changes	75-76, 446-448, 913,1579-1580	137, 145	40, 46, 100, 158, 168, 170	28, 257, 278	222, 446, 732	510-511	1878-1891	167-168, 201, 320, 352-358, 428-430, 506, 534-535
Confusion	477-478, 593, 667	109, 437, 486	158, 246	275, 212,	127, 456	49, 59-64, 711-712	126-128	234, 654
Relationships with Parents' New Partners	547-549, 563-564, 709-711, 737-742, 1454-1455	35, 75, 79, 137, 155, 371	284, 296, 305	120-126, 150, 180-181, 215, 402, 410	231, 481-483, 530, 839, 993	427, 740-748	43, 98, 435, 576	27, 60, 98
Sibling Relationships	486, 503-504, 1356, 1358	109, 113-115, 129	100, 120, 306	306, 388, 391	311, 622	72-73 , 87-88, 625, 636	98, 524-526, 538-539, 976-978	11, 52, 78
Allegiance	516-517, 523-524, 534-535, 558-559, 770	137, 288, 763	100, 139, 334	178, 201, 249	850, 853	174, 1221,	234, 538, 432	24, 398
Positive Experiences	242, 728, 730,	211, 391	78, 326	107, 359	57, 62, 420	327, 347, 866	1116	380, 579

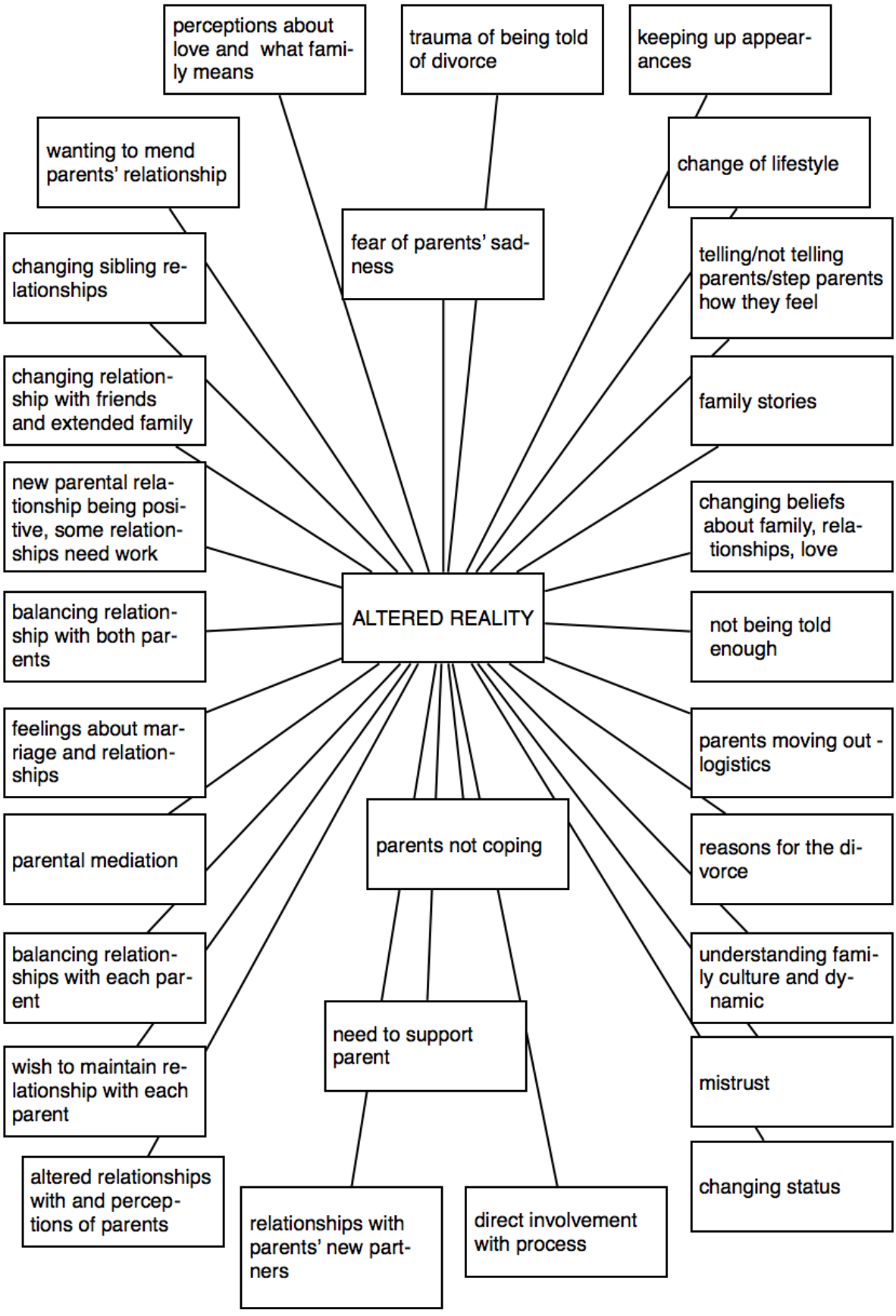
6.8 Appendix H: Subordinate Themes



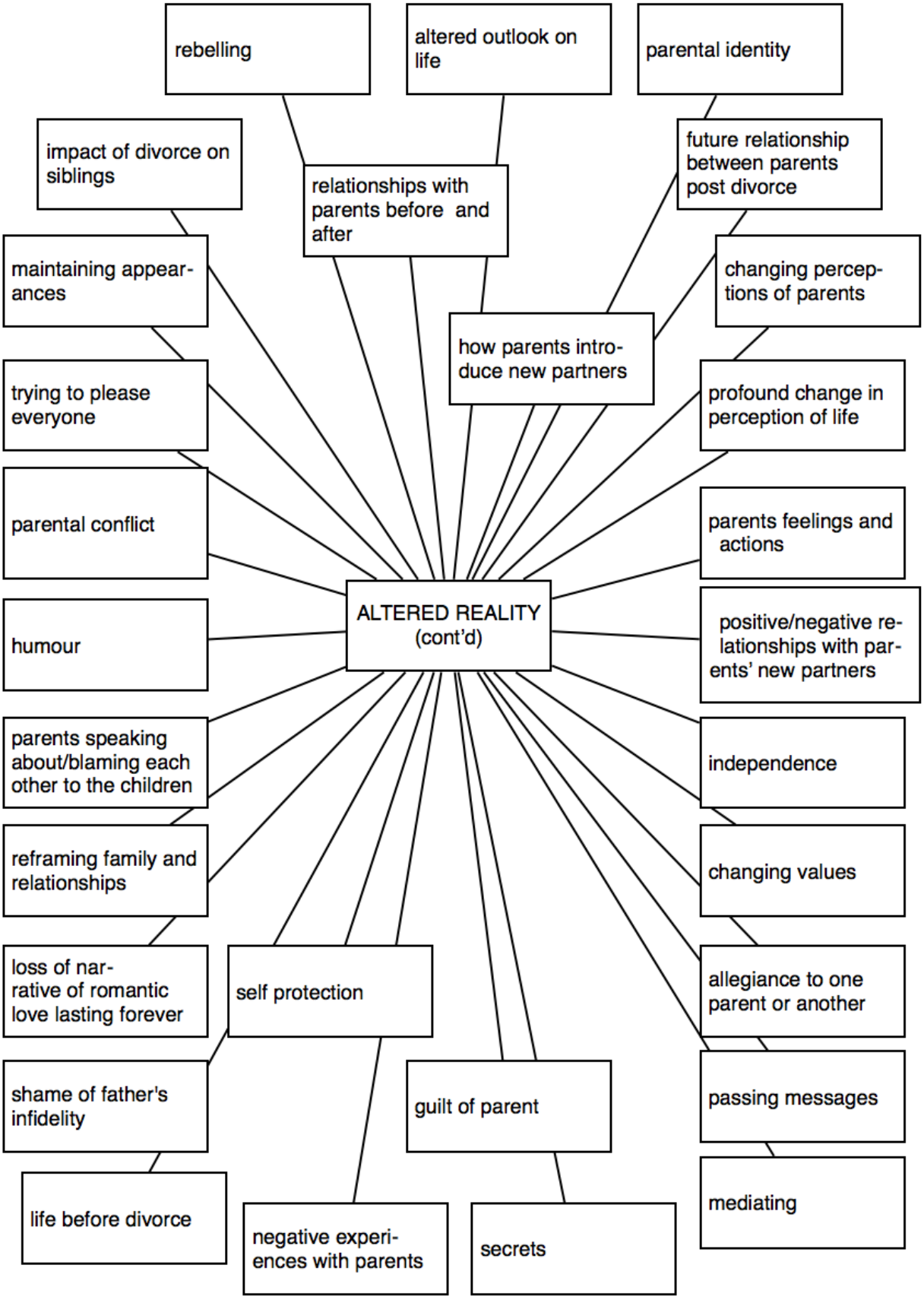
subordinate themes



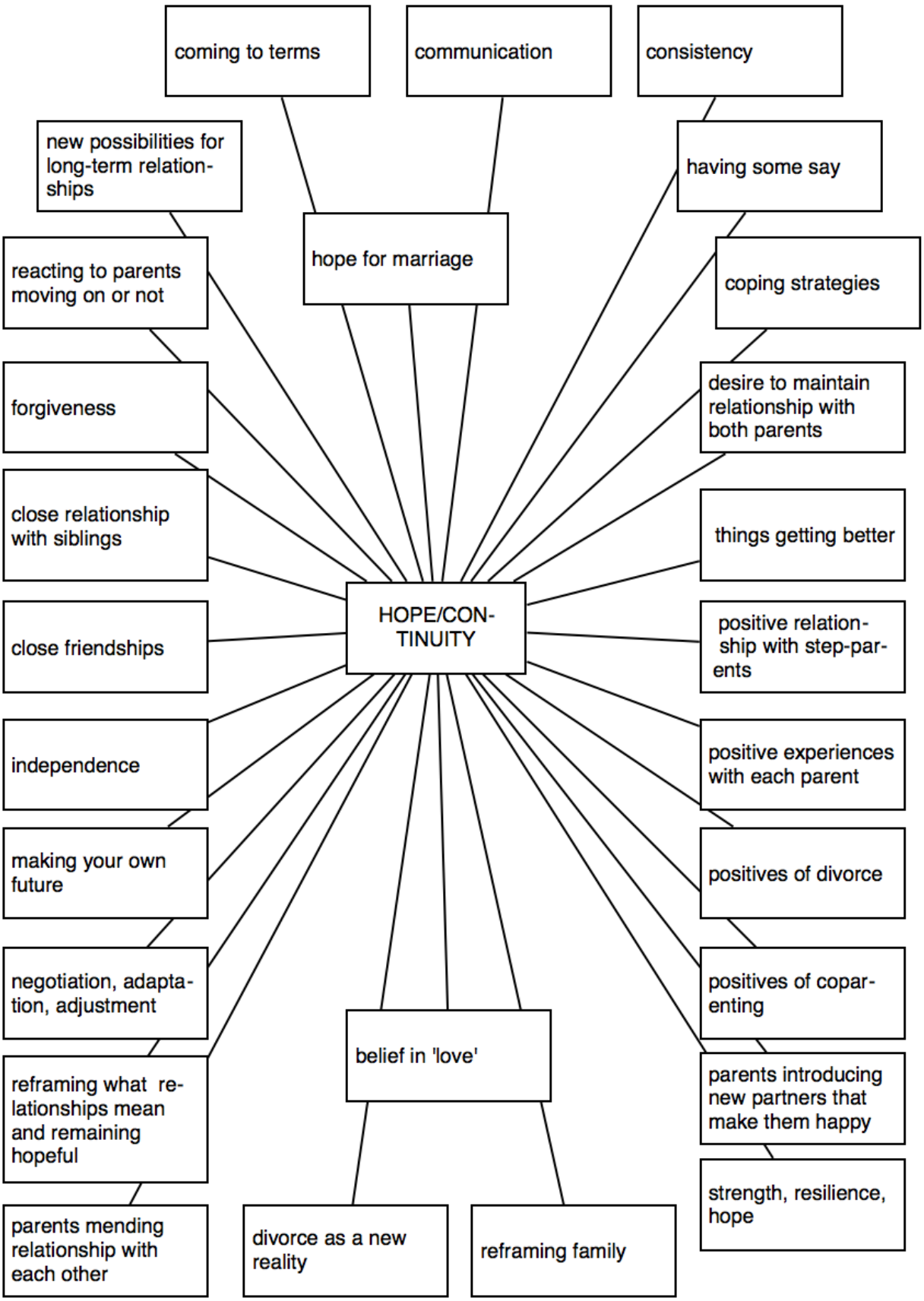
subordinate themes



subordinate themes



subordinate themes



6.9 Appendix I: Ethics Form

12) Appendices 1-6

Appendix 1. **ETHICS FORM**

Ethics Release Form for Student Research Projects

All students planning to undertake any research activity in the School of Arts and Social Sciences are required to complete this Ethics Release Form and to submit it to their Research Supervisor, **together with their research proposal clearly stating aims and methodology**, prior to commencing their research work. If you are proposing multiple studies within your research project, you are required to submit a separate ethical release form for each study.

This form should be completed in the context of the following information:

- An understanding of ethical considerations is central to planning and conducting research.
- Approval to carry out research by the Department or the Schools does not exempt you from Ethics Committee approval from institutions within which you may be planning to conduct the research, e.g.: Hospitals, NHS Trusts, HM Prisons Service, etc.
- The published ethical guidelines of the British Psychological Society (2009) Guidelines for minimum standards of ethical approval in psychological research (BPS: Leicester) should be referred to when planning your research.
- **Students are not permitted to begin their research work until approval has been received and this form has been signed by Research Supervisor and the Department's Ethics Representative.**

Section A: To be completed by the student

Please indicate the degree that the proposed research project pertains to:

BSc M.Phil M.Sc. D.Psych x N.A.

Please answer all of the following questions, circling yes or nowhere appropriate:

1. Title of project

A qualitative exploration of young adults' experience of family breakdown.

2. Name of student researcher (please include contact address and telephone number)

[redacted]

3. Name of research supervisor

[redacted]

8. Will all subjects/participants and/or their parents/carers receive an information sheet describing the aims, procedure and possible risks of the research, as well as providing researcher and supervisor contact details?

Yes

(Please append the information sheet, which should be written in terms, which are accessible to your subjects/participants and/or their parents/carers)

9. Will any person's treatment/care be in any way be compromised if they choose not to participate in the research?

No

10. Will all subjects/participants be required to sign a consent form, stating that they fully understand the purpose, procedure and possible risks of the research?

Yes

If no, please justify

If yes please append the informed consent form, which should be written in terms, which are accessible to your subjects/participants and/or their parents/carers)

11. What records will you be keeping of your subjects/participants? (e.g. research notes, computer records, tape/video recordings)?

Research notes, computer records, tape recordings. All data will be password protected.

12. What provision will there be for the safe-keeping of these records?

These records will be locked in a safe in the researcher's house.

13. What will happen to the records at the end of the project?

They will be destroyed 5 years after the completion of the study.

14. How will you protect the anonymity of the subjects/participants?

No information that can lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports in the project or to any other party. No identifiable personal data will be published or shared with any other organization.

15. What provision for post research de-brief or psychological support will be available should subjects/participants require?

Each participant will be offered a 15 minute de-brief after their interview to allow for any questions or concerns that they may have. If they feel that they require further emotional support they will be encouraged to contact their GP and also given the contact details of the Samaritans who offer a 24 hour, 7 days a week service for people experiencing distress. The contact details of the researcher and the Samaritan's will be on the de-brief form.

(Please append any de-brief information sheets or resource lists detailing possible support options)

If you have circled an item in **underlined bold** print or wish to provide additional details of the research please provide further explanation here:

Signature of student researcher ------[redacted]
22/1/14---------- Date ------

CHECKLIST: the following forms should be appended unless justified otherwise

Research Proposal
Recruitment Material
Information Sheet
Consent Form
De-brief Information

Section B: Risks to the Researcher

1. Is there any risk of physical or psychological harm to yourself? Yes
If yes,

a. Please detail possible harm?

Whilst it is not anticipated, there is a minimal risk to the researcher due to the potential emotional content of the interviews.

b. How can this be justified?

The slight risk can be justified due to the intended benefit gained through research.

c. What precautions are to be taken to address the risks posed?

Interviews will take place in City University rooms at prearranged times and dates known to another colleague and the researcher will be mindful and reflective of any issues raised for her in the process or content of the interviews.

Section C: To be completed by the research supervisor
(*Please pay particular attention to any suggested research activity involving minors or vulnerable adults. Approval requires a currently valid CRB check to be appended to this form. If in any doubt, please refer to the Research Committee.*)

Please mark the appropriate box below:

Ethical approval granted X

Refer to the Department's Research and Ethics Committee

Refer to the School's Research and Ethics Committee

Signature [redacted] Date [redacted]

Section D: To be completed by the 2nd Departmental staff member *(Please read this ethics release form fully and pay particular attention to any answers on the form where **underlined bold** items have been circled and any relevant appendices.)*

[redacted]

Part B: Publishable Article

Journal Article

The Phenomenon of Parental Divorce:

An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the Experiences of Emerging Adults

Caroline Douglas-Pennant

City University, London, UK

This content has been removed for copyright protection reasons

Part C: Case Study

The Professional Practice Component of this thesis has been removed for confidentiality purposes.

It can be consulted by Psychology researchers on application at the Library of City, University of London.